

Transcript of 'Local Sustainability Policy'

Season 1, Episode 9, Transforming Tomorrow

[Theme music]

Paul: Hello, and welcome to Transforming Tomorrow the podcast from the Pentland Centre for Sustainability in Business here at Lancaster University Management School. I'm Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

Paul: And we're back with another group of episodes, Jan, where I'm told reliably that you will not be mangling the English language, making up words that should not be made up.

Jan: None at all. All proper words, in the proper place and the proper order. You'll be happy.

Paul: Yes I, I did speak to some uh colleagues and friends who are most, most unimpressed [sound of Jan suppressing laughter] about the fact that 'infrastructuring' was used by a verb. Some of them have quit using English forever as a result.

Jan: I don't know what to say.

Paul: [laughs] So yes, we're here to discuss some new topics and we're going to be discussing something that revolves a little bit around Net Zero today, Jan.

Jan: Indeed. And Net Zero is part of the language that we have as we're addressing global climate change.

This is a perfect time to be having a conversation about global climate change ideas, and particularly the idea of Net Zero, and how it happens in, in places and in communities.

Because COP28 is on. Now COP stands for Conference of Parties, and it just means a meeting of those people who are party to an international agreement, and who have agreed to achieve certain things going forward in time.

So this Conference of Parties is the parties to the Paris Agreement which was signed in 2015, and it's already generating lots of headlines, there's been some good news, and there's been some uh people fighting about whether or not you can still have oil and gas in order to get there, and so we know already it's

an area where there's a lot of disagreement, a lot of discussion, and where academic research and particularly our first guest today can really help us understand this area.

[Theme music]

Paul: I'd never realised that it stood for Conference of Parties, I will admit that. And you say it relates to the Paris Agreement does that mean there's been 28 of them since the Paris Agreement or was Paris number, I'm going to say 15.

Jan: I think it was 15 actually, well done.

Um, so the Conference of Parties have been together since the International Panel on Climate Change has been put together. And then it gets very confusing because there's of course COP16 which is the Conference of Parties um 16th meeting for biodiversity which is, is next year, we might hear something about that in a future podcast.

So it just, it's an international relations term.

Paul: If they were being kind they would have thought of a different title for that so that we didn't have COP16 following COP28.

Jan: Yes indeed, it's quite confusing I grant you.

Paul: Very, very confusing. What isn't confusing is that we do have a guest in the studio with us.

So today we're joined by Dr Jekaterina Rindt a Lecturer in Marketing here at Lancaster University Management School. She's a co- investigator on the I-Connect project which is examining local policy innovation in the context of the UK Net Zero targets.

And I can say Jan, having spoken to many of them over the past few years, I can tell you she's one of the most popular lecturers that we have among students here. Universally described as brilliant, and pretty much adored.

Jan: What can I say? That seems my experience of Jekaterina as well.

Paul: Welcome Jekaterina...

Jan: ...welcome...

Jekaterina: Thank you for such a generous introduction. I hope to live, live up to these expectations. [laughs]

Paul: Just about the only person in the room at the moment who can be described as universally adored [Jekaterina laughs] as well, so there you are, it's, it's great to have you with us.

Jekaterina: Thank you.

Paul: We mentioned the I-Connect project very briefly, then. Do you want to just give us an overview of what the I-Connect project is?

Jekaterina: Yes, the I-Connect project is a collaboration between um Professor Radka Newton from the um Department of Entrepreneurship and Strategy, and Dr Mirian Calvo from The Lancaster Institute of Contemporary Arts, and myself from the Department of Marketing. And I think the interdisciplinary um collaboration here already says something about the aim and the, the nature of that project.

What we are trying to do is to introduce design into innovation of local policy making. And we have specifically noted that design has been introduced into national policymaking, and actually the UK has been a global leader in this field, and has been leading especially with the introduction of the Policy Lab UK in London about 10 years ago, and it has created multiple milestones at a national level.

It has democratised design in policymaking, it has created important milestones in recognising what the benefits of design are. Equally it has also shown what the challenges are, and it is something that I would consider a work in progress to some degree.

