

# ECO-PRENEURSHIP:

## The Aesthetics of Place Based Education



Outlook Tower, Edinburgh



New Lanark, at River Clyde - Scotland



Brantwood, Lake Conniston



Hidcot Manor, Chipping Camden

Report from a Study Trip to England, 11<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> of April 2014

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# Background and introduction

Facing the social, economic and educational challenges today, what can we learn from the ‘arts and crafts movement’ in England from the 19th century? In their efforts to counterbalance what brutal industrialism and capitalism did within Victorian England, *what were their guiding ideas?* Also, what were *the limitations of their attempts* to liberate culture and society from the shackles of industrial capitalism and positivist science? In short, what can we learn from these cultural creative? And how can the barriers they met be taken a step further in the context of the culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

The context in which we raise these questions is a project in Place based Social Entrepreneurship financed by the Ministry of Education (Utdanningsdirektoratet) in Norway: The project is aimed at *shaping the stepping stone* for future development and research, and identify the key alliances.

A study trip was shaped based on the experiences we had in the regional course ”Place based Entrepreneurship and Learning” in the Nærøysfjord World Heritage Park (Aurland) in Norway. In connection with the Entrepreneurship project a collaboration with Ruskin Mill College has been established, and a study trip to Ruskin Mill from regional key actors was held in November 2013. A return exchange study trip will be arranged with a seminar in Ecopreneurship in Aurland June 2014. The study trip was partly also a planning of this trip, as well as a foundation for a book we plan to publish in 2015. The study tour program was shaped by Aksel Hugo (NULS), Jorun Barane (SJH) and Morten Clemetsen (NULS) in collaboration with Sue Reed, RMC (se attachment 2).

## Focus and task of the study

After breakfast, we started the study with an introduction to the study trip by Morten Clemetsen. The context of our study trip is clearly the industrial revolution of 19th century England and a group of cultural creatives who tried to counteract the winds and to break out of the shackles of Victorian capitalist mainstream cultural development. To understand them, we must study them in the context of what they strived to do – and see their work in the context of the time they lived in and space they chose to operate in. That is why we have chosen to visit the places our protagonists operated in, when studying them (attachment 1):

Patrick Geddes is looked at in the context of seeing and being in *Edinburgh*  
Robert Owen is looked at in the context of seeing and being in *New Lanark*  
John Ruskin is looked at in the context of seeing and being at *Brantwood*  
Gertrude Jekyll is looked at in the context of seeing and being at *Hidcote Manor Gardens*

In each case our task is twofold;

- (1) to extract the essence of what each of them had to contribute, and also
- (2) to listen for what they lacked, what was missing.

The last day (Day 4 at the Field Centre) we will try to look back and distill the essences. These essences will serve the article and last chapter of the book we are writing (Jorun, Aksel, Morten) on Ecopreneurship.

## **DAY 1: Edinburgh and Patrick Geddes**

We started by an introduction to Patrick Geddes' thinking and work. All our four inspirations have one thing in common, which is their ability to see with new eyes what is around them. It is also interesting to see how at that time thinking within social sciences and natural sciences were not separated. Geddes was for example trained as an evolutionary biologist, studied sociology and worked with town planning – to understand his ideas on regional planning (see the figure) we need to understand that his thinking is dynamic and his eye trained by seeing processes in evolutionary biology.

Topos, or place, was the basis of Patrick Geddes' thinking. He developed a unique ability to think in images, helping him to see what is there but also what is not there – in case of the slums (at that time situated in the blocks where we had our breakfast) to a potential of beauty and possible restoration of them without wiping them all out and rebuilding.

In his models there is no need for a fixed position, to understand them we must fluidly grasp the lawfulness that they depict. Geddes is unique since he always also did what he was talking about. Here in Edinburgh, he developed the slums of the city and managed to change them into more human conditions. He also developed here, his ideas on regional development and how the city and its region are interlinked as one developmental organ with organs within them. This organic way of seeing the evolutionary processes of place, work and folk – and to connect these spheres in a structural phenomenology of how the three entwine and develop as city and region subserve each other can be understood in a very concrete way here in Edinburgh. We can also turn this around and say that seeing and being in this region help us understand the conditions for the development of Geddes thinking. The fluid multidimensional way of his thinking was also helped by an accident. On one of his study trips to Central America he was ill and lay blind in bed for 6 months – it was in this period that he developed the inner dynamic images that corresponds to a lawfulness in his thinking. What characterizes Patrick Geddes is also this ability to focus on imagination and a capacity to see what is not yet in the now. From him we can really ask ourselves how we work with imagination, connected to specificity of place, region, culture, work and folk.

