

EYES WIDE OPEN

A Statement for Social Action: to the SER Europe Committee

This statement has arisen from the *Eyes Wide Open* workshop, and conversations and questionnaires from participants at the SER 2010 conference in Avignon. It is a rallying call for all those involved to embrace and celebrate engagement with local communities, as integral to the ecological restoration of a place, and for time and resources to be available to make such conversations, engagement and mutual learning possible. We believe it is about committing solidly to the points and principles stated below:

**Avignon
2010**

Building
Bridges and
Crossing
Them:
Workshop
Outcome



Mr. Li from Liverpool's Chinese community planting Deptford Pink *Dianthus armeria* at the Eden Project, Cornwall

Community engagement is integral to ecological restoration

It is widely recognised that if ecological restoration projects are to last and be expanded they must endeavour to listen to and engage with the communities where they are taking place. Experience shows that where this effort has been made to share the passion for and practical challenges of creating ecologically rich and attractive landscapes, the benefits are appreciated by a broad section of society, and the impacts on the local economy and local pride can be enormous.

A bridge not crossed

There are, however, surprisingly few examples of meaningful social contact and dialogue with local communities within ecological restoration projects. In particular, action on this social dimension by academic restoration ecologists and SER conference participants is at a remarkably low level. In

conference papers and executed projects community involvement is still largely a notional concept, a recommended next step that is rarely made.

The danger is that, by undervaluing the social and cultural dimensions of ecological restoration work, the potential for SER to promote long term, successful projects on the ground will be severely limited.

If people can't dance they won't join our revolution

If projects are to flourish and endure in the long term, there needs to be a commitment to engage with those people who have a relationship with a place from the beginning. Often, there is an assumption that local groups will come to us; on the contrary, we need to find creative ways to meet, listen to, engage and work with them rather than simply talk amongst ourselves.

Generous partnerships will help projects flourish

As a priority, generous partnerships should be built between universities and other social and community groups involved in ecological restoration. This will also open up a diverse range of cultural and community funding opportunities outside of the strict confines of ecological or biodiversity funding streams.

Sharing the passion for ecological restoration

This then is a call for SER Europe (and SER International), to adopt principles to support working with local communities and wider public engagement, in what we believe is one of the most inspiring and important subjects in the world. To deliver this on the scale required to make a difference to the world, it is important we sing about what we do, and share that passion with a very wide audience.

