

Civic Limits:

How much more involved can people get?



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ResPublica
changing the terms of debate

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Contents

Foreword by Richard Wilson & Matt Leach 1

Executive Summary 3

Part One: Introduction 10

Part Two: Defining the Involvement Challenge 12

Part Three: Individual Limits 21

Part Four: Limited Techniques 38

Part Five: Financial Limits 52

Part Six: Civic Unlimited 60

Building Civic Unltd 77

Annex 78

References 79

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Foreword

"This is not another government initiative – it's about giving you the initiative to take control of your life and work with those around you to improve things. It has the power to transform our country"

- David Cameron, 14 February 2011

Well over a year since the election of the Coalition government, one of its core projects - the creation of a big society - remains a cornerstone of national debate. Yet despite the many column inches dedicated to it and policy documents seeking to build it, beyond the headline ambitions there is still no obvious collective sense amongst either ordinary people or many parts of national or local government of what a big society means or requires in terms of individual involvement and participation.

Civic Limits seeks to provide some definition to this aspect of the big society debate by exploring the best available data on the state of civic life in Britain and describing what in practical terms is required to get more people involved. We do this by first defining the involvement challenge, secondly by outlining some of the core issues to be overcome and thirdly setting out how we can transform our civic involvement performance.

A clearer vision for localism is now emerging, not least as a result of the passage of the Localism Bill through Parliament. A strong coherent statement of intent from government around its vision for civic involvement and participation is also needed. The success of the big society will be dependent on a step change in involvement and participation. Whilst it is creating demand and expectation, government has not so far set out clearly to the public the extent of the involvement it wishes to promote, or sufficiently acknowledged the challenges faced in implementing change on the scale needed to achieve it. Central government's communications around the big society has thus far been 'blindly optimistic', and failed to engage sufficiently with the challenge of increasing civic involvement. Instead it needs to be 'ambitiously realistic', outlining clear objectives, acknowledging the challenges faced, and speaking clearly and consistently about what it will and will not do to support its goals.

This will not be through simply replicating top down involvement strategies and targets of the past. Instead government must explicitly reach out with the aim of co-creating the big society from the bottom-up.

It is in this spirit that this document has been written, with the intention of initiating a dynamic conversation about what to do, as opposed to stating static proposals. It is in that spirit we offer Civic Limits and its recommendations as a starting point, with the expectation that they will be overtaken by initiatives and proposals developed from the bottom up, as involvement and participation becomes an increasing part of the way our society works.

This document is being purposely launched not as a finished, settled paper document, but as a living text on which we invite input, contribution and comment. It is not perfect; there will be errors and omissions. We look forward to your active participation in the writing, editing and debating of Civic Limits.

Richard Wilson & Matt Leach

Executive Summary

2010 was the year of the 'big society'. Whilst it dominated headlines, its greatest achievement was the sparking of a national debate about the nature of Britain today. The debate has spread so effectively because of its controversial and stimulating quality. The coming together of the big society agenda and huge public sector cuts has spawned a rare thing: a real public discussion about how we live, govern and solve problems.

In the midst of this discourse there is one area of clear consensus: the call for big society demands more people getting involved in community life. However, it will not be easy to get people engaged on the scale needed, and this needs to be openly acknowledged. The challenge we face is one of fundamentally rethinking how we approach involving people in civic and community life.

We include a limited number of recommendations, but that is not the point of this report. Rather its ambition is to contribute towards a more grounded debate around how to get more people involved in civic life. A debate which, if successful, may make it easier for future generations to get involved than it is for us today. If 2010 was the year of big 'blue skies' 'big society' debate, 2011 needs to be the year of the grounded, focussed on the discussion of how we practically get more people involved.

Defining the involvement challenge

Recent research shows a diverse picture of current civic involvement in Britain. While traditional forms of political participation such as voting and party membership have been declining, levels of volunteering have remained broadly stable over the last decade. Definitions of what accounts for involvement or participation are also changing, recognising the many 'informal' civic activities that people take part in, such as helping out neighbours or attending local community events. Other forms of arguably socially participatory activity, such as ethical consumerism, are growing; although not necessarily directly improving 'community life'. And, of course, there is the move online where many of these activities happen as much in cyberspace as in traditional community spaces.

However, a small 'civic core' of the population accounts for most of the activity taking place, whether volunteering, charitable giving or civic participation. Around 30% of our adult population currently do 90% of all volunteer hours and 70% of civic participation. People belonging to this 'core' are more likely to be well-educated and middle class than the population as a whole.

If we are to realise the aim of building a bigger society, we will need to dramatically increase the size of the 'civic core', and also broaden engagement to make civic participation more genuinely reflect the diversity of our communities. Given the extent of the Government's vision for a big society, we suggest in this document that our starting point should be an intention to double the size of our civic core.

A target of a civic core of 60% is ambitious, but then so is the vision for societal change underpinning the big society. But whether a 25%, 50% or 100% increase in the size of the civic core is sought, the challenge is significant. There is a pressing need to understand how we can get more people involved. The rest of this document seeks to identify how we can start to put in place the building blocks necessary to achieving that goal.

RECOMMENDATION

Doubling the civic core: Government should set out an ambition to double the size of the civic core over the next ten years, to allow the development of precise work to identify what is required to achieve this.

Individual Limits

To achieve the scale of increase in civic involvement proposed, we need to understand and acknowledge the barriers that prevent people from getting more involved.

Research into whether people would like to be more involved paints a mixed picture. For example some surveys suggest that the majority would like to participate more in decision-making, whilst others suggest that most people do not actually want more active involvement, but rather just 'more information'. Moreover, there would appear to be a significant disparity between the number of people who say they would like to get involved and those who actually will do so in practice.

Lack of time, both real and perceived, is a major barrier to involvement. Policies and incentives are needed to encourage and help people to reprioritise their time to make space for increased participation. This will include looking at the ways in which we live our lives, and addressing the changes in society that have impacted on people's ability to get involved. The significantly increased competition for our time can not be overestimated. The rise of new forms of media, higher social expectations and ever more sophisticated advertising techniques continually add to our sense of time pressure.

Urbanisation and increasing individualisation have led to the decline of many traditional relationships, community ties and reduced many people's sense of belonging to the places where they live. The growing need for a dual income household in order to sustain an adequate quality of life has reduced the people's ability to get involved. Changes in our neighbourhoods have reduced the opportunities for the soft engagement and interaction that can rebuild social capital and facilitate wider participation.

Business in particular needs to play its part in fostering a new culture of civic participation and involvement. This is not just about providing the pro bono assistance, small grants or organised volunteering that has typified much CSR, it is about creating a more flexible environment in which employees are empowered to find the time to participate in civil society. At a local level - business leaders need to rediscover their roles as "pillars of the community", taking on responsibility as civic and community activists alongside their economic role.

Personal perceptions and experiences can have a large impact on whether and how people get involved. Lack of confidence, knowledge and skills, both perceived and real, can act as significant barriers to involvement and can further widen the 'participation gap' by excluding already underrepresented or vulnerable groups. This is a major challenge to a big society concept which relies heavily on people being 'self starters'. We need to ensure that new opportunities to get involved are accessible to everyone and to ensure that involvement is sustained.

Finally, too much involvement activity misses the mark, appealing to a limited group of people, often already heavily engaged. This is because it is often built around the value sets of those who are designing the process (often - for those working in the state and voluntary sectors - primarily egalitarian), not the community, especially those with more individualistic motives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Support engagement beyond the civic core: Local and national government need to invest in supporting methods of participation which are proven to build confidence and explicitly support self-starting in groups outside the civic core (such as the Envision programme, which aims to build involvement amongst young people).

Design participation that works for the whole community. Those leading civic involvement activities (as individuals, community members or the public and private sector) need to give much greater attention to the values and motivations of those outside the civic core.

Rethink CSR with a focus on participation: Businesses should should reconsider their approach to CSR with a focus on encouraging and enabling civic participation. A key priority should be on redefining the responsibilities of their senior staff and managers to include the provision of leadership within their communities.]

Design participation and involvement into our communities Neighbourhoods need to be designed and redesigned to provide space for the soft engagement and interaction and support communities to achieve this through the neighbourhood planning process

Government and housing providers should monitor the impact of changes to social tenancies on social capital within communities, and consider how new provisions can be implemented in ways that avoid contributing to transience and help build settled neighbourhoods.

Limited Techniques

It is critical to ensure that forms and techniques of participation adopted are relevant to people's needs, expectations and lifestyles. If we want to build a stronger culture of civic involvement, we need to start by rethinking what we mean by participation.

Consultative activities are still very often the 'method of choice' for government - both national and local - despite the widespread recognition that consultation is often tokenistic and ineffective. Government should actively move away from a culture of consultation towards forms of ongoing, 'real' engagement in formal decision-making and social action.

The aim of state-promoted involvement should not be simply to harvest views, but also to empower individuals and build more active, involved and self-reliant communities. There should

be a greater focus on allowing bottom-up, organic forms of engagement to emerge, and attention paid to building and maintaining the relationships between individuals and organisations that form the foundation of better civic involvement.

In practical terms, the skills for facilitating high quality engagement should be recognised and supported. Too few people recognise that engagement and participation require specific skills and experience. Dedicated organisations that do exist such as Involve and Urban Forum need to be supported to ensure that good practice is better publicised and disseminated to encourage innovation and discussion about what good engagement really looks like.

Finally, there is a need to consider how engagement can 'compete' with other demands for people's attention and time and how to make engagement feel fun, energising and meaningful, where people can feel a sense of agency and ownership and see the impact their involvement can make.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Stop pointless consultation: Wherever possible, social action approaches, where participants have actual control over the issues they are addressing, should be prioritised over consultative activities. When consultative activities have to be undertaken, they should follow the principles of 'third generation engagement' outlined in Chapter 6 of this document.

