Changing the Conversation
**The Climate Imperative**
**Part 3: Canadian Voices**
June 9th, 2015

## Participants

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**Associate Professor Mark Stoddart,** Department of Sociology, Memorial University, Newfoundland

**Natalie Richards,** M.Sc. Biology Candidate, McGill University, Québec

**Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne,** Researcher, Future Earth, McGill University

**Laura Cameron,** B.Sc Honours Biology and Research Assistant, McGill University, Quebec

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## Ann Dale

Welcome colleagues to the third in our Climate Imperative series. We will be discussing the results of the visioning exercises from the Sustainable Dialogues Canada (SDC) project, which resulted in the seminal document, Acting on Climate Change. Solutions from Canadian Scholars. I start this conversation more energized than in the past, as it appears as if China will meet its emissions targets as of 2025, and the very recent commitment by the G7 to a carbon free economy by 2100.

It is my bet (which I won't be around for) is that the country which achieves a carbon neutral economy by 2050 will be a world leader economically. If I am right plant a tree or a flower in my memory :)

Before we begin our round of questions today, would you please briefly introduce yourself. I look forward to our discussion.

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## Mark Stoddart

Hi all, for those of you I haven`t met yet, my name is Mark Stoddart. I`m a Sociologist at Memorial University in St. John`s, NL. My research and teaching focuses on environment, social movements, communication & media, and leisure & tourism.

## Ann Dale

Welcome, Mark, and Mark has been leading the communication strategies for the project, as well as sitting on the Science Committee.

## Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne

Hello, I'm Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne. I specialize in ecosystem service science. I coordinated one of the working groups of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and completed a doctorate in the study of ecosystem services. During the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, I was also introduced to scenario work and futures thinking. I teach workshops on various kinds of scenario building, including visioning. And this is how I became involved in Natalie's work collecting and understanding the visions of Canadians, in the context of climate change and sustainability.

## Gary Pickering

Hi! I'm Gary Pickering; a Professor at Brock University in Niagara, and a newbie to the e-Dialogues
My sustainability-related research – which is a new area of activity for me – is focused in 2 areas:

1. Climate change adaptation for the Canadian wine industry, and
2. Understanding the psychological barriers that prevent individual Canadians from fully engaging in CC mitigation behavior

I also assisted in establishing the new Environmental Sustainability Research Centre at Brock, which is a transdisciplinary research centre with a new graduate programme in Sustainability Science.

## Ann Dale

Welcome Gary and Ciara. I must correct a previous mistake in our announcement in which Dr. Raudsepp-Hearne was mistakenly identified as a doctoral student. We are pleased to have your expertise on this panel.

## Natalie Richards

Hi everyone - I'm Natalie Richards, a masters student at McGill University with Catherine Potvin. My research has focused on recent conversations with different groups of people living in Canada on their desires for the future.

Here with me is Laura Cameron, who was previously working with us on a review of community visioning that has occurred in the last decade or so in Canada.

## Ann Dale

Welcome Natalie and Laura. Let's get started with our first question.

The Sustainable Dialogues Canada project, led by Catherine, held 14 visioning sessions over the last year. Natalie, what 14 communities did you visit and what processes did you use? Where they different for each one or did you use a common framework?

## Natalie Richards

Thanks Ann.

The sessions we facilitated spread from coast to coast – in each we attempted to hear from a diverse range of community actors and voices on their dreams for the future in Canada. We used a similar framework for each session, but with room for flexibility in order to allow each group to adjust their approach to the question. Each session involved iteratively moving back and forth between individual or small group reflections on participant's personal aspirations for the future, and sharing and discussing commonalities with the group at large. The process was ultimately geared towards cooperatively creating a narrative of the ideal future Canada that was based on their individual dreams.

Participating communities included:

- McGill University graduate students, QC
- Northern residents participating in the International Conference on Arctic Social Science in Prince George, BC
- Kamloops, BC
- Graduate and undergraduate engineering students at Polytechnique Montréal, QC
- Canmore, AB
- Nunatsiavut in Goose Bay, NL
- St. John's, NL
- Cape Breton in Sydney, NS
- Drummondville, QC
- Batchawana Bay, ON
- Professionals associated with OURANOS, QC
- Students at CEGEP Matane in Gaspésie, QC
- The Greater Toronto Area (Halton), ON
- Winnipeg, MB

## Ann Dale

What a diverse group of people? So, what did you guys learn? What were the points of convergence and divergence?

