

**Tomorrow's Sustainable Universities Conference
15 – 16 July 2010**

Workshop 3: Communication, conversation and community

Facilitator:

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Ecovercity StuDent has a stated action research strand. The core aspects of this strand are: '...to promote organisational reflection, learning and cultural change [...and] to assist the University in constructively challenging processes and procedures' (RM1231) with respect to systemic sustainable development.

This workshop draws on the learning outcomes from this research.

Promoting cultural change is challenging for any type of institution, perhaps especially so for Universities. These challenges are compounded when the cultural change concerns Education for Sustainable Development, involving fundamental infrastructural change in utilities, buildings and logistics, and behavioural changes at levels of organisation, department and the individual. Invariably communication is considered crucial in promoting these types of change.

Communication lies at the heart of university life. The core business of universities is education, the production and dissemination of knowledge. However, while universities are proficient at informing via purpose-built channels e.g. formal education, academic conferences and journals, they are notoriously awkward at communicating within themselves. The University of Bradford identified communication as one of its main areas for improvement in order for the Ecovercity StuDent project to be effective.

But communication of what, when, how – by and to whom?

Campaigns not only reflect the beliefs within the society they operate in, but reinforce those beliefs through conceptualizing issues in line with those beliefs. Pro-environmental information campaigns have tended to conceptualize sustainable development as individual attitude/behaviour change and, by doing so, have sometimes inadvertently divided, rather than united, people. So the Ecovercity action research approach has aimed to complement existing Ecovercity information campaigns by initiating conversational communication in order to gently disturb the status quo and create communities.

This workshop invites you to explore different approaches to communicating sustainable development – starting with the following questions:

- Does communication mean information, conversation or something else?
- How many conversations does it take to make a community?
- Who needs to communicate with each other for a University to develop sustainably?
- How do you get a University to have a conversation with itself?