



UCC

Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh
University College Cork, Ireland

Cork Workshop on Dynamics of Transformation: Multi-Societal System Transformation to Address the Polycrisis

University College Cork, June 2 - 3 2026

**Deep Societal Innovation for Sustainability and Human
Flourishing (DSIS)**

Cork Workshop:

‘Dynamics of Transformation: Multi Societal System Transformation to Address the Polycrisis’

June 2-3, 2026,

North Wing Council Room, Main Quadrangle, University College Cork, Ireland

Background

This workshop will build on the model of Deep Institutional Innovation for Sustainability and Human Flourishing (DIIS) being developed at UCC as a novel conceptualisation of whole-of-society transformation to address the multiple challenges of the polycrisis/metacrisis.

The DIIS model posits the need to move beyond socio-technical system change to deep complex transformation across six interconnected societal institutions, namely economics, politics, technology, education, religion, and gender. The workshop will explore the multisystem dynamics through which such deep transformation of interconnected social systems may come about.

Distinct academic discourses can be identified within each of the social institutions included in the DIIS model, for example, within politics on the need to implement maximalist versions of democracy; in economics on ‘beyond growth’; in technology on responsible innovation; in religion on the concept of ‘restoring the Sacred’; in gender on moving beyond violent hypermasculine concepts of boyhood and manhood; and in education on balancing the demands of education for the economy and education for democracy, sustainability and planetary justice.

The Cork Workshop on ‘Multi Societal System Transformation to Address the Polycrisis’ will bring together scholars from diverse disciplines to consider issues such as building inter-system connections, the role of multi-system actors, and shared narratives of change, to discuss how deep whole-of-society transformation to greater sustainability and human flourishing may come about in practice.

The workshop aims to offer both insight and hope.

Agenda

DAY 1 - June 2, 2026

- 9:00** Registration and coffee
- 9:30 – 10:30** *Welcome and Introduction (NW Council Room)*
- Ice Breaker Exercise (20 min.)
- Welcome (10 min.):
- **Brian Ó Gallachóir** (Associate Vice-President of Sustainability at University College Cork)
- Introduction (~30 min.):
- **Ian Hughes** (UCC, DSIS) *Deep Societal Innovation for Sustainability and Human Flourishing – Background context*
- 10:30 – 11:00** *Coffee break*
- 11:00 - 12:30** *Session 1 – Economics, Education, Politics*
Moderator: Edmond Byrne
- Impulse Givers (7 min. each):
- **Economics – William Hynes**
 - **Education – Kelly Salchow MacArthur**
 - **Politics – Kieran Keohane**
- Discussants (3 mins each):** Peter Doran, Kathleen Lynch, Gerard Mullally
- Dialogue (60 minutes)
- 12:30 - 14:00** **LUNCH – Book Launch Human Flourishing – Andrej Zwitter**
- 14:00 – 15:40** *Session 2 – Technology, Gender, Religion*
Moderator: Gerard Mullally
- Impulse Givers (7 min. each):
- **Technology – Andrej Zwitter**
 - **Gender – Susan Morgan**
 - **Religion – Oana Marian**
- Discussants (3 mins):** Edmond Byrne, Maggie O’Neill, Simone O’Rourke
- Dialogue One-to-One (40 minutes)
- 15:40 – 16:00** Coffee break
- 16:00 – 17:30** *Session 3 – Sacred Cows - The Elephant in the Room*
Sharing the things that cannot be said.
- 19:30** **Group dinner (*The Grill Room, The River Lee Hotel, Western Rd, Cork, T12 X2AH*)**

DAY 2 - June 3, 2026

09:00 – 12:30 *Workshop on Draft Declaration on ‘Deep Societal Transformation in a Time of Polycrisis’.*

09:00 - 09:30 *Keynote – Rebecca Henderson, Harvard University*

09:30 – 10:30 *Walking as Critical Pedagogy – Walking Social Transformation in Uncertain Times*
Moderators: **Bob Grumiau, Maggie O’Neill, and Gerard Mullally**

This walk is approximately 1 hour in duration with frequent stops. Please wear comfortable shoes and dress for variable weather. Also consider bringing a hat, sunscreen (we are being hopeful), and water.

