

What to do with Eco-Congregations?

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Scottish government and third sector have made innovative use of “values” research in crafting public policy (cf. “Common Cause”, 2010).

This has sustained new partnerships and forms of public engagement on environmental issues especially.

Part of the strength of “values” lies in the way they transcend individual cultures, religions, etc. - they can help pluralistic societies find a “common cause”

Even though we can speak about them in transcendent ways, values remain embedded in specific contexts and are expressed along lines delineated by local cultures.

The next step in building on “common cause” work is to develop a range of fine-grained policy pathways and bespoke partnerships which address the unique features of individual Scottish communities **and** draw on the unique strengths available when we work *through* culture

This research offers a window into a specific cultural experience - that of Scottish Christians.

So... what are the strengths we can draw on in working with Eco-Congregations?

- Established and persistent presence within Scottish communities - embedded in local politics and often aware of local tactics for getting things done.
- Eco-Congregation efforts often spin off into wider efforts (e.g. Fairlie community gardens) and support other initiatives (e.g. transition black-isle)
- Large footprint across Scotland (more than 350 groups)
- Local and Global - Ecclesial network can uniquely transcend constraints of political discourse and reach international audience.

- Eco-Congregants are champions of environmental justice, across space and time.
- Willing to express values as a “city on a hill” (cf. rooftop solar)

And what constraints exist in working with Eco-Congregations?

- Deeply concerned with “realism” - accounts of justice which accommodate “reality” - not “pie in the sky” but equity that can work.
- Given their long tenure in communities, Eco-Congregations can be more cynical than other third sector groups about new initiatives coming and going.
- Often instrumentalised - government and other third sector groups can tend to treat congregations as an extension of their mailing list and not as a partner invited to the table.