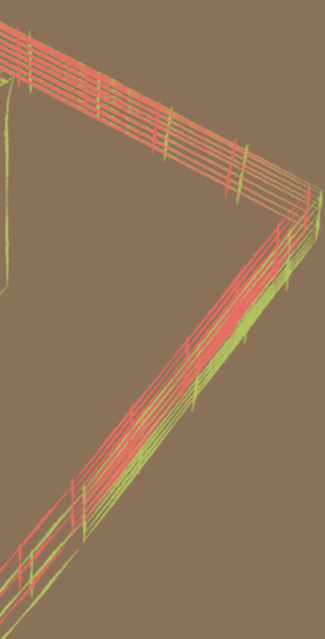


Grounds for Change

Chelsea Canavan & Deirdre Power



CONTENTS

action	10, 19
change	27, 33
legacy	05, 38



MARKET PLACE

JOHN LOGAN

'The chain that links a farmer selling eggs from a basket, house-to-house in the 14th century city and on to a delivery man ringing me every Tuesday morning all through the plague to say that he is driving up the street with my groceries, is direct and unbroken. The line of supply – from producer, to market, and on to the table – is a striking example of continuity.

But traditional ways are transformed too and while the Saturday farmers' market keeps some of us fed, the project is as much for tourism and entertainment – a spectacle - as for our weekday nourishment. Most Limerick people today get their food not from a local farmer or at the weekly market but from a multi-national supplier whose products were probably grown in a distant land and brought to the table by an intricate supply chain.'

CanavanPower's practice engages citizens and communities through dialogue and collaboration. Participatory elements are key, with the outcomes created often holding equal or less importance to the collaborative act of creating them. CanavanPower believes that actions, process and relationship building within the social space is ultimately the art.

Grounds for Change, is a contributing project to the Creative Climate Action Fund and Decarbonising Together. In conversation with the Munster Indian Cultural Association, historian John Logan, local farmer Kevin Wallace of New Leaf Urban Farm and Deirdre MacMahon of Limerick's *Neighbour Food*, we talk about issues impacting our environment, in particular food provenance from the local producer to the preoccupation of society's behaviours in consumerism.

This book is a culmination of ideas and hopes for further actions in slowing the tide of climate change.



DECARBONISING TOGETHER

FOODPRINT

Responding to economic, environmental, and social change through creative practice is a challenge welcomed by many socially engaged artists. The practice of Chelsea Canavan and Deirdre Power engages citizens and communities through dialogue and collaboration. Conversations and the making of common space often lead to significant discoveries. We propose this as a rebellious act of avoiding traditional or formal creative activity. We argue that action - the process and the relationships built within social space – are, ultimately, the art: outcomes, either real or imagined, are simply a consequence of the act of sharing the experience. Thus, the project Decarbonising Together brought us into co-creation with the Munster Indian Cultural Association (MICA), a group we had not known of previously.

The proposed project, collaborative in its intent, process, and outcome, presented challenges we hadn't faced before. The first was how to initiate meaningful climate actions within the community's

day-to-day lives; the second was how might we hope to engage the broader community, dispersed as it is through the province of Munster and beyond. As we emerged from the restrictions brought by Covid, and as face-to-face interaction became possible again, our primary goal was to take collaborative action in ways that would promote community engagement and participation.

What did decarbonising mean for our group – a disparate body of citizens – and for us as artists? We searched for common ground and we sought out an appropriate site of co-creation. A common curiosity about food and its production became a guiding goal: we focused on sharing time and space together. This would not be an artist-led project, but a space of co-creation - a compost heap of ideas - that might enrich our common ground.

We began by meeting a 'core' group. We initiated conversation through broad questions and lines of inquiry. We faced the central issue of what it would really mean for an individual or a household to decarbonise. The complexities of everyday living emerged as a common concern awaiting exploration. The humdrum everyday – workplace, schooling, community gathering, shopping, each presented the opportunity - and the challenge of making appropriate change. We organised site visits to gardens and orchards (Irish Seed Savers), innovate farms (New Leaf Urban Farm), producers (Neighbour Foods). We continued to talk, to debate, to question as we forged a set of

GERMINATE

mental tools to till our common ground. From these collaborative moments, Grounds for Change emerged.

