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DR. ANN DALE -- Former Carleton Grad is recipient of Trudeau Fellowship

-----By Michelle French-----

With over \$1 million in guaranteed research funding and enough ideas to fill a laboratory, academic-activist policy analyst Dr. Ann Dale jokes that her strong Irish Catholic work ethic will get her through a growing mountain of research projects. The recipient of a \$750,000 Canada Research Chair in Sustainable Community Development from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council and a \$150,000 Trudeau Fellowship for outstanding contributions to issues of public policy, Dr. Dale will continue jetting between Ottawa and Victoria, where she teaches sustainable development theory, governance and decision-making at Royal Roads University.



Since 2001, Dr. Dale has been researching the relationship between social capital and sustainable development. Canadians have never lacked in innovativeness, but infrastructure and transdisciplinary networks across communities have left much to be desired, she argues. That's why her research highlights good news stories, from Merit, B.C., where the small logging community has been able to diversify its economic base, to Vancouver's downtown eastside, where a colleague created a recycling program that employs 33 dumpster divers and binners and generates \$1.5 million annually. "Part of this research is trying to show government that you have to strategically intervene at certain levels, that you can actually destroy social capital in a community or conversely that you can build it by your policy interventions."

Since jumping from the governmental sector in the early nineties, Dr. Dale has been a firebrand of activity – picking up her Ph.D. at age 45 and launching an academic career where research and teaching go hand-in-hand with activism. Her experiences in multiple sectors led her to argue that Canadians – communities, institutions and governments alike – need to move beyond the stagnation of "solitudes, silos and stovepipes." Solitudes are cleavages between regions and people; silos divide sectors like the business and research communities; and stovepipes are divisions at the intra-institutional level, such as in government where Dr. Dale feels departments are isolated and thus remain ineffectual spaces for change. "The current structure of government actually mitigates against any of the big issues of the day," she explains, citing biodiversity conservation, climate change, sustainable transportation and water security as key issues in which there is a paucity of effective policy.

"I think what we need are new strategic networks and alliances between groups of people working around the issue," Dr. Dale says.

Despite the roadblocks, she sees positive change happening – in her research and in academic institutional constructs like the Trudeau Foundation, where scholars of multiple disciplines and at different stages in their careers unite around cutting issues. Dr. Dale optimistically predicts that young people, as well as aging boomers with money and time, may well fuel a renaissance where ideas and necessity will spark a renaissance of sustainable thinking. As a boomer herself with money thanks to her research awards and a head full of ideas, she has created her own tiny golden age of sorts. As chair of the National

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Environmental Treasury (NET), an organization that funds Canadian environmental groups, and as executive coordinator of the Research and Public Policy Office of the Canadian Biodiversity Institute, Dr. Dale is making ripples.

Leaning forward, she speaks emphatically of change. "We have to design our society to be able to live in a sustainable manner with other species and more in sync with natural systems," Dr. Dale says, eyes shining at the prospect of better days ahead. "That's part of what I hope to do with my sustainable community development work."

"I think diversification is one of the most important local strategies in a global marketplace," she says, settling into a sofa-like chair with her decaf coffee at a Sparks Street restaurant. Ever the idea-generating personality, Dr. Dale doesn't wait for a question before launching into a philosophical evaluation of the government's limited capacity to effect change in the name of environmental stewardship. "I think what's happened is that we've lost the ability... to create shared meaning about what's important to us for our humanity," she says, drawing from the philosophies of Amitai Etzioni and pointing to the lack of real policy engagement in the federal election to cement her criticism.

Improving communication between communities on sustainability issues is the backbone of Dale's work. As part of an online exchange system, Dr. Dale has led four e-dialogues on sustainable development. A year ago, she helped connect 6,000 scholars and activists across the country under the forum heading Sustainable Communities in Canada: Does One Exist? Dr. Dale would like to use her position as Canada Research Chair to continue exploring e-dialogues as a communication strategy within and between communities. "If we've lost the ability to dialogue about critical public policy issues and shared meaning, then what better way to try to engage in online dialogues and build on each other's successes between communities?"

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