But unfortunately or, or fortunately, for our project, we had noticed that there is still some scope for development in how we can use design at a local policy level. And I think this is especially important in light of the fact that it has been reported that every 10th Council in the UK is near bankruptcy, and on average every local council is 33 million um predicted to have a 33 million deficit by 2025.

So it shows two important issues here. On the one hand you have grand challenges like the climate change challenge, poverty, migration and others, but in this case we are particularly looking at the Net Zero challenge. That um is not only a challenge at the national level, it is actually a global challenge, very much as it says.

But at the same time you would expect the local um policy makers to operationalise that challenge, and to do something about it. So we see that there's an imbalance here by placing one of the biggest challenges of our time onto local councils that are maybe some of the most under-equipped, not just budgets-wise but also skills-wise, to do something about it.

Jan: That's a really fascinating opening, and maybe for our listeners could you say something about what Net Zero targets are, and I know that it's a really contested space, so just a sense of what we're trying to achieve when we're, as the UK and other parts of the world, are trying to have Net Zero.

Jekaterina: Sure. I find Net Zero fascinating because it is a very short word to summarise a very complex issue. [laughs]

So Net Zero means no longer adding to the total amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. That is probably the easiest way to put it. It was decided under the Paris 2015 Agreement, um where there were 197 countries, including the UK, that we should agree to lower our global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2100.

I will not be alive by then most likely, but hopefully this is going to um to happen for the planet because obviously we are, at this moment, at a very critical stage and this is why I think um the current governmental controversy around whether there's even scope to extend some of these deadlines to 2035, to, to keep it to 2030, have been met with very mixed feelings in the industry, policy makers, as well as citizens and NGOs.

Paul: We've talked about, mentioned COP28, that's obviously global, national. A lot of the policies you're talking about that have been introduced on the back of all the national agreements are at a very large level.

So why is it important to consider Net Zero at a local, regional level?

Jekaterina: Very good question. I think there are two reasons for that. One is that addressing Net Zero goals requires often very place-sensitive and regionally relevant policies.

I think when we talk about Net Zero most people associate this with um, probably an issue that should be uh classified with the Department for the Environment or any policy makers dealing with agriculture, maybe energy, of course energy um management. But actually when we look into the different sectors that need to work together to make Net Zero happen, we will quickly

realise how many different departments, and often siloed um uh divisions need to work together.

Just to mention a few, transport is a very important one. Transport contributes around 25% to the CO₂ emissions. And this excludes shipping and aviation, so obviously cars is an important issue but actually what we have been looking into even more is um, in the context of the Eden Morecambe project, how can we encourage sustainable and active transport, as a way of traveling or reaching the Eden Project.

We have been doing this at a fairly local scale because, as I, as I mentioned our main aim was to look into how we can help local policy makers deal with these issues. But transport is an important thing, and next to that it's also obviously environmental and forest management, um it's agriculture, it's also health, community and well-being management.

And we've discovered as we were discussing the transport topic with many of our stakeholders, and trying to visualise what some of their concerns are, what some of their um ways are of dealing with transport issues, is that there's much more into it than just um the efficiency of getting from one place to the other.

It often influences how we perceive the place where we have arrived at. I don't know if you've reflected maybe on your commute to work, if you had a good journey to work you may enjoy your day more, you get off on a better start, if you already were frustrated in traffic um, it kind of can influence everything, from the timing to, to your mood to how stressed you are.

So our aim with this project was probably to look at the Eden Project as a, obviously hopefully, very beneficial project for the region, but also to make sure that the journey to Eden is 'Eden-like', and at this point we encountered many challenges to, to making that journey happen, so we were grateful we had the chance to work with our local councils on this.

Paul: When you looked at the journeys towards where the potential Eden Project Morecambe site would be you looked at the Greenway, you looked at public transport, buses, everything, and you spoke to lots of people, I think you spoke to local businesses, you spoke to students here at the University, you spoke to people who had families visiting. Lots of different views.

