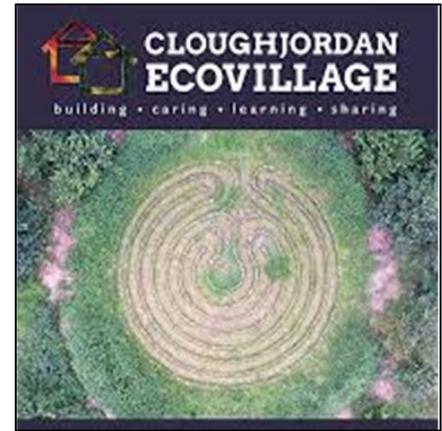


SOCI 395: Sustainable Communities: The Ecovillage Experience

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**Spring 2019 Travel Course to
Ithaca, NY (April 19-21)
and Cloughjordan, Ireland (May 19 - June 1)
(incl. 2 pre-trip meetings and online preparation)**

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**Course Description** - Students will learn about sustainable communities with an emphasis on the ecovillage model and take part in immersion experiences at two thriving ecovillages – one in New York State and the other in Ireland. Students will experience community life through social and service-learning activities, workshops with community residents and educators, field trips to nearby sustainability projects and exploring the natural surroundings at each location.

*Ecovillages are living laboratories of sustainability. They are intentional or traditional communities “using local participatory processes to holistically integrate ecological, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of sustainability in order to regenerate social and natural environments” (Global Ecovillage Network 2016).*

**Student Learning Outcomes** - At the end of this course you will be able to:

- Identify and describe the underlying social, economic, and ecological problems sustainable communities are attempting to address.
- Describe the sustainable communities movement and place it in the larger context of the wider environmental and intentional communities movements.
- Explain and give examples of sustainable community design and practice along the following dimensions: ecological, economic, social, and cultural.
- Design a basic model of an ecovillage community.
- Apply sustainable community design concepts to your own home and community.



## **Required Texts**

- *Ecovillages: Lessons for Sustainable Community* by Karen Litfin (2013, Polity).
- *Ecovillage – 1001 Ways to Heal the Planet* by Kosha Joubert and Leila Dregger (2015, Triarchy Press)
- *The Transition Companion: Making Your Community More Resilient in Uncertain Times* by Rob Hopkins (2011, Chelsea Green)
- Additional readings will be posted on Moodle.

## **The Ecovillages**

**EcoVillage at Ithaca (EVI)** is one of the first, and also largest, ecovillage projects in the U.S. Established in 1991, it is composed of 100 households in three different *cohousing* neighborhoods. Each neighborhood was built in a different decade (the third one was completed in 2017) and serves as a living history of the development of green building and renewable energy technologies. EVI has also been an integral partner in the development of numerous local and regional sustainability initiatives including: Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming, Ithaca CarShare, Ithaca College Sustainability Partnership, and Sustainable Tompkins County. EVI programs are designed to help visitors:

- *gain a new vision and hope for how humans can live together in partnership with the planet*
- *understand the link between social justice and ecological sustainability*
- *experience a sense of belonging to the land and to a learning community*
- *develop specific skills and knowledge to apply in their own lives and work*
- *be motivated to take action when they get home* (Ecovillage at Ithaca 2016)

**Cloughjordan Ecovillage (CJ)** is the first ecovillage in Ireland. Cloughjordan has won several national and international awards for green communities, including winning the Irish National Green Award three years in a row (Kirby 2016). It is a well-established project with an explicit educational mission and youth hostel on-site:

*The Ecovillage was envisioned as a destination for learning-by-doing and action research into sustainability, resilience, community living and rural regeneration. 100 adults and 35 children are now living in the ecovillage, and over 15 businesses, co-operatives and learning providers are also based there making it a dynamic ecosystem of innovation. Through its renewable energy heating system, its well-insulated houses, its community farm, its green enterprise centre with co-working and a digital fabrication lab, its community woodlands, its research relationships with Ireland's universities, the project acts as a powerful model for the transition to a low-carbon society and the building of community resilience.*

(Cloughjordan Ecovillage 2016)

In addition, Cloughjordan is not far from Kinsale whose *Energy Descent Action Plan* (Hopkins 2005) project kicked off the Transition Towns movement. Transition Towns are another cutting-edge sustainable community model we will cover in the course.

