



FROM FAIRY TALE TO REALITY

DISPELLING THE MYTHS
AROUND CITIZEN
ENGAGEMENT



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FOREWORD

This pamphlet has proven timelier than we could have expected. Over the period of researching this document, a string of key events have demonstrated how vital the issues this pamphlet deals with are. UK Uncut, the forestry consultation, student protests, riots, the Occupy movement, and the Leveson Inquiry all point to the need for better engagement.

The 'Big Society' has dwindled as a political buzzword, but its theme of devolving powers from central government to communities has continued through the Localism Act and the focus on open policymaking. But the truth is that overall engagement seems to be failing us as a society. All too often, the way that public engagement is done leads to citizens trusting public institutions and decision-making processes less. All too often, public engagement is done in ways that discourage participation from anyone but the most dedicated, when it should be building networks of active citizens. All too often, public services view engagement with local people as a tick-box exercise or nice-to-do, when it should be a cultural norm, embedded in their organisational DNA. All too often, the results of public engagement are left to gather dust on a shelf rather than being used to make a difference.

In part, all of these faults are due to the false myths that we tell ourselves about public engagement – 'it's too expensive, difficult and dangerous' – and the prophecies tend to be self-fulfilling. The methods we use to engage

are mostly old-fashioned and don't meet the expectations of citizens - it doesn't have to be this way. This pamphlet exposes the negative myths of engagement as false, providing multiple examples of how different engagement is possible and what it can achieve.

The RSA and Involve have come together to deliver this pamphlet because both organisations are passionate about its core message: we have barely scraped the surface of what innovative public engagement can do for public services, communities and citizens. This passion is derived to a large extent from our own experiences of public engagement.

At the RSA, we develop practical solutions to pressing social challenges. This includes designing and testing new approaches to engagement that help to build community resilience, encourage active citizenship and foster pro-social behaviour in the places we work. The Citizen Power Peterborough programme is a good example of this. Over the past years Involve has also explored what works in practice when it comes to engagement. We have always said that bad engagement is worse than none at all. 'Pathways through Participation', our recent two-and-a-half-year research project, has borne this out. The opposite is also true. Excellent engagement can have a stunning effect on public services. This pamphlet forms a vital part of the RSA's and Involve's shared mission to transform the opportunities that citizens have to shape services and decisions that affect their lives.

We encourage you to read and take action.

INVOLVE

Involve are experts in public participation. We believe passionately in a democracy where citizens are able to take and influence the decisions that affect their lives.

Through both research and practice we seek to radically transform the relationship between citizens and their governments to better use the creativity, energy, knowledge, skills and resources of all.

We have developed the case for public participation, produced practical guidance on how to engage effectively, explored innovative practices of engagement, and begun to understand how and why citizens engage. Our research covers both the practice and theory of engagement and is grounded in our work and experience.

THE RSA

In the light of new challenges and opportunities for the human race our purpose is to develop and promote new ways of thinking about human fulfilment and social progress, which speaks directly to our strapline - 21st century enlightenment.

Our vision is to be a powerful and innovative force. Bringing together different disciplines and perspectives, we bring new ideas and urgent and provocative debates to a mass audience. We work with partners to generate real progress in our chosen project areas, and through our 27,000 Fellows we want to be seen as a source of capacity, commitment and insight in communities from the global to the local.

Underpinning our work are enduring beliefs in human progress, reasoned enquiry, environmental sustainability, and ethical commitment combined now with a commitment to public participation and social inclusion. In pursuing these aims we are led by four values: independence, commitment, honesty and openness.

Our way of working consists of providing a platform for critical debate and new ideas; working with partners to translate knowledge and progressive thinking into practical change; and inspiring our network of Fellows to be a force for civic innovation and social change.

The RSA Fellowship is a powerful national and international network of accomplished individuals. Fellows are encouraged actively to engage with all aspects of the RSA's work and to develop their own local and issue based initiatives. Fellows bring a wealth of expertise and influence but more than that they bring a shared commitment to the values and working methods of our Society.

The rationale for our research and development projects ranges from those which seek to push the boundaries of thought in areas fundamental to the RSA's values, to those which develop new multi-disciplinary approaches to those which work directly with practitioners to generate research based innovation and change. Our aim is to foster more powerful citizens, nurture resilient communities and develop more innovative public services for individuals and communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank colleagues at Involve and RSA Projects. Special thanks to Susannah Willcox for her comments and editing of the pamphlet, Helen Fisher for able proof reading, Megan Weston for design and to Atif Shafique for his work on the case studies

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INTRODUCTION

UNEXPECTED HEROES

Myths run deep in all human cultures. They help us make sense of a changing world and remind us of profound truths.

Many myths feature an unexpected hero; the unassuming citizen who holds the power to solve the problem faced by society, be it a dragon that needs slaying or royalty in need of saving. In the famous myth of the sword in the stone, the medieval government struggled with numerous problems, much like governments of today. The legendary sword Excalibur, the solution to all of their woes, was firmly embedded in a stone where it resisted the efforts of the most skilled and mighty knights to withdraw it. The experts remained flummoxed, unable to resolve the problem, until an inexperienced pageboy (the future King Arthur) finally drew the sword from the stone. Solutions often come from unexpected places.

We have found that complex problems can often be overcome in simple and cost-effective ways by making the most of the local knowledge, relationships, energy and life experience of ordinary people – the unexpected heroes in society. As Charles Leadbeater has said of ‘transformative innovation’ in public services, solutions to social problems often come from ‘unexpected sources’ or ‘marginal figures’ – the citizen with ‘crazy’ ideas, the social entrepreneur with no respect for traditional ways of working, the maverick officer in the council who gets things done by using unorthodox and previously untested methods. These ‘positive deviants’, seemingly lacking the resources to make change happen, are actually great resources in and of themselves.

This approach, which we call ‘radical engagement’, is a conclusion of the RSA’s Citizen Power Peterborough programme. The work continues to surprise us – solutions to complex social challenges often don’t come from the ‘usual suspects’, or the 7% of the population who do three-quarters of all volunteering in the UK.¹ Rather, they frequently come from some of the most socially excluded citizens. Recovering drug users using their life experience and ingenuity to seriously reduce long-term drug dependency in West Sussex and Peterborough is one example of this.

Two key problems stifle citizen engagement today: first, a lack of inspiration about how it can be done and what it can achieve; and second, negative myths that prevent services and organisations from using more innovative and radical forms of citizen engagement. This pamphlet aims to address both of these challenges.

WHY RADICAL ENGAGEMENT?

The RSA and Involve have come together on this piece of work because we believe in the merits of citizen participation. It has a strong basis in theory drawing on deliberative democratic (Habermas and Rawls), civic republican (Aristotle and Rousseau) and liberal (T.H Green and Dewey) traditions in citizenship.

While distinctive in key ways, these traditions all contend that citizens are members of a ‘political community’ with strong rights and responsibilities to participate in governing

¹ Third Sector Research Centre, *Individual voluntary participation in the United Kingdom: An overview of survey information* (Briefing and Working paper: series 6, 2009).

and acting in the interests of the 'common good'. Such traditions identify participation in community and political decision-making as one of the defining features of what it means to be a citizen.

But the value we place on citizen engagement is also pragmatic – we don't only embrace it because we consider it to be good in itself. We know that, done well, it can improve decision-making, public service delivery and social outcomes.² The case studies in this pamphlet are examples of how this can be done and what is possible where the will to innovate exists.

