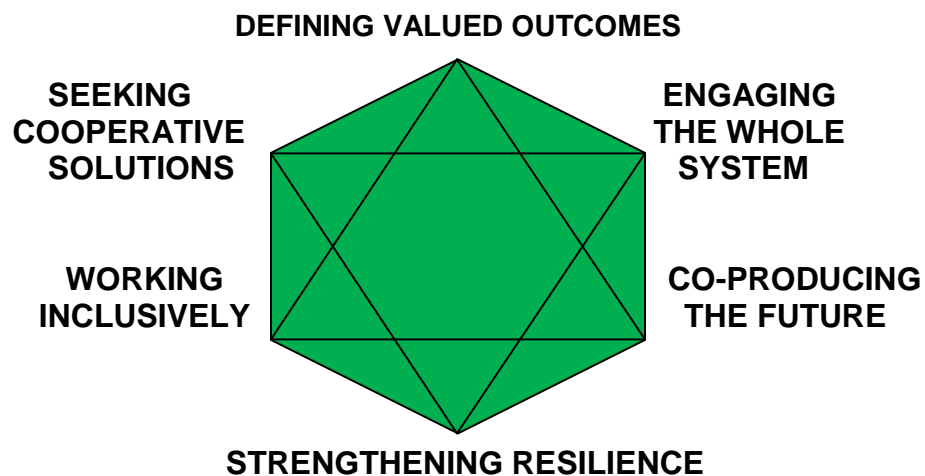**Centre For Inclusive Futures**

POLICY, ORGANISATION & COMMUNITY ACTION LEARNING

BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE THROUGH CIVIC PARTNERSHIP

SIX STRANDS OF LOCAL STRATEGY

David Towell

DEFINING VALUED OUTCOMES

SEEKING COOPERATIVE SOLUTIONS

ENGAGING THE WHOLE SYSTEM

WORKING INCLUSIVELY

CO-PRODUCING THE FUTURE

STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE

Preface

The Centre for Inclusive Futures summarises its mission as *Developing sustainable communities which include everyone as equal citizens.* In a preceding pamphlet, *Networking for Social Change* (available on-line at http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/), we explored how 'small groups of thoughtful, committed citizens' (to borrow from Margaret Mead's famous aphorism) can bring about change inspired by this objective.

This new pamphlet extends this exploration with a focus on civic leadership for local transformation. We continue to emphasise the importance of citizen networks as grass roots drivers of community development, but consider further how local innovation can be scaled up to the level of towns and counties, typically the first or second level of democratic local government.

Looked at from the perspective of citizen networks*,* this is a story of how self-organising groups can broaden their base, build alliances and seek policy influence so as to create the conditions for larger scale local change (e.g. to implement inclusive education). Equally, democratically-elected local authorities and their officers have a responsibility for 'place shaping' to promote the well-being of the whole community, most importantly by protecting the environment, enabling sustainable economic development and advancing social justice: goals which require the support and often the active participation of local people.

Our focus here is on both sides of this relationship: i.e. on how citizen groups and local authority leaderships can together create the *civic partnership* required to build sustainable and inclusive communities. In what follows we summarise six key strands in the strategies required to shape and implement the local agenda for building a better future. We hope that interested readers will find this pamphlet a useful stimulus to creative reflection on your own efforts to achieve valued social change.

David Towell   Centre for Inclusive Futures, July 2014

Introduction

Local efforts to build effective civic partnerships need to engage with three main kinds of complexity. First, we typically live in diverse communities, differentiated and sometimes separated, by issues of age, gender, ethnicity, control over economic resources and in other ways. This diversity can be a source of strength but it also brings differences in interests and perspectives. Second, communities and the larger populations which make up towns and cities face multiple and inter-related challenges, some in tension, for example, in addressing global climate change, ensuring full employment, reducing inequality and supporting people at risk of disadvantage. Third, at the level of local government, there are potentially many 'players' including: informal citizen groups and networks; more organised voluntary associations perhaps with specific missions e.g. to advocate for disabled people or protect the environment; non-governmental organisations which provide services e.g. in health and social care; commercial organisations, both local and super-local offering goods and services for sale and providing employment; and public bodies, including the local authority itself, which may have a variety of functions and many different departments, as well as being the focus for local political representation.