*Ecovillages are living entities: They sprout, grow, develop, change, and sometimes die off. Each one is a compromise between what is desirable and what actually happens in practice.*

-Jan Martin Bang, *Ecovillages: A Practical Guide to Sustainable Communities*

## **Assignments & Grading**

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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Participation</b> - 30 points - 30% of grade</li><li>▪ <b>Journals</b> - 35 points - 35% of grade</li><li>▪ <b>Final Project</b> - 35 points - 35% of grade</li></ul> | <b>Total - 100 points</b> |
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**Grading key:** 4.0 (A): 95-100; 3.7 (A-): 90-94; 3.3 (B+): 87-89; 3.0 (B): 83-86; 2.7 (B-): 80-82; 2.3 (C+): 77-79; 2.0 (C): 70-76; 1.7 (C-): 67-69; 1.3 (D+): 64-66; 1.0 (D): 60-63; 0.0 (F): 59 or below

## Assignment Details

**Participation** (30 points - 30% of grade) – All students are expected to actively participate in the online activities at the beginning of the course (mainly preparation for the trips to EVI and CJ), all scheduled meetings, guest lectures, workshops, service-learning activities, and on-site group chores (mainly meal prep and clean-up).

**Journals** (35 points - 35% of grade) - Students will keep an electronic journal of their reflections on course readings, ecovillage experiences and overall insights. This will include field notes from observations at the sites, reflections on service-learning activities, entries integrating concepts from course readings, as well as notes on all workshop sessions at EVI and CJ. The final journal entry will include a *skills inventory* which catalogs the students' sustainable community experiences based on their on-site workshops and service projects. These might include consensus decision-making, nonviolent communication, meeting facilitation, community solar projects, sustainable farming, residential and community-scale composting, green buildings and renewable energy, water conservation, shared transportation cooperatives, community currencies, and so on. More detailed instructions and a rubric will be provided on Moodle.

**Final Project** (35 points - 35% of grade) – A final project in which students design their own model sustainable community which incorporates elements from each of the dimensions. Projects will be in the form of a Powerpoint slideshow with an accompanying narrative paper. More detailed instructions and a rubric will be provided on Moodle.

Students returning to campus in fall 2019 will be expected to present their project at one or more of the following venues: (1) SUNY Potsdam Learning & Research Fair, (2) Associated Colleges Sustainability Day, (3) a campus presentation sponsored by the Environmental Studies and Sociology & Criminal Justice programs.

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Class Schedule

Date	Topics & Assignments	Activities and Due Dates
Feb. 25-Mar 1	<i>Introduction to course topics and each other</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Litfin <i>Ecovillages</i> Chap. 1 ▪ Joubert & Dregger pp. 1-32 	Post personal introduction (see instructions on Moodle)
Mar 4-8	<i>Global Ecovillage Movement</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Litfin <i>Ecovillages</i> Chap. 2 ▪ Joubert & Dregger pp. 33-76 	Read all class member introductions
Mar 18-22	<i>Ecological Dimension</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Litfin <i>Ecovillages</i> Chap. 3 ▪ Joubert & Dregger pp. 33-76 	
Mar 25-29	<i>Economic Dimension</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Litfin <i>Ecovillages</i> Chap. 4 ▪ Joubert & Dregger pp.77-112 	Journal I Due 3/29
Apr 1-5	<i>Social Dimension</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Litfin <i>Ecovillages</i> Chap. 5 ▪ Joubert & Dregger pp. 113-142 	Attend Associated Colleges Sustainability Day – Fri. 4/5
Apr 8-12	<i>Cultural Dimension</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Litfin <i>Ecovillages</i> Chap. 6 ▪ Joubert & Dregger pp. 143-172 	Apr 9 - Pre-trip meeting – Time and location TBA

Apr 19 – 21	<i>Ecovillage Immersion I: Ecovillage at Ithaca</i>	See full itinerary for schedule and activities. Workshops to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Green Building & Renewable Energy ▪ Nonviolent Communication ▪ Participatory Decision-Making
Apr 22-26	<i>Beyond Ecovillages</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Litfin <i>Ecovillages</i> Chap. 6 ▪ Joubert & Dregger pp. 173-228 	
Apr 29-May 3	<i>Transition Towns: Resilience and Localization</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hopkins Pt 1 & 2 	
May 6-10	<i>Tools for Transition</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hopkins Pt 3 pp. 92-192 ▪ Watch film: A New We: Ecological Communities and Ecovillages in Europe 	Journal II Due 5/10
May 13-17	<i>Energy Descent Action Plans</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hopkins Pt 3 pp. 198-292 ▪ Kirby “Cloughjordan Ecovillage: Modeling the Transition to a Low-Carbon Society” 	May 16 - Pre-trip meeting – Time and location TBA
May 19 – 31	<i>Ecovillage Immersion II: Cloughjordan Ecovillage</i>	See full itinerary for schedule and activities. See attached “Cloughjordan Module for Students in Social Sciences” for workshop descriptions & presenter bios.
June 3	Reflecting on Cloughjordan	Final Journal Due 6/3
June 7	Final Projects	Final Project Due 6/7

