

# SOL European Sustainability Group

NEWSLETTER ISSUE 3 AUTUMN 2004

## OUR MEMBERS:

ARC systems research, Austria  
Core Leadership Development  
Edna Pasher & Associates, Israel  
London School of Economics, UK  
Nature Academy Learning Lab, Sweden  
NIDO, Netherlands  
Politecnico di Bari, Italy  
Portland International, UK  
Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Germany  
Schlumberger  
Shell  
SOL Institute, Hungary  
Unilever

Penny Kennington, Convenor of the SOL European Sustainability Group, edited this newsletter. Layout and presentation was by [Cleara Communications](#). Brigitte Tantawy-Monsou of Unilever kindly provided sponsorship for the newsletter. For further information about the European Sustainability Group, please contact [pennykennington@waitrose.com](mailto:pennykennington@waitrose.com).

**Please feel free to distribute this newsletter to colleagues.**

As we come close to the anniversary of our first meeting in London in December 2003, we are busy preparing for our fourth meeting in the Netherlands in early November. In this newsletter, we include information on some of the projects that our members are beginning to engage on, which we will be discussing at our meeting. Please get in touch with the project proposer if you would like more information. We also have reports on the first SOL Forum on Sustainability, organised by the SOL Sustainability Consortium, on a meeting of the Israeli SOL Sustainability Forum, and on the last meeting of our group in Hungary, as well as some company news from Unilever.

Penny Kennington

## THE SOL EUROPEAN SUSTAINABILITY GROUP'S PURPOSE:

We are a diverse group of organisations, researchers and consultants in Europe who are actively working to create a more sustainable world, through creatively learning together, sharing insights, and developing practical capacity for sustainability both in ourselves and in the organisations we work with.

## USEFUL LINKS:

[SOL Sustainability Consortium](#)  
(company members of the SOL European Sustainability Group automatically become associate members of the Consortium)  
<http://www.solonline.org>

Society for Organisational Learning (SOL):  
<http://www.solonline.org>

World Business Council for Sustainable Development:  
<http://www.wbcsd.ch>

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### SOL EUROPEAN SUSTAINABILITY GROUP

November 3 – 5 2004, Small Earth  
Centre, The Netherlands,  
hosted by Shell and NIDO

Meet for dinner on the first  
evening, then a General Forum  
on 4 November and a meeting  
for members and potential members  
of the SOL European Sustainability  
Group on 5 November. Contact  
Johan Breukelaar,  
[johan.breukelaar@shell.com](mailto:johan.breukelaar@shell.com)

March 21 – 23 2005, Bari, Italy  
2 days of meetings with Peter Senge  
and the SOL European Sustainability  
Group, hosted by the Politecnico di  
Bari. Contact Prof. Vito Albino,  
[v.albino@poliba.it](mailto:v.albino@poliba.it)

### OTHER EVENTS

12 – 14 November 2004, Paris, France  
Global threats and Governance:  
Trade – Investment – Population,  
The 2nd Global Forum on  
Sustainable Development  
[www.equitable-forum.org/2004/](http://www.equitable-forum.org/2004/)

17 – 18 November 2004, London, UK  
Corporate Responsibility  
Management, Pervasive Risk and  
Today's Business Processes. Your  
most pressing questions answered  
[www.csrdatanetworks.com](http://www.csrdatanetworks.com)

## SOME PROPOSALS FOR SOL ESG PROJECTS

### Cognitive Mapping to Study Corporate Social Responsibility in Europe

This project is aimed at studying the issue of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Europe, which the European Commission Green Paper defines as the voluntary integration of social and environmental concerns by firms in their business operations and in their interaction with stakeholders. Some European firms will be selected and interviewed so as to identify the main concepts related to CSR as well as the strategies and actions adopted in this field. Results from the field research will be analysed through cognitive maps to understand what CSR means in Europe and identify differences or common approaches adopted in different countries. The expected results include an in depth analysis on CSR concepts, strategies and actions as intended and implemented in Europe. Cognitive maps of different approaches will be designed and discussed. Common approaches to CSR by European firms will be pointed out.