How do you build different views of different people into this kind of policy advice framework, because lots of people are going to have lots of different opinions?

Jekaterina: Excellent, yes. Um, and this was actually one of our aims to bring that diversity into the um policymaking process. We found that you know through, and this not to say that local policymaking is not trying to do their best, they actually really go beyond uh what many people would probably expect.

But it is that the legacy processes, the Legacy systems that are in place, are typically bound to certain types of evidence that are used to arrive at policy decisions. So we've been very keen to make sure that there is a sensitivity to the place, to the human needs, to um diversity of expertise, and the actual user experience that should be taken into account when making lasting and cross- sectoral decisions.

So when we were thinking about some of the ways in which we can bring this back to policymakers, amongst the stakeholders that you have just mentioned Paul we also were lucky to have on two of our stakeholder events local policymakers um being present.

And they have worked on, on the canvas that we have uh developed, and a few other tools, and it was fascinating for me to see that some of them met each other and had conversations about this topic for the first time because they came to our stakeholder workshop.

So for me, that was an achievement because they we managed to actually achieve a cross-departmental conversation, and that is sometimes what needs to take place first.

Another thing that I would like to mention, and I'm very proud of this happening at the moment, it is that um this diversity of evidence and experience, we try to capture this through ethnographic research methods. So we were having videography, photography, visual maps of how this can look like, and we were conscious that only a fraction of policymakers could dedicate time to actually come to our workshops, or also our 'walkshops' um that we've done.

And the aim was, of course, for this to be useful to policymakers, so we did not just want this to be um something to be seen by maybe one or two who were

especially enthusiastic in supporting our, our project, and equally our aim in this was not to educate policymakers, how they should do their work, this was definitely not the aim.

The aim was to help them and empower them with more evidence that lies beyond the conventional spectrum of data that is used in policymaking. We often find that the reports and sometimes the aggregate data that is used are kind of sanitised and optimised for the space of meetings where conversations take place.

Our aim was to innovate in this space and, and what we are currently working on is the first of its kind policy immersion space. And this is a space where, we are designing a actual physical space in the local Council that we hope will be visited by a variety of um policymakers who are in that building, and it is going to provide an immersion for local policymakers in, into the into the topic that is subject to that uh policy decision.

So practic, practically speaking um this means that we are going to have a room that is furnished with the firsthand photographic evidence with visual, audio evidence. We are currently working on footage that will have cycling and footpath evidence from using a GoPro, that will be used hopefully with um in conjunction with VR equipment.

So ideally what this means is that, if we cannot demand of of our policy makers to dedicate time to um come to those places to experience them, we will bring that place to them. And hopefully what will come from that, and we had some very positive feedback from the kind of conversations around this installation already, it is to um create a space where they have a conversation starter, but also a immersion into the real life experience of how that um Greenway can look like.

Jan: It sounds amazing, and this is where I think um what you said at the opening is that it's a design process. And so oftentimes we kind of think we, we generate knowledge through the same means as before, but you're showing us some really interesting and new bits of knowledge.

Now you said something really quite interesting there that caught my ear, you talked about 'walk' shops. [laughs] I have to say, in my accent I have to be very careful about how I communicate that. [Paul laughs]

Can you tell us something about the 'walkshops'?

Jekaterina: Sure. The workshops were to me a fascinating experience. We decided to do workshops because we wanted to capture what it is like to travel between Lancaster and the Eden Morecambe site using different ways of active and public transport.

So the workshop specifically referred to a group of different personas, we have invited different stakeholders but also made sure that they represent different personas who would be likely to walk that path, in this case.

Um we have replicated this also with cyclists, others using public transport including the train and the bus, but in this case the workshop referred to, I think it was about a group of six or seven people walking from, from Lancaster to, to the Eden Morecambe site.

And what I found fascinating about this is that, it was not just walking it and measuring how fast we were, and um and you know, it was not about the optimisation of that journey in terms of, is there even a foot path and can we use it?

It was more about capturing what does the experience of walking that path mean for the different people, and we were capturing this using a Polaroid camera, and a kind of diary sheet where we were logging in what smells we perceived, what sounds, how it made us feel.