In what follows we outline six aspects of the local strategies required to work with this complexity for civic gain: I) Setting clear goals through defining valued outcomes; II) Working across agency and other boundaries so as to engage whole systems; III) Making local people active partners in co-producing the future; IV) Strengthening local resilience to cope with uncertainties; V) Working inclusively so as to benefit from local diversity; and VI) Bringing all these processes together to seek cooperative solutions to local challenges. As the cover diagram suggests, these six strands of partnership working are inter-related: it may be helpful to think of I) as defining purpose; III) and V) as ensuring wide participation in establishing and delivering on this purpose; and II) and IV) as important means for promoting effectiveness.

Strand I: Defining valued outcomes

How can civic partnerships establish clear goals to guide the action required to meet a complex set of local challenges?

As we say above, localities and their populations face a complex system of challenges Historically, certainly in British public policy, challenges like these have been addressed through separate policies, different departments of government or other agencies and involving different professions, often through specific programmes or services which were not well connected either with each other or with the communities they served. That was always a weakness but in a period when the costs of failure on some fronts (for example, in relation to

climate change) are likely to be huge and the global financial crisis is a major constraint on investment, there is a renewed premium on securing maximum impact on local priorities from all our efforts.

An important contemporary response to this requirement is found in *outcomes-based policy-making*. This concept is simple and the new economics foundation www.neweconomics.org/ has produced an excellent guide to the practice, *Commissioning for outcomes and co-production*. Essentially the idea is to encourage civic leaderships, working with their communities and other local stakeholders to ask – and answer – the question 'what are the key things (the valued outcomes) we are seeking to achieve overall in this locality?' and then to use this public statement of priorities as the template to guide and evaluate everything which is done e.g. through the enabling role of the local authority, the services it commissions and provides and different kinds of community action. The same approach can also be applied at the neighbourhood level.

For example, in the London Borough of Islington (home to the Centre for Inclusive Futures), the local authority has defined the 'triple bottom line' more fully in terms of strengthening the local economy and paying the living wage, promoting vibrant and inclusive communities and minimising negative environmental impacts, all as part of a political commitment *Towards a Fairer Islington.*

Box I describes a Europe-wide set of commitments to achieving sustainable cities.

Informed by useful frameworks like these, every locality needs processes of leadership and stakeholder engagement to agree local goals and express these in terms of valued outcomes.

Box I: Sustainable Cities Charter

It is now 20 years since the 1994 Aalborg Declaration which led ten years later to the *European Sustainable Cities Charter* www.sustainablecities.eu/aalborg-process/charter This charter has now been signed by 2700 local authorities from 40 countries. The 10 Aalborg commitments make sustainability central to local policy making, including through attention to local economic development, protection of the environment, non-polluting transport and responsible consumption; emphasise social justice and the health and wellbeing of local citizens; and recognise the need to advance this agenda through strengthening participatory democracy.

In contributing to these processes, citizen groups and organisations representing particular interests, for example, Disabled People's Organisations, are of course likely to highlight particular goals e.g. to advance social inclusion and promote social justice. Their members also share with other citizens common concerns like the need to ensure sustainable development and can contribute to 'win-win' solutions by seeking to ensure that every local priority takes appropriate account of their interests.

Strand II: Engaging whole systems

What is involved in working across agency and other boundaries to address the complex system of challenges involved in building sustainable and inclusive communities?

Building the commitment to a limited set of locally valued outcomes and delivering concerted action require new ways of working which are a long way from the 'top down' command and control through separate bureaucracies which perhaps served their purpose in more stable times. Put succinctly, there is a need for alternative approaches which effectively engage whole systems.

Experience suggests three elements in these new approaches. First, we can make collaborative approaches more straightforward through organisational arrangements which for example, ensure different public agencies serve the same geographical areas, create joint governance or other multi-agency strategic forums and encourage pooled budgets (e.g. 'total place' in the U.K.)

Second, we can invest in analytic methods (like 'cause-and-effect mapping' and other operational research techniques) to identify how the interventions of different agencies might together impact on desired strategic outcomes.

But neither of these two elements eliminates the need for ways of working with complexity and uncertainty. For this we need more developmental approaches based on 'systems thinking' and continuous efforts to learn from experience. This third and most important element we call engaging whole systems. It has five main characteristics:

1. *Enabling leadership*. Both formal and informal leaders need to understand their role as being to keep the 'big picture' in view, shape critical questions for exploration and create spaces in which relevant stakeholders can make sense of the challenges and establish common direction.
2. *A listening culture*. An important asset in this work is the willingness to listen carefully to others. This means listening with an 'open mind' (so as to understand more fully), an 'open heart' (so as to empathise with others' experience) and an 'open will' (so as to allow new possibilities to emerge).
3. *A welcome to diverse participation*. It requires processes which aim to 'get the whole system into the room' and value the diversity of perspectives and distinctive local knowledge which such participation brings.
4. *Public learning*. It requires a strong interest in making relevant information widely accessible and trying to learn from this diversity of experience.
5. *A commitment to follow-through*. It also needs a strong focus on ensuring that this shared understanding and shared direction leads to effective action.