Supporting better civic involvement practice & innovation: During the period of transition to a new, more engaged society, Government should commit long term investment towards developing the organisations, expertise and resources necessary to drive the civic involvement challenge.

Financial Limits

Although transforming civic involvement and building a bigger society is a long-term project, we cannot ignore the impact of the current economic pressures on these efforts.

Challenging financial circumstances create both the need and opportunity for pursuing radical, rather than incremental change in the design of our public services. If we are confident about the change we want to see happen, then we should be brave enough to use the opportunity of radical reshaping of services to create new approaches to civic engagement, and allow more citizen-led, bottom-up forms of involvement to emerge and develop.

The energy generated by campaigns against cuts to local services should be harnessed and channelled into bringing people coming together and taking action to build stronger communities. Community organisers promoted by the government have a potentially crucial role to play in this. We need to make sure they have the appropriate support and training to help communities organise from the bottom up.

Whilst reforms to public service procurement are now a key part of the big society, it is unlikely that this will - in itself - lead to greater empowerment and engagement of individual citizens,

even where services are taken on by civil society organisations. Procurement contracts should explicitly require all delivery organisations to develop and maintain close and regular community engagement and involvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government should be ambitiously realistic not blindly optimistic: Some of the rhetoric and commentary around the big society coming from government has appeared more like wishful thinking than a concrete policy programme. The big society debate now needs to focus on tangible actions, being simultaneously ambitious and grounded in practical reality.

Engage Directly & Constructively With Cuts Campaigns to Create On-Going Engagement Platforms: As opposed to adopting traditional adversarial or communications based approach to 'managing' anti cuts campaigns, national and local government should seek more creative approaches which channel this civic energy and political interest into permanent platforms for civic engagement.

Public bodies should treat participation as a frontline activity: National and local government need to invest in promoting civic involvement and engagement. Given the importance of participation to the future of our public services, it should be considered as a frontline activity, rather than an overhead cost, and investment in it prioritised during the current period of change.

Public service contracts should include a requirement to promote civic involvement: Where public services are contracted out, there should be an explicit requirement increasing community engagement in the delivery of those services.

Civic Unlimited

All parts of government will need to change if they are to deliver effective involvement. Local government, in particular, should seek to use the opportunities and challenges created by current financial pressures to deliver transformational change in the way they do things. Rather than protecting existing ways of doing business, they should embrace innovation and experiment with radically new relationships and new ways of making decisions and delivering services.

As noted, the interplay between cuts and civic involvement is creating powerful pressures to innovate and transform, especially in the areas of engagement. Future approaches to engagement will need to be ongoing and bottom-up, combining face-to-face and online techniques, and characterised by interaction, deliberation, innovation and responsiveness. Such '**third generation engagement**' is by its nature disruptive to existing power structures as agendas are set by the participants. Local authorities should seek to bring these new approaches into the sphere of formal decision-making by redefining themselves as 'hubs' for participation and giving people the tools to get engaged on their own terms.

With tight resources, there will be a need to build on the knowledge, experience and assets we already have, and use models which are proven to work, going to where the people are and

explicitly making the engagement process fun; harnessing the power of online networks; and systematically and continuously involving people in key local developments, decisions and services.

There is a major opportunity to use civic involvement to both bring those outside the labour market inside civic life and to directly harness and develop the skills of the unemployed; building on the experience of projects such as Community Allowance. We believe there is particular benefit in focussing on those people in the community who have untapped skills in engagement, events, social media and campaigning, such as young people currently entering the job market.

Finally, in order to build up long-term confidence in involvement, we need to allow people sufficient time, space and support to develop and experiment with new approaches, without expecting instant results. For instance, the Neighbourhood Planning and Community Right to Buy components of the Localism Bill offer significant opportunities for the community to take greater control, but we need to ensure that sufficient time and community capacity exist to make the most of these opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government (Local & National) should transform themselves into ‘hubs’ for Participation & Engagement. Government should re-invent itself as highly interactive hubs of conversational engagement – where partnership and participation are core competencies not optional extras, and they should support the development and growth of other hubs and places of engagement.

Both public and voluntary sectors need to embrace transformative change: Many local authorities will face a choice after the May 2011 elections to either sustain or transform large parts of their operations; and it is vital that they choose the latter option.

Test new policies for their impact on civic involvement: At present, major new policies are subject to a range of impact assessments, to consider their regulatory, environmental and other impacts. There is a strong case for considering whether a new test should be introduced, to assess the extent to which new policy approaches contribute positively or negatively to community strength and self-sufficiency. New metrics should be developed and introduced to do this, to enable informed debate on the balance between the range of drivers for reform, which will include efficiency and affordability, alongside the impact on broader priorities around civic engagement and participation.

Enable communities to challenge to secure effective involvement: Chris White’s Social Enterprise Private Members Bill should be amended to ensure that community involvement is clearly included in its definition of social value, enabling communities to challenge where it is not effectively secured.

(continued)

Introduce the Community Allowance: The government should introduce the proposed Community Allowance, enabling long term unemployed people, and in particular those some way from the employment market, to take on limited (remunerated) work within their communities without impacting upon their benefit entitlements.

Introduce a right to try: The Localism Bill should be amended to ensure that where a community asset is publicly owned, the moratorium period should run for up to three years, to enable the community to develop a sustainable use, with an option to buy at the end of the period.

Principles

The nature of the business of civic involvement is we must constantly adapt to the shifting tides of public interests, political priorities and best practice. The recommendations we outline above are therefore necessarily time limited. Given that we have also outlined 14 overarching principles to steer the civic involvement work we need to undertake:

- Create conditions that support and allow transformative change
- Treat Participation as a Front Line Service
- Build and account for civic confidence
- Ensure public service contracts drive quality involvement
- Make use of the economically inactive as a valuable resource
- Channel civic energy from anti cuts campaigns into on-going conversational engagement
- Support creative disruptor approaches to involvement
- Account for and respond to participants’ values and motivations
- Prioritise social action over consultation
- Support conversational third generation engagement not one off processes
- Do not worry about involving everyone in everything
- Allow time to fail and succeed
- Be transparent, but not just with data
- To be truly innovative, the changes required are too great to centrally control.

Part One: Introduction

2010 was the year of the 'big society'. It was even recognised by Oxford University Press as the word of the year.^[1] Since the Coalition Government took office, the big society has solidified into a series of policies, programmes and even sparked an organisation or two. However, the greatest achievement of the big society so far however must be that it has sparked a genuine national debate about the nature of Britain today - one that has continued more than a year after the general election that initiated it.

Such debates are usually restricted to metropolitan journals, think tanks and institutions, but in this case it has spread to communities across the country. The debate has spread so effectively because of its controversial and stimulating quality. The coming together of the big society agenda and huge public sector cuts has spawned a rare thing: a real public discussion about how we live, govern and solve problems. Creating meaningful public debate is rare enough, but creating one that is not issue-specific such as the Iraq war or immigration, but instead focuses on the processes of governance that affect how we live, is truly exceptional.

There have been core debating points such as: 'Is the big society a fig leaf for cuts?', 'Can the big society survive the cuts?' or 'Is the voluntary sector failing to challenge the big society because of cuts?'^[2] But in the midst of this deeply passionate discourse there is one area of clear consensus: the call for big society demands more people getting involved in community life. Exactly how this involvement will happen or whether it is possible is hotly debated. It is this subject that we shall focus on here.

This publication, although called Civic Limits, does not argue that we are inherently 'civically limited' - quite the opposite. We do, however, make the case that at present we face significant challenges to getting people involved, and that these should be openly acknowledged, as only then can they be addressed and overcome. We also argue that the current environment of cuts and new political priorities require us to fundamentally rethink how we approach involving people in civic and community life.

We must build on the rich history of civic engagement in the UK, both the recent history and our older heritage. The recent history includes community empowerment, participatory budgeting and hyperlocal websites; our older heritage includes the voluntary sector, mutuals, cooperatives and decades of close working between the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The doctrine of social innovation is a good one, but only when it is cognisant of the different ways of innovating and of the existing resources and experience we have. All too often there is impetus to start from scratch, when it is not always the best option. Getting more people involved is right but difficult and that the current environment may make it more difficult, requiring us to be especially creative in mixing up old and new approaches.

1. See www.oxforddictionaries.com/page/woty

2. See www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/07/big-society-is-not-working; www.izweproject.com/2011/01/fig-leaf-or-carrot-the-big-society-is-driven-by-the-cuts/

Finally, we advocate that involving more people in civic life is not only possible and right but is now more important than ever. As we start to address perhaps the biggest national challenge since 1945 we will inevitably lay the foundations of Britain tomorrow. Just as the Victorian, Edwardian and 1960s planners shape so much of our civic activity today, through the architectural inheritance they have bequeathed to us, it is now our opportunity to build the civic spaces of the future: online, in communities, locally, nationally and internationally. The decisions we make today will have civic consequences for generations.

The ambition of this pamphlet is therefore simply to contribute towards a more grounded debate of how to get more people involved in civic life. A debate which, if successful, may make it easier for future generations to get involved than it is for us today.

Part Two: Defining the Involvement Challenge

Summary: *To set the context for this paper, we start by looking at recent statistics that show us how many people are currently getting involved in different types of civic activities in Britain (Section 2.1), as well as some research that shows who is getting involved and who is not (2.2). Based on this, we suggest that an ambitious target is needed for increasing civic involvement, extending the ‘civic core’ of people who are most involved from 30% to 60% of the population (2.3). We will also consider why some of the analysis of the problem thus far has failed to support greater civic involvement (2.4).*

If we are to get more people involved the first step is to get a sense of who is currently involved and who is not, understand why more involvement is necessary and explore what extra level of involvement we may be looking at. That is what we will do in this Chapter. In recent years there have been numerous studies on civic and community involvement in the UK. Here we touch on just a few to set the context for where we are in spring 2011.

