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“These Days Will Change Our Days”

July 6, 2020

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This moment is one of profound change. Climate change, environmental degradation and a biodiversity crisis, marked increases in inequality, economic crises, the rise of populism, and rising geo-political tensions have been providing clear evidence that current social institutions, including economics, democracy, religion, technology, gender and higher education, are not optimal, either for human flourishing or for addressing the urgent global challenges we face. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought this dangerous reality into even starker relief.

[Click here to watch the webinar.](#)

QUESTION & ANSWERS

This booklet is intended to provide a supplement to the Q&A session of the online event by addressing some of the questions that could not be covered there. It focuses primarily on Sessions 2 and 3.

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| William Hynes | William please give your thoughts on state tools to intervene for deep public interest e.g. applying conditionality to investments, ensuring social value etc. Does he think these will be used in recovery stimulus packages? | The state might need to be more actively involved in managing the human-based systems on which we depend - leaving it up to markets is risky as these systems are not self-stabilising or generate the types of outcomes we might want. There are a range of regulatory, institutional and policy tools available - but this must extend beyond providing framework conditions. A more active stance on industrial policy, regulatory standards for environmental protection and building more resilience and buffers to deal with systemic shocks would be some areas to look at. |
| William Hynes | William, how close do you think we may be to a 'Berlin Wall' moment of change in economic thinking, if at all? And how likely is it that such a tipping point may lead to the development of some of your OECD NAEC ideas? | I think we had an opportunity to overhaul economic thinking after the last crisis, but merely adapted and modified the pre-crisis model and the window of opportunity closed quite rapidly. If the financial crisis rocked the foundations of economics, the Covid-19 crisis may bring about its collapse. The systemic and interconnected nature of our economies can no longer be modelled based on approaches rooted in classical physics - we need an upgrade and the options are available. But we have also seen that academics can retreat into their belief and policymaking does not provide fertile grounds for ideas as academic as paradigm shift. So regrettably I think we are far from the tipping point but the good thing about tipping point is that change can happen rapidly when it does arrive! |

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| Clodagh Harris | <p>One issue that arises for me is the notion of 'empowering others' - I think Clodagh used this phrase, 'empowering society'. Given the reluctance of the state to really enable the innate capacities of its people, I think we have to appreciate empowerment can only be undertaken by people themselves. The BLM social movement is demonstrating this by reshaping discourse around race & social justice. Empowerment has to be undertaken by citizens themselves, not granted to them by others.</p> | <p>Excellent question. Certainly, citizens should not depend on others to 'empower' them and the BLM and the climate action strikes are excellent examples of how citizens have come together to challenge and protest the existing order and agitate for change. Arguably there is a role for the state both in terms of securing the fundamental rights of freedom of expression, association etc and the provision of high quality public education that facilitates critical and active citizen engagement.</p> |
| Clodagh Harris | <p>Might we be at risk of limiting our process of reimagining society by framing the process within the existing system? - as if a natural given. When we explore models/methods for ensuring popular control over our leaders, why do we not question the legitimacy of their position of power to begin with? Our current model, inherited/adapted from previous models (the divine right of kings/ the church etc..) assumes power being held by a leadership class - albeit with some democratic processes included, but at this point in human history is there any reason that power cannot be</p> | <p>Yes, excellent question and observation. Our re-imagining of democracy is centred on popular sovereignty which as you point out can be expressed in many forms either through directly elected political representatives, through our communities in participatory forums, through our participation in community and voluntary organisations and through deliberative democratic innovations such as citizens assemblies. For democracy to thrive it needs to be thought of holistically in terms of the relationships between all these forms of democracy where each could augment the strengths and address the weakness of the other.</p> |

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| | democratised so that rather than leaders we have actual public servants? The covid-19 crisis has made it clear that society is co-produced at community level, so why not reinstate political power at this level also? Does the success of citizens assemblies indicate that we are entirely capable of participatory democracy and self-governance? | |
| Kieran Keohane | For all panellists, how do they propose groups/communities best capitalise on the societal shake-up caused by Covid-19 to secure a just transition, sustainable recovery, and avoid missing this opportunity to secure a radically better future? | <p>'Every crisis is an opportunity' is one of the watchwords of the neoliberal revolution. Milton Friedman says: "Only a crisis - actual or perceived - produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable."</p> <p>The great danger of our present 'covid 19' crisis moment is that it will be the corporates and neoliberals who will capitalize on the societal shake-up, and seize the opportunity not only to restore the status quo ante –'business as usual', but to accelerate and intensify the marketization of the world, the commodification of everything, and the exacerbation of climate breakdown.</p> <p>But the brief moment of opportunity thrown open by the Covid 19 crisis is a moment of opportunity not only for neoliberals, but for us too. Friedman suggests that the crucial window is only 6 months or so, in which alternative ideas to those of the neoliberals may be floated and find purchase on hearts and minds. So, if groups and communities have new ideas – ideas such as those of a Green New Deal, extinction</p> |

