

NEW PROFESSOR IN CLIMATE CHANGE LEADERSHIP

TEXT: ERIC GUSTAFSSON FOTO: THEODOROS VOULGARIDIS

On August 31st this year professor Kevin Anderson was inducted as the second Zennström visiting professor in Climate Change Leadership and replaced the previous holder, Doreen Stabinsky (featured in Techna, issue number three 2015).

The Zennström-professorship is funded by the IT-entrepreneur Niklas Zennström, most known as the founder of Skype, and his wife Catherine, a life-long human rights worker and boardmember of Human Rights Watch. The couple founded Zennström Philanthropies together, an organisation whose main goal is to support, encourage and engage with people who are working with human rights and stopping climate change.

The induction began with some shorter inspirational speeches by Uppsala university's vice chancellor Eva Åkesson, followed by Niklas and Doreen. After the introduction, it was time for Professor Kevin Anderson or 'Kevin from Manchester', which he rather prefers to be called, to begin his first lecture: 'Climate change: A Parisian tale of triumph and tragedy'. It becomes quite clear from the beginning when Kevin starts speaking that he doesn't hold back when it comes to getting the message across:

- Prior to the Paris agreement all countries in the world submitted pledges as to what they would do in terms of reducing their emissions by 2030. If you add up all of those pledges from the world leaders, they are putting us on pathway towards a 3 or 4 degrees' centigrade rise in global average temperature by 2100. And let us be absolutely clear, that is a different planet from the one which we live on. The difference between now and an ice age is about 5 degrees centigrade in global average temperature, so a rise in 3 or 4 degrees is not a planet that we would recognize.

He then continued to explain where the notorious 2 degrees centigrade target which we have all probably heard of actually comes from:

- High carbon dioxide emission societies such as Sweden, UK, USA and so forth have come to define dangerous climate change at a rise in global average temperature



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of 2 degrees centigrade across the century. We broadly came to that because we think that people like us, relatively wealthy people, can adapt our way out of the impacts.

Poorer, climatically vulnerable parts of the world with very low carbon dioxide emissions would argue for 1 or 1.5 degrees' centigrade temperature rise because they are the ones who will suffer the impacts of our ongoing emissions. Paris was intended to address the huge gap between ambition and action.

Kevin shows a plot of our carbon dioxide emissions over the last 25 years that reveals a steep upward trend. He calls it 'the plot of arrogance' and continues:

- The mitigation message has changed little in the last 25 years. The first IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report in 1990 told us everything we needed to know about dealing with climate change or about the scale of the problem. That is before quite a few of you here were actually born. It was probably before your parents even met. We have had a quarter of a century of abject failure by people of my age and generation. People with no hair, grey hair or dyed hair. We have failed the current generation. And we are failing them day in and day out.

A couple of months later we got the chance to interview Kevin about his and Glen Peters' article about the trouble in using negative carbon emission technology in the IPCC's climate scenarios. At the end of the interview we asked him some personal questions about why he took the job as the new Zennström visiting professor:

- Well, I've been in Uppsala before and I think it's an engaging place. I like the teaching arrangement even though I don't get so directly involved with teaching, it's not just top down here but also bottom up and there's some real merit to that. I also think that Sweden is interesting because it's not so culturally different from the UK but at the same time there are big differences in some areas. I think Sweden is much more engaged in things that are collective while in the UK, we are much more atomized and focus more on the individual. I've gathered that there is a change going on here but nevertheless when you come from the UK it still feels that there's much more of a recognition that we can do good things together here. There is a social good that is as important as my own immediate wellbeing and welfare. So, I think there is a different attitude that allows different suits of policies to perhaps be developed in here than would be the case for example in the UK.

Sweden has also a reputation, in some ways deserved, of being more progressive when it comes to some environmental issues. I think that we must not overplay that though, I mean there are certainly lots of things that are wrong with Sweden, as for most nations. But nevertheless, I think Sweden has some momentum which means it's a little bit easier to get things moving. I think there are many good reasons for me to be here and I hope I can make some contribution.

So, what is it that you hope to contribute while you're here?

- That's the most difficult one... It's easier to say what you have achieved when you have gone. Personally, for me is to engage with people who think differently. I hope I can bring some of the things that we have done in the UK which actually, when it comes to climate change... I don't say that policymakers have moved a long way forward because they haven't, but structurally I think climate change is well embedded in the UK's legislation and framing, probably better than any other country in the world. We had a climate change act in 2008 and we are the only country in the world who have legislated carbon budgets. All of that is very positive and much more scientifically legitimate than a lot of other countries' framings and targets. However, our carbon budgets are too weak and we are not doing anywhere near as much as we should do when it comes to fighting climate change. But the actual framework is there

and thinking about that framework, well couldn't Sweden apply that framework to understand its own emissions?

In addition, I think the UK's academic environment has developed a lot of work on climate change. I think that might come back simply to the fact that the UK has been obsessed with weather for so long since

we've been relying on the sea and the maritime environment for centuries. And that has sort of played across into our concerns about the climate. In terms of thinking about climate change issues, we are more advanced than many countries. However, and let me be very clear here, in terms of acting about climate change, we're no more advanced than any other country. We are often in the back and in fact at the moment, it looks like we are moving even further backwards. But I think the skillsets that I've engaged with in the UK hopefully could be applied here in Uppsala or Sweden more generally.

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One last question, what does climate change leadership mean for you?

- There is a very common belief that leadership is top down and I don't see leadership like that at all. I think it is very unhealthy to think that we are expecting some benevolent dictator to tell us what to do to bring about the appropriate legislations. I see leadership as demonstrating a change and trying to understand that change and encourage other people to do it at all sorts of levels.

If you start to see universities, which are often thought of as being places of thought leadership, demonstrating a rapid and radical shift to being low carbon dioxide emitters. That gives other policymakers the opportunity to think "well how did they do it?" and this is why I think it is important, this idea to mixture bottom up and top down. We need examples of what is going on and general examples come from the bottom up. Then the policymakers go "oh so that's how they did it!" and starts to produce policies that

allow other people to do the same and spread the idea more widely. That's why it is a partnership and that's where I see leadership, across all the different levels of our society. From the family, right through to the prime minister. To think that only one group is going to solve the problem rather than the other is a mistake. I see leadership much more in that sort of integrated partnership, especially when trying to figure out how we are going to resolve what is probably the most significant challenge the human kind ever faced. ■

You can listen to the full interview on the blog: thewaveofthefuture.tumblr.com.