The project is related to sustainability (as it deals with CSR) as well as to organizational learning. In fact, the cognitive maps (which will be used to identify concepts, strategies and actions associated with CSR) are a technique that supports organizational learning. On the one hand, cognitive maps can help the interviewed firms to think about the CSR practices and strategies that they (sometimes unconsciously) already adopt, on the other hand they can be used to share knowledge and foster discussion on such practices and strategies.

The project has three main strengths. First, it is an attempt to fill a gap existing in the literature. Second, it will provide guidelines for firms, especially Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, willing to implement CSR policies. Third, the adopted approach (cognitive maps) is innovative with respect to the study of CSR.

**Barbara Scozzi** [www.poliba.it](http://www.poliba.it)  
Politecnico di Bari, Italy

### Types of Corporate Stakeholder Interaction in European CSR Activities

The aim of the project is to explore the different types of stakeholder interaction when enterprises develop and implement CSR activities. The main questions are (1) how enterprises design and organise communication and working processes with relevant stakeholder groups, and (2) which benefits result from stakeholder interaction. Successful ongoing or completed CSR activities in participant organisations in several European countries will be analysed from the view of stakeholder involvement in order to compile detailed information about different approaches, goals and purposes. The results are aimed at helping organisations find out which types of stakeholder involvement are most appropriate in their particular context.

**Brigitte Ömer-Rieder** [brigitte.oemer@arcs.ac.at](mailto:brigitte.oemer@arcs.ac.at)  
ARC systems research GmbH, Austria

## Complexity-Based Methodology to Support Sustainability-Oriented Work in Organisations

A complexity-based methodology is offered for use in any of the European Sustainability Group's projects, or to support members' activities on sustainability. A variety of qualitative and quantitative tools and methods are available to help organisations to co-evolve with a changing environment – both the social and natural ecosystems. These tools and methodologies include in-depth, semi-structured interviews which can help to identify themes, dilemmas, key questions and underlying assumptions. Facilitated reflect-back workshops support exploration of issues uncovered. We can also provide agent-based modelling and mapping of email connectivity to help map patterns of connectivity and reveal formal and informal networks. Another tool, called “landscape of the mind”, looks at cognitive preferences of individuals and teams (based on an email questionnaire). Julian Burton, an artist, can capture themes, dilemmas and underlying assumptions in a picture, enabling the situation to be seen by everyone which often opens up sensitive issues for discussion. We have successfully applied these methodologies in a number of organisations, combining the rigour of integrated methodologies based on research, with active support and involvement from an internal project team.

**Eve Mitleton-Kelly** [E.Mitleton-Kelly@lse.ac.uk](mailto:E.Mitleton-Kelly@lse.ac.uk)  
Director, LSE Complexity Group, UK

## SOL FORUM ON BUSINESS INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY – SOME HIGHLIGHTS

Since its inception, the SoL Sustainability Consortium has brought together innovative firms committed to deliver sound business results in harmony with social and environmental aims. The Consortium felt that it was timely to share what has been learned and to expand engagement with a broader circle of people embracing the fundamental changes necessary for sustainable development. Hence the SoL Forum on Business Innovation for Sustainability had been organized from October 12–14, 2004 in Dearborn, Michigan.

Bill Ford, CEO of the Ford Motor Company, opened the Forum with an enlightened perspective on the challenges ahead for his company. Ford Motors have accepted that the climate is changing and have been developing alternative fuel vehicles with business partners. He found it easy to define what 'unsustainability' means: “if people wake up one morning realizing that they don't have a future”.

One of the recurring elements of the Forum was the 'World Café', an innovative dialogue process to enhance value-creating conversations among groups of almost any size. Café conversations create the conditions for large numbers of people to engage in constructive dialogue and access collaborative intelligence around important

questions leading to evoking and appreciating value in organizational settings. Examples of questions are: 'What question is at the heart of your role in your organization?' and 'How can we build commitment to sustainability?'