Strand III: Co-producing the future

How can local people become active partners in shaping and delivering the actions which affect them and their communities now and into the future?

Clearly if we are engaging whole systems, local people as citizens, taxpayers, consumers and users of services need to be part of this whole. People are experts in their own lives and this expertise needs to be the key contribution, for example to personal health maintenance. Communities are typically rich in the capabilities of their members, their reciprocity and social networks. These are all important assets in improving local well-being.
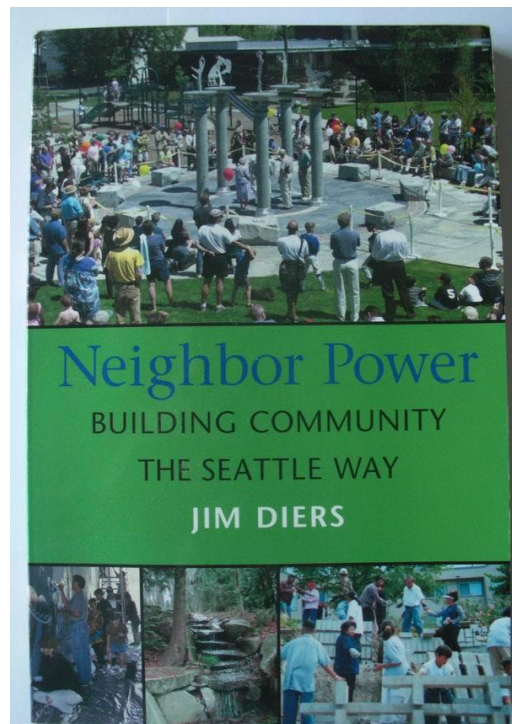
The process by which people and communities join with public agencies to build a better future has come to be described as 'co-production'. This partnership may be at the level of the individual (as in the health example), involve a particular group (e.g. older people being active participants in planning services they mainly use) or be about challenges facing the whole community (e.g. to reduce its carbon foot-print). An impressive and well-documented example at the level of a metropolis comes from the US city of Seattle, **Box II**.

At these different levels, we can identify five ways in which co-productive relationships can be encouraged:

1. At the individual level, front line staff need the time and support to personalise their work e.g. with public services users.
2. Citizens need good access to information to aid judgement about local opportunities and problems.
3. Voluntary organisations of citizens with shared interests are required to strengthen peer support and advocacy.
4. As in Seattle, devolution of municipal power to the local level enables

Box II: Communities as partners

Jim Diers' book tells first-hand the story of how over a decade, with leadership from the Mayor, Seattle decentralised its services to the neighbourhood level and invested in local community development, including through Saul Alinsky style 'community organising', to build the strength in associations of citizens to be empowered partners with the city authorities.

Neighbor Power
BUILDING COMMUNITY
THE SEATTLE WAY
JIM DIERS

neighbourhood challenges to be tackled locally with citizen participation.
5. At all levels, public bodies need to see citizens and communities as valued partners.

Finally, the heading which introduces **Strand III** refers to shaping the future and raises the further question of how a long term perspective, including the interests of future generations, can be represented in these partnerships. One part of the answer here comes from a commitment to an outcomes framework which includes sustainability as a key goal and thus draws attention to the long term consequences of local policies and initiatives. Another part comes from publicly investing in 'future guardians' (e.g. as Canada and Hungary have done at the national level) charged with scrutinising public policies for their likely impact. It is always good to ask 'What will our current activities mean for our children and grandchildren?'
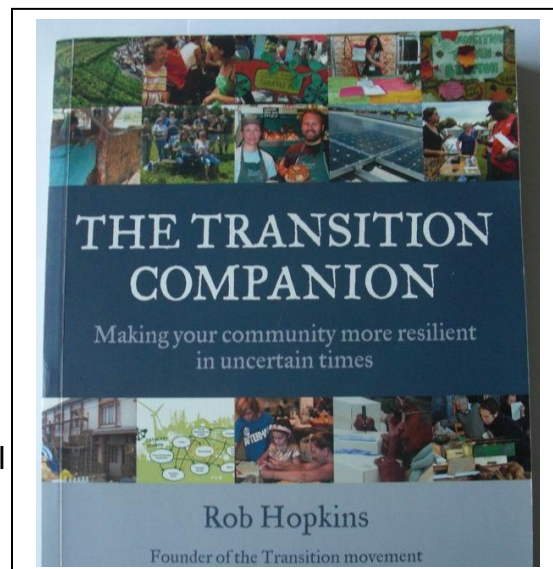
Strand IV: Strengthening resilience

How can communities and the networks of agencies which serve them enhance their capacity to cope with the multiple uncertainties impacting on local life?