## Natalie Richards

We're currently working through synthesizing and analyzing the data – so results are still at a very preliminary stage. Presently, we're seeing 4 themes emerging from the visioning sessions, these are: restructuring our communities to encourage social cohesion, shifting away from a dependency on fossil fuels towards an economy founded in renewable energies, reforming the state of democracy in Canada to increase meaningful citizen participation in decision-making, and rethinking the economy and its functioning in relation to social and environmental wellbeing.

There are definitely some regional differences between the visions - for example, in Canmore we heard a large focus on the affordability of communities, and in the North there is a great desire for the opportunity to be self-sustaining and autonomous. Overall, however, we're seeing a great deal of overlap in how people in Canada dream of the future. Social characteristics feature very strongly across all of the visioning workshops, alongside a general call to rebalance social, environmental and economic wellbeing through long-term thinking and decision-making.

## Ann Dale

Interesting, two of those themes are what we recently heard as well in our peer-to-peer learning exchange at Royal Roads University this past February--the need for social cohesion and rethinking the economy, and in particular, the GDP as a measurement of well-being? Would others care to comment?

## Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne

That's really interesting Natalie. I only participated in the first few sessions, but I remember how strongly it came across in each of the settings that people wanted their children and communities to be able to continue enjoying the same cultural, recreational and community activities that they have enjoyed historically, and to be able to find work within or close to their communities. Many of their jobs were under threat due to changes in the resource economy, or in some cases from environmental change, and the reality was that younger generations were leaving their communities to look for new opportunities.

## Ann Dale

This 'hollowing' out of smaller communities is problematic across the country. Will an emphasis on renewables enhance employment opportunities in these communities? Perhaps Rob Newell will comment in the e-panel about his field work on climate change, particularly in T'Souke First Nations?

## Mark Stoddart

One thing I`ve found quite interesting in assisting Natalie with the visioning work is that in many international climate change reports (IPCC and others), public opinion is presented as a problem to be solved by policy-makers through greater environmental education or public awareness campaigns. While the visioning sessions aren`t based on a representative sample of the Canadian general public, the visioning results provide another interpretation: that public opinion may be less of a barrier to acting on climate change than many are assuming, but that citizens want to see social-environmental change happen in ways that engages them meaningfully in environmental governance, and are interested in environmental policies that help create social change that leads to social (and not just economic) wellbeing.

## Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne

I would say that you're probably right in one respect, Mark, that Canadians mostly want the same things that environmental scientists want. But there has been a major communication breakdown that needs to be remedied. You might call it environmental education, but it's more a case of correcting the damage that has been done in the media and in politics that has created the environment/development dichotomy. I think this false dichotomy is finally starting to break down now. I do see it as a problem that needs to be solved.

## Ann Dale

Mark, this leads nicely into another question I had. It is often said, and politicians have clearly voiced, that the single largest obstacle to climate change adaptation and mitigation is social acceptability? It would appear that your results dispute this, I think that Canadians are now 'seeing' the impacts of climate change directly, and are way ahead of governments, would you all care to comment? And what are some of the barriers to acting? What do Canadians need?

## Mark Stoddart

In terms of where Canadians are in relation to governments on this, there seems to be a lot of heterogeneity in government responses between the federal government, provinces, and various cities. I think it is good to focus on who the leading governments (at any level) are, and encourage others to follow these as best practices, while also encouraging the leading cases to do even better (for example, if Vancouver is arguably the best at active and public transportation in Canada, how can we encourage them to catch up to Copenhagen or Amsterdam?). In relation to what Canadians need, I think Gary nails it on the head by referring to a sense of powerlessness (or, conversely, a sense of political efficacy) as being very important. Governments to have a role to play in opening up environmental governance and providing space for meaningful input and participation, and building a collective sense of political efficacy.

## Gary Pickering

Re: " And what are some of the barriers to acting?". Some recent work that we've done on a fairly representative sampling of adult Canadians (looking at psychological barriers to individual CC mitigation behavior) showed that 3 factors were the strongest predictors:

- belief that CC was due to human influence
- perceived risk of CC
- perceived powerlessness

'Option difficulty' and 'Looking foolish' were secondary predictors ...