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| | | <p>rebellion, climate action and just transition, for instance, ideas about social justice & equality expressed by BLM, even alternative ideas about the nature of humanity other than homo economics as an individual utility maximizing rational calculus machine but as a caring compassionate social being concerned with the health & well-being of others (as revealed by most people's conscientious cooperative and civic-minded response to public health protocols during the pandemic) well, now is the time to promote them and to agitate for them at every level.</p> |
| Ernst von Kimakowitz | <p>How do you view the rise of ESG investing (socially/environmentally screened investments) in the US?</p> | <p>Hi Maureen, ESG (Environmental Social Governance) investing is one form of investing that includes non-financial factors in determining an investment universe according to an investors motives, intentions and risk-appetite. We have on one side traditional investments seeking risk-adjusted optimal returns and on the other side pure philanthropy seeking no financial return and over the last decade or so a plethora of framings has emerged in between. Impact investing, sustainable investing, faith based investing, mission aligned investing, social investing or ESG investing are but a few of those, that all have different characteristics but are also used in rather fuzzy ways. Especially impact investing is currently often used in ways that have very little to do with the original intention under which the term was coined. So the use of these terms is also driven by marketability of corresponding financial services products. ESG investments in this context sit, in my view, very close to traditional investments as in that they still aims for risk adjusted optimal returns (so the overarching aim is the same as with traditional investments) but acknowledge that to yield those risk adjusted optimal returns ESG risks can no longer be ignored. So ESG investing is</p> |

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| | | <p>primarily about providing an investor with a full picture on the risks attached to an investment. Overall i think all of these emerging investment opportunities are great developments (and a global trend not only in the US) as they all share the notion that money ought to do something more than making more money but one needs to be aware also that not all financial services products that have some type of sustainability label in their name are living up to that promise.</p> |
| Ernst von Kimakowitz | <p>Do you think the Circular Economy concept offers a viable solution, or at least part of the solution, to rebuilding better and to achieving sustainability in business</p> | <p>Yes Joanne, big fan of circularity as i think we only have two alternatives. Either 1) we will suffer very substantial and painful limitations to our quality of life in the rich parts of the world as well as to the way in which low income regions can develop or 2) we will learn to no longer be so incredibly wasteful so that we can continue to have more people living longer, healthier, and hopefully also happier lives. Reusing what we extract from the planet has got to be an integral part of achieving 2) in my view.</p> |
| Ernst von Kimakowitz | <p>I agree with Ernst that tech companies are moving too fast and I am concerned that we create a world where we are more controlled and be programmed losing our human rights and power!! What is the answer?</p> | <p>The asymmetry of speed between societal deliberation the way we currently organize it and new developments in the tech sector is problematic and worrisome as it threatens the very foundations of societal peace and cohesion. Currently we find time and again that the power of the factual dictates how we use new technologies driven by private interests and set up in ways to benefit private interests while any discourse on if and how and when we want broad use of those new options or not is lagging far behind. I have been told for example that the GDPR is seen as a running gag at silicon valley firms. I don't have an answer here but the three options I think we have are 1) give in and accept greater concentration of power 2) slow down the implementation of tech innovation 3) speed up the decision making process on what</p> |

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| | | we want and what not. I would hope a mix of options 2 and 3 can help us avoid option 1. |
| Ernst von Kimakowitz | Sustainability is not out of sync with reality. What we experience is the result of crisis of values and ethical conduct in economic and political spheres. Business jump on the SD bandwagon to primarily use it for that own advantage and profit. Not to mention the politics. | I would agree that currently more businesses act out of strategic calculus rather than moral insight when it comes to their sustainability efforts. This translates to some individual business becoming a little less unsustainable while overall we are clearly not doing well enough. |
| Ernst von Kimakowitz | For all panelists, how do they propose groups/communities best capitalise on the societal shake-up caused by Covid-19 to secure a just transition, sustainable recovery, and avoid missing this opportunity to secure a radically better future? | Hi Matthew, by providing an appealing narrative on how we are capable of radical change in a short timeframe. However, I am not overly optimistic here to be honest as I am currently hearing more people wanting to get back to how things were than I hear people who want to build something new. So I'm afraid that the new normal may well turn out to be the old normal with a face mask. |
| Ed Byrne | Many people don't know enough about the environment, biodiversity and climate change or indeed the value of natural spaces to our societies. Do we have time to wait, in the context of the climate crisis, for the general public to understand the priority of these things? Doesn't the government have a responsibility to provide that information and education first? What steps do the panel members imagine are needed to reach that point where the public and the government are actively aware of and prioritising a | Education is required through developing an appreciation of facts and knowledge e.g. scientific knowledge, but also an appreciation that these are scaffolded by values and context. Then we can/should develop critical thinking skills to facilitate well-grounded critique, in particular in today's multi-media society. Recognition too that education is not, and cannot be value free; I just looked through my son's new secondary school books which we purchased this week; there were 7 pages on 'Sources of Energy'; 1 page on fossil fuels (the most prevalent form in Ireland today), 2 pages on renewables (the second most prevalence form) and then the majority (4 pages) on nuclear power! Moreover, his geography book had equal numbers of pages on acid rain and climate change (4 each), though in the case of |