Visit to the Outlook tower, High Street (The Royal Mile) near Edinburgh Castle. Geddes bought this building in 1890's for educational purposes. The five stove high building has a dome on the roof, where the camera obscura is located. Geddes guided his visitors directly to this room, demonstrating the unique view of the whole region. They were asked to carefully observe the colours and shape of buildings, landscape features and the interrelationship between objects. Then they should reflect on this experience of an unusual representation of the city and its regional context. Afterwards he guided the visitor down the stairs and through the exhibition rooms, floor by floor; first Edinburgh, then Scotland, UK (language), Europe and finally the world. This should make the visitor aware of the social – cultural - ecological systems on different scale, that brings us in our daily occupations (work) in contact with all systemic levels in the world , in dynamic and evolutionary interaction. The Outlook tower is a landmark for his pedagogical achievements.

Sue Reed's perspective: "It is always interesting visiting places with fresh eyes, to see and hear something new about familiar environments from the perspective of companions. The whole trip was quite eventful in that I was able to relate the different geographic locations of our inspirations to my biography, and to the location where I work in the Cotswolds. On returning home, and with hindsight, there were some significant moments on the journey where I could connect to the practical work of craftspeople, education and social enterprise of Ruskin Mill students with the therapeutic elements of the journey. Rather than focus on the enormity of our task, I will share the small moments which were significant. Small moments have potential. Individuals may feel they can complete a small task and contribute to the whole, and this is empowering and liberating. An example: The outlook tower - children and adults sharing the same excitement over the moving images inside the table of the camera obscura. When they lifted 'photographs' out of the camera obscura table, they were able to create small, moving art works of daily life on a piece of card. I was very conscious of a

comment from Morton who exclaimed how the clouds, turned upside down by the rotating camera, became different and more solid in their form . His comments reminded me of Constable's cloud studies and connected me to the work of John Ruskin."

### Day 1: New Lanark and Robert Owen

New Lanark is an eighteenth century restored cotton mill village on the banks of the River Clyde, close to the Falls of Clyde in Southern Scotland. New Lanark was created as a cotton-spinning village in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century and was transformed under the management of Robert Owen.

Owen greatly improved the conditions, facilities and services for the workers and their families and this led to many social improvements including progressive education, factory reform, more humane working practices and garden cities. By 1799 New Lanark was the biggest cotton mill in Scotland and formed one of the largest industrial groups in the world. Over 2,000 people lived or worked in the village. The mill continued manufacturing cotton for nearly 200 years, until 1968. (From Historic Scotland webpage) today and World heritage site.

Sue's reflections: "One man's vision for the well being of a community of 2000 people who were working with one product. Cotton spinning. Small scale enterprise for the well being of a working community. This place must have been a sanctuary for people whose other option would have been to work in the mills of Manchester or Derbyshire.

There were three situations at New Lanark which indicate traces of the 'model village' that combined social enterprise, work experience opportunities for students, and care for well being of visitors. The cafe selling local recipes; treacle scones and Bakewell tart - reminding me of the importance of caring for the heritage of 'traditional' and local knowledge. The carefully maintained stone dressed entrance into a walk was very important. The gesture was one of invitation and seemed to say "*to please walk this way, enjoy the woodland, bird life and water falling. Let the woodland re-energize your footsteps and work.*" There were no barriers, obstacles, sharp edges and closed doorways for workers, their families or today's visitors.

The strong connection with the falls of the river Clyde pouring energy over the rocks and into the atmosphere echoed by the blustery cloud formations – to me this connected Geddes, Constable, Ruskin, Owen to the exhilaration of the winds crossing the gardens of Hidcote Manors when we met Gertrude Jekyll on day 3.