Young people from different countries such as Egypt, Malaysia, and Mexico gave very interesting presentations in the context of 'Youth, Water, and Action', which included an insightful play by children from Malaysia about their river being polluted. Another participant walked two weeks (!) through the rainforest on his journey to the Forum.

Plenary presentations were limited to those by Peter Senge (SoL), David Duncan (Unilever), John Ehrenfeld (International Society for Industrial Ecology), Janine Benyus (Biomimicry), and Amory Lovins (Rocky Mountain Institute). Details of these should be available on the SoL web-site shortly.

A highlight on the final day was an all singing and dancing session led by Tulani Kinard. Just imagine the participants singing 'We've got the Power' to make a difference and dancing! As some of the participants expressed it: “Truly awesome”.

All in all, a spiritual experience that gave many new insights and was very enjoyable indeed.

**Johan Breukelaar** [johan.breukelaar@shell.com](mailto:johan.breukelaar@shell.com)  
Manager Sustainable Development, Shell Chemicals

“We need to create businesses as living systems, in harmony with nature, so that all life can flourish for all time”

## NEWS FROM ISRAEL

The Israeli SOL Sustainability Forum, led by Edna Pasher & Associates in collaboration with the MAALA Forum of Business for Social Responsibility in Israel, organized a special conference for “Rosh Hashana”, the Jewish New Year. This was the fifth meeting of the Israeli SOL Sustainability Forum.

The Israeli SOL Sustainability Forum could not have chosen a better time to explore sustainability, since the spirit of the holiday is about new beginnings, with a strong belief in the positive power of the future. And, indeed, the title of the event was: “You Cannot Predict The Future But You Can Create It”. Joe Laur, our guest keynote speaker, said it so well: “We need to create businesses as living systems, in harmony with nature, so that all life can flourish for all time”.

The conference was well attended by executives from leading Israeli companies. It was divided into three parts. Joe Laur, who is a Founder of the American-based SOL Sustainability Consortium, opened the event. He was in the snow in Vermont, USA and the conference was conducted in the IBM building in warm Israel. He spoke via video conference, made possible by the generosity of Israel IBM.

In his lecture, Joe presented the conceptual framework, practical tools and community support that companies need in order to build healthy organizations for the long term, and explored what it will take to create such sustainable organizations. He also talked about the SOL

Sustainability Consortium, whose members include BP, Shell, Nike, Ford, Harley-Davidson, Interface, The World Bank, DTE, Northeast Utilities, Unilever and others who are active in organizational learning and systems thinking for sustainable business. He emphasized that the Consortium provides an opportunity for peers from industry to learn from each other’s successes and challenges in addressing the triple bottom line of sustainability: to achieve economic, ecological and social results.

After this lecture, the CEO of MAALA, the Israeli Forum of Business for Social Responsibility, presented the results of the first survey ever conducted in Israel about the status of social responsibility amongst business organizations in Israel.

In the last part of the meeting we gathered for a toast to celebrate the Jewish New Year. The head of the Israeli Commission for Future Generations at our parliament, Justice Shlomo Shoham, who is a very supportive friend of the Israeli SOL Sustainability Forum, came especially to greet us and to encourage the activity of the Forum.