Additional Readings & Resources

- Bang, Jan Martin. 2005 *Ecovillages: A Practical Guide to Sustainable Communities*. Gabriola Island, BC, CA: New Society Publishers.
- Dawson, Jonathan. 2006. *Ecovillages: New Frontiers for Sustainability* Chelsea Green
- Global Ecovillage Network. 2016. <http://gen.ecovillage.org/> Retrieved October 10, 2016.
- Hopkins, Rob. *Kinsale 2021 An Energy Descent Action Plan – Version.1. 2005*. Kinsale Further Education College.
- Jackson, Hildur and Karen Svensson. 2002. *Ecovillage Living Restoring the Earth and Her People*. Devon, UK: Green Books.
- Meltzer, Graham. 2005. *Sustainable Community: Learning from the Cohousing Model*. Victoria, BC, CA: Trafford
- Walker, Liz. 2005. *Ecovillage at Ithaca*. Gabriola Island, BC, CA: New Society Publishers.
- _____. 2010. *Choosing a Sustainable Future: Ideas and Inspiration from Ithaca, NY*. Gabriola Island, BC, CA: New Society Publishers.

Cloughjordan Module for Students in Social Sciences

1. General introduction on climate change

Climate change is fast emerging as the defining challenge of the 21st century yet it remains by and large marginal to public discussion and even to most academic theorising about social change. This opening lecture introduces the issue as being more accurately conceived of as a clash between our socio-economic system and the limits of the ecosystem, manifested in growing scarcity of resources, in species loss, in greenhouse gas emissions, in potentially catastrophic changes to our climate, in pressures on food and water supplies, in rising sea levels and in threats to the oceans. Labelling the current dominant model of development as a 'high-carbon model' (German Advisory Council, 2011), the lecture identifies the changes required to transition to a low-carbon economy and society. This will require fashioning a socio-economic model that ensures development does not breach ecological limits and assesses the political and economic prospects for such a model to emerge.

*Session co-ordinator and lecturer: **Professor Peadar Kirby***

2. Energy Supply

Energy scarcity can be expected to have increasing impacts on every aspect of society in the years to come. Dwindling reserves of cheap fossil fuels will lead to steeply-rising prices and, very probably, to periodic supply failures. This will have major effects on how we live, how we work, how we travel and how we feed ourselves. Most governments seem blind to the implications, preferring to believe that efficiency gains and a gradual changeover to renewable energy will lead to a painless transition to a properous future. There is little sign of planning for the social reforms that will needed if this transition fails to materialize or proves to cost much more than anticipated.

This lecture and workshop will critically examine the prospects for alternative sources of energy, from the perspectives of their social, economic and environmental sustainability. Students will gain an appreciation that there is no 'Get Out Of Jail Free' card and that there is an urgent need for some unpopular decisions to be made regarding sources of energy. How we use energy presents equal challenges. Many of our life-support systems evolved in an era of cheap energy: the homes we live in, our commute to work, our workplaces and our food supply are among the most critical. Other sessions in this module will examine these.

*Session co-ordinator and lecturer: **Dr Duncan Martin***

3. Energy Use in Buildings

Houses, schools, offices and factories can be designed and built to use very little energy for the heating, lighting and ventilation we need to survive. The extra cost is not excessive over the lifespan of the building. However, improved building standards will do little to help the occupants of older buildings, including many poorer members of society. Rented housing is particularly problematic.

This lecture and workshop will examine the implications of the issues for policy and legislation in the areas of housing and the use of buildings. Should older housing be upgraded or knocked and replaced? Should co-housing become the norm? Should the single-occupancy house once again become the rarity it once was? Should most commercial and public buildings be multi-purpose, in use 24/7? Should house rental include energy costs – as is already becoming coming common for commercial buildings? Should renting become the norm for working people, facilitating relocation to reduce commuting distance?

Where we build and how we plan our towns also has systematic impacts on energy use. Should we abandon our coastal cities to the rising tides and retreat to new eco-cities on higher land? Such cities might be designed to exclude the private car and to minimize commuting, to minimize the use of water and energy and to harvest what they need. Radical, yes, but would any other solution be truly sustainable?

