

**OLLSCOIL NA hÉIREANN, GAILLIMH**  
**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY**

Text of the Introductory Address delivered by **PROFESSOR CATHAL O'DONOGHUE**, National University of Ireland, Galway on 17 October 2018 on the occasion of the Conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa*, on **BRENDAN DUNFORD**.

A Uachtaráin, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle....

President, Dear friends and scholars,

Today we are conferring on, Dr. Brendan Dunford of the Burren Programme, the Degree of Doctor of Science.

Brendan Dunford is being honoured for the work he has done and the work he has led, in re-invigorating the biodiversity in the Burren in County Clare.

The Burren; with its limestone karst landscape and distinct flora, with over 70% of Ireland's flowers growing here, is a unique landscape and ecological ecosystem.

This landscape and ecology is man-made,

- resulting from traditional farming practices since 4000BC
- as visible in the rich heritage of Archaeological sites.

The Burren, however was losing this uniqueness after the modernization of Agriculture after Ireland joined the EU

- where traditional farming practices that enabled this landscape and ecology to flourish,
- were replaced by practices that were resulting in scrub taking over the landscape, losing this unique ecosystem.

Brendan however has been instrumental in turning this about.

- From a farming background in Co. Waterford, Brendan has spent the past 20 years living and working in the Burren region.
- He completed his doctorate in Ecology from UCD in 2001 as a Teagasc Walsh Fellow on the impact of farming on the heritage of the Burren.

Brendan's PhD had immediate impact,

- where his studies moved from theory to action,
- enabling the transformation we have witnessed over the past 20 years in the Burren,

- not just preserving but restoring the rich landscape and ecosystem.

## **Entrepreneur**

Why you might ask is a Scientist being honoured in a conferring of Business, Public Policy and Law?

- Brendan is not just a Scientist, he is an Entrepreneur
- In the Private, Public and Social Realms

William Nordhaus last week won the Nobel Prize for his work on environmental economics in how to use market instruments such as carbon pricing to reduce pollution and improve the environment.

The idea is simple,

- if people can pay the true cost of environmental degradation or be rewarded for the true benefit environmental improvement, then we will have a better environment.
- Nordhaus' research shows that this can be a far more effective and efficient than direct government controls and regulations.

While this sounds simple in theory, it is a big challenge in practice.

However Brendan and his colleagues have been able to do this,

- moving from a top down, expensive and relatively ineffective regulatory approach
- to a market approach where farmers were paid to farm to produce environmental improvements.
- He calls it Farming for Nature.

Brendan's approach would not be out of place in a management handbook

- His approach is incentives driven
- It is a data driven, personalized, solution-based approach for the specific problems on specific farms
- It is consultative and engaging, working out with farmers how to achieve what is needed
- It is iterative, learning lessons from mistakes and constantly improving

They in effect created a market for biodiversity which resulted in a mindset change in farmers from

- Grudgingly going along, in a minimal way, with regulations
- To actively farming for Nature; just like raising cattle where they are rewarded for higher performance
- And taking pride in what they have achieved

Like any other entrepreneur, he had to

- identify the need,
- create the market,
- raise the capital and
- sell the idea

But instead of producing goods and selling services,

- He has produced a better environment
- In doing this he has Created Value not in Financial Capital, but in Natural Capital

Improving the environment has also seen innovative private sector businesses creating spin-offs from the Natural Capital such as

- the Burren Perfumery or the Burren Chocolatier that use natural ingredients from the ecosystem and
- the many tourism-based businesses that showcase the Landscape

### **Public Entrepreneur**

Improving the environment generates a public good, not a private good, and requires public intervention to have real impact.

For twenty years, the state has funded Agri-Environmental programmes, with varying degrees of impact; programmes paid for participation not for outcomes.

Brendan through his studies had a plan to improve things in the Burren, using his results-based approach

However just because you know what to do, doesn't mean it happens; there are plenty of good ideas that never make it to fruition.

Brendan as a Public Entrepreneur has had

- the drive and determination to persist and
- the capacity to communicate a good idea to convince
- and the organizational capacity to see the idea through to completion

He convinced the State to pay for improved environmental outcomes in the Burren and he then created a number of institutions to deliver these goals

As a new approach to environmental protection, the programmes started small, and grew.

- As farmers gained confidence in the approach, more wanted to participate.
- And as the state realized the effectiveness of this approach it was willing to put in more resources.
- Success breeds success.

What Brendan and his colleagues have done is now recognized as one of the most effective agri-environmental programmes in Europe.

- Results based
- Locally led
- High impact

With Policy makers and researchers from Europe wanting to learn from the Burren and to replicate it in their own countries

### **Social Entrepreneur**

A key to the success of these programmes is that it is not top down, but bottom up.

As Social Entrepreneurs, Brendan along with his late wife, Ann O'Connor established a particularly innovative organization, Burrenbeo.

- Through the concept of the Learning Landscape, its aim is to connect people with their places and their role in caring for them.
- It builds sustainability because there is buy-in and local ownership

Striving to do something important and achieving success breeds confidence to do other things.

- Improved confidence by communities in the Burren region in achieving successes in the ecological, cultural and economic spheres has created a renewed confidence in the future, resulting in a big improvement in economic circumstances.

The improved sense of place and the ownership it brings can thus have impacts far beyond heritage and culture to tangible economic gains.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, In the Burren, we have not just a world-class ecology, not just world-class landscape or heritage, but world-class community institutions

- Well designed, bottom up community-based institutions that have real impact.

Knowing what to do is not the same as knowing how to do it and actually doing it.

- The secret ingredient is Leadership.
- And there are Leadership lessons from Brendan's approach for all sectors.

Brendan's story is an inspirational story of what can be done through knowledge, vision, cooperation, determination and leadership

This university recognizes Dr Brendan Dunford as a pioneer of ecological leadership, entrepreneurship and innovation and bestows with gratitude on him our highest honor. I would ask Brendan now to come to receive the degree of Doctor of Science

PRAEHONORABILES PRAESES, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, *honoris causa*, ad gradum **Doctoratus in Scientiae**, idque tibe fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.