10:30 – 11:00 *Coffee*

11:00 – 12:30 *Workshop on Five Principles of the Declaration on Deep Societal Transformation in a Time of Polycrisis*

Breakout groups and feedback

12:30 – 13:30 *Lunch*

13:30 – 14:00 *Closing Panel*

Reflections on the workshop and next steps.

Declaration on Deep Societal Transformation in a Time of Polycrisis

Preliminary Theses

In the workshop, participants will be divided into 5 groups of 4 to expand (in 100 to 150 words) on each of the following statements:

1. While the contemporary polycrisis calls for deep reimagining across all the social institutions of society, the appetite and vision for such deep transformation is sadly lacking. *(Sets the context and the challenge)*
2. The urgently needed deep societal transformation will not require changes in one social system alone, but interlinked and cascading change across all facets of society. *(Outlines the need for multi-social system transformation)*
3. The actors within each social system exhibit capacities both for accelerating transformation and for impeding it. *(Names the multiple actors and their roles – both positive and negative - in the required transformation)*
4. The time within which transformation must occur is severely limited. *(Outlines the implications of the limited time available for transformative action)*
5. Insights into the dynamics of multi-system transformative change offer both a way of conceptualising deep societal transformation and active hope that it can come about. *(Sets the challenge for the workshop to offer both insight and hope)*

Bios of Workshop Participants

Edmond Byrne is Chair Professor of Process and Chemical Engineering at University College Cork, where he leads the BE(Hons) and ME programmes in Process and Chemical Engineering. He is a Principal Investigator at UCC's Sustainability Institute, and is currently leading an EPA funded project on 'Deep Societal Innovation for Sustainability and Human Flourishing' (DSIS) with a number of co-authors of this publication (this publication represents a research output of DSIS). His research interests include transdisciplinary approaches to sustainability transformation (he has co-edited two books on this area, as a precursor to DSIS) and on Engineering Education for Sustainable Development (EESD).

Emma Cahalane is completing an MA Sociology of Sustainability and Global Challenges programme at University College Cork. Her background is in primary education with a B.Ed. degree from Mary Immaculate College. Emma has accumulated a broad range of teaching experience across educational contexts, both in Ireland and abroad. Her interest in education remains a central focus of her work, particularly the role of education in achieving just and sustainable futures. Her current research explores how Irish society is illustrated within primary school textbooks and what such portrayals may reveal in how we imagine and relate to our world.

Peter Doran is a senior lecturer at the School of Law at Queen's University Belfast. He is a founding member of the all-island Wellbeing Economy Alliance, a global platform for new economic thought and policy, and a founder of the Environmental Justice Network Ireland. His first book was on the political economy of attention as commons, and he is currently editing a Field Day collection of essays responding to the 2024 Seamus Deane-Field Day Lecture by Amitav Ghosh on ecology, coloniality and language. Dr Doran is originally from Donegal and lives with his family in Holywood, County Down.

Niall Dunphy is a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Engineering and Architecture at UCC. A transdisciplinary researcher, he has 25 years' experience bridging the social sciences and humanities with science and engineering to investigate the human and societal dimensions of sustainability. He directs the CPPU research group within the UCC Sustainability Institute and sits on the Executive Management Team of UCC Futures: Collective Social Futures. Niall has served as principal investigator on over 30 multidisciplinary research projects.

Conach Gibson-Feinblum is a PhD researcher with the EUROBOARDERWALKS project and an affiliated member of both the Institute for Social Science in the 21st Century (ISS21) and UCC Futures: Collective Social Futures at University College Cork, Ireland. For her PhD project, Conach is exploring the very meaning, experience, and practice of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland as understood through the everyday lives and practices of beekeepers, using a combination of ethnographic, biographical, and arts-based methods.

James Glynn is the Founder CEO of Energy Systems Modelling Analytics Limited (ESMA), a data start-up founded in September 2024. ESMA builds innovative computer math models to co-create data-driven decision intelligence for a sustainable, secure future energy system, consulting for governments, international energy agencies, and universities globally. With 20 years of applied experience in energy systems analysis, James previously served as a tenured Senior Research Scholar at Columbia University's SIPA Center on global energy policy, leading their Energy Systems Modelling Analytics Program. An invited expert for the UN, IEA, and European Commission, he holds a PhD and two Master's degrees, reflecting his deep technical and financial expertise.