Also capturing different visuals that were relevant to, to different people. So in my case I actually found this fascinating at the start because everything that kind of caught my eye was rather concerning.

I remember seeing these posters, and I think it's actually still up, uh for a missing person, followed by the knife bin which is placed under the railway bridge, followed by the site where someone decided to, to end their life, so there's a lot of history and a lot of lived experience on these pathways, including also observing the different kinds of litter.

It was fascinating to me how much litter can impact our experience, and especially the kind of litter. Some of this indicates substance abuse, others indicates particular other social issues like leaflets to help with gambling addiction.

So I just found that we were witness to a lot of social challenges that marked the path to Eden. And at the same time I felt that, at a superficial level, if

people would look at this, oh we are designing active and sustainable transport options for the Eden Morecambe, it looked more like a tourist attraction.

But actually it was about embedding our research into the community, finding out what issues are important to the community, and how can the community have a space in um contributing to how that policy will look like.

Jan: Brilliant, and I know that path 'cause I cycle down to Morecambe occasionally on it. So sometimes it does feel a little bit scary, but at the same time you sometimes see we ponies off in the, and there's the football ground you go by, and whatnot, so it's quite a diverse space.

Paul: I, I find it fascinating as well that you can see things and it means different things to different people. I know that there's graffiti for instance that you could see, and some people might look at that say oh that's great, that's very artistic, and some people say oh I'm worried about this, is this an area where we're going to come across ruffians who are doing graffiti, so it's all, it's important to have the different people with different perspectives taking part in these workshops, because otherwise you get one view of yourself, and you don't get the view of the community as a whole.

Beyond that though it's not just looking at what's on the path there,, on the cycleway. You need to take into account things such as the facilities that available if someone needs to stop use a toilet are there actually any toilet facilities? If someone wants to get something to eat, is there actually anywhere nearby where they can go and get a snack? So there's so many different things that you need to consider aren't there beyond, like you said, just the path itself.

Jekaterina: Yes, and I think it's fascinating how, to some degree, our research was very practical in looking at exactly some of these things, like signposting. And considering, for example, the use of multimodal transport. What we mean with that, is that someone might want to plan a journey where, depending on weather, or personal health conditions, or the company that they're in.

Maybe if they're traveling with elderly um visitors they may want to walk only the first few kilometres of that, and then switch to a bus journey, and then maybe walk a little bit more, or choose to take a complete, completely embrace the, the train journey and then have a multimodal transport back.

One of the key things that we discovered is that signposting is an issue. The signposting of facilities, but also the signposting of um different, you know, how, how far is it to get to certain places.

But equally signposting about what the different sides that we encounter actually are, um Jan mentioned the, the ponies, and that was obviously one of the most endearing things to, to pass on that green path.

And there, there's great diversity on that path, and we also passed by a quite big industrial site where most of us were not familiar with what it is, but we later found out that it has actually fascinating history about the, you know, what, what it used to manufacture, and also passing by cemeteries, and I just think that there's a lot of potential for creating narratives for different segments of that path, and equally making them more user-friendly.

I think it is not so much even about um educating potential visitors about how they can lower the carbon footprint of their um visit to Morecambe by embracing active and sustainable transport, but by making active and sustainable transport accessible, safe, and something that is emotionally desirable.

And by emotionally desirable I mean, what kind of emotions does the, does taking that route elicit? In this case, in, in our case it was very mixed, it ranged from watching the peculiarities of why a knife bin is located there, to passing by ponies, and um a lot of very adorable dogs and, you know, watching cyclists excel in their uh in their speed.

But at the same time we are aware that the Green Path was originally designed as a very functional path, and it does its job for, for that reason. But considering that Eden is likely to attract a higher visitor traffic, we need to think about how we can manage that traffic in a way that is not going to create a negative experience once they arrive.

Jan: And particularly as people are coming from further afield, it'd be nice to hear what, what thoughts are evolving about um coming as a tourist, but maybe not driving all the way into Morecambe.