Cynics may ask 'but haven't we heard this all before?' This is part of the problem. We've been talking about citizen engagement in decision-making and service delivery for the best part of twenty years but without it becoming embedded in the way we tackle social challenges. Despite numerous consultations and participation processes, the Democracy Index and Eurobarometer Survey data show that the UK has very low levels of citizen trust compared to many other countries, and scores consistently low on international indices.³ This needs to change if we have any chance of making an impact on the big challenges facing us today – deficit reduction, reducing carbon emissions, and managing the effects of an aging population. Radical engagement, like those outlined here, are part of the answer.

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

THE DEFICIT

The Government has announced the greatest cuts to public services since the Second World War.⁴ Local government budgets are being cut by an average of 30% between 2011 and 2015.⁵ If these cuts are to be manageable and not entrench social problems, we need to think innovatively. To avoid devastating reductions in the quality of services, we need high quality input from those who use them in order to target resources effectively.

DECLINING DEFERENCE

Another shift is the decline in deference towards experts and authority. People have an increased expectation of personalised, responsive services, and are more likely than previous generations to vocalise their anger through boycotts, complaints and demonstrations. Increasingly, the public sector needs active consent in order to govern.⁶

CO-PRODUCED PROBLEMS

We know that governments are unable to solve many problems on their own. The best public services in the world all emphasise bottom up policy development. However, we also know that the 'some of the best' public services – rehabilitation services in Denmark, healthcare in Sweden and Sure Start programmes in the UK – have co-production at their heart; policy

2 E. Norris and S. McLean, *The Civic Commons: A model for social action* (London: RSA, 2011). (4) C. Bason, *Leading Public Sector Innovation: co-creating for a better society* (London: Policy Press, 2010). D. Boyle, J. Slay and L. Stephens, *Public Services Inside Out: Putting co-production into practice* (London: New Economics Foundation and NESTA, 2010).

3 Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2011: Democracy under stress* (2011), p. 4. European Commission, *Eurobarometer 77: Public Opinion in the European Union*, (2012). Gallup, *State of the world. 2008 Annual report* (University press: Washington, 2008). World Values Survey, *World Values Survey wave 2005-2007*. <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

4 Carl Emmerson, Paul Johnson, Helen Miller. *The Institute for Fiscal Studies Green Budget: February 2012*, Chapter 3: Fiscal Repair: Painful but necessary. (London: Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2012)

5 *Ibid*, Chapter 6: Local government spending: where is the axe falling?

6 S. Griffiths, B. Foley, and J. Prendergrast, *Assertive Citizens: New Relationships in the Public Services* (London: Social Market Foundation, 2009). OECD, *Focus on Citizens: Public Engagement for Better Policy and Services* (OECD, 2009).

is developed, designed and delivered by citizens and service users from the beginning, but in partnership with frontline public service workers.⁷

LACK OF TRUST

Public trust in many of our public bodies is at an all-time low. This is increasingly a problem in areas such as genetics, taxation, and crime. Governments need to visibly listen to citizens in order to restore this trust. The latest Ipsos MORI data shows that nearly 80% of people trust the advice of their friends over that of an expert, even on complex issues that require years of training and expertise.⁸

THE OLD WAYS ARE BROKEN

There are abundant signs that old methods of decision-making and public service delivery – where all the points were worked out by politicians or experts in advance, announced and then defended (and sometimes retracted at great expense after protests erupted) – are failing.⁹ These include low turnout at Police and Crime Commissioner elections, media scandals and court cases where inadequate engagement was found to be at fault. Recent examples of High Court rulings against the legality of consultations include: a Government consultation on the scrapping of subsidies for solar panels was deemed unlawful as the policy was enforced before the consultation had even ended, leaving no room for manoeuvrability in influencing the outcome; the consultation into the closure of paediatric cardiac services where the judge ruled that parts of the consultation were “distorted” to favour the saving of certain units over others.

STRUCTURE OF THIS PAMPHLET

This pamphlet makes the case for mainstreaming ‘radical engagement’ as an approach to improving social outcomes and tackling complex social challenges.

By radical engagement we mean engagement that goes beyond the usual approaches: an approach that pushes boundaries.

We first explore some of the myths surrounding engagement that need to be challenged if public agencies are going to take radical forms of engagement seriously. We have identified five prevailing myths.

To begin dispelling some of these myths, we provide six case studies showing how radical engagement can help to make tough decisions, deliver services in new ways that better serve citizens, and generate the power of citizens to make more efficient use of public resources.

The case studies are the product of in-depth conversations with practitioners from around the world who have identified these as examples of what is happening that is different, exciting and life changing in the world of citizen engagement. We hope they inspire public services across the UK and beyond.

We conclude by summarising the key findings of our research and offering practical recommendations, which we hope others can learn from and use to cultivate radical engagement themselves.

7 HM Government, *Excellence and fairness: Achieving world class public services* (London: Cabinet Office, 2008). NESTA, *Right Here, Right Now: Taking co-production into the mainstream*. Discussion Paper (London: NESTA, 2010).

8 Ipsos MORI, *Big Society – what do we know?* Base: 2,019 British adults, fieldwork dates 9th May – 17th June 2010. 2020 Public Services Trust, *What do people want, need and expect from public services?* (London: RSA, 2010).

9 2020 Public Services Trust at the RSA, *Citizen Engagement: testing policy ideas for public service reform* (London: RSA, 2010). Young Foundation, *Communities in the Big Society: shaping, managing, running services* (London: Young Foundation, 2010). HM Government, *Open Public Services White Paper* (London: Cabinet Office, 2011).

PROBLEMS

FIVE MYTHS ABOUT ENGAGEMENT THAT NEED TO BE DISPELLED

Most people can point towards myths, which were once seen as established truths, that had terrible consequences. Amongst others, these include medical practices, from bloodletting to lobotomy, and vaccination scares across the world, which have seen the resurgence of childhood diseases. Dispelling myths can often take time, but as ways of thinking change and new evidence arises, it is important to question the basis of entrenched myths. In the fight against HIV, a key frontline of which is in Africa, the evidence-based arguments in favour of the use of condoms is gradually debasing deeply held religious views that have traditionally presented obstacles.

During our review of existing approaches to citizen engagement, we have come across many false myths, which encourage people to think that engagement is not for them and hinder them from making use of important innovations. These negative myths have

numerous impacts. The hidden costs of failing to engage include increased conflict, overlooked opportunities and less efficient services that miss the mark. There have been numerous commissions and evaluations on topics as diverse as health, GM foods and crime, which have found that a lack of meaningful engagement has cost government dearly in failed policies and unnecessary costs. The Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre for Public Dialogue has worked since 2007 to create the space for open dialogue between policymakers, members of the scientific community and citizens.¹⁰

In the following section we identify and counter five common myths of engagement:

1. Engagement is too expensive
2. Citizens aren't up to it
3. Engagement only works for easy issues
4. Citizen power is a floodgate we should avoid at all costs
5. Citizens don't want to be involved, they just want good services

¹⁰ You can find out more about the Sciencewise programme by visiting www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk. Sciencewise has also prepared a very useful FAQ document about public dialogue: <http://sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/faqs-2/>

MYTH ONE: ENGAGEMENT IS TOO EXPENSIVE

This has been an often-repeated concern, but is becoming more common as budgets are cut and the impacts start to bite. It costs money to bring people together. Critics frequently portray engagement as a waste of resources, asking ‘do people want to pay for talking shops or real services?’ This, however, is a false dichotomy.