Bob Grumiau is a doctoral student at University College Cork and is part of the Deep Societal Innovation for Sustainability and Human Flourishing (DSIS) project. He has a transdisciplinary background in philosophy, anthropology and political sciences. Currently, his research focuses on the role of poetry in the process of re-enchanting the world.

Rebecca Henderson is one of 25 University Professors at Harvard, a research fellow at the National Bureau of Economic Research and a fellow of both the British Academy and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She has more than twenty-five years of major public board experience. Rebecca's research explores the degree to which the private sector can play a major role in building a more sustainable economy. Her publications include *Accelerating Energy Innovation: Insights from Multiple Sectors* (University of Chicago Press), *Leading Sustainable Change: An Organizational Perspective* (Oxford University Press) and *Political Economy and Justice* (University of Chicago Press). She is also the author of *Reimagining Capitalism in a World on Fire* which was shortlisted for the FT/McKinsey 2020 Business Book of the Year Award.

Ian Hughes is Senior Research Fellow at MaREI Centre, Sustainability Institute, UCC, working on the DSIS project. He also works as a Research Officer in the Department of Education and Youth in Ireland. Ian has a PhD in Physics from Queen's University in Belfast (1990) and a Postgraduate Diploma in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy from the Irish Institute for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy (2003). Ian is author of *Disordered Minds: How Dangerous Personalities are Destroying Democracy* and contributing author to *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump* and *The More Dangerous Case of Donald Trump*.

William Hynes is a Senior Climate Change Economist at the World Bank. He works on integrating climate issues into the Bank's macroeconomic analysis and dialogue in Central Asia and the South Caucasus and served as Co-Director of the Coalition for Capacity on Climate Action (C3A). Prior to this, as a Senior Advisor to the Secretary General and Head of New Approaches to Economic Challenges (NAEC) at OECD, he developed research programs on systems thinking, anticipation and resilience, new analytical tools and techniques and new economic and growth narratives. His publications and research are broad and interdisciplinary with a recent focus on green growth, systemic resilience and neuroscience-inspired policy. He holds a DPhil from Oxford University and was a Marie Curie Fellow at the London School of Economics.

Bahriye Kemal is a postcolonial scholar and activist-advocate for displaced and marginalized communities. A London-born Cypriot to refugees, her background has shaped her interdisciplinary research. She recently joined the School of English and Digital Humanities at UCC, having previously served as Senior Lecturer in Postcolonial Studies at the University of Kent. Anchored in postcolonial literary studies and history, her work spans sociology, ethnography, geography, and the politics of everyday life. She has published widely on postcolonial, partition, spatial, and displacement studies. She is co founder of research institutes, community networks, and NGOs across the UK, Cyprus, Turkey, Greece, Palestine, and Syria, where she co produces scholarly and public outputs with underserved and underrepresented communities.

Kieran Keohane is a professor with the Department of Sociology & Criminology, University College Cork, Ireland. PhD York Canada (1994) founding member of the international research network on the Social Pathologies of Contemporary Civilization, <https://socialpath.org/> and publications in social theory, cultural analysis, eco-politics, cities and public health.

Kathleen Lynch is a sociologist and Professor of Equality Studies (Emerita) at University College Dublin (UCD) where she has also held a Senior Lectureship in the School of Education. She served as a member of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) from 2020-2025. She is currently

an elected Executive Member of the Global Forum for Rehumanizing Education. She has worked over many years to promote equality and social justice through research, education and activism, inside and outside academia. She publishes widely on equality, care and social justice. Her most recent books are *New Managerialism in Education: Commercialisation, Carelessness and Gender* (with B. Grummell and D. Devine) (Palgrave 2015); *Care and Capitalism: Why Affective Equality Matters for Social Justice*, (Polity, Cambridge 2022). Her forthcoming book, *Beyond Human Capitalist Education: From Capitalocentrism to Carecentrism* (2026) will be published by Routledge in the summer.

Oana Marian is a writer and researcher. She currently works as a postdoctoral researcher in the Pregnancy Loss Research Centre at University College Cork / Cork University Maternity Hospital. Her work, which focuses on holding space for grief, is informed by her training in healthcare chaplaincy, Compassionate Inquiry, Active Hope, and the Quaker tradition in Ireland.