What started as a range of incubation processes, grew to be a viable working partnership. We began addressing issues relating to food, the economy, environmental challenge, and considered their implications for the everyday. Fertile and ready soil grows strong plants: similarly, our conversations, site visits, and co-creation sessions brought us to a point of initiating a shift in perspective.

MICA brought their traditional gatherings and feasts into the germination space. The Association holds a number of gatherings through the year that reaches far beyond our core group: over four hundred families are likely to experience one or other of these activities at some point.

We planned to collectively address these issues. But for now, we had an opportunity to broaden the range of engagement during Onam, Kerala's harvest festival, held annually in Limerick. Initial questions such as where does our food come from and what happens to it subsequently lead on to important conversations about circular economies, composting, soil health, local produce, and the concept of reciprocity.

Small group discussions have the potential to lead to a larger – nosier – one. Put four hundred families in a room and ask them to jump, and the floor will shake.

Pears harvested from an urban garden in Limerick and used to make chutney shared during Onam. The artists along with local resident Randel Hodkinson helped save the 150-year-old tree from felling. The Ginsburg Pear, named after the former occupants of the house from 1900.





Give each a spade and a small plot, and acres will soon be tilled. What if each household addressed just a single aspect of their weekly food regime? Multiply that by four hundred. A burden shared is a burden halved and halved again.

From such moments the idea for FoodPrint, an interactive household-information-pack emerged. It includes a worksheet that enables a household to monitor its pattern of food consumption and estimate its carbon footprint. Unlike most calculators, it does not stop there. Through a set of suggested routes FoodPrint may initiate a turn towards the integration of local food production, ways of trading and bartering, and healthful consumption.

Hopefully, it will refocus our decisions about our needs and our power to effect change.



CYCLICAL



FROM THE GROUND UP

KEVIN WALLACE

When we purchase vegetables from large supermarket outlets, we are mostly buying imported produce. As consumers we have little experience of how fresh, locally grown food tastes.

Most of our vegetables are imported from places like the Netherlands or southern Spain though increasingly places such as Kenya, Uganda, and Morocco where labour costs are low, are being drawn into the market.

When I lived in South Korea with my wife Helen, it was impossible not to notice the extent to which space was a primary issue for those living there. Seventy per cent of South Korea is covered by mountains; there is a constant struggle between agriculture and residential development and urban spaces have to be well thought out. High-rise apartments dominate even small towns. Yet, between the blocks of residential complexes are parks, places to exercise, and plots where

residents grow plants such as Korean chillies, cabbage, apples, and spring onions. I quickly realised that how we use space is of critical importance.

When we came back to Ireland, urban farming was beginning to gain some traction. I enrolled in a Masters of Arts in Youth, Community & Social Regeneration and as I researched the topic it became evident that there were few vegetable farmers left in Limerick county, and hardly any in the city. That gave me the impetus to try and start my own small-scale city farm. However, land is hard to rent or purchase in the city and I had to move the ten kilometres to Ballyneety to find enough land to begin farming. Since 2016 I had been supplying my produce to hotels, cafes, and restaurants but during Covid-19 I changed my business model to a weekly vegetable box scheme for up to thirty households. The desire for local produce of known provenance appealed to people.

In Korea, I had discovered Korean Natural Farming (KNF), a method which encompasses taking care of the soil and plants and animals. What sets KNF apart from other methodologies is that you make everything yourself, or as a community. Fertilisers, bio-stimulants, pro- and pre-biotics are all made from resources which are found nearby. The real impact of KNF comes in how we manage soil.

So, care, now factors into my farming practices. While growing I learn about my soil, the life within it

that sustains it, and the benefits of bio-dynamic farming. We capture a diverse range of soil microbes from a nearby forest or garden, places that are healthy and not contaminated by chemicals. We then use this starter-colony to culture larger amounts that we then add to our own soil. This process we call Indigenous micro-organisms (IMOs). These organisms rebalance the soil and prevent diseases and pests from taking over. It leads to healthier soil and, consequently, healthier produce.