This workshop will be followed by a tour of the ecovillage, with visits to a number of exemplar houses.

*Session co-ordinator and lecturer: **Dr Duncan Martin***

4. Food and water

Threats to food supplies in many parts of the world are being identified by the 5th Assessment Report of the IPCC as one of the major impacts of climate change. While the exact impacts are far from certain, the scientific consensus is overwhelming that our food production systems face major risks. Therefore greater localisation of food production and drawing consumers more into the production of a percentage of their own food needs is becoming civil society activism and even policy discussion. Similarly, the issue of water shortages has emerged as a major threat in some parts of the world, and is being exacerbated by climate change. Cloughjordan eco-village offers a practical example of how these problems can be addressed through its Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) community farm and careful management of water supplies, including a sophisticated drainage system and rainwater harvesting. This lecture will introduce students to the empirical evidence of the nature and extent of the threat of climate change to food and water supplies before going on to introduce them to what is being done in Cloughjordan. This will involve site visits and meetings with those responsible for the community farm.

*Session co-ordinator and lecturer: **Bruce Darrell***

Food production and resilience

Growing your own food can be the most effective method of reducing your ecological footprint and carbon emissions, as well as improving the resilience of your household and community. Growing a few vegetables in a back garden, balcony or allotment can be an important step in the transition to a more sustainable lifestyle, while increasing your connection with natural systems in the production of healthy food. Moving beyond a more casual approach to food growing, to a larger scale attempt at providing much of the vegetable (and other food) you eat, can enable a dramatic shift to more resilient food supplies. Unfortunately, shifting to a larger scale of gardening comes with its own problems and issues, not least of which the high rate of failure that new gardeners experience.

This lecture and workshop will introduce various methods for growing food in a small space and explore the difficulties and possibilities of food production in a climate like Ireland. Critical issues such as how to prepare the soil, where to get sufficient fertility and how to protect crops from increasingly erratic weather will be covered. This module will include a discussion about how to enable more people to grow more of their own food, and possible mechanism and support systems that can be developed to ensure greater success rate.

*Session co-ordinator and lecturer: **Bruce Darrell***

Rural communities and the future of Irish agriculture

Agri-food both contributes to and is affected by climate change. Ireland in particular is a significant emitter of GHGs via its agri-food sector. What's more, according to Minister for Agriculture Simon Coveney "nobody in the Irish administration ever suggested that agriculture was going to reduce emissions long term". How are rural communities responding to this? We will first explore the mosaic of agri-food related activities in Cloughjordan, and how these represent an example of an Irish rural

community adjusting its agri-food behaviour, while adding to its social environmental and economic sustainability. Then the focus shifts to one particular aspect of Cloughjordan, the Community owned farm. This farm is a CSA – Community Supported Agriculture – initiative, which is a specific model of risk, reward and responsibility sharing. Background to the formation of CSAs will be presented, which has social environmental economic and cultural dimensions. The specifics of the Cloughjordan based CSA will then be unpacked, within the framework of climate change and rural sustainability. Finally, Food Sovereignty will be presented as an overarching theoretical framework within which to house the Cloughjordan agri-food mosaic in general and the community owned farm in particular. Research on the sustainability of Food Sovereignty will also be presented, to assess the scalability of a food sovereignty approach.

Session co-ordinator and lecturer: Dr Oliver Moore

5. Community Resilience – Collaborative Approaches to Making the Transition to a Low Carbon World

It is clear that we are facing a systemic crisis for which we are completely unprepared. It is argued that the world is fast approaching a peak in world oil production, leaving oil-dependent communities increasingly vulnerable. A changing climate is already affecting communities across the planet, and as impacts intensify in the coming years communities will need to increase their ability to adapt and respond. This session will look at emerging cooperative actions that foster public empowerment and engagement, with the objective of strengthening the resilience of our communities and catalysing a transition to a low-carbon world.

Resilience from a community point of view refers to the capacity of a community to overcome adversity and adapt positively to change. This module introduces and discusses possible actions that can be made locally to develop resilience.

