

Creativity as a tool for change making in society

”Creative thinking led to Nobel Prize, not memorizing facts”, said about John Gurdon, Nobel Laureate, 2012¹

by

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¹ <http://collegeunbound.org/2012/10/24/creative-thinking-led-to-nobel-prize-not-memorizing-facts/>

Women Leaders for Sustainability – description of a working project.

Background

The *Women Leaders for Sustainability* group was made in 2011 of five Swedish independent consultants. The consultants work together or individually, depending on the wish from the customer. Their aim is to empower women in different parts of society –in state-owned organizations as well as private business – to strengthen the work for a sustainable society.

Sustainability is paramount to the survival of our societies and of the persistence of the integrity of our economies, cultures, and ways of life over time. It involves a balancing act between meeting the needs of the current generation and that of our children and the future generations in the best possible way.

The pursuit of economic growth has served as the principal means of improving living standards in societies. It is built upon the attributes of competition, rationality and linear thinking, accompanied by consumer and material-based measures of well-being, especially in the immediate and short-term. But a sustainable society requires much more. A sustainable society requires a holistic view of human systems, even as each of us focuses on the needs of our family, our group, our sector, and our nation-state. It necessitates a deep understanding of the crucial interdependence between our economies and the broader ecosystem of which we are part, even as we address current economic problems besieging many countries today such as unemployment, recession, poverty and inequality. It entails building cooperation to address concerns that are global in scope and scale, even as we compete in markets.

The *Women Leaders for Sustainability* group views that women have contributed much to society and economy but the totality of their contributions is not recognized nor are their needs adequately addressed in policy formulations and economic growth agendas. Furthermore, women have much to contribute towards a sustainable society and yet this potential is not fully tapped nor explored. Our group sees the gendered experiences of women as resonating in their intuition, their way of conceptualizing and thinking, as well as in their manner of relating and interacting with others. Their roles as caregivers, household managers, workers, farmers, and business owners have given them invaluable insights, intuition and new ideas for addressing the balancing act that is required of a sustainable society. To give an example, I quote Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop: “-I run my company according to feminine principles – of caring, making intuitive decisions, not getting hung up on hierarchy, having a sense of work as being part of your life not separate from it, putting your labour where your love is, being responsible to the world in how you use your profits, recognising the bottom line should stay at the bottom ”².

In her paper *The Crisis of Environment and Social Reproduction: Understanding their linkages*³ Professor Maria S Floro, of American University, Washington DC, draws from the contributions of feminist economics and ecological economics, to explore the interconnection between the evolving

² <http://sustainability.about.com/od/GreenBuilding/a/Women-Sustainability-Leaders.htm>

³ *The Crises of Environment and Social Reproduction: Understanding their Linkages*, Maria S Floro, Ass Prof, American University, Washington DC, 2011, p 3-4, p 22-23
https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=gmail&attid=0.1&thid=1349ff1d52443ac3&mt=application/pdf&url=https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui%3D2%26ik%3D87d110ad57%26view%3Datt%26th%3D1349ff1d52443ac3%26attid%3D0.1%26disp%3Dsafe%26zw&sig=AHIEtbSLxhyx_hKV-cbqzS1Bg_hUGJ6GDg

crisis of care for people and the deepening ecological crisis. Arguing that there are crucial interdependence between the market economy and the reproductive sector that is mainly based on care labor and between the entire human system and the ecosystems that must be urgently addressed. And yet it is quite easy to take this interdependence for granted. In fact, the acknowledgement of such linkages has been largely missing in policy discourses and often remain invisible in conventional policy discourses. The type of economic growth that has been pursued worldwide has increased strains and stresses on the care labor capacity and the ecosystem capacity, which are wrongly perceived to be of infinite supply. There are serious concerns and grave problems faced by societies as a result, which urgently demand new creativity in planning, design and implementation of human activities and of the policies that serve as guide.

She argues that a narrow and linear preoccupation on material economic growth inadequately addresses the care requirements of human maintenance and social reproduction and of the ecosystem; in fact it actively contributes to crisis creation and intensification, major disruptions and even possible collapse. [...] It is important to note that the interdependence operates at multiple-levels and involves dynamic feedback loops, requiring a holistic approach. They are complex, multi-dimensional and non-linear, and we only have bounded knowledge about these causal chains, the nature of the effects and their magnitude, thus making cooperation and collective action important. Their unpredictability and complexity should not be excuses, however, from integrating the true cost of maintaining the resilience of the ecosystem and of raising the next generation and valuing their future contributions in economic analyses, policy formulation and assessments.