The costs of engagement are usually tiny compared to the overall cost of the service, and this small expense can play a vital risk management role, often ensuring that the service provided is of a high quality. True – people prefer to pay for services themselves rather than the process of getting them. However, as the pig with the straw house will concede, ultimately it is worth paying a bit more for a service (in this case, bricks) that actually work, than less for a service that fails to deliver. Engagement may seem pricey, but this can be a false economy. We must

ask ourselves what its expense is compared to. The costs of not engaging are far greater. For example, the Environment Agency has found that not engaging around vital flood improvements can lead to expensive delays and risks, leaving communities exposed to devastating flood damage for longer than necessary.¹¹ Engagement increases the likelihood of implementation on time and within budget. As in the fable of the tortoise and the hare, moving slowly and methodically can result in better results than speeding ahead.

The costs of engagement are also often overstated. Recent evidence shows that engagement can be done cheaply and uncover cost savings.¹² For example, a few years ago practitioner Jeff Bishop looked at the experience of two cities in trying to implement controlled parking schemes and found that non-engagement came with significant costs in the form of delays and conflict.¹³ Without considering the true costs of not engaging it is no wonder that engagement can seem expensive.

11 Environment Agency, *Current Magazine* no.14, 2011. Available online at: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/static/documents/Research/Current14.pdf>

12 <http://sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Strategic-Research-documents/Evidence-CountsFull-report.pdf>

13 J. Bishop, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 2006. Available online at: <http://www.bdor.co.uk/publications/Tale%20of%20two%20cities.pdf>

MYTH TWO: CITIZENS AREN'T UP TO IT

Distrust of the capacity of citizens runs deep in governments. Edmund Burke said that a representative would betray his constituents if he (for it was always a he back then) were to sacrifice his superior judgement to public opinion.

Henry Ford famously said: "If I'd asked my customers what they wanted, they'd have said a faster horse." Everyone can point to cases where people don't know what is best for them, and get caught up in mass hysteria: the sub-prime mortgages crisis shows what happens when people don't act in their own best interests.

Of course, experts themselves are not immune to these problems. Experts can and do get it wrong, often with disastrous and expensive results. Numerous cases exist, from the Titanic to the trenches of the First World War and the Atlantis shuttle disaster, where those with expertise and power make mistakes and get caught up in 'groupthink'. Groups are generally smarter than the sum of individual intelligences. However, when a group is too alike, it can make less intelligent decisions than the individuals involved would have made on their own. For example, few experts accurately predicted the economic crisis of 2008. When asked why, a professor responded: "At every stage, someone was relying on somebody else and everyone thought they were doing the right thing."¹⁴

But citizens have expertise that professionals often do not, including knowledge about the impact of services and decisions on service users. Who knows more about local needs and conditions than local people themselves? As our interviewee from Imagine Croydon said: "Children are the experts at giving the viewpoint of being children." Even when the issues are technical, citizens can provide vital insight into public acceptance and ethics.

The opinions of citizens can also help test assumptions. Benevolent intent does not necessarily translate into success. For example, in many parts of the country, well-intended youth projects were set up by councils, only to be rarely used because they were not what young people wanted. The result of one Sciencewise Dialogue on wellbeing was that the Department of Health decided not to run an expensive outreach campaign because the citizens explained that it would not work.¹⁵ We all know of numerous examples of situations in which experts have created well-meant services that no one actually wants, wasting valuable resources and fostering distrust amongst people towards government (central and local) and services. We're not suggesting replacing brain surgeons with volunteers or government with the whims of a focus group as cynics have mocked. Rather, we are emphasising the complementary expertise of professionals with years of learning and the lived experience and knowledge of those who use services first hand.

14 A. Pierce, "The Queen asks why no one saw the credit crunch coming," *The Telegraph*, 2008.

15 <http://sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Publications/SWWays-to-WellbeingFINAL.pdf>

MYTH THREE: ENGAGEMENT ONLY WORKS FOR EASY ISSUES

There are those who agree with engagement in principle but don't think it is applicable in their particular area. Engagement is seen as being for 'easy' issues that are simple, close to people's everyday lives and uncontroversial.

Of course many different kinds of experts believe that their issue is off bounds, be they scientists, planners, economists, even arts curators! Experts may say: 'It won't work in my area because it is so complicated. After all I had to spend years at university to understand this.' Alternatively the feeling is that the issue is too contentious and conflict-prone. Like the lion in the fable of the lion and the mouse, experts feel that citizens have nothing to offer in terms of support or knowledge, but there is evidence to the contrary. There are numerous examples

where people have successfully engaged citizens in some of the most complicated and contentious issues of our time, including the rebuilding of New Orleans, developing an alternative voting system, managing the Federal Deficit in the USA, rewriting the Icelandic constitution, developing domestic violence courts in New York, and exploring the strengths and weaknesses of genetically modified foods. In fact, as risks mount we will need engagement more. We need citizen input precisely because the topic is difficult and complicated. After all, we choose to use lay members of the public rather than trained legal experts to determine guilt in jury trials. Speaking of juries, practitioners have been using citizens' juries for 30 years, with a wealth of experience that shows citizens can engage on difficult topics as long as they are supported properly. Isn't it time we dropped this objection?

MYTH FOUR: CITIZEN POWER IS A FLOODGATE WE SHOULD AVOID AT ALL COSTS

There is a deep running fear of citizens in parts of government. Citizens are often seen as a baying mob or unruly mass. Often the metaphor that springs to mind for civil servants is that of a tidal wave of criticism and scorn, which will inevitably come crashing down if the ‘floodgates’ of active citizens are ever opened.

This is an argument often levelled against open data or freedom of information initiatives. Many civil servants have had negative experiences of active citizens. In a top-down decision-making system, engagement is limited and often frustrating for both citizens and civil servants. Often the way we engage today, through consultation documents and public meetings, discourages participation from all but the most determined (and often angry). Typical public meetings often create ‘difficult’ participants by bringing in self-selecting contributors, encouraging combative behaviour and fostering conflict. Citizens feel like Arthur Dent in the Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, who is faced with ridiculous obstacles to having a say on a local planning decision, including the famous ‘beware of the leopard’ sign.

The result is a body of citizens that is disillusioned, cynical and adversarial, making the life of consultation officers miserable. Many civil servants expect that the unengaged will

act the same way and prefer to act as if they are under siege, pulling up the drawbridge to keep citizens out. However, what many civil servants find once they engage at a deeper level is that the experience can be rewarding and even enjoyable. Most people are polite and constructive if their engagement is framed in the right way – people cite ‘wanting to make a difference’ as the key reason for getting involved in local decision-making. Examples of failure and discussions getting out of hand show what happens when government tries to be overly controlling. American Deliberative Theorist Matt Leighninger has quoted a citizen at a public meeting in Colorado, who said: “Look, we know you’re working hard for us, but what we’ve got here is a parent-child relationship between the government and the people. What we need is an adult-adult relationship.”¹⁶; in short if you treat your participants like adults you’ll get adult responses.

We need to take responsibility for the situation. Rather than the metaphor of floodgates, we prefer to look at citizen engagement as a pan boiling over if left covered for too long. While a gut instinct might be to slam the lid down tight, this tends to make matters worse rather than giving citizens the chance to air grievances and let the steam dissipate. Given the right forms of engagement, citizens and officials can often move from a shouting match into more peaceful co-existence.

¹⁶ Matt Leighninger, “The Next Form of Democracy” (US: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006).



MYTH FIVE: CITIZENS DON'T WANT TO BE INVOLVED, THEY JUST WANT GOOD SERVICE

Finally, we finish with a common myth – that of apathy. It is sometimes suggested that engagement is a waste of time and money because citizens don't care or are too busy to participate. In the UK, the country that is the worst offender against the working time directive, won't increased engagement just attract the 'usual suspects'?