These include:

- Integrated and future-focused approaches to the rebuilding of social capital and systems of reciprocity
- The development of community resilience around food, energy and buildings
- Processes being developed by communities to engage in the sustainable economic development of their area

Session co-ordinator: Davie Philip and Mary Meighan

6. Climate change and the social sciences

The final session begins by examining the reality of how the main social sciences of economics, sociology and political science are addressing the challenge of climate change. It examines the dominant conceptual and theoretical paradigms that shape these disciplines and the social sciences more generally and argues that the transition to a low-carbon society needs to become a much more central issue to the concerns of each of these disciplines. Only if the social sciences are providing robust research evidence and policy-relevant studies can the scale of the challenge facing political leaders, policy makers, the business and farming community, and civil society be adequately informed and guided. This session will end with a facilitated discussion of the lessons to be learnt from the Cloughjordan ecovillage for the challenges of transitioning to a low-carbon society.

Session co-ordinator and lecturers: Professor Peadar Kirby and Dr Duncan Martin

Cloughjordan Education Team Bios

Professor Peadar Kirby is Professor Emeritus of International Politics and Public Policy at the University of Limerick. He previously lectured at the School of Law and Government at Dublin City University. He has written extensively on models of development both in Ireland and in Latin America, on globalisation and on vulnerability/resilience. His recent books are *Transitioning to a Post-Carbon Society: Degrowth, austerity and wellbeing*, co-edited with Ernest Garcia and Mercedes Martinez-Iglesias (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) and *Climate Change and Low-Carbon Development Pathways: From techno-optimism to political economy*, co-authored with Tadhg O'Mahony (forthcoming from Palgrave Macmillan). Other books include *Adapting to Climate Change: Governance Challenges*, co-edited with Deiric Ó Broin (Glasnevin Publishing, 2015) *Civil Society and State in Left-led Latin America*, co-edited with Barry Cannon (Zed Books, 2012), *Towards a Second Republic: Irish politics since the Celtic Tiger*, written with Mary P. Murphy (Pluto Ireland, 2011), and *Celtic Tiger in Collapse: Explaining the Weaknesses of the Irish Model* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Other recent publications include *Transforming Ireland: Challenges, Critiques, Resources*, co-edited with Debbie Ging and Michael Cronin (Manchester University Press, 2009), *Power, Dissent and Democracy: Civil Society and the State in Ireland*, co-edited with Deiric Ó Broin (A&A Farmar, 2009), and *Explaining Ireland's Development: Economic Growth with Weakening Welfare*, Social Policy and Development Paper No. 37, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD, 2008). Among his other recent books are the following: *Vulnerability and Violence: The Impact of Globalisation* (Pluto Press, 2006), *Contesting the State: Lessons from the Irish Case* (Manchester University Press, 2008), co-edited with Maura Adshead and Michelle Millar, and *Taming the Tiger: Social Exclusion in a Globalised Ireland*, co-edited with David Jacobson and Deiric Ó Broin (Tasc with New Island Books, 2006).

He has also published *The Celtic Tiger in Distress: Growth with Inequality in Ireland* (Palgrave, 2002), *Introduction to Latin America: Twenty-First Century Challenges* (Sage, 2003) and *Poverty Amid Plenty: World and Irish Development Reconsidered* (Trócaire and Gill & Macmillan, 1997). He has published articles in *New Political Economy*, *Review of International Political Economy*, *Politics and Society*, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *The European Journal of Development Research*, *Globalizations*, *Development Review*, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, *The Irish Review* and *Administration*. He holds a PhD from the London School of Economics.

Dr Duncan Martin is a Chartered Process Engineer, Chartered Scientist, Chartered Environmentalist and Chartered Waste Manager. Recently retired from a post as Course Leader and Senior Lecturer at the University of Limerick, he previously taught at Nottingham and Teesside Universities in England and NUST in Zimbabwe. Industrial experience included bulk enzyme production and responsibility for research on energy, by-products and waste with a major player in the Scotch Whisky Industry.

His primary research interest is in the mechanisms of biogas production from organic wastes and other feedstocks, through the process of anaerobic digestion. He has proposed an alternative reaction mechanism for anaerobic digestion, in which the reactions could take place in the solid phase, as well as in a liquid phase (if present). The decay of wood might serve as a familiar example of the concept (although the mechanisms are different – wood does not decay under anaerobic conditions.) A solid-phase mechanism might be dominant in a high-solids environment, such as a landfill, and would lead to very different process dynamics. Although politely received by the research community, this hypothesis remains unproven.

He was Chair of the Republic of Ireland Centre of the Institution of Waste Management from 2004-2006 and served on the Centre Council from 2001 to 2008. He served on the committee of the Environmental Protection Group of the Institution of Chemical Engineers and was a founder member of its Sustainability Group. He has been PRO and Treasurer of the Nenagh Community RailPartnership since 2007.

