

Press Release **University of the Trees-Oxford**

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A third university has come to light in Oxford. It is a university even older than Oxford University. It is a university in which all citizens are teachers and learners, but also one in which the trees and other-than-human-beings are the teachers as well. It is the *University of the Trees*.

Although here for millennia, it has only recently been acknowledged and become visible through the work of a group of citizens. This group has started to use a ‘kit’ available on the web “that operates like a kind of franchise”, says Oxford resident, Clare Cochrane, who is involved in developing a group in Oxford. And on its website one discovers just how this kit works.

A key part of the kit involves using tree-bands that say *University of the Trees*, which honour the trees and the role they play on the planet. The grey felt tree-bands with their golden embroidered letters are wrapped around the trunks of trees, about 1 meter above our heads. These tree-bands mark an area, creating a field of awareness, and making visible the university that exists everywhere and for all time. In this field for attentiveness and experience, the inhabitants of a town, village or city are invited to explore the environment ‘out there’ as well as to reflect on the views and values that determine the way we live in the world. The *University of the Trees* offers both an ‘on the ground’ option and a global networked version. Whether ‘online’ or ‘on the ground’, the *University of the Trees* creates an arena to engage with the world in new ways, to look and to listen again... to develop other ways of knowing that scientists are now describing as ‘new organs of perception’ and ‘contemplative enquiry’. The *University of the Trees* kit offers ‘tools’ for exploring such other ways of knowing, as a basis for developing alternative ways of inhabiting the world that are sustainable and humane.

In Oxford this arena for other forms of knowing is created using 100 tree-bands. Since 1 May morning this third, alternative university has begun to reveal itself in Oxford. “And this is just the beginning of a process”, says Emily Jones, its coordinator, who is passionate about reaching people of all ages and from all areas via the University of the Trees’ evolving programme. We will be offering tree-bands to a lot of schools –and a process that teachers can use with pupils of all ages. There are groups developing in different parts of the UK and in other countries. The coordinator of the Exeter group, Johanna Korndorfer says: “it is successful with diverse age groups, from little ones listening to the trees and sharing with adults and teachers what they have heard, to teenage school groups and adult forums exploring forms of creative ecological action”.

Emily and Johanna, like all members of the wider Social Sculpture network that developed this framework, all believe that responsibility and responsiveness to the eco-social crisis facing humanity and the planet, locally and globally, comes not from imposed moral duty, but from an *ability-to-respond*.

The 1st May is only the beginning of a long-term process. By the end of June all the 100 trees that define the field of the University of the Trees – will receive their tree-bands. The trees of Oxford with bands on can be viewed on Google Maps – link on UOT website. Anyone wishing to participate in this process, or developing the programme of activities should contact Emily Jones: universityofthetreesoxford@gmail.com or telephone Shelley Sacks on 01865 484961.

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Additional information

On one level the ‘university of the trees’ is like a charter – that villages, towns, cities, groups, organisations and individuals can link and commit to, creating a framework in which to reveal and acknowledge the existing ‘university of the trees’ and in which they can develop an alternative ‘university’ programme of actions and activities.

To link into and use this framework one agrees on a set of six ‘ethos’ principles. These are not rules but underlying ideas and commitments that give the University of the Trees its particular character.

The first two ethos principles are: ‘the trees are our teachers’, and ‘the ecological crisis is an opportunity for consciousness’. Another one has to do with the importance of different ways of knowing, and the need to develop what scientists are calling ‘new organs of perception’. This is one of the things that define this as a real mobile, alternative university.

It is up to the groups, organisations and individuals decide whether they want to develop an ‘on the ground’ version in their locality or simply be part of a ‘global network’ – linked by the website.

The redesigned website (June 2010) includes two ‘directories’

One – a global directory of ‘practice centres’ and creative initiatives, big and small - will facilitate awareness of creative initiatives linking culture and sustainability all over the world. The other –a directory of issues, perspectives, dilemmas, stories, questions, proposals –will be a place to gather issues, insights and perspectives, as well as offering online forums for the discussion of such issues. Two key forums will initiate the redesigned web-platform: one on Genetic Modification, another on Nuclear Power. *University of the Trees* groups and individuals will be able to participate actively, contributing to these directories and participating in online forums.

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50 words

University of the Trees-Oxford is a mobile, alternative university - connecting individual insight, focused dialogue and collective action towards the shaping of a socially conscious and ecologically viable world. It launches in Oxford on 1 May. Open to all. See website for details www.universityofthetrees.org, look out for our tent in the city, or contact universityofthetreesoxford@gmail.com