A sustainable society would need the contribution of both women and men in developing a development framework that incorporates both feminist economists and ecological economists' concerns and that provides a shared understanding of the natural resource and care labor constraints in meeting the needs of societies and the inseparability of the services provided by Mother Nature with the well-being of present and future generations.[...] Secondly, it would require the holistic way of thinking even as each of us has a specific goal or objective in mind, developing our understanding as well as maintaining an intuition of the needs of others outside our group and beyond our present generation. Ultimately, the solutions that address the crises of care and ecological sustainability demand from academics, policymakers and the rest of society that feminist economist Julie Nelson call "a recognition of common humanity and substantive responsibilities for care" that has more to do with commitment than with simply altruism or selflessness. It requires a radical shift from the culture of individualism to one of cooperation while maintaining his/her identity. A new framework and way of thinking is thus required to reduce the 'complacent irresponsibility' to our global society and to future generations. Such a framework also recognizes the limits to organization that is driven by competition and incessant pursuit of material prosperity. It is in this sense that the founding members of the *Women Leaders for Sustainability* group sees its work as part of the broader agenda for building sustainable societies.

Participating actors

The Nobel Museum, The Spark of Creativity, workshop and lectures - permeates the project and is used by the other actors when working with their clients

Consultant on Corporate Social Responsibility and the Baltic Sea Action Group - lectures about CSR and provides a platform on where to do business

The Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors, EU Commission /Sweden - leadership, communication and business innovation

Female Cross Culture Consultant - intercultural dialogue to make business easier, focused on sustainability

A coordinator - for the team and the author of this and related articles in the academic field

Description of the participating actors

The Spark of Creativity from the Nobel Museum

Since 2010 the Nobel Museum offers lectures and workshops for business professionals. The concept is called *The Spark of Creativity* and every program is customized for each organization with main topics Creativity, Innovations and Networks. *The Spark of Creativity* is held regularly at the Nobel Museum but recently also in places such as Beijing, New Dehli, Pune, S:t Petersburg, Zheijang and Shanghai. It consists of three parts:

Creativity (workshop): How to be more creative? Ways to come up with new ideas and how to become better problem solvers. This workshop is divided into three main parts: Individuals, Group processes and Organization. We mix discussions and practical exercises.

Innovation (lecture): From idea to business. This program emphasizes the "make it" phase in the development cycle. How can it be that organizations manage better than others? How can it be that a place like Cambridge has succeeded in producing so many Nobel Laureates?

Networks (lecture): Networks - spreading your ideas! The program takes its starting point in the Nobel Museum international travelling exhibition "Alfred Nobel: Networks of Innovation" that at present have been shown in multiple sites, from Paris to Abu Dhabi. The lecture illustrates the importance that networks have had to Alfred Nobel, as well as for many Nobel Laureates.

The Spark of Creativity is also used for problems the world is facing today, in order to obtain sustainable societies, e.g. concerning the environment. How can we promote economic growth, increase productivity, create jobs AND take care of the environment? The workshop makes you think outside the box and numerous stakeholders in society get innovative ideas and approach in their activities to handle challenges in today's society. In other words, being innovative so as to achieve a balance between the pursuit of individual's or national interest and the common interest beyond national boundaries. In achieving a successful collective action for the promotion of peace and stability equality is important, hence giving voice and platform for dialogue among different stakeholders.

CSR lectures and The Baltic Sea Action Group Foundation – promoting peace and stability

There is a demand from the market for greater responsibility and from employees for value driven business, CSR. Global economic power is shifting – in 2050 China will double the GDP of the US, with the middle class rapidly expanding. CSR is a holistic approach that involves Ethics, Economy and Environment and is communicated to the rest of the world through CSR commitments. Discussions around topics such as 3 BL, Balanced Scorecard, CSR in strategic level.

Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom was the first and so far only, woman to be awarded The Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences⁴ as well as The Johan Skytte Prize in Political Science⁵, The Skytte Foundation at Uppsala University, Sweden. Based on her ideas on collective action and how to handle Common Pool Resources the foundation *The Baltic Sea Action Group* is acting around the Baltic Sea to save it. The BSAG has chosen to address a global problem with collective action. *Women Leaders for Sustainability* works closely with the BSAG and is also interested to be a driving force to apply the BSAG model on the Mediterranean.

The Baltic Sea is in an alarming ecological state because of numerous reasons and the problem area is vast. BSAG therefore engages in tackling all problem areas and working on parallel projects. The BSAG motto is: A holistic overview and well-targeted concrete actions.

One of BSAGs most important assets is the network among high-level decision makers, many of the projects need a strong political or scientific backup and through their action plan on the Baltic Sea they contribute to peace and stability in the area.