So how are some of those tensions and, and mixed mode travel methods being thought about?

Jekaterina: Yes, we tried to embrace this by looking into the different personas. So one of the personas was an international member of staff who

had grandparents visiting from abroad, and how this would um translate how that current pathway would influence their experience.

We also had um single females um walking that pathway, or a married couple with dogs, and just to say I think that there is great potential that we've found in making that pathway come to life. As in, if there are international or national visitors but from different parts of the UK coming um can we think, think about ways of explaining the history of the place.

Are there, is there maybe an opportunity for QR codes, or something that will help them to understand what the history of Lancaster is. Um, the millennial Bridge what the pathway, how long the pathway, pathway will take, what different sides they will pass by.

So I think there is great potential for community contributions, and also for considering the wider impact of the Net Zero agenda. What I mean with that is um, something I've not mentioned before, but um a very important element of the, of meeting the Net Zero goals, is to think about what can we do about forest areas or greenlands that are going to help absorb CO₂.

I believe the UK is at 13% of the area being covered in forest, which is one of the lowest in Europe. And they have tried to address this by annual goals of planting more trees and things like that, which is very welcome. But we are also aware that um on that Greenway there are many opportunities to really capitalise on that investment, and think about ways in which we can possibly not just, just plant more trees to um deal with the CO₂ emissions, but also find ways that benefits the community, maybe through orchards or ways that educate children and, and the community about different seasons, about locally grown apples, pears, whatever is available in the, in the region that is, is local to this place.

Jan: So from uh naughty trees on Katy Mason's podcast [Paul and Jekaterina laugh] we're now into tasty trees...So I like...

Jekaterina: ...tasty trees, I like that...

Jan: ...I like tasty trees...

Paul: ...can a tree be both tasty and naughty at the same time?

Jan: Probably in different seasons quite possibly, yeah.

Paul: Depending upon the weather and its particular mood on that day.

It seems as well, Jekaterina, that this is driven by what's happening with the Eden Project North, which is a magnificent project, you know, lots of funding in there, hopefully help with a regeneration of Morecambe and the wider area.

But it seems that it can be applied to wider policy decisions that are going on. This might shine a light on how issues can be brought to the attention of those policymakers within the City Council, the County Council, in lots of different areas that might not necessarily have any relevant tie-in with either Eden or with Net Zero.

Jekaterina: Yes, and I think it's hopefully something that is going to be in the plans in the future.

Beyond helping our local policymakers in dealing with the active and sustainable transport issue and being able to link it to the Net Zero agenda, I think our second approach here was to sensitise and introduce local policymakers to the power of design.

And how we can use design to create more human-centric, sustainable, accessible and inclusive policies. And this is something that is not unique to um policies around the Net Zero agenda, it is something that ideally um should be considered in in multiple policies that are requiring a cross-sectoral um approach. And I would say most, probably most issues that come to mind would ideal require a cross-divisional or yeah cross-departmental approach.

And it's something that historically has not been a very strong feature of modern bureaucracy. In fact the, I think one of the main um I guess ways that design has been introduced into policymaking at a national level, and that as I mentioned has created a lot of positive effects, was the creation of policy labs.

And there was this phenomenon of 'lab-ification' where every national government uh tried to create a lab, and then kind of create an experimentation um mentality around using design and policy. And while it's very interesting to, to do it this way, I think the, some of the challenges are that it creates an island of experimentation, and an island of innovation, and it allows the actual policy body to almost function as usual.

So they have done their part in terms of innovating and giving this to people who know how to innovate, please do this, and if maybe surprisingly it's still had massive impact on how some policies have been designed. But I think the future is to think about the integration of design and having a more immersive

and transformative view of how we can use design and policymaking. And our longer term aim is to be able to scale this to other local councils in the UK.

Jan: I think the other thing that I've really taken from our conversation is the idea of legacy systems, and so quite often we uncover something we think, well that's a bit silly why are we doing that, when that might have been really sensible 5, 10 years ago or whatever and so we have a, a good colleague and, and friend of the Pentland Centre called Nick Barter who talks about 'future normal', and I think that's such a fantastic phrase because it's thinking about what kind of design and what kind of systems will help us navigate across to the future, but also will be entirely normal in the future, whereas at the moment seems a bit odd.