It is important here to understand the different forms of ‘participation’ or ‘involvement’; especially whether we are talking about political participation, which includes voting and participation in decision-making, and other forms of involvement in community and society such as volunteering, donating money or campaigning. The Pathways through Participation project makes a useful distinction between public participation, social participation and individual participation.^[3] We want to start by taking the broadest view, as the confluence of the ‘Big Society’ and public sector cuts demands that all options are on the table, and we believe will need to take a very broad approach to involvement if we are to transform the extent to which people are able to become involved in building a stronger and bigger society. Although we are ourselves not entirely happy with the term, for the purpose of simplicity we use ‘civic involvement’ here to refer to all these types of participation and involvement.

A number of recent surveys have shown that people think getting involved is important. Recent research of the views of the UK workforce showed that 54% of respondents felt it is important for them, as individuals, to contribute to their local community.^[4] People also seem to believe it is important for communities themselves, not just the state, to take action: for instance, a PoliticsHome survey found in April 2010 that the majority (55%) felt that there should be more community involvement and less state involvement in improving the quality of life in the UK.^[5] Other figures show that, when asked about involvement with local public services, over half would be very or quite likely to get involved in decision making about local health services (60%) and policing (58%), while just under half (48%) would be likely to get involved in decisions about education and local transport.^[6]

However, according to Ipsos MORI figures from late 2008, 50% of people said they do not want much or any involvement; and of those who would like to be involved, only 5% want ‘active involvement’ (as opposed to wanting ‘more of a say’ or just ‘information’).^[7] These figures show that the issue is not straightforward, and any claims of a desire for involvement should be handled with extreme care. Indeed, many people will say they want to be involved, but in practice they often do not ‘find the time’ to do so. What counts is who is actually involved, not what they claim they would do. People are notoriously over-optimistic about their ability to get involved. It is through this lens that we consider the available evidence in this Chapter.

2.1 How Many People Are Getting Involved?

Beyond the falling levels of political participation, especially voting and activities closely associated to party membership, people’s involvement in broader civic activity has remained mostly stable over the last decade.^[8] For instance, the Citizenship Survey 2009-10 shows that 40% of people in England had taken part in formal volunteering in the past 12 months, while 54% had taken part in informal volunteering.^[9] This means that over half of the population have offered some form of ‘free help’ at least once in a year, although formal volunteering is less common. Meanwhile, 56% of the UK adult population were giving money to charity, and the average sums have increased despite the recession, to £31 per person each month.^[10]

Membership of different organisations is another important part of civic involvement. Although trade union membership has declined rapidly, it is still one of the most common types of non-profit organisation that people join, together with sports clubs, religious groups, social groups and professional organisations. For charities, the picture is more mixed: many environmental charities have increased their membership considerably (for instance the National Trust has grown from 278,000 members in 1971 to 3.6 million in 2009), while others have seen a fall in numbers. Support for charities generally continues to be strong however, with a steady growth in their numbers.^[11] In contrast to other sectors, a rapidly expanding area of individual civic expression and influence is ethical consumerism: the UK ethical market has grown from being worth £13.5 billion in 1999 to over £43 billion in 2009.^[12]

These figures paint a diverse picture of civic involvement in the UK. However, the fact remains that the majority of the population are not involved in decision-making or the wider democratic processes, either directly or indirectly (see figure 1 below). Especially at the local level, despite a range of opportunities to get involved, the number of people taking part in local decision making remains low: the national average is only 14%.^[13] This finding is supported by a National Council

3. Brodie, E, Cowling, E and Nissen N (2010). *Pathways through Participation: Understanding participation: A literature review*. <http://pathwaysthrough-participation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Pathways-literature-review-final-version.pdf>

4. Brand Democracy (2011). *Big Society & Harnessing the Power of the UK*. www.bell-pottinger.co.uk/images/stories/pdf/bp_big_soc_research_report_v2_feb_16.pdf

5. PoliticsHome (2010). *‘The Big Society’: nice idea...but who will participate?* www.politicshome.com/uk/article/7869/the_big_society_nice_idea_about_who_will_participate%3F.html

6. IIPS (2010)

7. Ipsos MORI (2010). *Do the public really want to join the government of Britain?* www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/News/Do%20the%20public%20want%20to%20join%20government%20of%20Britain.PDF

8. National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) (2011). *Participation: trends, facts and figures*. www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/default/files/Upload-edFiles/participation_trends_facts_figures.pdf

9. Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) (2010). *Citizenship Survey: 2009-10, England*. www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/164191.pdf Formal volunteering is defined as ‘giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations to benefit other people or the environment’; while informal volunteering is defined as ‘giving unpaid help as an individual to people who are not relatives’.

10. NCVO (2011)

11. NCVO (2011)

12. NCVO (2011)

13. CLG (2009). *Citizenship Survey 2008-09: Empowered Communities Topic Report*. www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1547220.pdf

for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) report from 2009 which suggests that “people are willing to engage in issues that concern them, but see voluntary action as a more effective way of making a difference than engaging in politics”.^[14]

Fig. 1: Public Participation Rates 2001-2010



Source: Citizenship Survey 2009-10, England, Cohesion Research Statistical Release 12, July 2010

14. Kane, D, Clark, J, Lesniewski, S, Wilton, J, Pratten, B and Wilding K (2009). UK Civil Society Almanac 2009. London: NCVO www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/products-services/publications/uk-civil-society-almanac-2009

2.2 Who Is Getting Involved?

When one looks more closely at who is involved, however, the picture is unbalanced: a relatively small group of people is ‘doing’ most of the involvement. Based on data from the two most recent Citizenship Surveys, the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC)^[15] employs the concept of a civic core to highlight the fact that 31% of the UK adult population is responsible for nearly 90% of all volunteer hours, just under 80% of charitable giving, and around 70% of civic participation. This figure consists of the ‘primary core’: just over 7.6% of the population who collectively account for two thirds of all effort on at least two of the three dimensions^[16] of involvement; and the ‘secondary core’: the 23.9% who account for two thirds of activity on at least one dimension. At the same time, only 8% of the population do not record any activity, meaning that the majority of people do get involved to some extent, even if not very actively.^[17]

In terms of demographics, people in the civic core are more likely to have higher education qualifications, be middle-aged, home owners, actively practise their religion, and have lived in the same neighbourhood for at least 10 years. There are other notable inequalities in participation: for instance, currently more men (68%) than women are elected as local councillors, although women are more likely to donate to charity. And although 9.5% of the population belong to an ethnic minority, only 4% of elected councillors come from an ethnic minority group.^[18]

There are a number of models to help explain the character of who is actually getting involved in civic life. Here we look more closely at recent reports from the Institute for Insight in the Public Services (IIPS)^[19], Brand Democracy/Bell Pottinger and the Hansard Society, due to their relevance to this paper. There are naturally some overlaps and inconsistencies between them, but together they provide a useful lens for better understanding the nature of civic involvement in Britain today. And perhaps more importantly, how an expansion is taking place in the received wisdom of what constitutes civic involvement.

The Hansard Society’s 2010 Audit of Political Engagement^[20], divides the public into eight groups based on their level of political involvement. According to the report, around 24% of the population fall into the ‘political committed’ and the ‘active campaigners’ (these might be classified as the ‘civic core’ in terms of political participation), whilst ‘interested bystanders’ account for 14% (see figure 2). In contrast, those classed as either ‘bored/apathetic’ (8%), ‘disengaged/mistrustful’ (24%) or ‘alienated/hostile’ (10%) together make up 42% which is a significant proportion.

15. Mohan, J (2010). *What do volunteering statistics tell us about the prospects for the Big Society?* <http://bit.ly/fj2HRI>

16. These three spheres are volunteering; charitable giving; and civic association. See Mohan (2010)

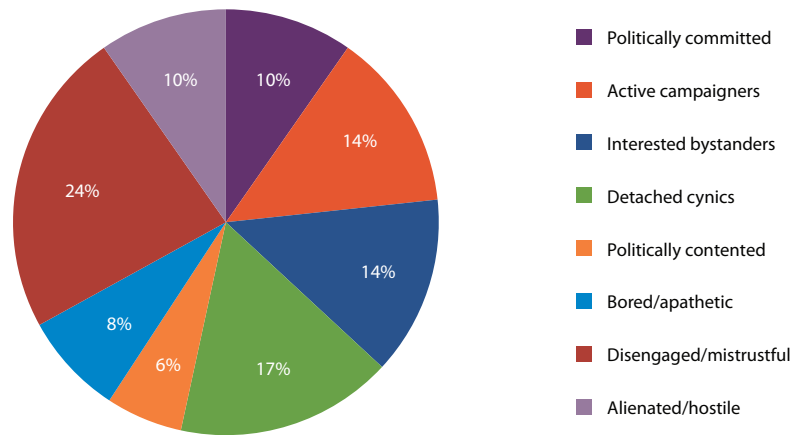
17. Mohan (2010)

18. NCVO (2011)

19. The IIPS is jointly funded by The Futures Company and TNS-BMRB

20. Hansard Society (2010). *Audit of Political Engagement 7: The 2010 Report*. www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/publications/archive/2010/03/03/the-7th-annual-audit-of-political-engagement.aspx

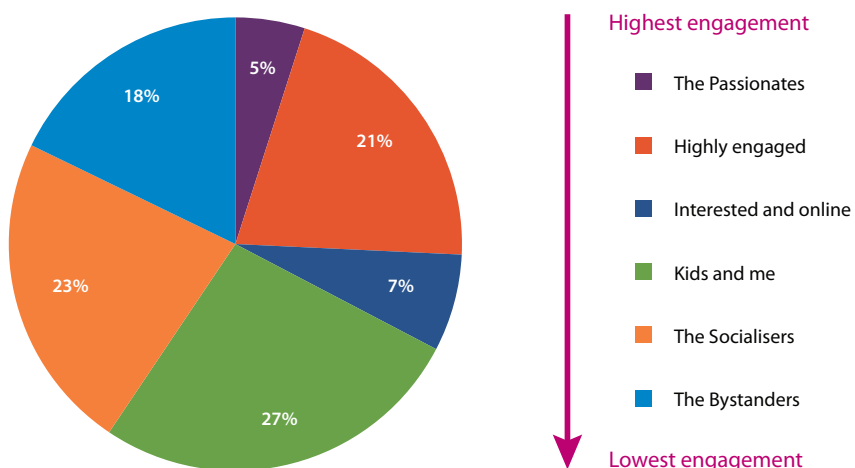
Fig. 2: Profiles of Political Engagement



Source: Adapted from NCVO 'Participation: trends, facts and figures' Original Source Hansard Audit of Political Engagement 7

Looking at civic involvement more broadly, beyond political participation, The Futures Company's Henley Planning for Consumer Change survey 2009^[21] divides the population into six groups, based on how frequently they participate in local and national activities (see figure 3 below).

