

Cork Environmental Forum

Position Paper 15 - Sustainable Economics



This Paper is based on widespread consultation including workshops hosted by CEF in Cork during 2003. We recognise the current trickle-down economic model of “boom & bust” creates many new business opportunities, but it leaves the majority of the community with uncertainty, stress, a reduced quality of life, and an impoverished environment.

Economic, social and environmental change requires more secure and integrated management to enable better forward planning and maintenance of a healthy environment. The need to support community regeneration and the sustainable management of natural resources requires the widest possible debate. A sustainable economy meets the needs of current and future generations rather than the desires of a few interest groups. It places a healthy environment before profit, security before short-term gain, people and communities before business.

Background

By taking care of people – including providing basic needs for quality housing and food, satisfying work, good health, and broad education – businesses will thrive. The economy of County Cork (and the country as a whole) should be run for the prosperity of its population rather than the businesses alone. There is more than one economic model – growth at any cost, low taxes, and direct foreign investment – that can deliver a good quality of life. Its characteristics include participation by communities in decision-making, success measured as quality of life improvement rather than standard of living, valuing all aspects of the economy from local to regional to multinational, robustness in the face of change, the ability to integrate with differing economies in other countries, and learning from previous success and failure at home and abroad. This Paper explores some of the questions which need to be asked, and suggests some of the measures that can help bring about a model Sustainable Economy in County Cork.

Resources are used efficiently and waste is minimised by closing cycles.

All sectors of the economy are significant consumers of resources such as electricity, water, plastics, paper, glass, metals and fuel, and significant generators of waste.

- 🌱 **Is the concept of Zero Waste achievable throughout the economy, beginning in the region of Cork?**
- 🌱 **Can regional business organisations enhance efforts to reduce resource use and waste generation across all these areas by measuring their activities and setting achievable targets for reduction?**
- 🌱 **Should business organisations be required to view waste as a resource and be taxed according to volumes produced? Should they produce waste audits comparable to tax audits on an annual basis?**
- 🌱 **Can businesses be organised in clusters to complement one another, rather than as at present grouped by type (electronics) or randomly (most industrial estates in Cork City)? This would enable the waste from one to become the resource / materials for another.**

Pollution is limited to levels that natural systems can process without damage.

Discharges from the manufacturing sector have contributed to the eutrophication of water resources in the County.

Air-borne pollution is also a significant issue, with the manufacturing sector responsible for a high proportion of all greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland. Road haulage traffic generates 22% when compared on a CO2 equivalent basis.

- 🌱 **Can we meet our international obligations under the Kyoto Treaty through a significant reduction in road transport emissions throughout the County?**
- 🌱 **Can the Cork region be promoted as a model of Green business encouraging environmentally benign manufacturing and clean technology?**

Local needs are met locally where possible.

During times of crisis in the past – notably during the Second World War – Ireland and the Cork region had to become very self-sufficient. During these times of relative prosperity, we need to find both nationally and regionally, the best balance between the import and export of goods and services. The “Buy Irish” campaign needs a fresh impetus, and we must begin to identify, develop and promote all those areas of the economy where potential for import substitution is greatest within the region.

- 🌱 **We need to encourage local businesses to become better informed about sustainability and its positive / negative impacts on their business.**
- 🌱 **The Regional Authorities should identify and promote businesses which have taken positive steps towards sustainability e.g. Macroom Environmental Industrial Park.**
- 🌱 **The Local Authorities should implement policies that promote sustainable economics e.g. Timber Purchase Policy of Offaly Co. Council.**
- 🌱 **Promotion of the Local Producers Information Booklet.**
- 🌱 **What kind of local taxes would people support for the provision of local services?**
- 🌱 **Consumers must be encouraged to request locally produced / Fair-Traded goods.**
- 🌱 **The Local Authority should proactively encourage the establishment of Farmer / Country Markets in the larger towns of the Region, and the revival of Agricultural Shows particularly where they have declined.**
- 🌱 **Do local networks such as Trading Schemes really work, and how should they be supported?**
- 🌱 **Regional branding needs to be proactively promoted.**

Satisfying work in a diverse economy is available to all.

What qualities are needed in order for work to be satisfying? Is it simply a matter of pay and conditions, or do people work better when they really enjoy both the work process and the products, and know the value of the contribution their efforts make to the whole community?

Good health of the community is protected.

A sustainable economy would not be damaging the health of the community by producing excessive amount of stress, environmental hazards and toxins, noise, waste that cannot be reused, etc...

Environment is not damaged by access to facilities, services, goods and other people.

For all sectors of the economy, an awareness of the adverse impacts of excessive trading is slowly developing. The issues of fair trade work both ways. Cheap imports into a region threaten the viability of local producers, while cheap exports of produce from a region to developing countries can threaten viability there.

- 🌱 **The Cork Region should promote fair-trade policies in all sectors of the retail industry through the relevant agencies.**

- 🌱 **What would be the effect of replacing personal taxes with higher sales taxes – thereby making it cheaper to employ a person rather than buy a machine?**

Skills, knowledge and information are accessible to all.

In order to stimulate change towards a sustainable economy in the Cork region, we will need to promote discussion of some radical new ways of looking at familiar problems. When people understand these possibilities, they can then make appropriate demands on their representatives who can then implement the necessary changes to the economy.

- 🌱 **Sustainable economics should be part of the curricula in National and Secondary schools.**
- 🌱 **Must businesses grow in order to survive? What would happen if we had zero growth?**
- 🌱 **Develop on-line resources on Sustainable Economics for those wishing to learn more and share their knowledge.**
- 🌱 **Provide information for businesses wishing to take the first steps in understanding sustainability issues.**
- 🌱 **Use CEF as a sounding board and resource on sustainable economics for policy-makers, business organisations and community groups.**

Participation in decision-making is extended to the whole community.

Change starts with questioning, and policy-makers and business organisations need to be asked thought-provoking questions.

- 🌱 **Consumers must be encouraged to question the source of goods purchased.**
- 🌱 **Local business must be encouraged and supported, and local work forces employed before imported labour.**

CEF Resources:

Books:

- 🌱 Natural Capitalism – the Next Industrial Revolution – by Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins & Hunter Lovins
- 🌱 Cannibals with Forks – the Triple Bottom Line – by John Elkington
- 🌱 The Growth Illustration – by Richard Douthwaite
- 🌱 Human Well-Being and the Natural Environment – by Partha Dasgupta
- 🌱 The New Economy of Nature – by Daily & Ellison
- 🌱 The Living Company – by Arie de Gues

Web Sites:

- 🌱 <http://www.feasta.org/> - foundation for the economics of sustainability
- 🌱 <http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/> - aims to improve quality of life by promoting innovative solutions that challenge the mainstream thinking on economic, environment and social issues. We work in partnership and put people and the planet first.
- 🌱 <http://.greeneconomics.net/> - links to many green economics related sites and papers
- 🌱 http://www.en2.wikipedia.org/wiki/green_economics - definition of green economics

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To foster, promote & implement sustainable development within the Cork region