Figure 1: River Clyde right upstream from New Lanark

## Day 2: Brantwood and John Ruskin

We spent two nights at Brantwood, exploring the landscape, the interaction between the buildings, the lake Coniston, the woodland slopes, the gardens and the pasture land. 'Brant' is Norse for steep, and Brantwood's steep woods were first worked by Norse invaders in the ninth century. With a stunning diversity of flora and fauna, these ancient semi-natural woodlands comprise half the 250 acre estate. Elsewhere the estate ranges from lakeshore meadows to high, open fell.

On the first morning, Jorun told the story of "King Arthur and the sword in the stone" and we found many stories in the landscape, the story of the women's by the lake, the dragon hill and so forth. We had also a long conversation with Howard Hull, the director of the Trust. He shared with us the aesthetics of running a museum that lives and breathes in the spirit of John Ruskin, and some of the challenges of the 'burden of great volumes of books'.

John Ruskin was one of the greatest figures of the Victorian age, poet, artist, critic, social revolutionary and conservationist. After many visits to the Lake District from the age of five onwards, his affection for the Lakes was such that in 1871, when he was 52 he bought Brantwood on the shore of Coniston Water. He then set about expanding and renovating the house. He first added the famous turret, on the south west corner. From here he could gaze out over spectacular views north, south and west. The house was filled with a collection of art treasures that Ruskin had acquired on his travels at home and abroad. There were Medieval manuscripts, Pre-Raphaelite paintings, Turner watercolours and his fabulous mineral collection. John Ruskin took a part in the design of the extensive gardens. Originally laid out from 1871 onwards, the restored garden comprises areas of sloping ground below and above the house which extend to about 20 acres, and includes dramatic features in areas of natural woodland with cascading streams among rocky outcrops. A collection of ferns is being established, and azaleas and Rhododendrons are a particular feature (from Visit Cumbria and Brantwood webpages). A biodynamic garden has been developed by Sally Beamish and her staff. A new book on the Brantwood Gardens were just launched the day we visited. The property is managed by Brantwood Trust and the educational and museum operations by The Ruskin Foundation.



Figure 2a: Brantwood at lake Conniston



Figure 2b: One of Sue's drawings

Sue: "Here at Brantwood I was struck by the architecture of the building and how it may have enabled John Ruskin to perceive his relation to the enormous and impossible task he gave himself in the time he lived. There is a quote which was written on the study wall. I copied it and shared it with colleagues at work, it has generated much conversation about how we may see each other and our relationship with the nature of our work, and each other.

*The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion-all in one." (John Ruskin, in Modern Painters Vol. III).*

My second strong experience was standing in the middle of a 360 degree turret of glass and light which was created on the side of the house. Ruskin could stand or sit in this space and watch the clouds scuttle over the waters of Conniston Lake. Here it was possible to experience being in the middle of a wider universe. Ruskin described this moment “to float in the midst of the natural world.” At the same time he realised the enormity of his task, the natural world also contains “storm clouds of dead mens souls” These two aspects were symbols of the light and darkness of life. I was struck by the insight that perhaps Ruskin was too solitary, and may have tried to transform society alone, perhaps it was not possible in his time to involve the considerable numbers of people needed for collaboration and community building? Stepping out of this turret there is the opportunity to walk through a hillside biodynamic garden, planted with herb and indigenous plants.



Figure 3. The turret in Ruskins sleeping room

This therapeutic walk enabled Ruskin to walk from the enormous task to experience the potential of small spaces for healing and restoring the spirits”.



### “Eat cake and carry on!”

This motto was discovered on the wall in the café at Brantwood. And it depicted a strategy we could recognize ourselves in: Chocolate Brownie at Birmingham New Street; Bakewell Cake at Preston Station; Treacle scones at New Lanark; Lemon tart and chocolate cake at Branwood and Flapjacks at Hidcote Manor Parks ...

### Day 3: Hidcote Manor Gardens and Gertrude Jekyll

Sue: “ here we have an example of collaboration. Gertrude transformed her experience of two dimensional painting into a 360 degree perspective of growing a whole painting with flowers”.

