



## CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE CHALLENGES OF DEVELOPMENT SERIES

### Transformative education: Lessons from a new eco-campus

Presentation by **Cécile Renouard**, ESSEC Business School and co-founder and president of the [Campus de la Transition](#) in Forges, France (suburb of Paris)

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#### Summary

In addition to discussing the specific challenges, dilemmas, and possible solutions to the climate crisis, a growing movement is recognizing the need to foster new pedagogies and educational approaches that shape how we think and act. Before and alongside imagining different paths forward, we need to foster more sustainable ways of being in and understanding the world for all of us. A growing international network of colleges, institutes, and research centers aim to offer opportunities for experimentation to support a transition to a new economy that respects and values natural balance and healthy ecosystems. This requires returning to a vision of what it would mean for every citizen to live a good life and flourish without excess.

Professor Renouard presented on the work of the *Campus de la Transition*, the first such project in France. The stated mission of this campus, founded in 2018, is “To promote an ecological, economic, cultural and social transition matching the scale of challenges and upheavals of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our goal is to return the economy to the service of humanity and nature... To achieve this mission, the Campus de la Transition is a training center for social and ecological transition, a research laboratory, and an eco-place that experiments a sustainable lifestyle.” In a phrase, they are pursuing ‘formation for transformation.’

Alongside offering a community for students, teachers, and professionals to live and practice this lifestyle through concrete issues of energy, agriculture and food-systems, or engagement with a bio-regional economy, the *Campus de la Transition* provides the space for interdisciplinary and holistic research for the future. The *Campus* team seeks to foster an approach that bridges the recognition of systemic and complex problems and the aim of fostering a good and ethical life embedded in community – in the same sense as the concept arising in Latin American of *buen vivir*. The goal is to facilitate, based on systems theory, a ‘great transition’ from the current unsustainable dynamic equilibrium to another, more just future equilibrium.

Alongside the teaching and on-site projects of the program, the team has also written and published the *Great Transition Handbook* in conjunction to a request from the French Ministry of Higher Education. The *Handbook* posits a “six gates” approach to six complementary perspectives. Drawing from Greek, these gates are described in the following diagram:

	Title ( <i>the Great Transition Guide</i> )	Field	Skills
	Oikos <b>Inhabiting a shared world</b>	Diagnostic	Complex systems thinking
	Ethos <b>discernment and decision-making for collective and cooperative well-being</b>	Discernment	Ethics and responsibility
	Nomos <b>Measuring, regulating, governing</b>	Rules	Integrated problem solving, change governance
	Logos <b>Interpreting, critiquing, and imagining</b>	Narratives	Futures thinking
	Praxis <b>Acting on the issues at stake</b>	Actions	Cooperation, collective commitment
	Dynamis <b>Reconnecting with the self, others, and nature</b>	Inner reconnection	Interiority, presence to oneself and to otherness

Walking seminar participants through each of these gates in depth, Renouard explained how *oikos* relates to the systems thinking required to understand the holistic complexity of the ecosystem, how *ethos* relates to our visions of environmental justice and the values we want our society to uphold, and *nomos* to measurement and institutions in relation to ecological issues. As we begin to look towards taking action, *logos* relates to the stories we tell ourselves about climate change and the concepts we use, *praxis* to the levels at which we act and the organization of those efforts, and finally *dynamis* to spiritually reconnecting with nature. While certain individuals will specialize in certain skills, we should cultivate some of each gate in all of us and acknowledge the importance of all six across society in supporting the transition. Rather than viewing the skills and fields in competition, they should be recognized as complementary and mutually supportive.

Instead of thinking of the climate crises or any other crises in isolation, Renouard advocates for a holistic recognition of their interrelation – for instance the challenges of energy and climate change cannot be disentangled from global and national inequalities. Issues should be considered in relation to the tools of each of the six gates across three horizons (Sharpe 2013) – a nuanced understanding of the status quo, a sense of desired incremental or transformational changes, and imagined visions of the future.

Altogether, Renouard presented a compelling vision of a holistic pedagogy. As a seminar participant, I was left with a sense of measured hope. While the pedagogy is comprehensive and the vision of the future it instills inspiring, the gap between the model of the school and pedagogical and social realities, even in a setting such as Oxford, can feel overwhelming. To address the climate crises well, is there a space for a middle route – perhaps a pedagogy of ‘good enough’? Where might an institution as mired in bureaucracy as Oxford or most state education begin in incorporating this model and these gates? How can we extend the reach of institutions such as this campus beyond the already-converted to engage with those reluctant to imagine more sustainable futures or broader images of human flourishing? While the complexity of the good presented at the seminar makes it far more compelling than the many historical philosophical ideals that once powered revolutions, that same complexity makes achieving this good all the less conceivable in a world still riven by ignorance, inequality, and self-interest. All the same, the wisdom, insight, and experience on display in the *Campus de la Transition* pedagogy offers us reason to hope.

**Summary by Denton Knight, MPhil Development Studies, 2021-23**