

Conference success in Dublin

On October 9th and 10th the Foundation held a conference on the land question in Ireland. The event was a collaboration with Irish think tank Feasta.

Peter Gibb reports on the aims and accomplishments of the conference

Around a hundred and twenty people attended the Foundation's major conference this year. *Land: the claim of the community* was organised in partnership with the Irish think tank Feasta - the Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability. The two-day international event in Dublin attracted delegates from all over Ireland and the UK, and from across the social sectors and the political spectrum. In the audience were councillors and members of the Daol representing Fine Gael, the Irish Labour Party, the Irish Greens and Sinn Fein.

The full programme included over twenty speakers from around the world. They included Fred Harrison from CLPS, money and debt economist Richard Douthwaite, member of the Scottish Parliament Rob

Gibson MSP, Transport for London's vice-chair Dave Wetzel, 'Gaian democrat' John Jopling, the IU's UN representative Alanna Hartzok, Kevin Cahill of the Times Rich List and Josh Vincent from Philadelphia's Center for the Study of Economics.

The event aimed to clarify the nature of the community's claim on the land: it looked at Ireland's long history surrounding the land question, and examined its current land-related problems. Papers were presented to set the scene on subjects such as the ancient Brehon Laws. 'Problems' were then looked at, such as the Tudor plantations, the issue of the Irish village, and housing affordability in Dublin.

The 'problems' having been identified, the conference then sought out 'solutions'. Attempts were made to universalize the

common understanding of Ireland's situation, and set its tradition in the broad context of international experience. Case studies were presented from around the world, including the Scottish community land tenure movement, the Niger Delta Fund, Social Housing in London and urban regeneration of the US rustbelt. A series of workshops developed a range of initiatives and ideas for ways forward.

The event attracted considerable media attention. It was universally hailed a huge success. It is hoped the two organizations will be pursuing more joint projects in the future.

A transcript of the conference proceedings will be available shortly. Contact your local Foundation office for further details. Funding permitting, a follow-up book is planned for publication in the spring. **L&L**

Changing the rules of the game

A view from the Dublin conference floor by **Leonie Humphries**

A vision of a 'multicultural, shared social space' was conveyed at this two day event - achieved through an understanding of sharing in the 'surplus' of humanity's combined endeavours. This would provide a balance between individual claims (promoted through the economics of the market) and the claim of the whole community, from which all individuals also benefit.

A wide range of issues were covered at the conference. The event focused on Ireland, yet also studied many other cases, as well as the broader issues of land reform and alternative systems of ownership and taxation. It was argued that these alternative systems could enable a shift away from the pressures on productive enterprises, and towards the provision of public revenue from unearned windfall gains derived from ownership of land and natural resources.

Speakers from around the world provided the floor with experience and intelligent analysis on a variety of issues, including historical perspectives and solutions to the current problems in housing, transport infrastructure and the environment.

Working examples of land value taxation

in America, community land trusts in America and the UK as well as schemes to collect resource taxes in the US and Africa were outlined.

The inevitable road to ruin on the boom/bust cycle was graphically described: the cycle will hit rock bottom in Ireland between



Josh Vincent - keynote speaker

around 2007 and 2010 if the country fails to rise to the challenge of collecting the 'community's claim' - ie. the 'rent' of land and natural resources. The inevitable result, it was argued, is that Ireland will become marginalized, and will experience all the associated problems, whilst EU subsidies go east to new members. Worse than this, the UN predicts that in 30 years time one third of the global population will be living in slums, if current policies are left to run their course.

The underlying message that came across during these two days was that the rules of the game need to be changed. Governments must take responsibility, and use their power to change the laws to both stabilise the current situation and work towards a fair and sustainable future.

Solutions are available, but a new language will be required to connect with the business community and with politicians. The need is for simplicity, neutrality and fairness.

The last word, and my favourite pun of this conference, must go to Dr William McCluskey, who began his talk saying that 'property tax reform is a growth area'. But even as house prices rocket, neither he nor the audience seemed to appreciate the irony of this statement. **L&L**