## Ann Dale

Gary, I would like to pick up on the idea of 'helplessness'. Is it because we scientists have failed to communicate the solutions. As you know a deliberate strategy we used with our document was to assume climate change adaptation and mitigation was possible here and now, and here are the ten steps to achieve a carbon free economy by 2050. I heard that the BC government, already a climate leader, is seriously looking at Acting on Climate Change.

## Gary Pickering

That's exciting news: re: possibility of BC Government running with Acting on Climate Change! I suspect the helplessness/powerlessness belief is due in part to the way in which the popular media has historically presented CC (over-sensational; problem not solution-focused, yada yada). Mark and others here are much well-versed in this area. However, yes - I also think we have not been as much solution-based in our communications as scientists to the masses

## Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne

There are some comments from the e-audience are relevant here. Our system doesn't encourage people to change their behaviour unless they are supremely dedicated. Governments need to provide incentives for behaviour change, from subsidies to fantastically comfortable/efficient public transit, to pushing 'green' as an aspirational lifestyle.

> Susanna Bruneau
>
> I agree that public opinion isn't as much of a barrier as often thought. I think that because being low-carbon is not supported in a systemic way, it is hard for people to have that kind of lifestyle without a lot of extra work that many don't have time for.

## Mark Stoddart

Yes, the environment-economy binary has definitely been a consistent problem in political debate and in media coverage of environmental issues, but I find the focus on `the public` as the problem and better information from political elites a troubling way to frame the solution

for a few reasons. First, as a tremendous amount of research in media studies indicates, audiences are much more complex, less homogenous, and less subject to media persuasion than these linear models of audience effects imply. Second, other research on environmental communication challenges this information deficit (or forcing function of knowledge) model that assumes that if the public only has enough information, the right environmental choices will naturally follow. Information deficit models tend to neglect how our environmental beliefs and behaviours are shaped by our emotions, social network connections to family, friends, co-workers, and others. Third, and relatedly, as Susanna points out in her comment, this focus on public opinion as the problem to be solved also plays into a tendency to individualize responsibility for climate change action, rather than focus on building social structures that facilitate and enable pro-environmental action, rather than placing the locus of responsibility on individual citizens or consumers.

## Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne

Whole-heartedly agree with this.

## Natalie Richards

Ann, what we feel we are seeing from this research is that people in Canada are not averse to change itself. In many sessions we have also heard that people are not averse to changes that might be inconvenient in the short term where the long-term benefits outweigh those temporary costs. A key factor here is the level of public involvement in the process of change. Climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts, amongst other decision-making, will reorient the future of Canada and so that reorientation should be based on the desires that people have for the future. This requires the public to have the means and the space to join the discussion of which changes should be made and how they should be implemented. The visioning research suggests that the level of meaningful public participation in that process is a cornerstone factor in alleviating the social rejection of sustainable transformation in Canada.

## Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne

Natalie, in the survey of other visioning exercises run across Canada, did you also find that people are not averse to change? I'm quite interested in this, as one problem that I've found in much of my visioning experiences is that the people who show up to participate are often already quite invested in the process of change. In a few instances recently I had the challenge of talking to more diverse groups, who were extremely opposed to change of any kind. "Why would we want this (green change) when we've never had it before?" was the kind of question we got.

## Laura Cameron

Interestingly, in looking at 30 community visions previously articulated by communities across the country, we found similar themes as those that came up in Natalie's workshops. It seems that people living in diverse regions of Canada desire social and environmentally sustainable communities, and transparent government that will help these desires be realized. In many cases the desires we have heard in these visions mirror many of the solutions or pathways to sustainability proposed by scholars, and policies encouraging and enabling people to act.

The past visions that we surveyed incorporated the input of over 120,000 people living in Canada. However you being up a good point Ciara. In most cases these participants are self-selecting and thus it is likely they do not fully represent the views of the majority. However, most visioning exercises aimed to incorporate a diverse cross-section of community members, and engage those who may not otherwise seek out such an opportunity.

## Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne

Thanks Laura. The power in visioning exercises is that most of us do want the same end result, even if we can't agree on the way to get there. Once that end result is articulated, it's then not so difficult to start thinking that change is actually desirable.

## Ann Dale

Ciara asked an important question, what about the people who are opposed to change, in my classes there are many who see the glass half full and others who see the glass half empty (including my beloved husband:) I find the latter more difficult to 'inspire', what communications strategies can we employ to build momentum between the early adopters and the laggards?