Let's be realistic. We may never get a majority engaged but we can expand the minority that does. Even a few per cent would be extremely useful. Through history we've seen that small groups can make a massive difference. The key is to tap into citizens' motivations and provide different levels of engagement. Without a 'shallow end', the numbers of people actively engaged will never rise. Not everyone

will want to run their local library or set up a community action forum. But three-quarters of people routinely say they would like to be more involved in their communities if the opportunity could be integrated within their busy lives.¹⁷ A 2012 Consumer Focus Report found there were "many people who said they would like to have more influence, but who are put off because it was not easy for them to find out about or take up opportunities. There is a clear opportunity to tap into the resources and energy of this particular group who may need some extra encouragement and support."¹⁸

What we have shown with these five myths is that they lack a foundation in reality. Engagement fills a vital role in modern policymaking and service delivery. There are strong arguments for engagement and we hope we have helped put these negative myths to rest, like the leeches and lobotomies of the past.

¹⁷ Ipsos MORI, *Do the public really want to join the government of Britain?* (London: Ipsos MORI, 2010).

¹⁸ Consumer Focus, *Hands up and hands on – Understanding the new opportunities for localism* (London: Consumer Focus, 2012).



SOLUTIONS

The only way of overcoming these objections is to provide evidence to the contrary. In this section we look at what radical engagement can do for us.

Many people have identified innovation as a key part of modern public service reform, and we know that engagement is often a key ingredient of innovation. However, engagement needs more than a dose of innovation itself – bad engagement is worse than no engagement at all.

Engagement is firmly stuck in old ways. Most engagement remains very basic, consisting of written consultations, surveys and focus groups. We are often unthinking in our attempts to use a variety of methods. An ‘add participants and stir’ approach which simply tacks on participation to the end of an otherwise unchanged decision-making

structure makes for bad participation and bad outcomes for all involved.¹⁹ The examples of radical engagement we tend to look at are very narrow, and a few have been cited to death – the Participatory Budgeting exercise in Porto Alegre springs to mind – whilst a great number of relevant examples remain unknown. It is time to broaden our horizons. We hope that by choosing some of the most innovative examples from around the world we have found some that you haven’t come across yet.

In the remainder of this section, we discuss these examples of radical engagement in greater detail.

What unites these otherwise disparate projects is the willingness to try new ways of working and think differently. These powerful examples show that innovation does not necessarily have to cost the world if we use existing resources more efficiently.



NAME	LOCATION	DATES
Imagine Croydon	Croydon, UK	2008 – 2009
My Estonia	Estonia, Europe	2008 – ongoing
‘Our Budget, Our Economy’	USA	2010
‘Geraldton 2029 and beyond’	Geraldton, Australia	2009 – ongoing
Citizens’ Initiative Review	Oregon, USA	2010 – ongoing
Deliberative Democracy in Tuscany	Tuscany, Italy	2007 – ongoing



¹⁹ Brodie, E; Hughes, T; Jochum, V; Miller, S; Ockenden, N; & Warburton, D. *Pathways through participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship* (London: NCVO, IVR & Involve, 2011).



CASE STUDY 1 – COMMON VISIONS

Project name: 'Imagine Croydon'

Location: Croydon, South London

Organised by: Croydon Strategic Partnership and The Campaign Company

Time span: Eight months, from 2008 – 2009

Link: <http://www.thecampaigncompany.co.uk/old/croydon-council-imagine-croydon.html>

PURPOSE

Imagine Croydon was a vision-building exercise; it transcended conventional methods that public organisations use to develop common visions – which usually involve only basic consultation and a lack of local ownership and participation – and utilised diverse methods to help build local ownership, reach a broad range of people and, above all, make participation fun.

THE CHALLENGE

Like many other areas across the UK, Croydon faced citizen apathy and cynicism towards community consultation. While visioning exercises are common in the UK, they are often limited by a process that excludes large groups of people. Low levels of participation mean little community ownership can be built around the vision.

Many existing strategic plans are perceived as ineffective paper exercises, divorced from actual change. The town's strategic partnership therefore sought to develop a new positive vision of Croydon's future that would dispel negative perceptions of the town and build public trust in both the vision and the consultation process through which it was developed. This involved an open discussion between residents and stakeholders on what Croydon should be like in 30 years' time, with constructive civic engagement central to the process.

THE PROBLEM

Attempts to develop joint visions for communities that fail tend to do so because they are driven from the top and the people who respond to community visions tend to be the most active. Reaching a wider group of people is seen as costly and difficult. Without broad ownership these visions remain just documents on shelves.

THE SOLUTION

Overcoming citizens' inertia and apathy can be usefully done using numerous approaches to reach out to groups on their own terms. Making use of innovative techniques to engage with young people, such as an online game, increased enthusiasm and reduced costs compared to other options, such as focus groups.

INNOVATIONS WORTH EMBRACING

You could consider:

- * Using an online game to target young people who would others not have taken part.
- * Using postcards, video booths and other informal mechanisms to gather data through everyday settings.
- * Incorporating competitive elements into engagement to increase enthusiasm.

SIMILAR EXAMPLES

- * Orange Rockcorps:
<http://www.orangerockcorps.co.uk/>
- * Carbon Pathways Game:
<http://my2050.decc.gov.uk/>

ACTIVITIES

A broad range of methods was used to conduct the conversations and ensure a good turn-out. This was highly successful, with 20,000 people from a range of backgrounds participating. Methods ranged from online and paper surveys to formal and informal consultations, as well as social media for recording personal opinions ('YouQube'). Residents were able to engage on their own terms.

A two-way dialogue was initiated through clever use of technology and online social media – including handsets that gauged participants' responses in real-time, and a shared 'wiki' site that allowed active debate

– also helped dispel public apathy and allowed participants to directly observe the impact of their view on group discussions. Another element of this imaginative consultation process was 'Croydon2040', a strategy game targeted at young people in schools, colleges and youth groups. It allowed them to take on the simulated challenge of running the Croydon borough, using the incentive of competition to successfully encourage widespread youth participation.

Over 25 schools, colleges and youth groups took part in the project over a 10-week period, and widespread deliberation reached hundreds of young people. Each week teams of students awaited challenges ranging from whether to implement a congestion charge to how to allocate limited financial resources in healthcare. The core 'council' of students

received a challenge each week and then conducted a wider consultation process within the school or youth club on the issues raised.

At the end of each week teams justified decisions taken in statements framed as 'council' press releases. 'News bulletins' via YouTube™ and 'council' announcements through Twitter™ and Facebook™ increased student interest in the process and also meant a wide audience could 'tune in' to the decisions of their own school and other teams taking part.

Where, in the past, youth consultation was 'like pulling teeth', these young participants were actually hassling local stakeholders for advice on their weekly challenges.

These open and diverse methods also ensured that a range of citizens were able to participate, including those who are usually apathetic (such as young people), so that the vision was as representative as possible.

Methods were also carefully designed to enable positive and constructive engagement, rather than simply providing a forum for venting grievances. Techniques such as writing postcards 'from the future' encouraged people to consider how they would like to describe the town in the future, thereby allowing citizens to evaluate current problems in a productive way and ensure high-quality consultation.

The vision-forming process secured a documented agenda for change, 'We are Croydon', which all citizens and key stakeholders could aspire to.