Fig. 3: Engagement patterns



Source: The Futures Company's Henley Planning for Consumer Change survey - 2009 (2222), Base: all respondents in GB aged 15+

21. As presented in Institute for Insight in the Public Services (IIPS) (2009). *What the Citizen Wants 2009*. www.tns-bmrb.co.uk/assets-uploaded/documents/what-the-citizen-wants-2009_1285166510.pdf

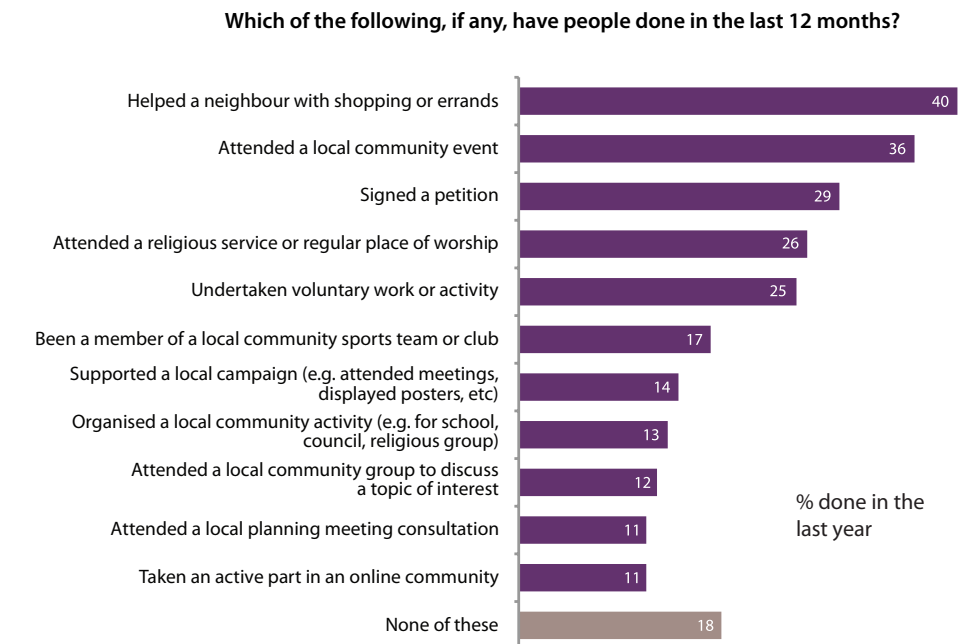
Brand Democracy's 2010 survey of the UK workforce^[22] similarly identified six types of individual in relation to how they get involved: activist (19%); leader (10%); follower (19%); joiner (25%); for hire (10%); and disinterested (6%). Although the 'disinterested' section here is very small, implying that the majority of the working population would get involved if given the right support and incentives, this is to some extent contradicted by other figures (see Section 2.3) which illustrate that not everyone wants or feels they can get very involved. The overarching point here is that even if people are mistrustful of politicians and disengaged from formal political processes, many still claim the willingness and ability to get involved in their communities and to help others.

How do people get involved?

The definition of what it is to be involved is changing. Increasingly, the definition of civic involvement has been extended to include the 'informal' activities that many find more appealing. Although few people might consider their kind acts of offering 'unpaid help' to be volunteering, the Citizenship Survey includes this within its definition of 'informal volunteering'.

Adopting a similar expansive definition of involvement, the IIPS found in 2010 that the most common forms of involvement were 'helping a neighbour with shopping or errands' and 'attending a local community event' (see figure 4).

Fig. 4: How involved in our community are we?



Source: TNS omnibus 2010, Base: All respondents (1990)

22. Brand Democracy (2011)

The results of Brand Democracy's workforce survey were similar although slightly different, suggesting that the most common activities were being involved in community projects (26%); helping neighbours or the elderly (26%); being involved in local schools (20%); and getting involved in local hospitals (12%). These findings however seem to support the observations of high numbers of people volunteering in the health and education sectors.^[23]

The statistics referred to above start to outline who is getting involved in Britain today and how. Naturally this is a complex picture, the figures are imperfect and the reality is constantly changing; however they do highlight the scale of challenge faced. In Chapter 3 we start to explore the key motivations and barriers to people's involvement, as well as their underlying values, in order to identify the right incentives and support needed for encouraging different types of people to get more involved.

2.3 How Much Civic Involvement Do We Want?

Defining a desirable level of civic involvement is simultaneously difficult and important. Difficult as civic involvement comes in many shapes in sizes, many of which are hard to measure, and important as if we are to build a big society, we need to have an idea of what 'big' is.

Given the sheer number of ways people are being asked to get more involved - from increased volunteering, running of services, community organising, co-production of services and so on - and the type of involvement being promoted by the big society vision, which has a clear emphasis on time intensive involvement such as community organising and volunteering, alongside 'easier' 'cheque-book' and consultative involvement, we are going to need a lot more people involved. It is this latter point that is key - by launching the big society in the way that it has, the current government is demanding a step change in levels of civic involvement.

The Prime Minister himself has made this clear:

"This is not another government initiative – it's about giving you the initiative to take control of your life and work with those around you to improve things. It has the power to transform our country"

No matter how you analyse it, the big society as advocated by the government means a big change in levels of involvement. Key pillars of the big society such as volunteering, community organising and social action are time intensive activities. Even if we better exploit more 'time efficient' methods of involvement such as social media (which we suggest later in this document will be essential) there is no escaping the core message that the big society means more people spending more of their time in civic life.

This will require a change in the ways we all organise our lives. A starting point for engaging the nation with this challenge should be for Government to set a clear and shared public ambition for civic involvement so there is a common sense of the scale of what is being aspired to. The aim should be to secure a shared national commitment to massively increased levels of all types of involvement across society.

23. According to NCVO, an estimated 23% of all volunteering takes place in the public sector, including 170,000 NHS volunteers and 300,000 school governors. See NCVO (2011).

For the purposes of illustrating the challenge that is faced in trying to build a bigger society we suggest that this initial ambition should be to **double the size of the civic core**, the group that does the vast majority of civic involvement at present. Setting such a target is in a sense arbitrary, however it is a critical step towards starting to understand the scale of what needs to be achieved if we are to build a bigger society.

RECOMMENDATION: Doubling the civic core: Government should set out an ambition to double the size of the civic core over the next ten years.

While there may be varying definitions of who exactly is included in this 'core' and how large it is, we think that the TSRC figures of 7.6% in the primary core, and 31% in the 'larger' civic core are useful for our purposes. Following from this, we would aim at having around 15% of the UK's adult population being active in more than one area of involvement (the inner core), and around 60%, or almost two thirds, as the civic core 'doing' the vast majority of involvement in one way or another - whether through volunteering, charitable giving or civic participation.

To seasoned practitioners of involvement, aiming for 30%, let alone 60%, of the population active involved in civic life would seem incredibly ambitious. After all, it was only five years ago that Demos and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation were advocating the '1% Solution': that getting just 1% of people involved was both realistic and sufficient^[24]. But this was against a background of very different government priorities, and a much narrower definition of civic involvement than has become commonplace in policy circles today.

A target of a civic core of 60% is ambitious, but then so is the vision for societal change underpinning the big society. But whether we are seeking a 25%, 50% or 100% increase in the size of the civic core, the challenge is significant. There is a pressing need to understand how we can get others involved. There is a need for a much better understanding of the conditions in which different groups of people have the willingness, ability and capacity to get involved. We will address these questions and explore what is needed and who should be targeted more closely in Chapter 3.

2.4 Moving beyond traditional forms of democratic participation

Much has been said and written over the last decade about the disconnection between people and the traditional democratic processes of governance. The fall in traditional forms of public participation, such as electoral turnout and party membership, has been well documented.^[25] While most people believe that it is their duty to vote (76%), and that voting gives people a say in how the country is run (58%), only 28% think that the present system of governing work well.^[26]

24. Skidmore P, Bound K and Lownsbrough H (2006). *Community participation: Who benefits?* www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/1802-community-network-governance.pdf

25. For instance, membership of the main political parties dropped from over 1.6 million in the mid-eighties to just over 400,000 in 2008. See NCVO (2011)

26. NCVO (2011)

The influential Power Inquiry report published in 2006 highlighted the fact that, rather than an apathetic and uninterested public, the main reasons behind today's political disengagement were related to the inability of formal democratic processes (including mainstream political parties and the electoral system) to sufficiently reflect the diverse values and aspirations of modern society, or to offer citizens sufficient influence over political decisions.^[27]

This is because any process of civic empowerment, framed in relation to the formal political realm, will always be hamstrung by its necessary deference to elected members and the process of governance. The inherent hierarchy of our political institutions is increasingly out of kilter with the dominant value sets and systems by which society operates (such as transparency, choice, collaboration). The fact that our political institutions are structured and therefore behave in ways which people find hard to relate to is because they are the product of out-dated value sets, which most people now no longer hold. Unless there is a radical root and branch reform of political institutions, they will continue to fail to attract the involvement of all but a tiny minority.