And so I think the way that you bring together people's experience of a place, how they'd like the place to be, how they'd like it to be different really helps on that that journey to future normal. It's really inspiring stuff.

Jekaterina: I would love to add something to this because the, the future normal actually speaks to some of the methodology we have used in our stakeholder workshops, and that was around creating four future worlds. It's building on the scenario-building uh methodology, but it was around detaching how we envision the future from the current constraints, limitations and legacy systems that we are aware of.

And while it takes some time sometimes to encourage policy makers to really embrace it, once they have been through it they love the idea of having a chance to not be constrained by the linearity of thinking, and by optimising from the current state, but actually be able to imagine a future state and then reverse engineer what would need to happen today to make that happen.

Paul: I loved the report actually that was created at the very start of it, and we will put a link in on the podcast page telling you where you can find all the information on the I-Connect project and the report,, the four different Lancasters that were imagined I think it was in 2050 to tie in with the Lancashire 2050 plan? I think there was Lanctopia where everything was wonderful, people were using you know renewables energy, people were using transport that was sustainable. There were, if you had your own petrol-powered car you were very much frowned upon, and all the way down to Lanctastrophe? Lanctastrophe...

Jekaterina: ...yes, Lanctastrophe...

Paul: ...yeah, so whoever made up the word didn't consider how you might have to say it, Lancastrophe, yes. And that that was where everything had gone wrong, and I think people might have been using horse and cats to get around if they were getting around at all?

Because lots of people just didn't want to travel because it was impractical, and some wonderful ways of imagining what the normal might be, obviously recognising as well that none of these scenarios that were there were going to happen exactly, but it was ways of imagining it, and it's just some great some, some great way of doing things I loved that you've done that, that you'd ask people to imagine what happens if we do this, what happens if we do that. If we have good well-being and good transport, good well-being but bad transport, good transport but bad well-being or everything's just gone to hell in a handcart.

It was, it was great. I loved that.

Jekaterina: Thank you. I think the futuring, the use of futuring methods really helped us in some radical way to decouple how we think about the future, and future policies, from relying on historical datasets.

And as much as I am a data-driven person, this is part of my research identity, it's part of what I teach, um I think that we also need to be critical of what historical datasets do, in that they tend to encourage linearity, and they tend to encourage optimising the path we are on.

And to some degree they encourage path dependency, if we are not able to critically delineate what other evidence is needed, and what evidence may be useful in future to create different states.

When you mentioned the Lancastrophe world it was actually something memorable from that group, when they said that if you don't do anything today this is where we will actually end up.

So to some degree I think the Net Zero agenda is very important to help us make sure that we will not end up in a Lancastrophe scenario.

[Theme music]

Paul: One thing I will say about one of the negative scenarios was it suggested there would be more travel by hot air balloon, which was in a negative scenario, but I just thought that would be wonderful [Jan laughs] if we could all just travel around in our own little hot air balloons sort of...

Jan: ...Phileas Fogg comes to mind and all of that literature...

Paul: ...having seen teams try to set up hot air balloons, it would take you a good extra hour to get ready for work in the morning, just to blow up the, the hot air balloon to such an extent that you could go to it.

That's been wonderful Jekaterina, that's been a fantastic conversation, or do you have something else [inaudible].

Jan: I now fully understand why you're universally adored. So pleased to have you with us.

Paul: Thank you very much Jekaterina. We'll be back next week, and next week we're welcoming uh Dr Allan Discua Cruz who is the Director of our Centre for Family Business here. We'll be discussing lots of issues around family business and sustainability.

In the meantime if you do have any questions you'd like to send to us, please do drop us an email pentlandcentre@lancaster.ac.uk, or you can find a form that's on our web page, or wherever you download our podcast there's a link to a form you can send in with any feedback, we'd love to hear from you.

So, until then, I'm Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]