The Baltic Sea Action Group is an independent non-profit foundation, based in Finland, with a co-partner in Sweden, whose mission is to revive the ecological state of the entire Baltic Sea. The official name of the Baltic Sea Action Group is Foundation for a Living Baltic Sea. The work is based on constructive cooperation with authorities and the private sector and it firmly leans on scientific research and the views of specialists. In February 2010, BSAG together with the Finnish President and Prime Minister, organized a Baltic Sea Action Summit. The Heads of State and more than 140 companies and organizations around the Baltic Sea made concrete commitments for the wellbeing of the sea. BSAG continues to work on new commitments whilst following the old ones. The BSAG process continues in St. Petersburg in the spring 2013. In spring 2012 bigger Swedish companies came together at the Nobel Museum in order take part in the workshop *The Spark of Creativity*.

The BSAG has started a new program: *Innovative solutions -New Challenges program* to identify big gain, high risk solutions that can make a difference. An example of a project that needs further research but is interesting for the future is the oxygenation of the sediments in the Baltic Sea area.

The BSAG foundation is operating throughout the Baltic Sea. The main focus is to act through companies and their practical environmental projects that lead to concrete results, all turned into commitments. A commitment is an action or a process which results in a direct or indirect contribution for a healthier Baltic Sea. It should be as concrete as possible and preferably it should offer new solutions that have not been tried before. A worthy commitment is based on the business operation and the competence of the company. The company provides knowledge and resources - actions that represent its expert knowledge and best performance! Today the BSAG has around 200 commitments, all closely followed up by the organization.

⁴ http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economics/laureates/2009/

⁵ The Johan Skytte Prize In Political Science

BSAG acts as an initiator and catalyst and strive to bring together various sectors of the society to work with what they do best and have the resources for – to make commitments and concrete projects. Projects are based on HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan – BSAG turns programs and policies into concrete actions with result-oriented public-private partnerships.

Everyone is welcome to make a commitment and take part in the Baltic Action Summit process to help saving the Baltic Sea. It can be a new product, a method or a R&D project. It can also be financial support to assist BSAG in reaching its goal – a healthier Baltic Sea. Companies can develop new products, test techniques, make new contacts and expand their markets. Companies receive positive publicity and the opportunity to demonstrate environmental, social and economic responsibility in practice. Such actions make companies more profitable, attractive and competitive.

Both the Baltic Sea and those who participate in the work benefits from the collaboration. All commitments are made public, as Nobel Laureate Ostrom suggests in her 8 principles⁶ and are published on the BSAG website. In order to make it easier to get ideas about commitments, the BSAG uses the creativity workshop from the Nobel Museum.

Female Entrepreneurship Ambassador, EU Commission⁷/Sweden

The BSAG is an arena for business. To strengthen women around the Baltic Sea to work with Corporate Social Responsibility related issues within a company, or as an entrepreneur, *The Spark of Creativity* is also used by a Swedish partner of the network *The Female Entrepreneurship Ambassador, EU Commission*. *The European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors* was inaugurated on 5 October 2009 during the Swedish Presidency with a conference at Stockholm. Around 150 Ambassadors of female entrepreneurship from 10 European countries that were selected via the relevant Commission's call met to network. During the event's Gala dinner the Swedish Crown Princess Victoria and Vladimir Špidla, the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, were present. A couple of years later another 100 Ambassadors of female entrepreneurship from 12 new countries have been involved in the network, aiming at giving a boost to female entrepreneurship to support female economic empowerment as well as the fact that Europe needs the creativity and innovation from female entrepreneurs and to be an engine to European growth, job creation and welfare.

Together with her clients the Swedish female entrepreneurship ambassador enables business development and change by supporting the client's existing business so that the client is able to manage and drive its own processes and performance management. With seminars, workshops and business games in the fields of leadership, communication, business innovation and IT focused possibilities the clients reach a new level in development and profitability. Services are delivered to the state and to service producing businesses. Entrepreneurship is based on a two way communication – intern and extern. It is therefore of crucial importance that you know yourself as well as the context in which you are acting. Before starting the process, employees are asked to come up with their fears. Only then, you are able to achieve the most from a process of change.

⁶ <http://onthecommons.org/magazine/elinor-ostroms-8-principles-managing-commmons>

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/promoting-entrepreneurship/women/ambassadors/index_en.htm

Women and especially younger women, who have been in the company for only a couple of years and that want to take on CSR, benefit from the *Women Leaders for Sustainability* business network, where they have the possibility to share knowledge and experience as well as be part of a mentor system.

Innovation means to develop ideas to complete solutions, they will be of new use and give the customer a new value. Innovations can be to take a small step or to make a bigger change or to implement completely new ideas in a new field or within different structures. How do you create it, then? When talking about innovation you most often mention hard values such as goals, methods, resources, key figures or follow-up or you talk about making a strategic analysis of the organization, leadership or the organizational culture. But are the hard values enough? What about courage, lust and curiosity, what we in everyday life would call creativity. Look at what you already have and ask yourself how you can combine it in another way. Last, but not least, you need a culture and a forum that support your innovation.