We should consider the prospect of an urban farm in Limerick city. Implicit in that is the creation of a learning hub, accessible to everyone, serving as a model farm, self-sustaining financially and thereby giving back to the people of the city. As someone who has run a market garden, I can see its potential for social and communal development. An urban farm could also be a family-orientated tourist attraction, a place where adults might learn to grow food for their families and neighbours, and where children might learn how food is produced and where it comes from.

By running a café on-site, an urban farm could provide work and training opportunities in the hospitality sector; links might be forged with third level colleges and with other food businesses and it could be a vehicle for other producers in the region to promote their produce. Moreover, it would be a demonstrable and effective teaching space for farmers and growers alike who understand that farming practices need to change in a radical manner through a model that is scalable, profitable, and multi-sectoral.

Growing food connects us to the people around us. It is a social leveller; it offers a way to be a part of a community or a way to create a new community.

Allotments have a long history in this country. Limerick once had a vibrant allotment scheme, regrettably, now very much reduced. Green spaces in cities are at a premium; thus, how we use them is even more important. In a world where food networks

are highly dependent on finely tuned transportation networks which are not robust enough to withstand shocks such as the Covid epidemic, Brexit, or the war in the Ukraine, we should be growing more of food in our gardens and in the community-shared in-between spaces of our villages, towns, and cities.

LESS IS MORE





GROUNDS FOR CHANGE

CHELSEA CANAVAN and DEIRDRE POWER

Change is a process that occurs over time, whether in nature or through human intervention. It may be a prolonged and protracted process, taking months or years, or it might be just a single day, a few hours, a moment. Our efforts to affect change in a creative way, as artists, have proven fruitful. Change comes from a need; it reveals want, and it cannot come without action.

We collectively explore the need for change in our relationship to food. We focus on local producers in a world of mass consumption, from the growing and sharing of our produce to mitigating the challenging circumstances around our insatiable demands. We explore the complexities of sustainability and we consider traditional, almost forgotten ways even as we browse the manicured displays of our supermarkets, wilfully ignoring its provenance and its composition.

Reflecting on these issues empowers us – we can release ourselves from the expectations of consumerist eating. Grounds for Change presents a

CITIZENSHIP

SYSTEMS

small intervention, an action needed to 'unpick' the capitalistic ways in which our food is procured. The work aims to bring the cultural agenda to the heart of the body politic. An individual exploring these ideas might seem foolish and doomed to fail; collectively, a focus on compound change and active engagement, transforms the process radically.

The starting point for our project emerged from our action research on allotment schemes. Spurred on by our awareness of rising inflation and environmental impact. In the past, seed saving, public allotments and small private gardens were a vital means to an end, an implicit and intrinsic to the lives of those depending on them. These spaces and processes have now become luxuries; they are not a given, and they are not imperative to our survival because we have become one with the consumption of food in which we have no relationship with.

Limerick city now has less than five working community allotments, where the act of growing one's food has become a social pastime grounded in systems of class and economic imperative. Although the post-covid economy has stimulated small-scale innovative ways of acquiring food, the dominance of cheap food from branded supermarkets might now prompt a rethink of our relationship to food. As producers and consumers, we need to radically change how we connect and find food.

We see that food systems function in a dynamic complex of economic, social, and political relations. In recognising this, our aim, as socially engaged artists, is to take the local as our starting point. By connecting communities of interest – those from farming backgrounds with those directly involved with distribution and, finally, with consumers - we propose a possible new food system, one of possibilities.

We do this, not by reimagining, but through making and through radical action: not by waiting for system change, but by stepping ahead of what the system is. As we make liminal production spaces available and accessible for producers, we identify their potential as farms that will nourish mind and body while contributing to the development of sustainable circular economies. We propose places of community engagement that teach us to know and appreciate our food as it moves from land to table.

...an existing space may outlive its original purpose and the raison
thus in a sense become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted,

d'être which determines its forms, functions, and structures; it may
re-appropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one
Henri Lefebvre - The Production of space



NEIGHBOUR FOOD

an interview with DEIRDRE MACMAHON

Who are you and what is your practice or business?