Hidcote Manor Gardens were created by Lawrence Johnston, and he in turn was advised by Gertrude Jekyll and Alfred Parson. Johnston was the plant collector. Gertrude the painter with flowers and Parsons the designer of the garden. The garden is so well established that it invites the walker to meander through the labyrinths and discover their own routes. I noticed for instance, that the scent from the April hyacinth quarter was overpowering. I needed to walk out of it to a less scented area with gentle perfume. This reinforced the aspect of different perspectives. Each person met the garden in different ways. However we all stopped our walk and separate routes when we met the edge of the garden which overlooked the sheep meadow, the wildness of the oak trees and grass. At the edge of the garden children, sheep, adults were playing and talking together freely in the wind that blew across the meadows and into the garden. Perhaps Gertrude also had this capacity to create free spaces through her designs, which connected to memories of childhood? Sally Festing (1991) described how Gertrude, as a sturdy little girl, stood in Green Park, London, clutching a bunch of mop headed dandelions. Her nurse forbade her to carry them-perhaps this was for practical reasons. The sap from dandelions would stain her hands, her dress and pinafore. However for Gertrude they were the bright yellow smell of childhood and London. There is a certain continuity here of childhood experiences informing an adult journey of creating colourful gardens for other to enjoy.



Figure 4: The space of infinity is in touch with a diversity of enclosed garden spaces, Hitcote Manor Gardens

## Concluding essences

A study exchange trip is planned with core staff from Ruskin Mill College to visit Aurland in June 2014. This echoes the study trip made by core staff from Aurland to Ruskin Mill and Horsley Valley in autumn 2013. The study trip was all in all a preparation for this exchange seminar. We met on the 4<sup>th</sup> morning at the Field Centre of Ruskin Mill Land Trust in Nailsworth with the task to look back and sum up the essences of what we seen and learned. method used to sum up the study trip was to go through our excursions and conversations day by day and precipitate main findings. Jorun made a point that we in the future will need to develop more precise methods of ecological imagination, to see more clearly what is not yet there and sense the ‘not yet’ in the here and now. Here is a summary of our review:

### DAY 1 – REVIEW

1. *Reveal and transform what is there*  
*Å avdekke og foredle/transformere det som er på stedet*

From Patrick Geddes we can learn how it is possible to work with what is there. Even in settings where there is seemingly slum, there is hidden beauty. His town renewal work in the Edinburgh slums is an excellent example of how such an eye is able to see potential and to make the right interventions, enabling physical transformation of derelict places and social/spiritual transformations for people who live there. The aesthetics of Geddes’ work has to do with the training of the eye that sees this hidden potential, but also a will and skill that brings it to life.

2. *Understand the dynamics of the region*  
*Å forstå den regionale dynamikken*

Visiting the Outlook Tower in Edinburgh, it is possible to get a concrete demonstration of Geddes’ ”eye for the region”, his eagle’s eye perspective on what is there in and around Edinburgh is demonstrated. Like a farmer needs to understand the layers, dynamics and individuality of his farm organism, the town planner’s eye understands the layers of living interplay between people, worklife and place. His model is a way of thinking, like a lense to grasp the dynamics of how the physical, vocational and spiritual dimensions of a region lives and grows. The evolutionary mind of the biologist develops an aesthetic way of perceiving the history and life of a region, and the lawfulness of its evolution.

It is quite creative how he also brings the upper classes into the area and thereby is able to counter the physical and social barrier between the classes at that time in Edinburgh.

3. *Train the capacity of imagination*  
*Å øve evnen til billeddannelse*

What is unique in Geddes’ work is that his method includes not only history and existing dynamics, but to work with the emerging future. In his model and work we need to ask ourselves how we develop capacities to work with imagination, and at the same time be specific – in contexts of concrete time and place. In future studies, this element needs to be addressed with more specificity and conscious emphasis. Seeing what is there, one can always shift attention and listen for the counterpoint, for what is missing (as when seeing red is calling forth the activity of seeing green). In future studies, we will be able to have a stronger focus on not just what is there, but what is not there – and on how training of this method of imagination may be undertaken.

