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Speaker: John Crowley



John Crowley is Chairman & CEO of the PHGD Group, which brings together a cluster of companies addressing the various dimensions of ideas and consultancy on social transformations as well as renewable energy solutions. Before founding the Group, he spent 18 years at UNESCO, leading the Section for Research, Policy and Foresight from 2014 to 2021. He was previously responsible for ethics of science and technology and for global environmental change. Before joining UNESCO, he worked as an economist in the oil industry (1988-95) and as a research fellow at the French National Political Science Foundation (1995-2002). From 2002 to 2015, he was editor of the UNESCO-published *International Social Science Journal*. He is the author of *Sans épines, la rose. Tony Blair : un modèle pour l'Europe ?* (Paris: La Découverte, 1999) and editor of *Tony Blair, le nouveau travaillisme et la troisième voie* (Paris: La Documentation française, 1999), *Pacifications, réconciliations* (special issue of the journal *Cultures & Conflicts*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), and *Rethinking Human Security* (Paris/Oxford: UNESCO / Wiley-Blackwell, 2008, with Moufida Goucha). He has published a further 100 academic articles and book chapters, mainly on political theory and comparative politics.

“Generalizing Capital”

The notion of “capital” has been widely used in the academic literature and public debate to refer to the blindspots of traditional economic thinking, and in particular to the limitations of GDP as a metric of economic performance. Ideas and measurements of natural, human and social capital have been developed, and methodologies proposed to embed them in accounting systems. At the same time, environmental theorists and activists have often expressed deep concern about the generalization of capital to cover “nature”, notably through the concept of ecosystem services. The objections are both pragmatic (once things are explicitly valued they can be more easily enclosed, appropriated and even confiscated) and conceptual (economic categories applied to non-human entities block understanding of their intrinsic value). In this lecture, I propose to build on but also challenge these objections. Connecting the various meanings of “value” and the various kinds of “capital” points to ways in which generalized capital can contribute to richer and more sustainable understandings of territories, landscapes, ecosystems and cultures – including but not limited to their straightforwardly economic dimensions.