

Report from the Chair, AGM 2.8.2023, ECC-SIG of OHS

This has been a terrible year, not for our little organisation, but for the planet. I don't need to tell you about all the disasters that have taken place as a result of climate change over the past year. We are historians, documenters of events and of people's lives, but at times I have to remind myself that what we do is not a complete irrelevance, despite the enormity of the challenge now facing the planet.

Since our last AGM, held in October 2022, we have focused on 3 areas: online seminars, the world map of environment/ climate crisis oral history projects, and the International Oral History of the Transition Movement.

Online Seminars

We have had 5 presenters, all of which have been excellent.

In March the presentations were entitled 'More than Weather'. Kelly Hydrick of the Climate Stories Project described the work of this extraordinary educational and artistic forum for sharing stories about community and personal responses to climate change. Melody Hunter-Pillion, of the Global Change Fellow at North Carolina State University, focused on her interviews on the effects of extreme weather events in the Caribbean.

In June the presentations focused on wildfires. Dr Shirleene Robinson of the National Library of Australia described the Badja Forest Road fire oral history project, about the devastation caused by the wildfires of New South Wales in 2019-'20. Holly Mercer, Professor at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, spoke about the Rising from the Ashes project, documenting the immediate and ongoing impacts of the 2016 Chimney Tops 2 wildfires, an unprecedented event in Tennessee.

And today, of course, we have heard from Sean Holman, Wayne Crookes Professor of Environmental and Climate Journalism at the University of Victoria, Canada, about the work of the Climate Disaster Project.

Organising these events is now to be shared between myself and Simona Tobia of the University of Pau, France. Many thanks Simona! And if anyone knows of a project that might be suitable for a presentation, please could you let either Simona or myself know.

World Map

We now have 67 ECC oral history projects entered on the map worldwide, covering all sorts of effects of the Crisis, from drought to flood to increased hurricanes to extreme heat, from interviewing agricultural workers in Scotland to a project about biodiversity in California. However, while there are a number of projects from outside the English-speaking world featured, there are not nearly enough, so our task in the coming year is to focus particularly on including oral history projects from those parts of the world where English is not the dominant language, to make the map more truly representative and also more useful to those who consult it. Kelly Hydrick has kindly agreed to take over this area of work from me.

International Oral History of the Transition Movement

The Transition Movement is an international movement aimed at moving towards a net zero society, particularly focusing upon localism. Following the inauguration of this international oral history project at the OHS Conference of 2022, we have held 6 meetings, involving projects in Norway and Sweden, France, the USA and the UK.

In France, Hub Sud-Ouest France en Transition is participating. Our contacts there are Simona Tobia and Andrew Milne, of the University of Pau.

Jessica Taylor has been conducting interview in the Appalachian mountains of the Western United States, a region that has fueled the United States' twentieth-century industrialization and militarization through its natural resources – most famously, coal. At times these interviews call into question the whole notion of transition. As interviewee Patricia DeMaro puts it, 'One of the things that I do is teach systems, and help people understand the interconnectivity of these issues, that you can't just solve one all by itself and think you're done. They're interconnected and we're really looking at changing the systems, the underlying way we do things. That's why I like to talk about transformation and not transition. We're long past the time of a transition.'

Also in the United States, Kelly Hydrick has been reaching out to Transition organizations in the Boston area. Here it seems that the umbrella term 'Transition' has in fact fallen out of use, with organisations coalescing around different terms such as 'green' or 'sustainability'. However, the work is on very similar lines.

In the west of England, Transition Town Wellington is extremely active. Its flagship project, a food forest on an 8.5 acre site next to the town's iconic, 200-year-old textile mill at Tonedale has catalysed the local council to create a 65-acre Green Corridor around the town, to protect and enhance biodiversity, local food production, sport and accessible outdoor activities. A funding bid for the oral history project has now been completed by Anita Roy and Anita Corbin, and been submitted.

The most advanced project is a Nordic collaboration, taking place in Norway and Sweden together, led by Mariela Norheim and Inger Christine. The interviews are taking place in Bergen and Gothenburg, with a partnership between Memoar and the Sustainable Life Network. The project is well underway.

At this stage the projects in Norway and Sweden, the UK, the United States and France are being run separately and funded separately, in effect as pilot projects, and each is at a different stage of development. Every one of them will lead to an outcome, in most cases an exhibition, as well as the archived interviews. We then intend to use the success of these projects to put together a much more closely co-ordinated international project involving many more countries, and funded centrally rather than through each individual country.

Finally

I would particularly like to thank Jude Allen (of course), Padmini Broomfield and Jess Taylor for their support throughout the year, and Beth Thomas for her excellent revision of our pages on the Oral History Society website.

And I would like to suggest a small change to our name, so that we will no longer be called the Environment and Climate Change SIG but rather the Environment and Climate Crisis SIG (our initials, helpfully, will stay the same). It seems to me that we should take every opportunity to emphasise the gravity of the present situation. I hope this suggestion – and this report – meets with your approval.

Rib Davis, Chair, ECC-SIG, 2.8.2023