4. *Just do it - put human ecology at the centre of industriousness*  
*Sett igang - sett menneskenes skaperevne i sentrum*

From Robert Owens impressive industriousness, we agreed that we can learn just to do it. In spite of the times and conditions he was living, he was here able to demonstrate in large scale how to make industry different, with a different set of moral intentions he is a grand example of the industry giant who himself is breaking the shackles neo-liberal ethics. The scale of his work is very impressive, as well as the destination of placing the human values first, and let industry serve them – in stead of the other way around. The human ecology is at the centre is at the centre of all industriousness in this example.

5. *Chose the place that supports your idea*  
*Finn fram til stedet hvor dine ideer kan realiseres*

The site in which Robert Owens was able to fulfill his ideas is important. It supports it – and protects its. The place guides the development of the idea. To be in dialogue with it.

6. *Make the tensions in the dialogue with place transparent*  
*Synliggjør spenningene i dialogen med stedet*

There are different layers of this dialogue between the development of an idea and the place it chooses to take root. And along all these layers there are tensions will appear between what is there already and what is coming in and wants to come into being

## **DAY 2 – REVIEW**

7. *Make visible, so everyone can see with their own eyes*  
*Synliggjør tingene – så alle kan se med sine egne øyne*

From John Ruskins method of writing we can learn the difference between education by 'instruction' and education by 'making visible'. As one of his contemporaries said, after having read his book 'The seven lamps of architecture': " ... this book seems to give me eyes". In this method of "lending his eyes" to the reader, we can learn from Ruskin how freedom may enter education. Through letting each person see and experience with his or her own eyes, each person need to do their own personal sense-experience to gain an independent access to "what is in it for me". Here the link to Goethe and phenomenology is obvious. Also the foundation of a general method of 'education to freedom'.

8. *Let ethics come to life through aesthetics*  
*Etikken ligger skjult i estetikken*

There is in John Ruskin's sensitive and aesthetic approach to nature and human life, an inherent connection to the ethics of his social thinking. The sensitive eye will feelingly be in contact with the being of the other – in nature as well as in social life. Through being in touch with the being and beings of life itself we feel ourselves connected to the world and the other. And through this feeling of connectedness an ethics is implicitly born, that is non-instrumental. From an aesthetic sensitivity and connectedness with the world of appearances an ethics of compassion and understanding is cultivated. The brutality of a capitalist and Victorian English exploration of nature and the human beings is obvious to such an eye.

9. *Transpose the burden of dead books into lived experience*  
*Overfør bøkernes døde kunnskap til levende erfaring*

In our conversation with Howard Hull, the director at Brantwood, he made clear to us a burden implicit in the immense number of books and texts that is shelved after Ruskin. The point is that they were written and spoken into and out of a living context, which is gone once you simply now read them line by line. There is therefore a need to transform them into lived experience – piece by piece. This principle of the burden of texts is well known in religious life, where the same reversal appears – so that the corpse character of the words become IT, and the life-imbued experience they are sourced in disappears.

### DAY 3 – REVIEW

10. *Keep your integrity, and work together*  
*Bevar din individuelle integritet – og arbeid sammen*

From Gertrude Jekyll and her biography we learned how she was inspired by Morris and by Ruskin and wanted to put their ideas into life. She insisted, however, in the way she did this – to do it in her own way. Her canvas as a painter was exchanged with gardens – and her art became to paint with the colours of flowers in gardens, as no-one had done before her. Seeing the way she kept her intention clear and through a long life created more than 300 gardens, is quite impressive. She also was able to plan her later life and have a grip on how she shaped the last phase of her life.

11. *Balance the female and male qualities*  
*Finn balansen mellom de kvinnelege og mannlige kvaliteter*

Seeing how Gertrude Jekyll had worked with the gardens in Hidcote Manor, we were all struck by the balance between the female and male aesthetic qualities in this garden. It became evident that she also had not developed the garden alone, but was working with the architect Johnston. In some of the gardens the "forming forces" were very strong, in others the "forces giving life-imbued content". This interplay between form and colour, structure and beauty, below and above, straight and round was present throughout the composition of each garden as well as the interplay and conversations between them. It speaks this garden of a very complex, yet precise balance between the female and male qualities – throughout the whole design. So we feel at ease in it, and anyone can breathe and move freely within the created structures.