Most simply, resilience has been defined as 'the capacity to deal with change and continue to develop'. Resilience is very important to contemporary communities. The extent of current risks varies in different parts of the world but we all face 'acute' challenges, for example, from climate change and extreme weather events, global shortages of food and water, rapidly fluctuating energy prices, turbulence in the financial markets, pandemic illnesses and violent conflict. Each of these can produce major 'shocks' to our current ways of life.

Our capacity to deal with these challenges is weakened by what we might think of as 'chronic' problems including the growing inequalities which divide people and communities, the lack of local control over big decisions (e.g. on the economy) , and the ways in which we have become dependent on professional interventions in human concerns we once felt capable of addressing with the help of our family and neighbours. For all these reasons, strengthening resilience has become central to the discussion of sustainable development as articulated in the now global network of 1100 or more self-organising 'transition initiatives' **Box III.**

Box III: Building local resilience

THE TRANSITION COMPANION

Making your community more resilient in uncertain times

Rob Hopkins

Founder of the Transition movement

This and other experience points to five ways of strengthening resilience:

1. Emphasising place-based governance and local democracy. *We are in control of how we respond to local challenges.*   -
   - As we have seen, this requires both decentralisation from the national state so that municipalities can develop appropriate responses to local priorities and devolution within local authorities so as to engage communities in co-producing this better future.
2. Reweaving the economy closer to home. *We exercise ecologically responsible stewardship over our land, water, food, energy production, construction and employment.*
   - This democratic control needs increasingly to extend to the ways in which we reshape the local economy to increase self-reliance and meet local needs fairly, while protecting the environment.
3. Fostering an inclusive culture. *We celebrate our diversity and are confident in our capacity to tackle problems together.*
   - Local people and social capital ('the social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness which arise from them') are important assets in strengthening resilience.
4. Encouraging individual wellbeing and mutual engagement. *We are fit in body and mind and involved in our neighbourhoods.*
   -This local culture needs to help people develop their personal resilience, for example through the *Five ways to well-being* 'connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give'.
5. Making links to other places and communities. *We know we can learn from others travelling similar journeys.*
   - Localities are not alone in these efforts and many challenges are similar, inter-connected or indeed require joint action, for example to bring about policy change on a larger scale.

Strand V: Working inclusively

What processes are required to ensure that the diversity in local communities is both valued and mobilised to achieve a better future for all?

Experience, for example in the transition movement suggests that 'ensuring that initiatives reflect the greatest range of voices and experiences….is vital to their success'. We need to create processes for working together – both in shaping the agenda and taking action – which genuinely welcome diversity and make a positive space for everyone's participation.

Fortunately there has been a flowering of methods ('social technologies') which help with these objectives. Drawing on this literature, we summarise here different issues arising in the effort to work inclusively and identify seven *inclusive practices* which are useful in addressing them:

1. People bring different interests, perspectives and experiences to the table in any exploration of community problems. It is helpful sometimes to make a little time for participants to try to see things through the eyes of others by the simple practice of carefully *listening to each other*.
2. On a larger scale it is often important to bring a variety of people together to generate a rich shared picture, for example, of what is good about the local neighbourhood and what could be better. The *'World Café'* offers a comfortable but structured approach to hosting conversations that matter and drawing out common themes.
3. Participants may need opportunities to make sense of complex information before they can join in with commitment and imagination. It can be useful therefore to take some time to map these *sense-making opportunities* and consider how they can be extended.
4. Where lots of things are going on, or being planned (perhaps by different groups or agencies), it may be important to check – and indeed improve – the contribution each is making to achieving locally-agreed strategic outcomes. The practice here requires *plotting current activities against agreed outcomes* and reviewing where there is scope for greater impact.
5. Similarly, it may be useful to involve a wide range of people in *identifying 'assets'* potentially available in the locality (e.g. in existing local associations, in the businesses which make up the local economy, in the natural environment, etc.) so as to examine whether these assets might have more to offer in advancing the strategic priorities.
6. Working inclusively in diverse communities requires that we ask the question *'Who's not here'* and *'How could we better engage them?'* The relevant practices focus on how we invite people to participate, express

hospitality, make adjustments which enhance accessibility, encourage contributions and show appreciation.