We are not saying that engagement and involvement through the formal political system should stop. Rather we are arguing that much more attention should be given to other, more directly empowering methods of engagement with the public. But if this is itself to have legitimacy, it must embrace participation on a large scale - it cannot be left in to those forming the current civic core.

One of the most important aspects of the debate about the big society is the extent to which it offers an opportunity to re-examine and move beyond a reliance on purely representative politics by placing real power in to the hand of citizens.

Conclusion

While traditional forms of political participation such as voting and party membership have been declining, levels of volunteering have remained stable over the last decade, and other forms of activity, such as ethical consumerism, have grown considerably. And there is a growing recognition of the many 'informal' civic activities that people take part in, such as helping out neighbours or attending local community events.

But we remain reliant on a small 'civic core' of the population, which accounts for most of the activity taking place, whether volunteering, charitable giving or civic participation. There is a need to not only significantly increase the numbers of people taking part in civic life, but also to make this participation more genuinely reflect the diversity of the population.

The starting point for this must be the setting of an ambitious goal for increasing civic involvement - initially aiming to double the size of the civic core. But this will require us to move beyond conventional approaches to civic engagement and, in particular, our over-reliance on political representation as our primary route to involvement. Chapter 3 starts to explore how we might achieve this new ambition.

27. The POWER Inquiry Commission (2006). Power to the People: The Report of Power: An Independent Inquiry into Britain's Democracy. www.powerinquiry.org/report/documents/PowerToThePeople_002.pdf

Part Three: Individual Limits

Summary: To understand how we can significantly increase the levels of civic involvement, we must start by looking at the barriers that prevent individuals from getting more involved. The various modern pressures on people's time are clearly an important factor here (3.1), closely linked to broader changes in our society, which have reduced many of the traditional spaces and opportunities for people to interact and engage with others in their communities (3.2). As well as these trends, the more practical issues of lack of skills, capacity and confidence can also act as significant barriers to involvement (3.3). While tackling these barriers is important, we must also make an effort to understand the underlying values and motivations that influence how people view society and their role in it, as well as the different incentives they respond to (3.4). Finally, not only getting people involved, but sustaining their involvement, is crucial (3.5).

As Chapter 2 highlights, levels of participation have remained steady over the last decade. And levels of involvement are over-reliant on a relatively small civic core. If we are to increase levels of involvement, we must better understand why, even with the significant investment of the previous government in initiatives to promote empowerment and volunteering, we have yet to see a great upsurge in civic involvement.

There remain significant barriers to people getting involved. Many of these barriers may be personal and deeply, even subconsciously held; but others are much simpler and relate to people's busy lives. According to research by the IIPS, the main barrier to people getting involved is, unsurprisingly, lack of time, followed by lack of knowledge of how to get involved.^[28] We will focus on four main areas where we think specific attention is needed. These are time poverty; changing society; skills, capacity and confidence; and changing values. Later in the chapter we explore the different incentives that different people respond to when getting involved.

3.1 Time Poverty

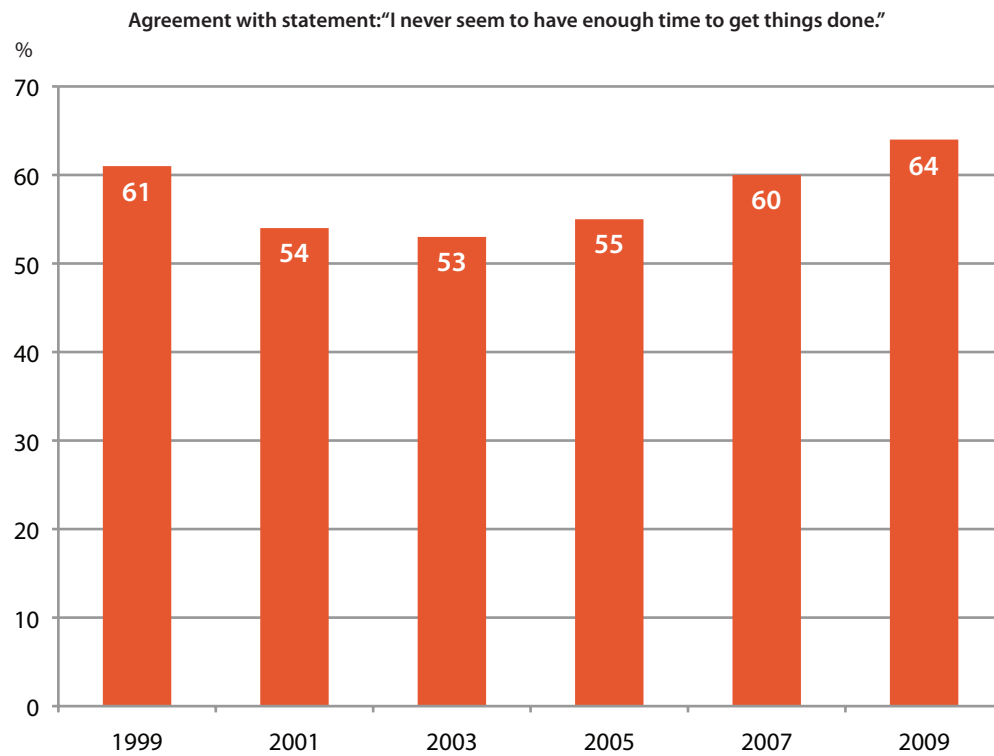
People living in the UK are busier than ever before, with varied and competing demands on their time. The changed nature of how we work and play; the rise of employment rates, especially among women, over the last 50 years; the pressure for greater flexibility from workers; and the various social demands on 'free' time all mean that there are significant pressures on the time people are willing and able to spend on getting involved in their local communities.

As The Futures Company's data in Figure 5 below shows, in 2009 64% of people felt they did not have enough time to get things done and this figure is likely to be even higher for 2010. For example, data compiled by the Electoral Commission shows that the most common reasons given by young people for not participating in the 2010 general election were a 'lack of time' or 'being too busy' (rather than, for instance, 'my vote won't make a difference').^[29]

28. IIPS (2010). IIPS divides the barriers to involvement into three main categories: personal (time, confidence), social (feeling that "it's not for me"), and structural (lack of information, red tape).

29. The Electoral Commission (2010), Report on the Administration of the 2010 General Election

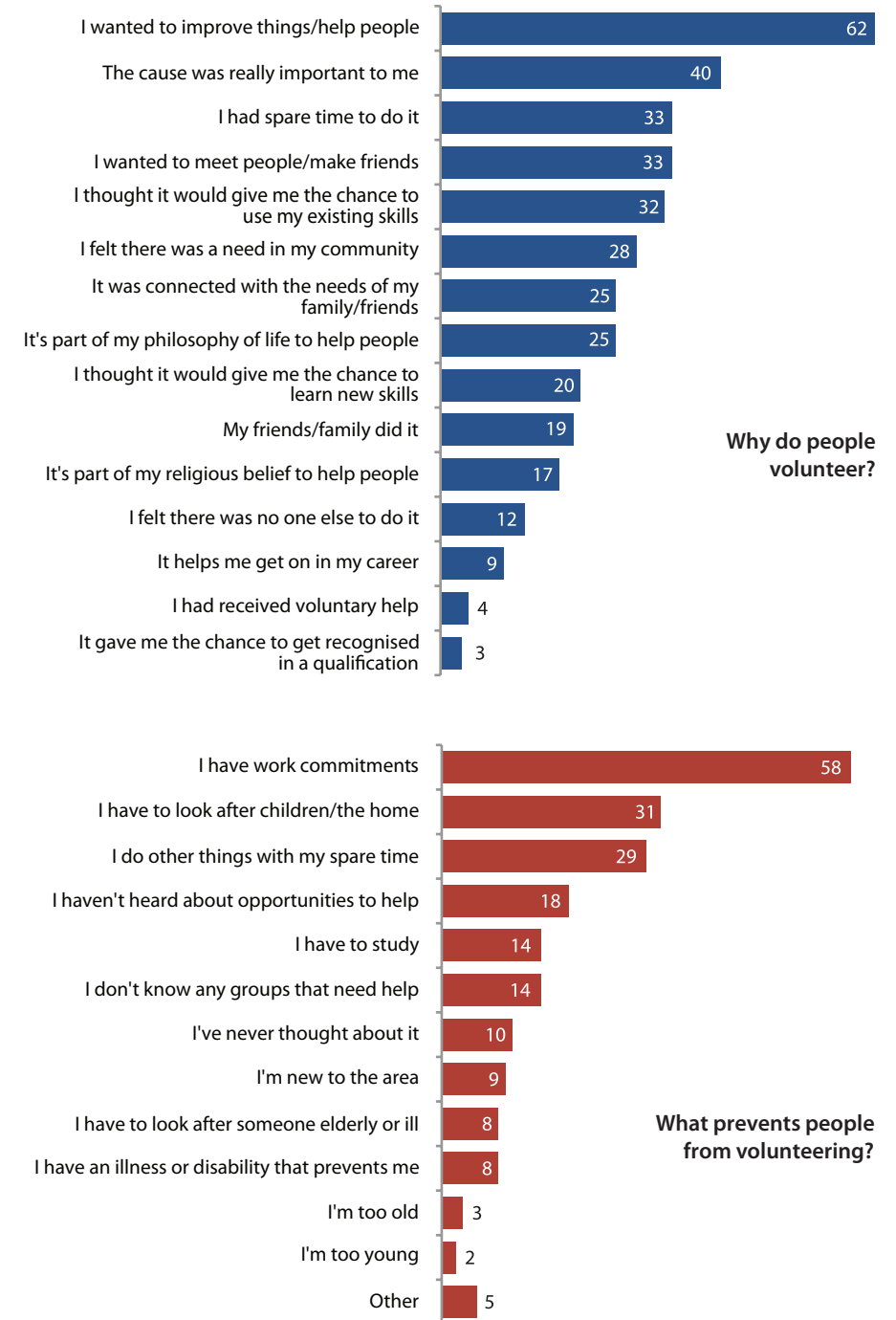
Fig. 5: A Feeling of Time Poverty



Source: The Futures Company's Henley Planning for Consumer Change survey - 2009 (2222), Base: all respondents in GB aged 15+, rebased to exclude Not Stated and DK

Figure 6 opposite shows the main reasons people have cited for volunteering, as well as the main barriers that prevent them from volunteering. This supports the previous points about multiple pressures on people's time, especially work and child care commitments, preventing people from getting more involved.

