



Glasgow Centre for Population Health

Seminar Series Six (2009-2010) summary

The main purpose of this short paper is to summarise the principal ideas presented by the six contributors to the Glasgow Centre for Population Health's sixth seminar series which ran from December 2009 to May 2010.

Key points together with their implications are summarised on a single page for each seminar in the series. The paper also draws out some emerging common themes from across the individual contributions.

For information - the Centre's website contains has a range of resources for each seminar. Each has a transcript, a summary, presentation slides (where used) and an audio recording which you can listen to directly from the GCPH website. A similar set of resources exists for all seminars from the previous five years which can be accessed at <http://www.gcph.co.uk/events/past> and by using the left hand menu to filter the events to each seminar series set.

Presenter	Title	Key Ideas	Implications
Prof. Michael Meaney, McGill University, Canada	<i>Nature and Nurture? The intergenerational transmission of risk for chronic illness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of an individual in any species is a process of adaptation • This occurs within socio-economic, environmental context • These resource effects are mediated through parental behaviour, particularly maternal behaviour • This mediation interacts with gene structure and activity to alter stress response through to adulthood • This affects wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early life experience sets important biological markers which can carry poor stress response and associated illness across the generations • The whole context is important especially the interaction between socio-economic, environmental and cultural factors as well as parenting
Prof. Tim Jackson, University of Surrey	<i>Prosperity without Growth</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In our finite world, current economic structures and associated growth are not sustainable... • ...yet “de-growth” is unstable bringing in its wake unpopular consequences • Another definition of prosperity - of our ability to flourish as human beings within the ecological limits of a finite planet - is possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integral to flourishing are material needs which are finite (not desires which are infinite)... • ...Social and psychological dimensions are important including identity, meaning and participation in society.... •Social goods and public space are central dimensions of flourishing, not merely a safety net for those who cannot resort to the market • These need a new economics, focused on cycles rather than growth • There are two key components to this: firstly ecological investment and secondly ecological enterprise developed within the Earth’s capacity

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Eleanor Yule, Filmmaker	<i>Scots Miserablism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the 1970s Scots filmmakers have developed a reputation for making miserablist films • Key characteristics are a tragic tone, violent lives, addicted anti-heroes, women in secondary roles, gallows humour, urban squalor from which there is no escape and where forgiveness and redemption are unknown • Previously other perspectives were more common • Other filmmakers see different qualities in Scotland and the Scots • While the genre has authentic roots, miserablism has become a habit and a commodity which sells well • Miserablism is the portrayal of an unequal society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<i>Sick nations make for sick storytellers and sick storytellers can make a nation sick</i>” • How we see ourselves in Scotland is mirrored in / encouraged by the persistence of miserablism • How do we develop other narratives about Scotland which are both authentic and hopeful and show the possibility of a society that can be more equal?

Presenter	Title	Key Ideas	Implications
Wayne Elliot The Metereological Office	<i>Impact of weather on human health – current and future issues</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Met Office approach to weather and health understands relationships between weather and health, understands who is at risk and develops tools to support them • UK society and culture is well adapted to weather systems from the prevailing south west • By and large in the summer months if the wind is from south and east then we experience hot weather and poor air quality. When the wind is from the east and north the UK has cold weather. Both instances are associated with increased risk of population health impacts • Climate change is a long standing natural feature of the planet • Evidence highlights that warming is being exacerbated by human activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Met Office runs heat wave, cold weather and ultraviolet light services to warn about and help protect from the health related impacts of weather • The health impact of global warming is most likely to come from an increasing number of extreme weather events for which we are not well adapted • Adaptation to this change is now necessary • The past is no longer a good guide to future weather patterns • Where does Glasgow stand in relation to this? How can we better protect ourselves from the effects of heat, cold and flooding which are now likely in the coming century? • Multiple co-operations linking local to global will be necessary to address these changes