I am Deirdre MacMahon, the Host of Neighbour Food Limerick, an online service, allowing local farmers, growers, bakers, and artisan producers to sell directly to their customers.

What's the future of the food economy and changes in food habits since the online shopping phenomenon began - will it remain a constant?

While online shopping and before that mail order shopping has been around for many years, the enormous growth in online food shopping really started during the pandemic. I think it will remain a constant in society for quite some time, as it is so convenient. For smaller businesses, it is not very cost effective, but it's almost a necessity now to compete with the larger supermarket chains.



What are the impacts (benefits and challenges) of supporting local producers?

So many. Supporting local producers keeps money in the local economy, which is more important than ever these days. Local producers are deeply interested and invested in what happens in their local community, city, and county. They care about their locality, and their customers. They are accessible and keen to engage with their customers.

They are always open to feedback.

Do you foresee a return to notions of seasonal foods consumption and in particular the circular food economy?

I think the seasonal food idea is great in theory, but we have all become accustomed to having such a wide choice available all year round. Some products such as wild garlic, rhubarb, summer fruits, fresh peas are seasonal but it's a small part of the market. But if we were to all buy more locally, this would naturally mean more seasonal buying because we would only be buying what was available locally. I think there will always be a bit of both - no-one wants to stop eating bananas - but at the same time, there is nothing better than the taste of a summer strawberry from just a few miles away.

NO ONE WANTS
STOP EATING
BANANAS



DECARBONISING TOGETHER

MICA (Midwest Indian Cultural Association)

Our community group, Munster Indian Cultural Association (MICA), had been looking for opportunities to contribute to local communities for a while. We think that our activities and contributions should not be limited to Indian communities and that we should also contribute to other local groups where we can make a positive impact. In our search for such an opportunity, it came to our attention that the Limerick Arts Office and Limerick Council were actively inviting local groups to contribute and take part in Decarbonisation Projects.

This was an excellent opportunity for MICA, an organisation of more than two hundred families, many of whom are interested in growing what they can in their own limited spaces, while also working fulltime. Consequently, we viewed this as an excellent opportunity, something that might continue into the future, even when the project has officially ended.

We want our members to keep following the project and to reduce carbon footprint wherever they can in their lives.

OPPORTUNITY

The first meeting we had with the artists was really great. They listened to us as we explained what the Midwest Indian Cultural Association had done in the past and what we hope to achieve in the future. Along with the artists we went on to gain a better understanding of decarbonisation. We wondered would the issue be resolved simply by growing our own vegetables and fruit or would it require other powerful interventions. We wondered what other long-term opportunities awaited us. This was an excellent initial discussion with great thoughts and brilliant ideas from the participants.

MICA chose Onam - the festival of harvest, and one of the biggest events historically for us –to spread the message of decarbonisation. More than five hundred people came together on the day to celebrate, to participate in games, and to follow the traditional ceremonies. This was the best opportunity to talk about bringing down our carbon footprint, and an opportunity for MICA to engage with the community and the bigger world out there. Organising that – including serving food on fresh banana leaves to five hundred people - was not an easy task. At previous festivals we had used paper leaves, coated with a layer of plastic and it was clear that fresh leaves were a much better option, though we had to order the leaves from India well in advance.

While this import wasn't ideal, it opened an avenue for us as an organised group thinking about other areas where we might reduce plastic use, including

finding alternatives to the paper cups and plates we had traditionally used to serve water and desserts. Perhaps, they don't need to be banana leaves, but a more locally sourced large leaf that is local to us now, outside India.

So, collectively, we then drew up a plan for waste management; manually separating all the food into 14 compostable bags, five more for recycling, and two for general waste. At previous festivals we had generated twenty-one bags of general waste! We are proud of that change, something inspiring that gave us a powerful signpost to a better future. As we plan to take this forward, MICA hopes to keep spreading the message of growing health-giving food and the wise management of household waste. We think that spreading awareness is a central part of our tack and that is something we would love to keep on sharing.