Susan Morgan is an academic at Ulster University within the School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences. She is the Principal Investigator for the Taking Boys Seriously (TBS) research project, a longitudinal participatory action study aimed at addressing disparities in educational outcomes for boys from working-class communities. The research adopts an educational ecosystem perspective to examine how compounded disadvantage—including poverty, conflicting constructions of masculinity, and educational approaches—shapes boys' educational experiences. Crucially, it goes beyond analysis to identify and develop the principles and practices that actively enable boys to flourish, offering practical pathways for meaningful and sustained change.

Gerard Mullally is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Criminology, University College Cork (UCC), where he teaches modules on community, environment and sustainable development. He is a principal investigator at the Sustainability Institute, and a member of the executive management committee of UCC Futures: Collective Social Futures. He is co-editor of *Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Transitions to Sustainability* (Routledge 2017), *Metaphor, Sustainability, Transformation: Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (Routledge 2021) and co-author of *Walking as Critical Pedagogy* (Routledge 2026) He was honoured with a Life-time Achievement Award by the Environmental Forum (2021) for his contribution to local sustainability.

Brian Ó Gallachóir is Professor of Sustainability and Associate Vice-President of Sustainability at University College Cork, delivering on UCC's ambitious plans to consolidate its role as a leading university of sustainability. Brian is also Director of UCC's Sustainability Institute, overseeing the strategic direction of nearly 500 sustainability researchers in UCC. In addition, Brian is Director of MaREI, the €130 million Research Ireland Research Centre for Energy Climate and Marine and Director of ERBE-CDT, the UK-Ireland centre for doctoral training in energy resilience in the built environment.

Maggie O'Neill is Professor of Sociology & Criminology and Director of the Institute for Social Sciences in the 21st century and UCC Futures: Collective Social Futures. Maggie is Vice president of the European Sociological Association, a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, a fellow of the Royal Society for Arts and an elected member of the Royal Irish Academy. Her long research career demonstrates expertise in critical, cultural and feminist theory as well as biographical, creative & mobile methods and policy relevant research, often with marginalised communities-working together to create change.

Simone O'Rourke is a Research Support Officer on the DSIS project with a focus is on project communication and event planning. She holds a Business degree from VWA Bochum, a Higher Diploma and PG Certificate in Sustainability and Climate Action in Enterprise from University College Cork and has completed a MSc in Sustainability and Climate Reporting at Atlantic Technological University.

Simone's next project will focus on the role of 'third places' within the Deep Societal Innovation for Sustainability and Human Flourishing (DSIS).

Kelly Salchow MacArthur is a Professor of Graphic Design at Michigan State University (MSU), a 2-time Olympic rower, a 2-time Olympian Artist, and a Member of the IOC's Culture and Olympic Heritage Commission. She is an Honorary Visiting Researcher in UCC's School of Education through June 2026. Kelly's graphic design practice and creative research focus on environmental awareness, advocacy and action. Her work has been disseminated internationally through exhibition, design awards, conference, and publication, and is included in several permanent collections. She is a recipient of MSU's Distinguished Partnership Award for Community-Engaged Service for her green mapping projects with Monroe County.

Hannah Weytjens is a PhD researcher in sociology at C3I, KU Leuven and GERME, Université Libre de Bruxelles. Her research focuses on superdiversity, urban inequality, and symbolic boundary-making in diverse city neighbourhoods, with a particular focus on Brussels. Drawing on walking interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, she examines how residents navigate diverse everyday urban spaces and explores the role of aesthetic preference and lifestyle in this context. Her work engages with debates in urban sociology, migration studies, and cultural sociology.

Andrej Zwitter is Professor of Human and Data Sciences as well as Director of the Research Centre for Human and Data Sciences at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria. He served as Dean of the Faculty Campus Fryslan and founding dean of the University College Fryslan, University of Groningen, Netherlands. He was a founding board member of the WEF Chapter Zero, Netherlands and of the urban data centre Data Fryslân. He was also the program director of the research group on Human Flourishing at The New Institute in Hamburg. His expertise covers data governance, law and ethics of digitalization, as well as emergency management and sustainability and human flourishing. Upcoming titles: Andrej Zwitter (ed.), Human Flourishing Across Cultures and Disciplines, Bloomsbury 2026 // Andrej Zwitter, Oskar Gstrein, Tais Blauth (eds.), Politics and Governance of Big Data and Artificial Intelligence, 2nd edition, Edward Elgar 2026.

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