Fig. 6: Reasons for and Barriers to Volunteering



Source: Citizenship Survey 2008-09: Volunteering and Charitable Giving Topic

The economic downturn has made this pressure even greater: when people are worried about losing their jobs and earning a decent living for themselves and their families, other matters can easily become less significant, and income-generating activities become more important than offering free help or participating in political activities.

But the fact remains that if we want stronger and more resilient communities we must spend time within and as communities. Despite the various time pressures, there clearly is at least some willingness by people to get more involved. If the government wants a big society with an ever increasing number of active citizens, it is going to have to ensure that our society can be restructured into one which provides powerful incentives for people to reallocate their time and the opportunity to do so. We need to understand how we spend our time right now, and what it is that drives our current life choices. And we need to find and adopt the policies and practices that allow us to reinvest our time, our most precious resource, sensibly and responsibly.

3.2 Changing Nature of Society

As we have seen above, the various pressures on people's time present a significant challenge to getting more people involved in their communities. These pressures are all closely related to the changing nature of today's society, which is affecting not only the way people spend their time but also the way they view and interact with the communities they live in, their fellow citizens, and the wider world.

One notable change over the past 50 years is people's decreased dependence on and interaction with their neighbours, especially in large cities. The 'modern' ways of living, working, travelling, shopping and relaxing mean that the traditional opportunities and spaces for coming together (such as communal celebrations or neighbourhood markets) are more limited.^[30] An obvious example of this is the rise of large supermarket chains and the decline of neighbourhood shops.^[31] A study published in 2003^[32], which explored the relationship between neighbourhood design and social capital, found that people living in 'walkable' neighbourhoods (i.e. places where services and amenities such as local schools, corner shops, places of worship, community centres, playing fields etc, are within a walking distance to most residents) were more likely to know their neighbours, participate politically, trust others, and be socially engaged – in other words have higher levels of social capital – than those living in car-oriented suburbs. This clearly has important implications for how we design our cities and public services if we want to create real and accessible spaces and opportunities for participation – creating genuine space to engage.

RECOMMENDATION: Design participation and involvement into our communities: We need to design and redesign our neighbourhoods to provide space for the soft engagement and interaction and support communities to achieve this through the neighbourhood planning process

30. Hemming, H (2011). *Together: How Small Groups Achieve Big Things*. p. 177-78

31. This issue and the increasing concentration of assets and ownership in general, is explored in a recent ResPublica paper, 'The Right to Retail' available at <http://www.respublica.org.uk/articles/right-retail>

32. Leyden, K M (2003). Social Capital and the Built Environment: The Importance of Walkable Neighborhoods. *American Journal of Public Health* 93(9), 1546-1551. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1448008/

Case Example: Participation at the heart of Neighbourhood Planning

Merton Council's Neighbourhood Planning for the Lavender Fields area shows the value of long term engagement with residents and other stakeholders. Instead of a one-off event, the Council and its partners have involved local people since 2005 in not only planning for improvements to their neighbourhood, but in ensuring that they can maintain continuous discussions about what further changes need to be made. In addition to developing local services and facilities, great importance is placed on community space around the children centre, the community centre, and the local school, park and library as places where people can meet informally and share views about the future of Lavender Fields.

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/environment/regeneration/nrs/lavender-fields-np.htm>

Another, closely related point is the increased 'transience' of modern living, again especially in urban areas, whereby people move more than they used to. This means people are less likely to grow a sense of belonging and attachment to the places where they live which, in turn, may make it more difficult to build stable and engaged communities. The journalist Rod Liddle recently argued that, instead of recognising this challenge, some of the government's policies, such as limiting the length of social tenancies or emphasising a mobile and flexible workforce, are undermining people's ability to feel secure wherever they live and thereby also their ability to 'put down roots' and feel a part of the community – which are essential for them becoming more involved.^[33]

RECOMMENDATION: Government and housing providers should monitor the impact of changes to social tenancies on social capital within communities, and consider how new provisions can be implemented in ways that avoid contributing to transience and help build settled neighbourhoods.

Finally, the growing pressures on families to generate two incomes in order to meet the costs of living, including significantly higher housing costs, has reduced the extent to which people have the time in their neighbourhoods to get involved in their locality, alongside meeting domestic and social demands on their time. We address this further in Chapter 6.

RECOMMENDATION: Rethink CSR with a focus on participation: Businesses should should reconsider their approach to CSR with a focus on encouraging and enabling civic participation by their workforces.

33. See www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/housing-management/removing-secure-tenancies-undermines-big-society/6514004.article

However, changes in society have also created new opportunities for participation, most notably online. In many areas we are also witnessing a backlash against some of the trends mentioned above, expressed by, for instance, a re-emerging emphasis on locally produced food and products, member-run businesses and cooperatives, land and car sharing schemes, neighbourhood street parties etc^[34]; in addition to the more long-standing roles of various local community groups, projects, charities, clubs and associations. Henry Hemming's recent book, *Together*^[35], highlights many of these old and new forms of doing things together, identifying a possible revival of small groups in Britain and the difference they can make.

We should therefore be careful about making alarmist assumptions about Britain's overly individualistic, detached or 'broken' communities. However we should also be wary of assuming that we can build stronger and more engaged communities by exhortation alone. The skills, capacity and confidence of individuals and communities also needs to be addressed.

3.3 Skills, Capacity and Confidence

A big part of why people do not or do not want to get involved has to do with their perception of what involvement means and what is expected of them if they decide to get involved. For instance, recent qualitative research by The Futures Company and the Pathways through Participation project showed that some people may be worried about the level of commitment expected of them, and may feel that if they cannot commit fully than it is better to "not sign up at all".^[36]

Lack of confidence is also an important barrier, especially in terms of not knowing where to start and how to get involved; perceived lack of the knowledge or skills needed for participation; or fear of responsibility and repercussions. People may also worry that they will not be welcomed by those already involved or that there are no other people like them taking part.^[37] Often the spaces of participation can also act as a barrier, especially if they are felt to be too formal, making participants feel uncomfortable and intimidated.^[38] According to the RSA:

"Unless managed carefully, the drive to strengthen civic society has the potential to deepen the inequalities that already hamper participation. [...] Time-poor, under-confident, vulnerable or excluded groups will find it hard to make their voices heard in a big society that relies too heavily on people being 'self-starters'. It is therefore crucial to ensure new forms of participation involve, attract and build the capacity of marginalised groups."^[39]

Indeed it is important to recognise that all these barriers affect different people to a different degree. Not everyone has access to the same opportunities to participate: some people and communities are faced with more barriers than others, such as lack of time, money and transport, and people will face different barriers at different points in their lives.

34. See, for instance: www.landshare.net/; www.thepeoplesupermarket.org/

35. Hemming, H (2011). *Together: How Small Groups Achieve Big Things* (John Murray)

36. IIPS (2010); NCVO, Involve & Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) (2009). Pathways through participation: Strengthening participation: learning from participants. <http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Strengthening-participation-final.pdf>

37. IIPS (2010); NCVO, Involve & IVR (2009)

38. Norris, E and McLean, S (2011). The Civic Commons: A model for action. London: RSA. http://www.thersa.org/___data/assets/pdf_file/0003/385518/RSA-Civic-Commons-Final.pdf

39. Norris & McLean (2011)

In terms of structures, the RSA's Civic Commons projects notes that current models of encouraging citizen participation in civic life are too top-down, that the topics and structures of participation activities are designed centrally, with citizen input limited to voicing opinion. We agree with this, and seek to develop the idea further in Chapter 4.

3.4 Social Values and Incentives

3.4.1 Motivations for Involvement

Research shows that the reasons people are motivated to participate are varied and personal, ranging from wanting to meet new people and socialise, or enjoying the activity; to improving something or the satisfaction of 'giving something back; to having control over things'.^[40] Others have argued that it's the emotional reward of getting involved was the biggest incentive (for 67%, 'Just feeling personally that I am making a difference' was most likely to motivate them), rather than benefits such as certifications, public recognition or time credits.^[41]

The Pathways through Participation research project, which analyses the motivations, barriers and processes of participation from the individual's perspective, identifies many other practical and psychological factors that play a role in motivating people to get involved; such as feelings of injustice and anger; or simply being asked or persuaded to get involved by friends/family/colleagues.^[42]

As useful as these insights are, there is a tendency to get into an argument of what is the best form of incentive, cash or social change for example. We think that a more useful approach is to work backwards from an understanding of the values and the circumstances of the people we are trying to involve, and build incentives from there.

