

Making Natural Connections 2012:

10 lessons from the conference in shaping a Positive Manifesto for Improved Environmental Planning

1. **Try on several pairs of glasses:** As professionals in whatever field we tend to look at the world through our own brand of 'professional' glasses. We rarely put on other peoples glasses so as to see the world through their eyes. It is surely better to do this and then overlay your glasses so you can better join up and make connections.
2. **Abandon Targets and Performance Measures in favour of a clear set of goals:** The targets by which we all operate and judge our worth rarely help good planning. Most exemplar projects actually relate to people overcoming institutional hurdles and operating outside conventional working practices. Sharing and buying into a clear goal allows people to adapt and change in a shared journey as learning and experience increases.
3. **Celebrate and learn from conflict and failure:** Conflict, disappointment and failure are all necessary and vital parts of personal and professional development. It is how they are handled that is key. However, current public opinion sees failure as an opportunity for witch-hunts, scapegoats and clamours for resignation which creates a culture that is averse to taking risks and experimenting. This is the very opposite of what we need to do for good planning. This is endemic throughout public policy and in schools where children are not allowed to do anything that has risk associated with it.
4. **Wisdom beats Cleverness:** We are training people to work in specialist silos as superspecialists. Yet we also need people who understand the bigger picture set within critical understandings of the social, economic and environmental intersections in order to address the big societal challenges we now face. We need wisdom not cleverness in our resource management decisions.
5. **Overcome Nature Deficit Disorder:** We are in danger of creating a society with nature deficit disorder as we seek to restrict, prevent and deny people the opportunity to have fun in the countryside. Children in particular are a key group who are not allowed to indulge in natural play, build dens and climb trees. However equally as a society we are becoming divorced from nature and understanding its value except through media which is highly selective.
6. **Rethink how we communicate:** We have a surplus of information at our disposal which allows us almost instant gratification whatever subject we are searching for. Yet we rarely discriminate between poor or good information. We also use technology in ways that increasingly remove us from direct human interaction; virtual friends dominate our global

network of increasingly vulnerable connections. The cumulative effect of all this is that human scale of things disappears along with its contact, cooperation and reciprocity.

7. **Intoxicated by eloquence of our own verbosity:** As professionals we use jargon and a vocabulary that alienates the public but also divides us into our own professional silos. We all champion OUR idea or theory as superior to other disciplines and defend our own positions. We rarely embrace and promote what unites us all.
8. **We aren't necessarily doomed:** Those of us who care about the environment tend to speak in doom and gloom narratives. This simply turns people off as priorities for the environment are not on their radar. We have extremely poor PR and fail dismally to get our messages across. So it begs the question why we don't spend more resources on using professionals to get our key messages across more positively and effectively.
9. **People are at the heart of the environment:** People should be at the centre of decisions we make and, to that end, we need to orchestrate more people-centred approaches that use skills of people more constructively. There is so much time spent by people fighting things which could surely be diverted to more profitable and sustainable ventures. Key is getting decision makers to involve people before plans and decisions are made.
10. **Break boundaries and silo mentality:** Behavioural change is needed as we are all locked into systems and work practices that make it hard to escape from the status quo. We are on our escalators and we are all looking for someone else to jump off. In seeking new avenues partnerships offer an opportunity space that cuts across boundaries in pursuit of more fluid and sticky structures.

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