

## **Building Innovation Through Time: Testing the Resilience of Social Innovations**

Frances Westley

The success of any social innovation in transforming complex systems is hard to assess without a longitudinal and historical perspective. Most innovations come and go with little broad or disruptive impact on the broader social or ecological system that created the problem that the innovation addresses. These incremental innovations may be routinized quickly, representing “add-ons” to existing structures. However, the innovative idea, process or product may also attract other innovative ideas in adjacent domains, resulting in a gradual or sudden cascading impact. This impact moreover may be judged positive at the time, but over time may come to be viewed as having negative outcomes. For these reasons longitudinal and historical assessment of successful social innovations makes it possible to understand the role of agency, policy opportunity, economic, political and cultural context and how these interact overtime. This panel will adopt such an historical perspective. Quilley will explore the role of system entrepreneurs in the successful transition town movement in England, Robinson the success of CIRS, a living laboratory of sustainability, in terms of building performance, the behavioural interface with building inhabitants, community engagement, and public, private, NGO and research sector partnerships, in Canada’s most western province, British Columbia. Coates and Holyrod will look at the history of social innovation in Canada. Lastly McCarthy will look at the Man and Biosphere projects involving First Nations communities in social innovation in Ontario. As opposed to formal paper presentations, each presenter will give a brief synopsis of the study and then will present answers to the following three questions:

Where did the innovation start?

What were the social, economic and policy context that nourished its growth?

Where were the barriers or traps that threatened/or are threatening its transformative capacity?

Panel participants and papers:

John Robinson, Alberto Cayuela – “CIRS: A Living Laboratory of Sustainability and Community Engagement”

Stephen Quilley – “System Entrepreneurship and The Transition Town Movement”

Carin Holroyd – “Partners in Social Innovation: Government, Public Policy and Social Innovation”

Dan McCarthy – “The Case of Social Innovation in Building Social-ecological Resilience”

