

Building Greener Smarter Communities - Geovate 2018



The theme for this year's Geovation challenge was 'Building Greener Smarter Communities' and it was sponsored by Innovate UK and Northumbria Water Group to the tune of £185k.

This one day conference took place on 16 February at the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) in London. It marked the third day of the Geovation camp, during which the ten best ideas get developed into ventures that could attract funding. The format for the day was a morning of talks and an afternoon during which the ten finalists presented their pitches to a panel of judges, culminating in the award of funding to the teams with the most promising ideas.

Links to SDG'S

Chris Parker from the Ordnance Survey opened with some background. Annual Geovation challenges have been running for ten years and are intended to promote innovative use of Ordnance Survey products to address the theme. The idea is to think global - the themes have links to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals - but to act local. The challenge is to scale the best ideas up in a sustainable way by thinking smartly as well as using smart technology.

It's Cool to Reuse

The highlight of the morning was undoubtedly a stirring talk from Wayne Hemmingway, co-founder of Red Or Dead and Hemmingway Design. He gave a vivid account of his entrepreneurial activities when he first arrived in London in the 1980s. He put his success down to a spirit of reuse fostered at an early age, to the point that the furnishings in his own home are all reused or second hand. He bemoaned 'the bank of mum and dad' mentality, but wondered how entrepreneurs would fare today in a world of chain stores and without the independent traders and the street markets which enabled him to succeed.

Geovation Successes

The afternoon started with an update from two previous Geovation winners. Chris Parker reminded us of the 2016 winner, Refill, which promotes the refilling of water bottles. With waste plastic right at the top of the environmental agenda, it's time has come (www.refill.org.uk). Sam Parton then introduced OpenPlay, which is a discovery and booking system for sports facilities. The system is now being used in seven countries. When he went to the Geovation camp he revealed that he was down to his last few pounds and had no 'Plan B'. He had to win.

The Pitches

The teams were then given five minutes each to present their pitches. 'Community Friend Walks' aims to empower those who have lost the confidence to walk. 'Happy Crocodile' aims to help get children to walk to school by using geography to plan secure routes and organise volunteer leaders.

Plastic waste has been in the headlines following 'Blue Planet', and two teams had already been addressing the problem – 'Plastic Clever', which aims to provide resources for schools, and 'Plastic Patrol' which 'gamifies' the collection of plastic waste. 'Oasis' changes communities through the power of flowers. They have converted a barren three-acre site and generated income from the produce. 'Neat' matches up growers who have a surplus with eaters who would like to buy fresh and local produce. In a similar vein, 'FoodSpot' matches up people who want to grow food but have no space with businesses and individuals with unused space. 'Portable Ecosystems' want to install portable garden units (PGUs) in places which have been paved over.

'Offigo' gets local businesses to combine their resources online as a means of promoting local high streets and help shoppers find what they want. 'WareHAUS' plan to construct modular housing units within currently disused property and rent them out to 'key workers'.

And the Winner is...

The judges recognised the desperate state of housing in Britain and awarded £50k to 'WareHAUS', £20k to 'Offigo' and £20k to 'Portable Garden Systems'. There were other awards to 'Happy Crocodile', 'Plastic Patrol' and 'Plastic Clever' (working together), and 'Community Friend Walks'.

For more information on the challenges and Geovation in general, visit www.geovation.uk

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