CASE STUDY 2 – BETTER SERVICES

Project name: 'My Estonia'

Location: Estonia (nationwide)

Organised by: My Estonia civic initiative

Time span: From 2008 (ongoing)

Link: <http://www.minueesti.ee/?lng=en>

PURPOSE

A lack of citizen engagement fuels many of the pressures that public services are facing, such as increasing costs and higher demand. While the state requires a more active citizenry to remedy this, many people are still sceptical about whether participation can work.

Civil servants reinforce this by seeing the public as docile and preferring top-down service delivery and citizen mobilisation. However, the widespread public participation in 'My Estonia' challenges this image of citizens and showcases a bottom-up process of meaningful civic engagement.

THE CHALLENGE

Across the world citizen ownership and action has been identified as crucial to achieving a number of key desirable outcomes, including lower crime, improved environments and better public health. However, citizen inaction usually makes achieving these outcomes difficult. This is especially the case with Estonia, where decades of highly bureaucratic Soviet rule prevented an independent civil society from emerging, with post-Soviet breakup-related violence and challenges confounding these difficulties. There was very little sense of citizen empowerment.

THE PROBLEM

Many problems are beyond the scope of governments to solve. Problems that are part-created by citizens cannot be solved without citizens getting involved.

THE SOLUTION

Allowing citizens the space to self organise can help bring them onboard to solve complex issues, often on their own without resorting to government interventions.

INNOVATIONS WORTH EMBRACING:

- * Using online tools (such as Google Maps), enabling citizens to help map where interventions are needed.
- * Providing an online platform to allow citizens to self-organise and take action.
- * Handing over control to local groups and giving them space to take action.
- * Citizens can come up with examples that don't require government support and funding.

SIMILAR EXAMPLES

- * Flood mapping
- * FixMyStreet:
<http://www.fixmystreet.com>
- * Place Speak:
<https://www.placespeak.com/>

'Let's do it – let's clean Estonia' was borne not simply from a desire to clean up the country's forests but to activate citizen enterprise and show what collective action could really achieve. A small group of citizens came together to create an idea that eventually captured the imagination of thousands of people.

ACTIVITIES

'LET'S DO IT – LET'S CLEAN ESTONIA'

On 3rd May 2008, 50,000 volunteers, (3% of the Estonian population), mobilised nationwide to clear 10,000 tonnes of illegally dumped rubbish. This was collective action involving citizens, NGOs, private companies and state officials; it also sought to change the behaviour of those involved in illegal dumping, as well as helping to instil the idea that the state and its citizens are separate entities.

The project achieved significant financial and time savings. It is estimated that the work done by the public in one day at a cost of £500,000 would have cost the state up to £20 million and taken three years. The event also had a lasting international impact. Latvia and Lithuania soon followed suit with nationwide collections and a 'Let's do it! World Cleanup 2012' event also took place with over six million volunteers getting involved from 96 countries.

BRAINSTORMING EVENT

Following the 'Let's do it' campaign organisers set up a national brainstorming session to generate grassroots-led – rather than state-imposed – creative ideas and solutions for lasting change in Estonia. In May 2009, over 11,800 citizens engaged in open agenda

'thinktanks' for this purpose. An online 'deed bank' also facilitated collective action. In addition, organisers sought to demonstrate the value of grassroots engagement to the public, showing its significance to finding solutions for improving quality of life in Estonia.

The brainstorming day also helped to shift attitudes at the highest levels of government. Most importantly, it showed top officials that grassroots debate does not simply lead to mass venting of grievances at government, but can create a space for constructive grassroots-based problem-solving. President Toomas Hendrik Ilves even recognised the importance of citizen-led initiatives in tackling apathy. The majority of solutions created by the event were citizen-led, challenging the image of public disinterest.

THEMED WORKSHOP EVENTS

Education: Networking events took place in the form of seminars, workshops and debates, and also included online media. The aim was to explore the challenges facing Estonia's schools in the 21st century. Participants sought to develop concrete proposals for educational reform by sharing experiences of the existing system.

Farming and Eating: Workshops entitled "Let's Eat It" explored the state of organic farming in Estonia. Working with non-profit organisations who have already made contact with farmers across the country, participants sought to improve the rural farming and urban consumption nexus by finding ways in which Estonian produce could be made readily available in cities at affordable prices.

For more information see:
<http://www.letsdoitworld.org/>



CASE STUDY 3 – RESOLVING INTRACTABLE PROBLEMS

Project name: 'Our Budget Our Economy'

Location: 57 sites across the USA

Organised by: AmericaSpeaks

Time span: June 26, 2010

Link: <http://usabudgetdiscussion.org/>

PURPOSE

Across the Western world, budget deficits are one of the most pressing and difficult issues. While markets and many citizens demand clear actions to bring deficits under control, ideological divides about how cuts should be made make space for debate and compromise unlikely. This is also exacerbated by a policy landscape where lobby groups can marginalise the views of the general public.

Most current cuts consultations are unsatisfactory because they tend to be relatively narrow in scope and employ non-interactive methods, such as surveys, to collect existing opinion, with no opportunity for citizens to learn from each other and engage in conversation and consensus. AmericaSpeaks sought to challenge the assumption made by the media and many politicians of an insurmountable 'divide' between 'liberal' and 'conservative'.

THE PROBLEM:

Today government faces many seemingly intractable problems. Increasingly public discourse on key topics is locked in eternal conflict, with lobbies controlling the terms of the debate, and where those who scream loudest win debates and obscure the public voice.

THE SOLUTION:

Genuine deliberative engagement has been shown to be able to uncover common ground, identify the issues in need of more work, as well as sharing the tradeoffs with citizens directly.

INNOVATIONS WORTH EMBRACING:

- * Independent set up and delivery by trusted organisations.
- * Structured and fair discussions, allowing all sides to be heard.
- * Provision of open and honest information.

SIMILAR EXAMPLES:

- * Citizens Assembly British Columbia:
<http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public>
- * Iceland Constitution:

THE CHALLENGE

The credit crunch of 2007 left the USA with one of the biggest public deficits in the world. The deficit in the 2011 budget totalled \$1.56 trillion. The USA has since moved away from the brink of financial disaster, but national faith in the progress of economic recovery is still low. Concerns centre on the high levels of unemployment, the slow pace of improvements and the strong intervention of the state in the economy.

AmericaSpeaks, a not-for-profit organisation specialising in public engagement, decided to ask key questions of the nation last year in 'Our Budget, Our Economy' (OBOE). The dialogue between the public and the state to date had not been open on the issue of the deficit and economic recovery. Daniel Clark, project manager for OBOE, was keen to overcome this, to encourage an atmosphere where decision makers could "work more openly in finding political solutions" and generate a wider public understanding of the decisions available. This motivation inspired AmericaSpeaks to attempt the logistical feat of bringing together thousands of citizens for one day of public discussion.

ACTIVITIES

On 26th June 2010, 3,500 Americans gathered in National Town Meetings across the country to learn and deliberate about the

pressing economic and fiscal issues of the day. Each meeting was structured in a way that allowed participants to interact with a diverse range of individuals – liberals conferred with conservatives, richer people debated with poorer ones, and all ages were present. Despite media representations of huge social divisions in American society, the discussions were amicable and found common ground on a variety of issues. For example, 85% of those surveyed in the 19 city meeting sites favoured at least a 5% reduction in defence spending.

After being presented with the real facts and figures, many people moderated their ideological views to reach consensus for the long-term goal of reducing the deficit. Liberals agreed to greater spending cuts and conservatives accepted the need for higher taxes. Citizens were not simply drawing on their own opinions when deliberating a certain policy option, thus avoiding the main drawback of random opinion surveys. 89% of participants also expressed dissatisfaction with 'tone and quality of political discussion' in the country, and many wanted the public to be recognised as a key player in politics.