Cross culture consultant

A Female Cross Culture Consultant enables business with other cultures through increasing the understanding of cultural differences for better communication. What is a culture? What is your organization's culture, what is your national culture? Latest news from research on how companies can benefit from having cross cultural awareness, when doing business with other cultures. Hofstede's culture dimensions⁸ e.g power distance, individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity, long-term vs short-term orientation serve as a base for discussions as well as a comparison of different culture among different countries and organizations.

“Politicians from both right and left could learn from the Nordic countries, The Nordic countries – the next supermodel”, the Economist claims on February 2, 2013⁹. Does Scandinavian (business) culture facilitate collective action? People and business life are pretty much alike in Scandinavian countries. They all tend to not rely on the hierarchy of people's relationships and in its approach to business structure. They are pragmatic, eager to develop an efficient system which allows people to perform their tasks effectively. This egalitarian approach and the flat management come together with an openness of communication and freedom of information that many more hierarchical societies would find almost anarchic. A combination of tax regime, that people find trustworthy and therefore is not misused and centrally agreed salary agreements pay differentials are almost unbelievable low. There is little social distance between managers and subordinates. Managers are seen more as facilitators or coaches who offer advice and suggestions, delegate to competent colleagues and communicate clearly and unambiguously. Bosses do not play a traditional, paternal role, they are not expected to know all the answers and it is assumed that the person performing a particular task is the most knowledgeable about that particular task. It is important therefore to be seen as competent and diligent in order to progress. Personal relations as well as class or education are secondary to competence and consensus is a key word in decision-making. Married to a Swede but with roots in Shanghai, the consultant leads discussions to encourage women to become interested in the dual possibility to take responsibility for the environment AND get more customers as well as provides a tool kit for women who are working in CSR on how they can work.

⁸ <http://geert-hofstede.com/dimensions.html>

⁹ <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21571136-politicians-both-right-and-left-could-learn-nordic-countries-next-supermodel>

Interviews pursued (Sparre - Floro) at the BSAG Base Camp in May 2012 among Swedish business organizations

The Baltic Sea Action Group in Stockholm arranged a day -long meeting for invited bigger Swedish companies to take on CSR commitments. The day started with a workshop on *The Spark of Creativity* at the Nobel Museum.

Interviews were conducted in order to understand the discussion behind the reason the companies saw on why to take on commitments. The interviews were presented at the International Association for Feminist Economics, Barcelona in June, www.iaffe.org.

Here is a selection of answers from the Swedish companies (the interviewees' answers are mixed):

**The role of the business in society is, by law, to earn money but I believe that they shall do it by making the world a better place. I believe that lots of companies solve different kinds of problems, but that the companies and the society look upon it in a different way, what to give priority to. I also believe that it is hard to make companies take decisions too far away from their core activities, after all they are specialized in a product or service.. Unfortunately, lots of CSR commitments do not change the company profoundly, the business idea etc. Then the result will be more cosmetic.*

**Companies are part of the society as is the society on companies. The role of the companies is to develop the society. We offer our customers some environment products, most of them are not willing to pay for them, although more and more do. To me, environmental issues and the economy go hand-in-hand, in a longer perspective, since by reducing environmental resources you achieve lower costs. Companies introduced at the stock exchange do not choose donations, I believe. CSR commitments close to the company's core activities are both more effective and attractive.*

**The role of the firms is very marginal. The responsibility is entirely with the government. To believe that companies, small or big, shall take that responsibility is naïve. The governments, no matter party, have abdicated from their responsibility, with too much of competition and left the foundation of the society into the hands of risk capitalists. We do not believe that companies alone can save humanity or the environment. The state or EU need make more clear rules, as an individual you cannot afford what is really needed. The government, politicians, authorities need to take their responsibility. We value our commitment highly, especially the one where we help out with the oxygen in the Baltic Sea. We expect to grow and bring a couple of Swedish companies to work internationally.*

**Our role is to see how our products can make a positive impact on the environment and climate. We do this actively – to make people understand how our technique can be used in most companies – IT as an environment technique. In the future we will need flexibility and new models to develop our societies that will need technique and smart tools in order to be competitive, predict problems and to be efficient. We want to engage in society by making projects together, not only contributing with money. In our company we have an open dialogue where everyone is welcome to give suggestions. Then we choose our commitments based on how we can be supportive, how it supports our core business and values. Companies must be competitive. By developing, being transparent and to listen to their customers' needs they will be competitive.*

** We work continuously to reduce our use of fossil fuels. Good conditions for the staff are a prerequisite for a sustainable business. The government is responsible for legislation that follows international conventions and to make sure that they are implemented. The consumer should be told about different goods and hopefully pick the best.*