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| | transition to a sustainable society? | the latter, one of these was on how climate change was a natural phenomenon, and the other three looked at anthropogenic factors. This says/implies something to young students learning about key energy sources or important environmental issues; I've always wondered why ~100% of all first year engineering students are critically, positively disposed towards nuclear power each year. Not that's there's anything necessarily wrong with nuclear; however is our education system (formal and informal) promoting critical thinking? Our formal education systems (and informal ones) need to promote an understanding of the nature of knowledge, science and the world around us, as well as critical thinking, and an understanding of the values base of education. We can and ought (/note value laden exhortation) all, though educators at all levels in particular, play a part in this, along with our institutions of state/government/s. |
| Ed Byrne | To summarise Niall's point 'educate, agitate, organise'! | It's strange how some of the most educated people on climate change, socio-environmental issues, etc. who agitate & organise, were largely not educated on the issues through the formal educational system. Does formal education need to up its game considerably, including/especially in 3rd level (universally)? As an educator, I think it does! |
| Ed Byrne | Govt educated us very quickly on COVID19!! | Yes, the value of well-informed science and medicine was well demonstrated in Ireland. In Britain however, where 'the science' was followed (and explicitly alluded to) to stop contact tracing, and where 'modeller' scientists were later blamed for dominating the narrative over the epidemiologists, the policy and public health outcomes were very different; When put in Context, thus the application of knowledge, facts, and science is not 'value free', nor can it |

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| | | be, no more than can economics, say, be. This needs to be understood by an educated population; else govt's can use their favourite version of 'the science' to make policy decisions, while science is both misunderstood (as being capable of providing some unique optimised 'solution' to all problems) and public trust in science is thus ultimately potentially eroded, with negative consequences for society. |
| John Barry | What practical tools/measures would Aine, Ed and John suggest in the short term to embed nature protection, climate action and wider sustainability in recovery plans and stimulus packages? | <p>A Joint Commitment to a Green and Just Economic Recovery from Local and National Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public stimulus investment decisions should be conditional on a low carbon and climate resilient outcomes • Redesign and invest in carbon neutral transport infrastructure • Promotion of citywide and county wide or area-based approaches to energy efficiency and renewable heat • Localise services, support and infrastructure to build community resilience, including more citizen participation to co-design solutions • Focus on wellbeing in natural and built environment investments, and not GDP or orthodox economic growth • Retrofit domestic homes |
| Aine Ryall | What practical tools/measures would Áine, Ed and John suggest in the short term to embed nature protection, climate action and wider sustainability in recovery plans and stimulus packages? | When preparing recovery plans and stimulus packages, account should be taken – where relevant – of any likely environmental impacts of a plan or package. Where such impacts are identified, modifications should be made to address them before the plan or package is approved and adopted. A record should be kept detailing how environmental and sustainability considerations were taken into consideration in the preparation of the plan or package and how any likely environmental impacts were resolved. |

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| | | <p>Implementation of the plan or package should be kept under review to identify and address any unforeseen environmental impacts that arise during the implementation stage. There should be accountability for environmental impacts in the implementation phase.</p> <p>In certain cases, the law requires that a plan or programme is subject to strategic environmental assessment (SEA). Public participation is an important element of the SEA process which enables the public to raise concerns about likely environmental impacts including the impact on nature protection, climate etc. Public participation can be an effective way to ensure that environmental concerns are taken into account in decision-making processes, including the processes that lead up to the approval and adoption of recovery plans and stimulus packages.</p> |
| Aine Ryall | <p>Dr. Ryall, what can political institutions do to equip the Courts to take on climate cases? Is sentencing guidelines sufficient, or is codification the answer?</p> | <p>It is important to bear in mind that the Constitution provides for the separation of powers between the Executive, the Legislature and the Courts.</p> <p>It is for Government to make policy. The Courts enforce the law and uphold fundamental rights etc. So the Courts would not 'take on climate cases' as such. It is for individuals and / or groups to consider bringing cases before the courts.</p> <p>So, for example, in Climate Case Ireland, the NGO Friends of the Irish Environment brought a case against the Government seeking more ambitious and more urgent climate action. This case has now reached the Supreme Court on appeal. It was heard by that Court on 22 and 23 June 2020. Judgment has been reserved and will be delivered at a later date.</p> |