The meeting concluded by the drawing up of a group message to send to political leaders in Washington. The two statements that received broadest support urged politicians to "abandon the failed politics of partisanship" and treat citizen input "as if it were coming from a powerful lobbying group".

CASE STUDY 4 – THE WHOLE IS LARGER THAN THE PARTS

Project name: 'Geraldton: 2029 and Beyond'

Location: Greater Geraldton, Western Australia

Organised by: City of Greater Geraldton and partners – Greater Geraldton City Region Alliance Governance Group and Curtin University.

Time span: Initiated November 2009, project running until 2013 (and beyond)

Link: <http://2029andbeyond.com.au/>

PURPOSE

Common civic engagement challenges include fragmentation of effort and the lack of involvement of ordinary citizens in helping to resolve important issues. The Geraldton experience provides an interesting example of what a joined up and coherent process looks like at a city region level. Not only do the many engagement strands all work in tandem, there is cooperation between citizens, government, industry and the media to resolve issues that matter, and to help enact their outcomes through more collaborative governance.

Adversity often draws out the best in us. Geraldton is using the challenges that face them environmentally, socially and economically to revitalise their democratic governance, providing opportunities for ordinary people to play their part in co-creating their future.

THE PROBLEM

While one-off engagement is relatively easy, how do you make sense of the governance of a whole city? Individually good consultation may be undermined by an overall bad political culture.

THE SOLUTION

Using a multitude of methods that all feed into one approach, where each method is tailored to meet different needs and where the strengths of each method complement each other.

INNOVATIONS WORTH EMBRACING

- * Looking at the variety of approaches you currently use and see how they can all be joined up.
- * Using different activities for different groups of people.
- * Making use of citizen champions.
- * Using existing community spaces for meetings; either face-to-face or online.
- * Providing challenge prizes.

SIMILAR EXAMPLES

- * Citizens Assembly British Columbia: <http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public>
- * Iceland Constitution: <http://stjornlagarad.is/english/>

THE CHALLENGE

The Greater Geraldton City Region in Western Australia is at a crossroads. It faces big challenges for its future growth and sustainability, with depleting fishing and agriculture on the one hand, and new developments – port and rail, large scale renewable energy and mining – on the other, each having significant implications for the city region. In Western Australia there is low turnout for local government elections (they are not compulsory, unlike State and Federal elections). The public is cynical about politics and politicians, and the government is sceptical about the ability of civic engagement to meet the country’s complex challenges – like in the UK.

The City of Greater Geraldton and its partners hoped through the 2029 project to reverse this ‘general political malaise’ by transcending a top-down approach and placing residents, many of them first-time participants, at the heart of the sustainable development agenda. The project is comprehensive, responsive to unanticipated opportunities, and is long-term in nature. Complex issues are negotiated through multiple discursive avenues using an approach that combines creativity and calculated risk-taking. Resolutions are communicated and enacted by the City wherever feasible.

The 2029 project is being overseen by the Greater Geraldton City Region Alliance Governance Group – an innovative form of participatory governance. It represents the beginning of a culture shift aiming to embed deliberative democracy within government, industry and the community.

ACTIVITIES

Over 2,000 people (approximately 6% of the population) have been involved in deliberations. This effort has been supported by 40 volunteer Community Champions, ordinary citizens who have been trained to organise and facilitate small-scale deliberative techniques. In 2010/11, this included 36 World Cafes fostering lively discussions about the region, where people would like to see it in 2029, and how change could be implemented to reach this vision; this was followed by around 20 Conversation Cafes (in local cafes) to help understand what people meant by “the Gero feel” (often mentioned), i.e. Geraldton’s identity.

Importantly, socio-economic inclusivity and full engagement of the community was ensured through the participation of young people and local Aboriginal people in seven separate World Cafes and numerous Conversation Cafes, where they constituted the majority, as well as concerted efforts to elicit their participation in the large-scale public deliberations.

Digital deliberative democracy is being generated through an innovative platform, CivicEvolution, which enables self managed groups to develop ideas that interest them into proposals that can be considered by the Alliance Group. Aided by the local newspaper’s social media site, and focusing each week on one of the deliberative proposals generated, over 4,000 residents have been attracted to comment.



These face-to-face and online deliberative processes during 2010/11 resulted in prioritised proposals (by citizens and the Alliance Group) being implemented. These included planting one million trees, now well in progress, plans for both youth and indigenous centres, more cycle pathways and better communication about 2029. Longer-term initiatives have been incorporated into the City Region Strategic Plan, including improvement of public transport and a focus on renewable energy.

A one-day event with over 150 randomly sampled residents deliberated two big issues facing the community. Unexpectedly, they determined that the City Region should focus on becoming carbon neutral, and it should not be supportive of the mining companies' push for a fly-in-fly-out workforce.

Later in 2011, there was a focus on city regional planning. Small-scale deliberations culminated in an Enquiry by Design process involving 250 participants (citizens and stakeholders) over

a three-day period. Extraordinarily, over 200 community participants remained engaged from the first full day of deliberation through to the end of the two afternoons/evenings. This process resulted in an agreed overall City Regional Plan with clear guidelines to underlie any future plans. In 2013, rolling public deliberations between the residents and businesses involved will develop plans, precinct by precinct.

Based on the outcomes of the 2029 process to date, a Community Action Plan was developed and has now become a 'Community Charter'. This documents the community's aspirations together with a series of practical reforms, to be jointly 'owned' by the citizens, industry and the government departments involved.

In 2011 Geraldton won the United Nations Award for Liveable Communities (LivCom) for Community Participation and Empowerment. It was also a finalist in the international Reinhard-Mohn Prize for 2011 for 'Vitalizing Democracy'.



CASE STUDY 5 – DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Project name: Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR)

Location: Oregon, USA

Organised by: Healthy Democracy Oregon

Time span: Piloted in the 2010 elections – it now has a permanent role within the executive branch after the passing of House Bill 2634

Link: <http://www.oregon.gov/circ/pages/index.aspx>

PURPOSE

In some parts of the world, such as New Zealand, Switzerland and several states in America, citizens' initiatives provide a platform for direct, bottom-up democracy. The process enables ordinary citizens to propose laws, which are then implemented if they pass a popular vote. The state of Oregon is considered one of the pioneers of citizens' initiatives (which started in 1902), with progressive laws ensuring women's suffrage and an eight-hour workday typifying some of its successes.

But over the years, Oregon's initiative process has increasingly been subverted by vested interests, with wealthy 'political entrepreneurs' sometimes using the cover of citizens' initiatives – through spin, money and sometimes fraud – to undermine the state's democratic process. Another problem with the process is that the measures up for ballot are often unclear to citizens. To counteract this and provide good quality information to citizens, Healthy Democracy Oregon worked with

THE PROBLEM

Citizens' initiatives can be powerful forms of direct, citizen-led democracy. However, in some parts of the USA they have been subverted by special interests and big money, which has led to voters only having access to poor quality information when making ballot decisions.

THE SOLUTION

Citizen-led information collation, production and distribution through citizens' juries helps circumvent this problem by providing voters with independent, impartial and high-quality information about initiatives in the ballot.

INNOVATIONS WORTH EMBRACING:

- * Using citizens' juries to independently evaluate the facts and issues surrounding ballot initiatives – overcoming spin and misinformation.
- * Calling on a range of stakeholders – including campaign groups and experts – to directly engage with citizen panelists.
- * Citizen panellists directly providing high-quality information to other citizens and voters through Citizens' Statements.

