Reflective Thoughts and Comments on LK7Dublin (June 22-24, 2016)

These reflective comments and observations are confined to different roles that I’ve had prior and during the conference. For the purpose of clarity, I would specify my role, as follows:

1. As a Team Member of the Program Committee of the Conference;
2. Co-organizer and Presenter of a joint session;
3. Speaker of a short Civil Society Reflection at the Conclusion of the conference.

My accumulative observations have led me to characterize the LK7Dublin conference as the most interactive LK conference. The program provided a generous space and expanded content to learn, exchange, make connections and share fun social moments. The program’s delivery formats were diverse and had paid attention to specific conference participation needs of the attendees and the presenters.

Specific Reflective Comments

1. Organization
I have had the privilege to have been a member of the Organizing Committee in all previous LK conferences since its inception in 2000. My reflective comments here, however, would not be
comparative but are rather specific to how the LK7 Dublin Conference program of activities unfolded.

I thought LK7Dublin was very ambitious in incorporating a unique organizational feature by providing co-ordination and leadership not to one but two Conference Organizing Committees, the Program Committee and the Steering Committee. The committees had complimentary and also parallel delegated functions. They remained open for the members to join one or both. This enriched pool of resources certainly provided the conference a huge amount of support and skills to draw to implement the planned activities.

I found this rather unique. All previous LK conferences have had one committee which undertook both the Program and the Steering Committee functions. The Conference Staff were certainly entirely immersed in providing leadership, staff support and technical support to Committee members for different digital soft wares applications in addition to facilitating both direct and back and forth communication functions. The staff deserve unconditional compliments in providing leadership in implementing and delegating the various tasks, maintaining appropriate information flow and doing a great job. The sheer large size of the committees required serious attention.

Other unique features of the staff roles were that they demonstrated a solid level of independence and terrific back up staff support system. While they would draw support from the Committees, they will disengage momentarily, kind of disappear as if they had gone for a short “vacation”, only to appear with a solid program structure and other delegated plans in place! All segments of the conference program benefitted from the solid conference organization skills and delivery mechanisms provided by both the staff and the volunteer members.
Should the two-committee mechanism be attempted in the future, I would suggest a smaller size and not offering individual volunteers to sit on both committees. This approach could provide easier facilitating opportunity and help the staff save valuable time to spare for other program implementation functions.

I suggest future LK8 conference organizers engage with the LK7Dublin staff to look into specific organizational structures to draw potentially useful lessons to apply in their own specific local context.

2. Presentations and Networking Opportunities

We had a joint presentation of four presenters from different practices, perspective and regions assigned under the Ultra Short Presentations. This format for us was definitely confining, as we had prepared for a full workshop format. This presentation format did not adequately provide a significant amount of learning or exchange opportunity, particularly for two of our co-presenters who were attending the LK conference for the first time. However, we felt that having more presenters under the same format helped in having an appropriate size of audience.

The Poster Presentations, equally benefitted from this approach to have them as a part of the program and encouraging everyone to attend. The small space was very helpful in encouraging participants to interact, with the added very useful incentive of food and drinks.

Having the conference dinner and entertainment event earlier as opposed to later during the program, definitely provided the needed space for the conference participants to engage with old colleagues and friends and get to know the new ones. I certainly felt that the event met both of these objectives and provided me and gave our new colleagues who attended the LK for
the first time the opportunity to meet and get to know each other socially prior to our presentations.

3. Student Focused Program

As someone who advocated the inclusion of student specific sessions and representation, I was delighted to see a larger than the usual token number of student focused sessions and, indeed, the representation of a student on the Steering Committee and seeing so many students participating in this conference were added positive features.

One anecdote that I found most revealing and inspiring learning experience was meeting a young undergraduate student from Germany who had decided on her own initiative to miss her classes in favour of coming to attend the conference in order to learn more and to reinforce her undergraduate classroom training in environmental engineering. These types of individual student decisions deserve attention to inspire others to learn from examples of “daring to learn” and also to guide us in understanding the depth of intergenerational challenges.

4. Plenaries

The diversities of perspectives were impressive, particularly given the restricted time allocated. I personally find plenaries taking way too much space and time to allow much learning or exchange to take place. In my view, this segment provided great themes and topics, yet, it would have enhanced in-depth learning had there been adequate provisions for reaction from the audience or could have been perhaps reduced to just a few but allow more time from the floor (under this provision would only apply to thematic presenters not officials welcoming or greetings). This format was used at the LK3Paris which allowed a full scale debate after the panels to the pleasure of some and annoying others as being too philosophical (manly participants from North America!).
In a nutshell, in my view, the plenary presenters should be tasked to provide a vision with defined concepts or else replace them with presenters who would share and speak from the perspective of their lived experiences to inspire, empower and leave something behind to reflect on.

And, it would have been great to have someone speak for a few minutes about the commemoration of 1916 the Irish Rebellion. We saw photos and statements all over the city streets not knowing the full historical meaning and impact of this most significant historic moment in Irish life. A few minutes of the plenaries could have filled this information gap nicely.

5. The Conclusion/Reflective Session

The initiative was really a terrific idea to capture the highlights or other learning curves in the context of live expressions provided by individuals from different backgrounds and professional social contexts.

I was delighted to have been asked to provide some reflective thoughts and thankful that a number of colleagues found the comments meaningful.

Finally, LK7Dublin provided a meaningful context and very generous space for numerous big and small events and moments to tell our story, making connections to learn from others and the chance to take away a very positive LK conference and the Irish experience as well.

Thanks for making it happen!