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| | | <p>As regards sentencing guidelines, these arise in the context of environmental crime. The typical example would be where an individual or a company has caused environmental pollution and is found guilty of an offence by a court. It is for the judge to determine the penalty for the offence in accordance with the range of possible penalties set down in the relevant legislation.</p> <p>Generally speaking, penalties for environmental crime in Ireland tend to be on the low side and there can be a lack of consistency in the penalties awarded. We do not have sentencing guidelines for environmental crime in Ireland at present. Such guidelines do exist, however, in Northern Ireland and in England and Wales. Consideration should be given to introducing sentencing guidelines for environmental crime in Ireland. The experience with such guidelines in other jurisdictions has been generally positive.</p> |
| Aine Ryall | For all panellists, how do they propose groups/communities best capitalise on the societal shake-up caused by Covid-19 to secure a just transition, sustainable recovery, and avoid missing this opportunity to secure a radically better future? | <p>It is important that individuals, groups and communities make their views known to public representatives at every level and relentlessly keep up the pressure for change. The media, and in particular social media, has a key role to play here in raising and maintaining the visibility of environmental issues and calls from the public for urgent action. This approach makes it more difficult for Government to ignore these demands. And the timing is good. We have a new Government and a new Programme for Government. There is an appetite for action, possibly even transformative action.</p> <p>The pandemic has created a strong momentum to move to a more sustainable society. For example, the pandemic led many people to reconnect with the natural environment and especially so during the height of the</p> |

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| | | ‘lockdown’. It is no surprise therefore to find that there are now strong and persistent calls for better nature protection. Similarly, we see calls for better urban design, more pedestrianisation of streets in our towns and cities, better cycling infrastructure, high quality public transport etc. Now is an ideal time for active citizenship and to make it count. |
| Fionn Rogan | For all panelists, how do they propose groups/communities best capitalise on the societal shake-up caused by Covid-19 to secure a just transition, sustainable recovery, and avoid missing this opportunity to secure a radically better future? | The scale of the COVID-19 response from the government and particularly from the public shows the significant capacity for transformative change that has been dormant and untapped. When a crisis like COVID-19 hits, the ideas that are ‘lying around’ tend to be the ones that get adopted, so keeping the ideas of just transition and sustainability in the foreground is very important. In the current context, I think making the link between positive health impacts that arise from certain sustainable initiatives such as active travel and warm comfortable homes (i.e. from retrofitting) is very important. Lastly, change that communities can undertake without government support is the most sustainable change since government support will likely waver in the future. |
| Niall Dunphy | For all panellists, how do they propose groups/communities best capitalise on the societal shake-up caused by Covid-19 to secure a just transition, sustainable recovery, and avoid missing this opportunity to secure a radically better future? | The speed (and relative efficiency) in which society was transformed in response to Covid-19 shows the previously considered unthinkable is possible. No longer do citizens have to listen to the refrain ‘that just can’t be done’. Achieving a just transition inherently requires the participation of citizens, both individually and collectively. But true participation means involvement at all levels of the discussion. This includes defining what constitutes a just |

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| | | <p>transition, how it will be achieved, and how benefits (and losses) will be distributed.</p> <p>It means that citizens themselves (again, individually and collectively) need to envision and articulate the type of future they want. However, citizens cannot way to be asked, they need to demand the right to be heard.</p> <p>Those who are 'winners' in today's society (whether citizens or corporate entities) have the least motivation to seek change. Yet, in many facets of our society (and economic activities) we (as a people) are relying on incumbents to lead change.</p> <p>Citizens need to become informed, to collectively mobilise, and to make their voices heard. Otherwise we will that when transition does arrive, the world will have many of the same flaws (if not more) that we see in today's society.</p> |
| Niall Dunphy | How about shareholder activism? | <p>This is an interesting question. There is a good deal of value in stakeholder activism and there is no doubt that it has worked (to an extent) in the past. However, shareholder activism implicitly means accepting that primacy of the (financial) market in shaping the future of our society. I would suggest that shareholder activism can be a useful tool to nudge companies, but on its own it will not, and arguably cannot lead to a 'just' transition.</p> |

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