SIMILAR EXAMPLES

- * Minnesota Citizens Assembly (MnCA), Citizens Jury on Election Recounts (USA): <http://www.jefferson-center.org/>
- * PEALS, Community Jury Project (UK): <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/peals/dialogues/juries.htm>
- * Prajateerpu: The People's Verdict (India): <http://www.prajateerpu.org/>

members of the Oregon Legislature to develop a pilot for the Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR) in time for the 2010 elections. CIR uses citizens' juries to independently evaluate citizens' initiatives. In addition to providing a counterweight to the influence of vested interests, the CIR also clarifies the impacts of what a measure will or won't do – an equally difficult problem for citizens.

THE CHALLENGE

Citizens' initiatives can be very powerful tools for direct democracy. In the UK, the Localism Act of 2011 devolved powers concerning housing and planning decisions, in particular to communities and neighbourhoods via local councils. Councils, for example, list assets that have been nominated by the community to possess local value. If these then face closure and/or sale, community groups will be given the time to organise a bid in order to retain the asset when it is placed on the market. This is an effort to put the potential and capability of community groups on a par with that of private interest groups. Professor David Magleby assessed the process in the USA and described it as a "high-stakes battleground for well-funded interests". Special interest groups often spend vast amounts of money campaigning against grassroots initiatives, with spin and misinformation being predictable outcomes.

To challenge this climate of poor quality information, Healthy Democracy Oregon has enlisted the support of organisations, legislators and thousands of citizens in using deliberative democracy to strengthen the integrity of the state's ballot initiative process. Citizens' Initiative Review uses citizens' panels to provide voters with reliable, independent and impartial information, helping them to make informed democratic decisions about initiative proposals.

ACTIVITIES

In 2009 the Oregon Legislature approved a pilot of the Citizens' Initiative Review for the 2010 election. Following this, Healthy Democracy Oregon convened two reviews in August 2010 in collaboration with the Secretary of State's office, State Elections office, policy experts and campaign representatives. The first review examined Measure 73, which proposed minimum sentences for certain sex crimes and repeated driving under the influence offenses. The second review examined Measure 74, which would allow for the establishment of a medical marijuana supply system, provide research programmes and other assistance, and legalise the limited selling of marijuana.

Each review involved a citizens' panel consisting of 24 Oregon voters that were randomly selected from Oregon's entire voting population in a manner that fairly reflected its demographic make-up. The deliberations were conducted over a five-day period, and included engagement with campaign advocates, identification of key facts, and drawing on information from experts. At the end of deliberations, the panel drafted 'Citizens' Statements' identifying their findings, which were included in the Oregon Voter's Pamphlet for the 2010 election, thereby providing voters with access to the findings.

The pilot was highly successful. A national team of leading researchers funded by the National Science Foundation evaluated the reviews and found that they were high-quality, fair and impartial, and of great use to voters. The majority of Oregon voters (65% for Measure 73 and 57% for Measure 74) found the Citizens' Statements helpful and informative, with those reading the statements becoming more knowledgeable about the measures as a result. In addition, the citizen panellists involved became more self-confident in political and community engagement.

In 2012, Healthy Democracy ran a series of Citizen Initiative Reviews into two proposed ballot measures. Through an open, deliberative process, the commission that was comprised of 24 randomly selected voters evaluated the arguments presented for and against the measures. As a result, the commission's findings were distributed through the statewide Voters Pamphlet, which is sent out to all voters in an attempt to inform them prior to voting.

In the context of debates about direct, bottom-up democracy and its risks, the Citizens' Initiative Review project provides a powerful example of how deliberative citizens' panels have the potential to provide fair and high-quality information to voters, thereby circumventing the corrosive effects of spin and misinformation on processes of direct democracy. More fundamentally, it allows citizens, and not vested interests, to be at the heart of community engagement and citizen-based policymaking.

CASE STUDY 6 – INSTITUTIONALISING ENGAGEMENT

Project name: Deliberative Democracy in Tuscany

Organised by: Region of Tuscany

Time span: 2007 – ongoing

Link: <http://www.consiglio.regione.toscana.it/partecipazione/> (Italian)

PURPOSE

In 2007 the Region of Tuscany passed Law No 69: 'Rules on the Promotion of Participation in the Formulation of Regional and Local Policies'. The Law is the first of its kind in the world as it institutionalises deliberative participation within the policymaking process. It draws on principles of deliberative theory and responds to the dissatisfaction of citizens with traditional decision-making methods. Unlike ad hoc deliberative exercises aimed at certain policy areas such as participatory budgeting and town planning, Law No 69 is general in its scope and is intended to function at all levels.

THE CHALLENGE

Tuscan civil society was observed to be in decline, as citizens turned away from the traditional power structures of political parties and institutions. Voter turnout declined and citizens increasingly turned to ad hoc citizen committees to channel their views on issues affecting local areas. Law No 69 (the Law) sought to open a new medium through which the motivations behind the citizen committees could be embedded within the policymaking process.

Rekindling Tuscan civil society was one challenge; another concerned the actual passing of the Law. Those sceptical of the Law included members from the Regional

THE PROBLEM

Increased dissatisfaction and apathy towards traditional power channels of regional and local politics.

THE SOLUTION

Embedding the principles and practice of deliberative democracy into the decision making process through a law.

INNOVATIONS WORTH EMBRACING

- * Embedding and institutionalising 'top-down' engagement.
- * The independent nature of the Regional Authority for Participation.
- * Citizen led processes initiated by citizens or civic organisations; not just government led processes.
- * Developing participation laws and structures through the involvement of citizens in agreeing the terms through which they will be involved.

SIMILAR EXAMPLES:

- * The Localism Act (2011, UK) gives citizens powers to initiate a referendum on an issue that affects the local area.
- * The National Commission for Public Debate (1995-) is an independent body formed by the French Government to integrate public engagement practices into issues of high social, economic or environmental significance when petitioned to do so.

Government, Assembly and the majority party, Partito Democratico (formerly the Italian Communist Party). Their arguments echoed traditional concerns regarding the merits of participation. First, a questioning of the efficiency of participation; and second, a conflict of responsibility whereby representatives argued that, as elected public figures, their role assumes responsibility and that the Law would raise doubts about this.

ACTIVITIES

The Law itself was developed through a meta-participatory process – namely, citizens having a say in how it is they wish to contribute within the policymaking process. This exercise included local authorities, grassroots organisations, associations and interest groups, professionals and academics, and ordinary citizens. Together, those involved had a significant input in defining the goals, content, and features of the Law. In all, around a thousand people contributed to these discussions, which were focused on deliberative theory and drew on case studies of its implementation in Brazil, France, and the UK. At the final stage of this process, a 21st Century Town Meeting was held in 2006 where, through a wide scale deliberative process, the details of the bill were finalised.

The formulation of the Law did a lot to dispel myths concerning participation. Responsible and concerned citizens came together, expressing their interest in mechanisms which could link them in a meaningful way to their public institutions. The Region's President, who was present at the Town Meeting, expressed his support for the citizens' recommendations. The Law was passed with broad support, with members of the centre-left majority voting in favour and the centre-right opposition abstaining.

The Law channels the (now embedded) citizen involvement to the regional level, concerning large-scale infrastructure projects potentially having significant social or environmental impact, and the local level, concerning a range of local issues.

Via the first route, citizens or local authorities that are concerned about an industrial project (at least 0.5% of Tuscans over 16) in its early, thus flexible, stages can request that the Regional Participation Authority initiates a public debate. Whilst the proponents of the industrial projects are not obliged to follow the recommendations of the report, they are expected to respond to the concerns and the Region gives priority to projects that have been through this process.