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David Gustave Kids Company	<i>Code of the Street, how we should re-interpret morality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marginalised young people, though often criticised, seek the same kinds of fulfilment as the population at large • The organisation of youth culture reflects central aspects of mainstream culture • Deficiencies in young people can mostly be traced to insufficient love and care • Consolidation of the physical world accompanied by unconditional regard helps young people to flourish • Learning what it means not to be rejected is an important part of development • Making possible moments of connection with young people in which for the first time they can make real choices is hard work, but essential • Hobbes suggests that the first condition of humanity is to seek peace. This may explain why so many young people self refer to Kids Company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of relationships are central to the possibility of positive change • Different circumstances make for different responses, how can circumstances conducive to positive change be developed? • What changes in mainstream culture would assist positive change in youth culture? • How can the possibility of peace without fear be developed for marginalised young people? • Significant discipline and preparation is needed in order to make moments of connection when change is possible • If the morality of mainstream culture and youth culture is the same, the arguments here apply also to mainstream society

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Adam Kahane	<i>Power and Love – A theory and practice of social change</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power is the drive of everything to realise itself - getting this done • Love is the drive to unity of the separated • Power and love are two aspects of the same whole • Difficulties arise when these two dimensions of life are out of balance • Each has generative and degenerative qualities • Power without love tends to be reckless and abusive and love without power, sentimental and anaemic • It is difficult to work with both of these since most organisations, societies, communities tend to be dominated by one or the other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working to balance power and love is difficult but necessary • In working with difficult issues and situations it is often helpful to leave time and space for effective action to emerge unfettered by the distractions of structure • How inclusive is the whole which is being sought? • To help situations or systems which are stuck, be aware of how the dimensions of power and love play out in one's self and in one's organisation, community etc • Work on the weaker dimension to make it stronger not the other way around. The aspiration is to use all of both • Practice until adept!

Making connections

While each of the contributions to the series makes a unique contribution, it is also possible to synthesise common themes which run through them. These few paragraphs are not an exhaustive listing of the connecting ideas among the contributions, but rather a few examples given in the hope of encouraging you to make your own.

Wholeness

Each contribution makes important comments on wholeness. Adam Kahane suggests that there is a unity or wholeness to which love aspires, while David Gustave highlights it in the preparatory work which leads to moments of connection. For Tim Jackson it is expressed in the description of a finite planet and the possibility of ecological activity which sustains this web of life rather than undermines it. For Eleanor Yule this possibility is undermined by the addiction to miserablism where connection is undermined and possibilities for development and connection are limited. Wayne Elliot highlighted the connections further by pointing out that wind direction has population health implications (!). For Adam Kahane the search for wholeness is an inherent human characteristic which can sometimes be blunted by the need for self realisation.

Environment

References to environment are to be found throughout the series and at every level of human activity and experience which it covers from the world of genetic code and sequence, through individual relationships and culture to economy and biosphere.

A rich environmental thread ran through Michael Meaney's lecture. Its most striking expression to be found in the idea that exposing a lizard, which later becomes pregnant, to the smell of a predatory snake means that her offspring are born with a longer tail making it more difficult for a snake to eat. David Gustave suggested to us that the environment in which young people found themselves had a significant impact on their behaviour, which altered as it did. Moving to a larger scale, Eleanor Yule suggested that the miserablist perspective limits what we think ourselves capable of. Wayne Elliot suggested that global warming is likely to have a health impact which we need to prepare for now, while Tim Jackson suggested that a nurturing relationship to environment and ecology ought to form the basis of our economic life.

Multiple realities or possibilities

Seeing beyond one possible future or reality could be a key element of fostering positive change in a city like Glasgow. Michael Meaney for example highlighted that while DNA structure is fixed in an individual, it contains many possible expressions, within and across generations, depending on how other factors play

out for that individual, hence the long lizard tail if the mother is exposed to predator scent.

Tim Jackson expressed it as the possibility that another world is possible. A world in which we live with the Earth's carrying capacity and develop nurturing and sustainable relationships with this while still meeting need. If we cannot imagine such a world, we cannot have it.

Eleanor Yule spoke directly to the imagination of worlds in film and suggested that it is possible for our nation and our city to change the way in which it predominantly sees itself. Sick stories make us sick. To what extent can well stories make us well?

Wayne Elliot set a number of possible worlds, based on possible increases in global mean temperature and the possible health consequences of these.

Adam Kahane highlighted situations in which power or love dominates and the possibilities which can emerge when these are in balance.

A key point in all of this is that the future is not already out there. It is not some place we are going. It is a place we are making. The making of it can change both us and the destination. What kind of Glasgow do we want? One which is made by the actions of others only? Or one in which we play a full role on realising? If the latter, then how?

The views expressed in this paper are those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Glasgow Centre for Population Health.

Summary prepared by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health.