## Mark Stoddart

In terms of reaching people via media, media genre conventions tend to privilege conflict, drama and spectacle, which do not always go well with communicating solutions, hope and positive messages of social transformation. I think focusing on the good news stories where there are best practices is one way to do this, and to illustrate that pro-environmental change is possible, and also often brings social benefits (i.e. societies that are ahead of us environmentally also tend to score very highly in various other UN indicators of social wellbeing). Another (though perhaps less positive) way to frame social-environmental change is to ground the argument more in the issue of innovation and economic wellbeing. As more societies become invested in moving in a more sustainable direction, those who hold out are likely to fall behind. To use a (not ideal) metaphor, the train is leaving the station - do we want to be on it as social innovators, or do we want to be left standing on the platform arguing while it pulls away?

## Gary Pickering

I agree with Mark, particularly with respect ( in the case of climate change and environmental degradation) to the potential benefits of framing the message in terms of other issues perhaps more important to 'the laggards', as the US have tried with respect to climate change scepticism (focus on energy security messaging, not necessarily global warming)

## Laura Cameron

Indeed, I think that highlighting pro-environmental change that is simultaneously socially and economically beneficial is a way to perhaps involve those who may normally be uninterested in environmental issues, or "glass half empty" folk. I find the work of John Robinson and colleauges at UBC particularly interesting in this respect. They advocate for a transition from the traditional harm-reduction approach to sustainability to a net-positive approach. I think this reframing could help to engage a broader section of the public.

## Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne

Power dynamics play a role in fear of change. Those with less power seem to think that change favours those with power (I'm thinking of the recent speech from the Mayor of Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean about environmentalists and intellectuals trying to take away lumber industry jobs, an idea that is echoed in urban areas by people criticizing the removal of parking spaces or implementation of bike lanes). Historically though, this is not always the case.

## Laura Cameron

In terms of aversion to change, our results can't speak too much to that directly. Our analysis was focused on comparing peoples' desires and in most cases did not delve into the pathways and actions needed to achieve those desires.

## Natalie Richards

As Laura points out, both the design and our current capacity to facilitate visioning exercises of course left the door open to self-selection bias amongst those who participated - but what I find really inspiring about the visioning we facilitated in the last year is that we were able to capture voices of individuals spanning the range of conservative-liberal, environmentalist/activist and those who in their daily lives don't take an interest in environmental issues. Even across this spectrum we heard people saying that they believe that change is needed, and that they are willing to make those changes with the support of government policy that would encourage it and limit free-riding.

# Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne

It might come back again to creating an environment where change is made easy. In Montreal, people are still willing to sit in traffic for 2 hours every day, because they don't see public transport as a desirable alternative. Better infrastructure and comfortable options, as well as incentives and regulation are all needed. This is certainly not my area of expertise, so I'd like to hear from the experts, but I experience these challenges constantly in my community work.

# Ann Dale

Ciara, key points, we need change on many levels--micro behavioural change, meso and macro, through government policy as Natalie points out. Canadians need to 'see' the options, so you raised the elephant in the room, transportation. But it is easy, you now have even the Economist arguing for the end of oil and gas subsidies, what Reguly has called 'pump rice insanity'. So, we can move to modal transportation choices by demanding of our politicians to end these subsidies and redirect all cost savings into building this infrastructure in Canada. Anyone ever traveled on the TVG in France, as Mark points out, we are on the platform still arguing.

# Natalie Richards

I agree Ciara - and think that Rob's comment also nice embraces this: "these solutions don't have to be purely climate-oriented. Climate action has so many co-benefits, so why not also include in the discussion benefits of better air quality and more walkable cities?" Action to mitigate/adapt to climate doesn't have to only be focused on climate science, there are a lot of solutions that are mutually beneficial...

# Ann Dale

Fear is often at the root of change, and it seems to me that providing 'grand visions' of the way forward, backed up by the best science may not be a bad strategy. I am learning a lot from this discussion, and I am picking up on Natalie's comment that "the visioning research to date suggests that the level of meaningful public participation is a cornerstone factor in alleviating the social rejection of sustainable transformation in Canada". There is a very interesting book on this, entitled, Transformative Sustainable Development, Participation, reflection and change, by Kei Otsuki, Routledge Press. They argue that we need space for reflection and participation to co-produce sustainable trajectories in different social-political, economic and material contexts?