SHARE AND CARE



CANAVANPOWER

Chelsea Canavan and Deirdre Power's collaborative practice engages individuals and communities through dialogue, where participation is central and the creative action being as important as the completed work. As socially engaged artists we believe that actions, process and relationship building within the social space together constitute the work of art.

MICA

Munster Indian Cultural Association (MICA) was established in 2006 to promote social and cultural welfare of Indian families in Midwestern region Ireland. Our members gathers together to celebrate festivals like Onam, Christmas, New Year, Easter, Vishu and many more. MICA's charity wing, Share and Care was established in 2012. Share And Care activities comprises of Medical allowances, Edu-care (scholarship to students), Distress Relief and Charity through Local Communities.

JOHN LOGAN

John Logan has been living and working in Limerick since 1974. His primary research interests are in the history of schooling, housing, and cultural change.

KEVIN WALLACE

Kevin Wallace is pro-active in sustainability food economy and community well-being collaborating with growers, culinary experts and socially engaged artists. New Leaf Farm in Limerick has overturned the idea of large scale factory farming to create an award winning biologically diverse market garden. In the increasingly globalised world, Kevin is developing new and dynamic solutions to challenge the import-dominated market. Incorporating Korean Natural Farming techniques, the principle philosophy is improving the soil biome. New Leaf Urban Farmers is well respected amongst the finest restaurants for the quality and innovation involved in growing. Kevin's produce and is a regular supplier to several Michelin Star restaurants in Limerick and throughout the country.

DEIRDRE MACMAHON - NEIGHBOURFOOD

Deirdre MacMahon an eighteen like-minded food enthusiasts founded Limerick's first co-operative grocery shop in 2013. She served on the co-op's board and for three years as its chairperson. The project resulted in collaboration with producers, chefs, and nutritionists in, talks, seminars, and community gatherings. She was also the co-organiser of the international nutrition conference "Wise Traditions" at Thomond Park in 2015, 2016 and 2017. Since 2020 she has served as host of NeighbourFood Limerick at Limerick's Milk Market, an online market that helps farmers, growers, bakers and artisan producers to sell directly to the public.

page 4-5

Drawing by Chelsea Canavan - former Gas Works Ireland, Limerick.

page 8-9

Photography by Deirdre Power, gates to the site of the Fairgreen, established in 1852 under the Great Munster Fair Act it provided for the holding of an annual fair in the Townland of Singland. The site was also used for the National Allotment Scheme in 1938 to 1949.

page 13

Photography by Deirdre Power, the Ginsburg Pear

page 14

Photography by Deirdre Power

image 1 - At the Onam Festival the FoodPrint was presented as a publication for use within the families of MICA's.

image 2 - At Irish Seed Savers, the artists and MICA held workshops at seed savers to experience the saving process and to learn about growing spaces.

page 15

Photography Deirdre Power, Culture Night, the artists invited the public to engage with the project during culture night through a print making workshop contributing to the Decarbonising Together project.

page 16-17

Photography by Deirdre Power, hands of Kevin Wallac, organic farmer, New Leaf Urban

page 21

Photography by Deirdre Power, Kevin Wallace is sitting on his compost heap. He held a workshop for MICA around soil health and Korean Natural Farming methods.

page 23

Photography by Deirdre Power, this image shows the participants and artists the mycorrhizal fermentation process for his soil.

page 24-25

Photography by Deirdre Power, the artists hosted a meet up with MICA and other contributors to the project to explore conversations around inner city spaces and growing.

page 30-31

Photography by Deirdre Power, Kevin Wallace showed MICA and the artists his polytunnel growing process and crop rotation methods.

page 34

Photography by Deirdre Power, NeighbourFood and Deirdre MacMahon share with the artists and MICA how the stall supports local producers with its subscribers.

page 36-37

Photography by Deirdre Power, MICA, the artists, and local volunteers visit New Leaf Urban Farm in an exchange workshop with Kevin Wallace.

page 41

image 1- Photography by Deirdre Power, workshop at seed savers

image 2- Photography by Deirdre Power, family workshop at seed savers

image 3- Photography by Deirdre Power, food shared and ate together at the Onam Festival 2022

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