3.4.2 Social Values

Despite the long history of the national values survey^[43] and the work of cultural theorists such as Professor Robert Kegan^[44], social values have remained on the peripheries of civic involvement discourses. Now, however, a convergence of community analysis, market research and new age business thinking is offering up various ways to segment our society according to its values sets. We covered some of these segmentations in Section 2.2.

This is important, as only through an understanding of core values can we be sure that we have the right incentives in place. If we agree that we want to expand the civic core from 30% to 60%, we are going to have to widen the involvement offer to appeal to more people. Therefore we need not only multiple channels of engagement, but we also need to understand the different incentives different people respond to when choosing to spend their time getting involved.

40. IIPS (2010)

41. Brand Democracy (2011)

42. NCVO, Involve & IVR (2009)

43. See www.cultdyn.co.uk/bvs.html

44. See www.gse.harvard.edu/faculty_research/profiles/profile.shtml?vperson_id=318

For too long the civic involvement offer, whether to RSPB volunteers counting birds, Envision students improving their schools, or people attending neighbourhood forums, has largely been 'the chance to improve' something external: community, service or natural environment. As we shall see this kind of offer is problematic as it only tends to appeal to 20% of the population (the 'egalitarian'), especially as involvement campaigns (often run by sophisticated modern communications experts) tend to focus less on duty, thereby excluding 35% of the population (the 'conformist'). This is a simplification and does not do justice to the sophisticated communications systems of many in the voluntary sector; nevertheless the truth is that many civic involvement offers tend to appeal to altruistic sentiment, which necessarily limits its appeal.

If we genuinely want to increase civic involvement we are going to have to appeal to more people across society. This is going to require a much broader range of approaches to engagement than are currently commonplace.

RECOMMENDATION: Design participation that works for the whole community. Those leading civic involvement activities (as individuals, community members or the public and private sector) need to give much greater attention to the values and motivations of those outside the civic core.

RECOMMENDATION: Support engagement beyond the civic core: Local and national government need to invest in supporting methods of participation which are proven to build confidence and explicitly support self-starting in groups outside the civic core (such as the Envision programme, which aims to build involvement amongst young people).

There are various ways to segment society according to their values as we have already seen Section 2.2. Here we focus on an approach developed from the work of Beck and Cowan^[45]. It is an attempt to categorise British society into broad values categories, values which fundamentally affect how we will or will not get involved.

Values are important as they affect how we see and act in the world. They determine what we see as important and the choices we make – whether it is shopping or addressing climate change. Critically, they are changing. Here we list the different value sets in terms of their age, i.e. the oldest first, and we indicate whether they are increasing or decreasing in size and influence.

It is important to emphasise that any exercise in segmentation is always a gross simplification. People have criticised these models as offering a 'pseudo-science', and because of the lack of current data to back them up, such a criticism has merits. We therefore present this very much not as in any way scientific but as a lens with to consider how to better understand people. We have used this model as we think it is most useful in understanding how to configure new incentives structures (Section 3.4.4); however there are many others and we recommend employing one that works best in each particular context.

45. Beck, D and Cowan, C (1996). *Spiral Dynamics: mastering values, leadership, and change*. Blackwell: London.

We have estimated the percentages based on available global data and other UK values data. They are our best estimate, but should not be seen as definitive. We also recognise that there may be some gaps in the data sets used in this approach, however it is very similar to other models with comprehensive data (such as the British Values Survey^[46] and the World Values Survey^[47]), and we feel that its practical utility is higher than many of the other models. Since we are dealing with generalisations, we propose that a slightly larger generalisation to use this model is a helpful one, although not the only one.

It is also worth emphasising here that each individual is naturally unique and holds multiple values, to varying degrees, and acts according to different values in different circumstances. Values modelling, such as used here, is useful however when we move from the individual level to looking at 'groups' within society, and we believe this understanding remains critical to getting more people involved.

Tribal

Motivated by immediate gratification and the pursuit of power over others, often in order to protect oneself. This is normally driven by a perception of a dangerous world, one which needs to be controlled or it will control you.

Approximate Size: 10%; **Growth:** decreasing

Examples:

- The mafia
- Certain aspects of the trade union movement
- Extremist political and religious orders and organisations
- Street gangs
- Football hooliganism

Conformist

('there is duty and a right & wrong')

Often found in established patriarchal systems; the foundation of nationalism and belonging; created the agricultural revolution; common in religious orders and the foundation of the traditional representative democratic infrastructure.

Size: 25% of the population; **Growth:** decreasing

Examples:

- Public sector (more junior staff)
- Local government (more junior staff)
- Accounts departments
- Mason and associated groups
- Many traditional membership organisations
- Many traditional clubs & associations
- Many local councillors and some MPs

46. See www.cultdyn.co.uk/bvs.html

47. See www.worldvaluessurvey.org/

Individualist

('the best at playing the game win')

This is the foundation of the current capitalist mindset and commercial world, sparked from the scientific enlightenment challenging conformist thinking (manifest in the church), often called 'modern'. Current manifestations include: celebrity culture, fashion, entertainment, 'strive-drive' (work hard, play hard), meritocracies, personal brand / individuation, 'get ahead' culture, American Dream.

Size: 35% of the population; **Growth:** stable

Examples:

- Corporate world
- Middle management in public sector / local government
- Media world
- PR & marketing
- Some social enterprises
- Many MPs

Egalitarian

('everyone's views are equal')

Started in the 1960's and has been growing ever since, this is the dominant values set in many protest, anti-war, civil rights and environmental movements. Within academic circles the relativist and 'post-modern' agendas are a product of this values set. It has driven the increase in NGO numbers, the civic involvement agenda, consensus decision-making, and the importance of community. Many of the principles are at the heart of the internet, particularly web 2.0 and co-production of data and services, most famously resulting in Wikipedia. This sector is incredibly important for us to understand here as this values set tends to dominate many of the key actors in civic involvement, from the voluntary sector to the people who get involved now. It is this group which represents the civic core already involved (see Chapter 2).

Size: 25% of the population; **Growth:** increasing

Examples:

- Charities
- Some social enterprises
- Some senior management in public sector
- Some MPs

Integrative

('Reflective, Flexible, Mix and Match')

The key characteristic of this values type is it does not stick to one dominant values set. Instead it is pragmatic and adapts according to the situation. Many organisational leaders across all sectors have this values set. It began to grow in the 1980's but remains very small. It involves an understanding of relative belief systems and that (unlike the others) none of them are 'wrong', but each is appropriate in different contexts. It leads to highly complex thinking about social systems and social engineering. It also can explain frustration and discord between leaderships and their organisations.

Size: 5% of the population; **Growth:** increasing

Examples:

- Leaders in many fields
- Some social enterprises (usually most innovative)

3.4.3 What This Means for Civic Involvement

These values sets help us to better understand many of the characteristics we are now seeing in wider society, in particular:

The decline of traditional democratic systems: with the decline in conformist thinking, people feel less duty and therefore vote less. Because of the increase of individuation and personal branding, fewer people feel that mainstream political parties accurately represent them. Therefore party membership dwindles while we also see an increase in independent candidates.

Growth in individualised brands: people associate their identities less and less with outside institutions, whether that is countries, political parties, membership organisations or others. Instead, people create their own brands around their own mix of single issues, campaigns, social network profiling and fame culture.

Individualists, not getting involved: because of the dwindling legitimacy of traditional politics and the increase in the egalitarian values set, consultation and participation have become increasingly important. The values analysis tells us however, that while decision-makers may be passionate and concerned to involve people, those who are conformist may feel a duty to respond, but those at the 'individualist' level - the largest segment of our community - are unlikely to unless their 'buttons' are accurately pressed.

Community building / disintegration: this is an interesting phenomenon. The conformist values set kept communities together partly through a strong sense of duty to our neighbours. With its decline, and the increase in individualisation, people define their communities very differently – often enabled by the internet; and communities of interest spring up remotely while geographic communities dwindle in strength. On the flip side, however, the egalitarian set values community a great deal as a means to tackle many of the social and environmental issues it cares about. We see this in the NGO movement which may increase in strength overtime. The egalitarian population is also growing which will give rise to an increased push for participation and inclusion, as well as an increased frustration that the rest of society does not immediately get involved as they do. We will see these developments continue to evolve.

We will need to see increasingly imaginative methods for re-invigorating the current involvement systems; based on an understanding of different value systems and the importance of pressing the right buttons. Examples of this include bringing together quantitative approaches such as online referenda and surveys (products of the individualist approach) with qualitative techniques, such as community workshops (products of egalitarian approach). The doctrine of social innovation is in many senses a classic integrative approach, and this will continue to re-invent the system as a whole. An important caveat on this is how other value groups will experience social innovation.

For individualists and principally conformists, the level of risk and uncertainty required may be uncomfortable. And if these groups are the main target of the big society agenda, it may need strong leadership from egalitarian and integrative leaders.

A frequent criticism of the big society is that not enough people understand exactly what the government means by the big society. There are probably many contributing factors, including the often polarised and small media sound-bites through which most of us experience life. Whether we think there should be more detail or not, an important recognition is that different value groups are more and less comfortable with uncertainty. While integratives and egalitarians may be comfortable with a high-level vision and flexibility in implementation, individualists and principally conformists will be uncomfortable with anything which is not clearly stipulated. This is an important recognition in designing communication strategies to support its development and implementation.

3.4.4 Incentivising Involvement

So how we might practically incentivise different values groups, so that we can expand the civic core? A detailed analysis of the different values sets, and principle approaches to encouraging first steps towards involvement is set out in the table below.