Sorry, stepped out of my moderation role, couldn't help myself:) Maybe questions to ask during the next federal election?

## Natalie Richards

Ann, to recap a bit regarding the importance of visioning and similar activities:

The SCD Climate Action Plan indicates that sustainability "a property of desired futures that takes into account the ecological, social and economic consequences of different courses of action." (p.43) This means that people's dreams for the future are inherently important to Canada's approach to sustainability, and that in thinking about and taking steps towards mitigating climate change Canada's leaders and decision-makers must take into account those visions. Fostering these types of conversation and building vision for the future can orient Canadian leaders (at all levels) in their decision-making based on long-term planning. Alongside the expert knowledge-base required to build the "strategic capacity" (CAP, p.47) for acting on climate change, visioning and similar participatory future-thinking tools can contribute to building knowledge of what kind of future we should be aiming for as we make environmental, social and economic decisions and advance in a climate action plan. Additionally, visioning supports a new approach to addressing climate change and sustainability issues through a positive, forward-looking lens that focuses on what is possible - a refreshing change from the alarmist, harm-reduction/sacrifice approach to sustainability (I'm thinking here of John Robinson and Raymond Cole's article on "regenerative sustainability").

## Ann Dale

This may be a little redundant, however, several of you are engaged in visioning, visualizations and other tools to discuss the 'future' with various publics. How important are these types of activities to the implementation of our report and sustainability? And how important is government leadership?

## Mark Stoddart

Some work I did with David Tindall (which appeared in a 2012 issue of Organization & Environment) drew on a survey of about 1200 Canadian environmental organization members to examine how environmentalists are thinking about climate change responsibility and solutions. One thing that came out of that analysis was a dual, or bipolar, focus on government policy and individuals as the driving force. In other words, citizens are seen as having the ability to apply pressure to move government into acting, while government can create policies that encourage pro-environmental behaviour (or discourage anti-environmental behaviour). While this interpretive framework is incomplete (we argue in the paper that it is largely missing an appreciation for the social justice implications of climate change responsibility and solutions), I think it is fairly accurate in seeing the need for political change and more micro-level forms of social change as mutually reinforcing and necessary.

### Ann Dale

Maybe we need to reframe the issues, reveal the solutions every time we raise an issue, and definitely we need to empower people more, by recognizing the need for agency and self-esteem? As well, illuminate the co-benefits, we are just working on a paper on this, did you know that urban green spaces reduce atmospheric $CO_2$ levels and decrease building heating and cooling needs, reducing GHG emissions (yes), but also help to combat obesity, increases social capital and community building, and very surprisingly, increases the life span of the elderly (Younger et al. 2008, American Journal of Preventive Medicine. My own research shows how much innovation is happening on the ground in BC communities, and as you know, in your own provinces?

### Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne

Now you're talking! ecosystem services :)

Aside from the high-tech solutions, we shouldn't forget that there are many simple solutions. A deciduous tree outside a south facing window can dramatically change the energy dynamics of homes and buildings. Ground permeability, green infrastructure, etc, we included these solutions in the Acting on Climate Change report.

### Chris Strashok

As we approach the end of the dialogue, I thought everyone might be interested in seeing a 'word cloud', capturing the main thoughts and ideas of the conversation. The sizing of the elements in the word cloud indicate the amount of references. It's obviously a tool that works very much on the 'overview level', but it works as a visual summary.

## Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne

Very nice!

## Ann Dale

We are nearing the end of this conversation. I encourage our audience to go to our website and read our report, Acting on Climate Change, Solutions from Canadian Scholars, http://www.sustainablecanadadialogues.ca/en/scd. This will be our last conversation in this series when we will talk again in September around three climate scenarios that we will be working on over the summer. I hope everyone has a glorious summer. Any last comments?

## Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne

Thank you Ann! (and to my fellow participants and anyone who listened in)

## Mark Stoddart

No last comments, other than to say thank you Ann for organizing and facilitating these dialogues, and to all who participated for a thoughtful and engaging conversation.

## Gary Pickering

Thanks Ann - great job moderating/facilitating. Thanks also to fellow panel-members.

## Natalie Richards

Thanks so much Ann for facilitating this discussion! Was a pleasure to talk through these topics with everyone.