The second route is focused on local issues and is aimed at local authorities, citizens, schools, and businesses. These proponents have access to financial, methodological and logistical support. Financial support is the main form and 700,000 euros has been allocated each year to support the proponents. This is especially significant given that in Italy it is more difficult than in other Western countries to gain access to funds for participatory exercises.

Neutrality is important for the implementation of the Law for it to maintain its legitimacy as a mechanism for meaningful interaction between the public and their institutions. To this end, the Regional Authority for Participation was formed as an independent authority. The main task of the Authority is to allocate funding to the aforementioned participatory processes and to offer advice relating to the methods adopted. The Authority is comprised of professionals of political science, public law, and citizen engagement in order to ensure the soundness of the allocations.

Funding has been sought for issues such as urban development projects, education policy and environmental concerns. Between 2007 and 2012, out of 205 requests, 111 have received funding amounting to 3.5 million euros – 32,000 euros for each, on average. The majority of requests have come from local administrations, though schools and citizens have also received funding for initiatives.

Law No 69 inspired a similar law in the neighbouring region of Emilia-Romagna, and other legislative initiatives concerning engagement have developed in Puglia and Latium.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This document has outlined the need for radical engagement. As the examples we've provided show, it is possible to achieve amazing outcomes making use of new approaches to engagement. If the public sector is to make full use of these opportunities it will require a radical rethink of organisational culture. It is to this we now turn.

Here, we offer suggestions for the direction of travel for citizen engagement and relations between public agencies and citizens, based on what we have learned from our review of radical engagement practice. It is interesting to contemplate what engagement would look like if we were designing it from scratch. If you had complete freedom to create, what would your structures look like? For us it is very clear that we would develop something different from what we have today, with more posts shared between organisations, a focus on the individual participant and with more porous organisational boundaries. Our aim is to help improve public service delivery and decision-making by moving radical engagement into the mainstream. We want these recommendations to help achieve culture change through further practical experimentation, with radical engagement as one of the standard ways of getting things done. Our recommendations are grouped together under three categories:

A First principles

B Incentives

C Process

A FIRST PRINCIPLES

1. Start with the practical problems and experience of citizens.

Engagement should tackle practical issues that matter most to people. This incentivises citizens to take action because they see the benefits to them. Citizens are closest to on-the-ground problems and therefore best placed to make an impact. Drawing on their life experience and local knowledge is vital to delivering social change.

2. Build the capacity of citizens to problem-solve.

Focus on building the capacity of citizens to be more self-governing and resourceful. Agencies should build training and confidence-building work into their engagement strategies. To prevent widening disadvantage, particular support should be provided to families and places with less resources and capacity to overcome the challenges they face.

3. Design engagement with long-term impact and sustainability in mind.

Citizen engagement is undermined by an over-reliance on one-off, intermittent events, which raise expectations that can't be met. This fuels rather than challenges public cynicism towards engagement and services in general. To overcome this, focus on building the foundations for future and repeat engagement with citizens. This means designing engagement strategy from the outset with citizens, with the aim of delivering long-term social benefits. The recent Pathways through Participation research shows that the quality of engagement matters – badly designed engagement was cited by many people as the reason they chose to disengage from decision-making and politics.

B INCENTIVES

4. Citizens should be commissioned to tackle long-term social challenges.

Experiment with a new commissioning model – services should commission groups of citizens to tackle specific challenges not yet overcome. Citizens should receive a ‘community dividend’ (i.e. a collective reward) if successful, giving them a stake in the success of the project.

5. Start with the right incentives – don’t underestimate the power of having fun.

Most people associate engagement with dull town-hall meetings – the same participants, talking about the same things and in a way and in an environment that alienates most citizens. Unfortunately this perception is also often a reality. The first step towards changing this is to make engagement fun – if people enjoy something, they’re far more likely to keep doing it. They’re also far more likely to recommend getting involved to their friends, relatives and people they know.

6. Make the most of the behavioural sciences to improve engagement.

Action-oriented engagement depends on citizens taking responsibility and committing to make a difference. Behavioural economics has shown how public declarations of commitment - or ‘pledging’ - to a course of action can help achieve this. Engagement practice can learn from this by asking citizens to sign up to goals as a group or encouraging individuals to take on explicit responsibilities. Draw on the concept of ‘social proof’, where people take their cue on how to behave from others like them. With this in mind it becomes important to publicise engagement opportunities widely in order to encourage pro-social behaviours.

C PROCESS

7. Personalise and target engagement opportunities.

Target invitations to get people involved in civic and public decision-making; this will increase diversity in participation, particularly if contact is made on the basis of a personal connection. Actively identifying and inviting people to participate makes them significantly more likely to take part. Without this type of intervention, engagement is far more likely to be dominated by small groups of ‘insiders’. Combine digital with face-to-face participation to combine the strengths of both techniques.

8. Use social networks analysis to make engagement more inclusive.

Use social network analysis to make engagement more representative and diverse. This shows up networks of relationships between people and organisations, and can identify the most socially isolated people who need to be included in placemaking activity. By mapping these networks, social network analysis can also identify the ‘hubs’ or organisers within a community.

9. Diversity is important for engagement to be perceived as accountable and legitimate.

Inclusion is key for the legitimacy of engagement. Government should make the most of all local assets, particularly the experience and insight of often-overlooked groups. As we move towards community/citizen action-oriented approaches to problem-solving, it will become more important for citizens to be accountable to, and to some extent representative of, the people around them.

10. Democratise the exchange and distribution of information

Information is power, especially in the Internet age. It is widely accepted that those in control of the channels of information distribution command a great deal of influence. Putting citizens in charge of the flow and content of information democratises and legitimises initiatives. It also builds trust, because those that make use of the information will feel secure knowing it hasn't come from political

spin doctors or vested interests, or even from out of touch 'experts'. The Open Government Partnership works towards freeing the flow of information top-down. Bottom-up examples of citizens controlling the flow and content of information processes include: citizens' juries, citizen-led action forums, networks and research projects, as well as citizen-produced websites, blogs, and online discussion forums.²⁰

²⁰ See www.participationcompass.org for one of the most comprehensive interactive collections of participative methods and approaches.

CONCLUSION

The story of King Arthur remains instructive for those, like the RSA and Involve, committed to citizen engagement. Arthur didn't rest on his laurels once he had drawn the sword from the stone; instead he encouraged a new generation of heroes. The Knights of the Round Table epitomises the cultivating approach to civic renewal and leadership found in our examples of radical engagement. Arthur stepped back and let others play a role – and so it must be with engagement as well.

Like all myths, radical engagement has supporting characters: its mentors, genies, and wise old women, with exceptional knowledge and powers – governments are often most effective as Merlin, Mr Miyagi or fairy

godmothers rather than the attention-hogging hero. We have shown how, in some case, it is better to save that role for the citizens. We need to move from the limiting myth of the all-powerful state to one of the state as a facilitator.

Radical engagement suggests a new type of public service underpinned by a different way of engaging with citizens: public services as 'facilitators of change', using engagement to stimulate citizen power, build citizen capabilities, and foster community self-reliance and social resilience.

Myths can mislead; they can also inspire. We hope that through this pamphlet we have burst some bubbles of misconception and lit a few fires of imagination. It has been inspiring to speak to experts from around the world, and we hope to have inspired you to go out there and make a difference whether you are a policymaker, an activist or an 'ordinary' citizen. It's time to pull that sword from the stone.

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ISBN 978-0-9552421-8-2

February 2013

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