**Sari Erlich** [sari@pasher.co.il](mailto:sari@pasher.co.il)  
Edna Pasher PhD & Associates

## DANUBE ADVENTURE



*Dinner on the Danube, June 2004*

Our meeting in Hungary took place in June, in the hills above the city of Budapest. On the first day, Eve Mitleton-Kelly told us about the 10 characteristics of a complex evolving system, and we discussed their relevance, and how leaders can help organisations adopt these characteristics in order to learn to co-evolve with social and political forces and with nature. We dined and dialogued on the Danube – as shown above. On day two, a wider group of us had a very stimulating day with a wide variety of speakers - see John Beckett's article on the next page. On the third day, the members of our group met to look at some of our own questions. We started by looking at the purpose each of us had in joining the group. Many of us stressed the importance of a diverse set of members and our

European perspective. People appreciate the chance to explore issues in the group, at our meetings, to learn from one another and to be able to apply the learning back in the workplace. Many of us also wanted to see SOL tools in action, to learn how to apply them to the sustainability agenda, to be able to contribute to enhancing sustainability. The group can help us expand our horizons, and also is excellent for networking, and making interdisciplinary connections that are hard to gain elsewhere. We want to expand our membership – particularly to encourage more companies to join. We looked at the attractors:



### Our challenge to ourselves:

Can we as a group create a new arena – develop and provide new tools, new processes, new stories, insights, inspiring examples, so that we can support businesses, governments and civil society in reducing unsustainability and creating sustainability

We decided that we want to be able to spend about half our time together on learning activities – discussions, exploration, specific experiential learning on selected topics – and the rest on projects. We spoke about potential projects – some of them are described briefly in this newsletter and will be developed at our next meeting in the Netherlands.

In conclusion, we left with plenty of ideas and energy for establishing our projects, inviting new members to join us in the Netherlands in November and in Bari in March, and putting what we had learned into practice.

**Penny Kennington**

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Convenor, SOL ESG

## FINDING REFLECTIVE SPACE

The setting for the Hungarian SOL European Sustainability Group meeting was perfect, with good balance between the comfort of a hotel and the beauty of a rustic setting. The main room that we occupied for our meeting seemed to spill out into the fields and hills, through the large, open windows giving lots of light and fresh air. The swimming pool was invigorating but not too large as to be taxing. The masseur soothed and reassembled tired muscles to complete the transformation.

*Finding time and space to reflect is precious and this was a place to do that.*

Profit focussed, corporate animals often have difficulty in finding and enjoying this 'reflective space'. Their domain is the jungle where dominating, pro-active, task orientated behaviour is valued. The meeting times and content at this event, more so than at other SOL events I have attended, seemed to evolve over the three days. It felt as if there was time set aside to build consensus at each step rather than being paced and planned in advance. It felt a little like the experience in a Quaker gathering where one only speaks when moved to do so. Certainly this approach gave flexibility and allowed us to

explore more fully the opportunity presented on the second day when Jozsef Verass from the Cabinet Office was suddenly able to attend and then, as he was about to leave, he agreed to answer some questions, and what followed was a very fascinating dialogue

This process, adopted in Hungary, of providing only limited structure and allowing time for ideas to emerge, was very interesting. In part, I think it reflected Hungarian culture. I also wondered whether, for some traditional (Western) corporates this approach could, at least initially, take them outside their comfort zone. Yet for most, I think the event, over three days, provided a major learning opportunity, and confirmed to me that taking time and space to reflect does offer significant rewards.

**John Beckett**

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Portland International, UK

## NEWS FROM UNILEVER



Unilever

Unilever has topped the Dow Jones sustainability index for the fifth year. The DJSI World index and the DJSI Stoxx index, a European index, were published earlier this month. The World index includes more than 300 companies from 22 countries that lead their industry in terms of corporate sustainability, while the Stoxx index includes 178 companies from 13 countries. The DJSI are the world's first global indices tracking the financial performance of leading sustainability-driven companies worldwide. Assessment results provide detailed information about recent sustainability developments in the corporate world. According to Dow Jones: "Across all industries, the integration of economic, environmental and social criteria has moved further up the business agenda and is increasingly incorporated into company strategies and core business operations." They complimented Unilever on its successful execution of its sustainability strategy, and the fact that this is supported by Unilever's high level of engagement across its three key areas of endeavour – fisheries, sustainable agriculture and water care.

**Brigitte Tantawy Monsou**

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Vice President Organisational Effectiveness, Unilever NV