He has been an active member of the ecovillage community since 2002, living in Cloughjordan since 2006 and the ecovillage itself since 2013. He is acting manager of the community's district heating plant and has played a leading role in the Village Education Research & Training group from its formation. He has served one term on the Board of the Cloughjordan Ecovillage Service Company and two on the Board of Sustainable Projects Ireland Ltd, the educational charity that established and manages the ecovillage.

Davie Philip currently manages the Community Resilience Programme at Cultivate Living and Learning. Davie was a founding member of both FEASTA: the Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability and Sustainable Projects Ireland the company behind the ecovillage project in Cloughjordan, Co. Tipperary where he now lives. He is a catalyst for the Transition Movement both in Ireland and internationally. From 2009 to 2011 he sat on the board of SEAI the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland and currently is a board member of Grow It Yourself Ireland. Davie chairs the Cloughjordan Community Farm and is active in the education and research working group at Cloughjordan Ecovillage. He conceived and directed the 'Powerdown Show' a 10 part TV series on how communities can do more for themselves and wrote and directed a short film on resilient communities called 'Surfing the Waves of Change.'

Bruce Darrell was educated as an architect in Canada before moving to Ireland in 1997. Since then he has been actively involved in developing sustainable communities, and exploring methods of improving the resilience of our food supply systems. Bruce was actively involved with Dublin Co-housing, a citizen-led multi-unit housing development that was planned for the the city centre. For the past 12 years he has been working to help establish the Cloughjordan Ecovillage, where he is active in the areas of education, food and land use, in addition to designing and building two of the houses in the community. He has a keen interest in developing urban and small-scale agriculture systems, and in exploring the many possibilities and benefits of reintegrating human habitation with food production. He played an active role in enabling the recent dramatic increase in food growing projects and people growing their own food in Dublin. He was a Co-founder of the Dublin Food Growing initiative (which later became Dublin Community Growers), worked with Dublin City Council, the Minister of State for Food and Horticulture to establish new areas for allotments and community gardens in the city, as well as offering courses to educate people about the possibilities and practicalities of growing food in their own back gardens.

Since 2003 he has been an active member of Feasta (the Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability) both supporting the development of this innovative 'think tank', and working as a Food Security Analyst. In 2005 he organised the first international conference to explore the relationship between food security and peak oil. Since then he has focused on the possibilities of the use of biochar and developed the concept of nutritional resilience. Since moving to Cloughjordan, Bruce has worked as a grower for the Cloughjordan Community Farm, been an instructor on numerous permaculture courses. His current projects include the RED Gardens, a series of 5 Research Education and Demonstration gardens which are exploring different methods of growing food at a family scale. He is also planning a new project - the Resilient Garden - with the aim of testing the possible resilience of various methods of food production at an intermediate scale.

Dr Oliver Moore is the Communications Manager and EU Correspondent with ARC2020. His PhD, from 2007, was in rural and agri-food sociology, with a specialisation in organics and direct selling. He is also published in peer reviewed academic journals, such as the International Journal of Consumer Studies and the Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development. Currently he is research associate with the Centre for Co-operative Studies in UCC's Department of Food Business and Development.

Oliver is also a feature writer and columnist with the Irish Examiner, while he also contributes to other publications such as Food and Wine Magazine and the Farmers Journal. He appears regularly on RTE Radio one's Countrywide farming radio show. He lives in Cloughjordan Ecovillage in Ireland.

Mary Meighan is the Founder and Director of Celtic Journeys, Ireland. She has a lifetime of experience making sacred journeys all over the world and a deep passion and understanding of her own native Celtic culture. Mary regularly visits other countries giving talks on the Celtic Tradition, facilitating Celtic Workshops, and guiding Retreats on Celtic Spirituality. She currently lectures on the M.A. in Addiction Studies, Dublin Business School. Mary is researching material for a book in respect of how the principles and characteristics of the Celtic Wisdom Tradition can support a more integrated and holistic lifestyle, with particular reference to Recovery. Mary has researched Wisdom Traditions and within that context explored how the Celtic Wisdom Tradition could potentially enrich current practices in community living and sustainability. Along with a B.Sc in Psychology from the University of Ulster, A Diploma in Addiction Therapy and a professional qualification in Social Work (C.Q.S.W.), Mary obtained a Masters degree in Social Work from University College Cork. She also holds a Masters degree in Spirituality from Naropa University, U.S.A.