12. *Let the enclosed space touch the space of infinity*  
*La det avgrensede rommet møte evigheten*

In our conversation with Howard Hull around 'communities at lakes', Howard gave us an image which Ruskin used in characterising lakes: "Lakes are like finite pieces of infinity". In the central lower pond of the Hidcote Manor gardens, the sky touches a slowly circling surface of a very low, and very wide slowly moving pond. Being low and so wide it is the main event of that low dense circle space. Only a few flowers dropped from the magnolia tree. It opens up a vertical dialogue as in the Norwegian hymn where it says "to live is to be like the still sea, and to mirror off the sky". Similarly we come every now and then to spaces where the enclosed gardens are penetrated by a view of the space of infinity, in a space behind space into the infinite horizon. Any local project placebased project should learn from this "breathing with the infinite" and let the global space have entrance to the local.

13. *To stay local and be in all the spaces*  
*Forbli lokal, men vær tilstede i alle rom*

Gertrude Jekyll's garden at Hidcote Manor is a demonstration of how it is possible to stay in the very local and still give us a feeling of not being entrenched. The spaces breath in conversation with each other, and even though we are vey local and in a classical English garden we can suddenly feel the presence of Italy, or of Greece. Young people today will want to have this feeling of presence of the world in what they engage with in the local. It can, as well as all the other 12 previous learned essences, become directive ideals for working with giving the new field of Ecopreneurship a clear identity and direction.

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These essences, when seen as a whole form beginnings of an 'Aesthetics of Placebased Entrepreneurship and Learning'. Seen as a coherent whole they delineate first contours of a living theory of Social Ecopreneurship.

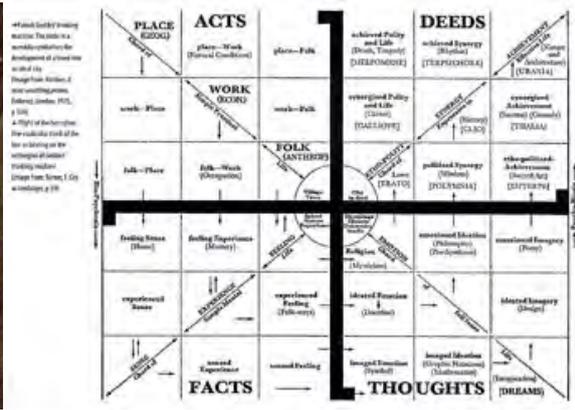


Figure 5. Smell of Hyacinths in Hidcote Manor Garden, Chippenham, North Cotswolds.

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**Appendix 1: The four social and ecological entrepreneurs of the study**



Patrick Geddes (1854 – 1932) and his living, thinking image of the region



Robert Owen (1771 – 1858) and (above right) New Lanark along the River Clyde



John Ruskin (1819 – 1900) and one of his watercolour drawings



Gertrude Jekyll (1843 – 1932) and one of the 300 gardens she left behind

## Appendix 2: The four participants and co-authors



*Jorun Barane* is project coordinator of the project Placebased Social Entrepreneurship. She is nature educator and storyteller from Sogn Jord og Hagebrukskule (Sogn Agricultural College), Aurland in Norway. Jorun has been the co-leader of a series of projects on Placebased Entrepreneurship and Learning in close collaboration with the Norwegian University of Life Science.



*Aksel Hugo* has since 2009 been working closely with Jorun Barane developing new regional courses in Placebased Entrepreneurship and Learning and the current project on Placebased Social Entrepreneurship. He is Associate professor in science and environmental education at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences. Currently he is research coordinator at the Field Centre connected to Ruskin Mill Land Trust in Nailsworth, England.



*Sue Reed* is an artist and art educator, former mayor of Nailsworth and mentor in special needs education at Ruskin Mill College. Sue is currently doing a PhD in at the University in Derby, with a focus on methods of situated mentoring and performed social pedagogy out of embodied art and craft practice.



*Morten Clemetsen* is landscape architect and Associate professor in Landscape Planning at Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås in Norway. His many years of research and development of new tools for landscape analysis and management lead him to take particular interest in the theoretical work of Patrick Geddes.