7. Finally, to sustain ourselves in this challenging work we need to *invest in celebrating* what we are doing and meeting our common human need to have fun!

VI: Seeking cooperative solutions – a checklist

How can citizen networks and organisations work together with local government to shape and deliver the local agenda for positive change?

Bringing together the preceding analysis, we conclude with a check-list of questions (next page) to guide both 'sides' in civic partnership development on working together for positive change.

interests of simplicity, this check-list is written with a focus on the municipal (LA – local authority) leadership on the left-hand side and a CSO (civil society organisation) (e.g. an alliance of disabled people) on the right hand side. Reflection on these 15 pairs of questions should help ensure the widest possible mobilization of local people and agencies in securing a better future.

Box IV shares an example of using this check-list in municipal policy-making from the Colombian city of Floridablanca.

Box IV: Civic partnership in action

Floridablanca's Mayor has created a disability advisory committee made up from his officials and representatives of the disability community. Starting both from the Mayor's priorities and a disabled people's agenda grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the committee is using a workshop format to consider the 15 sets of questions so as to establish and review a joint strategy for the municipality.

Defining valued outcomes

1. How well has the LA articulated its responsibility to meet the 'triple bottom line' of environmental protection, sustainable economic development and greater social justice for all local people? 2. How well has the LA created processes for wide participation in agreeing and acting on local strategic goals? 3. Are these clearly expressed as valued outcomes to guide and evaluate a wide range of local actions?	I. How well has the CSO articulated its goals in terms of valued outcomes (e.g. as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities)? II. How well is the CSO exploring how these goals might contribute to progress on wider local priorities (e.g. how supporting disabled people into employment could strengthen the local economy)? III. How well is the CSO exploring how its interests might be reflected in action on other priorities (e.g. by making accessibility for all a key dimension of transport policy)?

Engaging the whole system

4. How well is the LA leadership creating opportunities for local people and organisations to come together to make sense of local challenges? 5. How well is the LA working 'transversally' to analyse the potential contributions of different departments and agencies to achieving the strategic outcomes? 6. How well is this joint working reflected in delivering effective action?	IV. How well is the CSO actively contributing its perspectives and experiences to local sense-making? V. How well is the CSO exploring potential connections with other CSOs which might facilitate action on related or complementary objectives? VI. How well is the CSO playing its part in local initiatives (e.g. as a vehicle for outreach to interested citizens or as a partner in delivery)?

Co-producing the future

7. How well is the LA inviting partnership with local communities and civic associations in shaping and delivering action on local priorities? 8. How well are public services devolving leadership to the neighbourhood level and ensuring delivery staff have the autonomy required for personalized	VII. How well is the CSO investing in developing the capacity of its members (e.g. through community organizing) to be empowered partners with public agencies? VIII. How well is the CSO working to strengthen peer support (e.g. for mutual information, advice and advocacy) among interested citizens?

engagement with citizens? 9. Are there good arrangements to ensure that policy-making properly reflects the interests of future generations?	IX. How well is the CSO helping its members explore what will be required to secure a better future?

Strengthening resilience

10. How well is the LA strengthening democratic control over local responses to unexpected challenges? 11. How well is the LA helping to foster economic self-reliance and responsible stewardship over local resources? 12. How well is the LA helping to strengthen local communities as places of social cohesion and mutual support?	X. How well is the CSO supporting its members to play their part in a pluralist local democracy? XI. How well is the CSO aligning its interests with sustainable economic development (e.g. through participating in 'green' initiatives)? XII. How well is the CSO helping to connect people up through social networks which promote everyone's well-being?

Working inclusively

13. How well is the LA providing a welcome for diverse participation and attending to the voices of people at risk of marginalisation? 14. How well is the LA fostering a listening culture which seeks to learn from different perspectives? 15. How well is the LA making use of social technologies (e.g. World Café) which promote shared understanding and encourage the will to act on significant challenges?	XIII. How well is the CSO welcoming diverse participation and reaching out to people on the margins? XIV. How well is the CSO helping its members to listen carefully to different perspectives? XV. How well is the CSO supporting its members in becoming active participants in many local opportunities for conversations which matter?

The ideas and experience on which these six dimensions of strategy are based are set out in more detail and further referenced in a series of blogs at:
http://centreforinclusivefutures.wordpress.com/2014/01/18/building-a-better-future-through-civic-partnership-2/
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