Table 1: Values Types, Motivations & Engagement Options^[48]

Values Type	Motivation	Perspective on Involvement	Engagement Options
Tribal (10%)	- What they can get now, in terms of immediate rewards: cash, pleasure - One of most powerful motivating emotions for this group is shame - Immediate gratification for their efforts	"If I'm not going to get something out of it immediately, I'm not interested" "There's nothing I can do to help anything, why bother"	- Rules and regulations can be effective, where possible in supporting engagement - Cash and other rewards - Make sure their involvement leads to immediate rewards / feedback of some kind - Opportunities for self-advancement in terms of volunteering
Conformist (25%)	- Rules and regulations - They are often motivated by the 'stick' i.e. the rules we all need to conform to in society - They will be motivated by appealing to their role in upholding the system	- Some, particularly older audiences, will see it as duty to be involved, and probably already will be - If not involved, more difficult to get them involved "Everyone who can be, is already involved"	- Link the agenda to some very 'British' or traditional (ritual wise also) and 'not new' - To motivate – focus on the need for people to get more involved to 'preserve our way of life' - Using war-time like communications around 'your country needs you'

(Conformist cont.)	- Duty is a powerful motivated - As is guilt - Motivated by fear and concern - Link to traditions - Sense of belonging – connected with established groups and networks	'Broken Britain' as a communication will appeal to them as they believe things were always better in the past - Will be sceptical of 'new initiatives' - Uncomfortable with the lack of detail in the central vision, as used to central dictate - Uncomfortable with the invitation to risk	- Making it a social norm – effective here if it can create a sense of duty - Link to existing (or new) institutions and orders to create sense of belonging with others - As clear direction as possible in terms of exactly what this means and how they precisely should get involved – ideally as locally directed as possible (e.g. Local Gov. leadership clear direction)
Individualist (35%)	- Will innovate within rules and structures - Personal recognition and celebration – how they personally made things better - Things getting incrementally better (evolution not revolution) - Personal aggrandisement and image - Success and achievement - Consumerism - Individualisation of brand identity - Looking good in front of others - Fun	"I pay my taxes, why should I get more involved" "We do need to be more efficient in how we do things. Public sector too wasteful" "I have very little extra time to give, my life is so full"	- Motivate using the possibility of incremental improvements and efficiency - Making it a social norm – effective here if it can create a need to 'keep up with the Jones's' - Create micro-opportunities to begin involvement ('Pathways to Participation') - Make activities 'fun'
Egalitarian (25%)	- Prefer very flexible structures - Motivated by bigger scale visions and initiatives - Revolution instead of evolution - Inspired by diversity - Equality is very important - Creativity and artistry - Believes in bottom up - Making a difference to other people - Rights more than responsibilities	- Agree it would be great to get more people involved - Very concerned in inequality of eventual provision (postcode lottery) - Suspicious of top-down initiatives with central mandate	- Invite them to co-create the vision - Make space for a bottom up perspective ('may a thousand flowers bloom') - Inspire with the national vision of making a difference to others (particularly vulnerable) - Ensure the vulnerable are included and protected

48. Developed from Beck, D and Cowan, C (1996). *Spiral Dynamics: mastering values, leadership, and change*. Blackwell: London.

Integrative (5%)	- Both rights and responsibilities important, depending on the situation - Inspired by systems thinking and pattern recognition - Personal development and exploration - Social and the environment (has biggest scope of concern) - Transparency and honest in communication – admitting mistakes and vulnerabilities and foundation of relationship - Personal leadership – leading by example	- Would see the current climate as an opportunity for innovation - Appreciates the aspirational vision but would have concern about the potentially ungrounded / unrealistic nature of cultural change	- Invite them to engage as leaders in creating processes and flows for this agenda - Be honest about the difficulties and state of uncertainty – invite participation
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As the table illustrates, the picture is not a simple one. If we consider the IIPS Community Groups in figure 4 and table 1, we can start to get an idea of the incentives and processes required to get to 60% by focussing on the 'Interested & Online', and 'Kids & Me' groupings. Table 2 outlines the dominant value types of different community groups. Since 'The Passionates' and 'Highly Engaged' are already engaged, and 'The Bystanders' will be very hard to engage it is becoming clear that we will need to employ a wider of approaches which appeal to the individualists as they are the dominant value sets amongst at the next tier who we have the best chance of engaging.

Table 2: Community groups & dominant value types

Community Groups	Dominant Values Types
The Passionates (5%)	Egalitarian
Highly Engaged (21%)	Egalitarian
Interested & Online (7%)	Individualist
Kids & Me (27%)	Conformist, Egalitarian & Individualist
The Socialisers (23%)	Individualist
The Bystanders (18%)	Conformist & Tribal

But prioritising incentives that appeal to people with more individualistic values is not just about rewards and prizes. Indeed, some research^[49] suggests that for some people payment will reduce their motivation to get involved. This is undoubtedly true for many in the UK's voluntary sector, who are firmly in the egalitarian values set. This was demonstrated in practice when Bexley council offered a £50 prize incentive to members of the voluntary sector to get involved in engagement processes. Despite gaining decent involvement rates none of the eligible members of the voluntary sector participants sought to claim the prize, as cash was not a motivator for them.

However, individualists may well only become initially involved through appeals to drivers not linked to the core participative purpose - for example to have fun, or get to know neighbours, or through links between attendance at participative events and access to discounts or memberships. For example, the broad cross-section of the community falling into the Kids & Me category may primarily become involved in activities as a result of access to mutual support, with - initially - participation and involvement being only a limited driver for getting engaged.

3.5 Sustaining and First Step Involvement

Often the incentives needed to get people involved for the first time and those needed to sustain involvement are different. The actual process of getting involved changes people, for example before a meeting many of us find the idea of meeting new people daunting, whereas after that initial meeting they may actively look forward to reconnecting with those same people.

But it is not as simple as seeing initial involvement as a particularly difficult 'hump' after which it is all downhill. Sustaining involvement can be just as, and sometimes more challenging. The point is more that once we have been involved in a specific process the reasons to stay involved are different from those to start getting involved.

The Pathways to Participation projects found that issues that may stop people being involved include feeling their participation is not having any impact, that no one is listening to their opinion, that they are not enjoying the participation experience itself, that it is not relevant for them, and the list goes on.^[50]

A better understanding is therefore needed of how people's participation changes over time, affected by different life situations, opportunities and barriers; and how social relationships and networks shape participation; as the basis of developing a 'people-focused' approach to encouraging and sustaining participation. Chapter 4 starts to explore approaches to ensuring this can be achieved; Chapter 6 sets out how third generation involvement techniques can start to transcend barriers to broadening and then sustaining involvement.

3.6 Motivating the Reluctant Involver

Four successive Prime Ministers stretching over 20 years have been arguing for greater public involvement. And today few argue with the aspirations of increased involvement that lie at the heart of the big society.

49. Heyman, J and Ariely, D (2004). Effort for Payment: A Tale of Two Markets. *Psychological Science* 15(11), 787-793. Available at: www.jstor.org/pss/40064046

50. NCVO, Involve & IVR (2009)

What is more contentious however are the mechanisms for encouraging this greater involvement. The New Labour approach could be caricatured as prioritising investment (e.g. supporting infrastructure voluntary organisations) and regulation (e.g. the Duty to Involve); while the Coalition is favouring high level rhetoric (e.g. the Big Society) combined with removing barriers (e.g. DCLG barrier busting team).

Regulation and barrier removal while important are insufficient for achieving the targets outlined in this publication which we believe are necessary for the big society to deliver. This is because when faced with the practicality of trying to involve people, individuals and organisations are usually confronted with the messy reality of involvement. Some feel that by getting people involved they will end up giving something up (influence or money), while others find the uncertainty of involvement incompatible with a target culture or their project management training.

Implicit in this paper, and the entire big society debate, is an assumption that more involvement is a 'good' thing. While there are few who would argue with this, as we have seen, it is another step for individuals within organisations to devote the necessary time and energy to directly pursuing this agenda. An important recognition is that the values and motivations described above do not just apply to those being involved, they also apply to those doing the involving. Within organisations, only the egalitarians and integratives will actually value involvement enough to align their own personal values towards pursuing it as a good in its own right. For individualists a 'business case' will need to be made, and for conformists this will almost definitely need to be made through regulation. This provides a useful challenge to the assumption that simply removing barriers will be enough to ensure government, both local and national, is able to get people involved.

It takes may therefore take significantly more motivation for a local government officer, or VCS co-ordinator, to pro-actively seek the involvement of others, compared with business as usual. Involving others is complex and can be difficult, but of course can also come with significant opportunities and rewards. The point being that for people to embrace involvement, they themselves need to be sufficiently motivated to believe that the first step it is worth the effort. This is something that often only comes from experience, and is very hard to pick up any other way.

This does not mean that we should not attempt to win the hearts of key involvement influencers, indeed we should double our efforts, but we should also prepare people for the involvement challenge and make it feel both easy and important. The limitations of current approaches and techniques are explored in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

Research and experience shows that the lack of time, both real and perceived, is a major barrier preventing people from getting more involved. If we want more people to get involved, we need to better understand how they currently spend their time and what drives their life choices.

Increased pressures on people's time are closely related to the broader changes in society, such as urbanisation and increasing individualisation, and have led to the decline of many 'traditional' relationships, community ties and people's sense of belonging to the places where they live. Challenges around lifestyles and environment need to be overcome.

As well as time, place and relationships, people's personal perceptions and experiences can have a large impact on whether and how they get involved. Lack of confidence, knowledge and skills can act as significant barriers to involvement, and can further widen the 'participation gap' by excluding already underrepresented or vulnerable groups. This is one of the major challenges to the big society concept which relies heavily on people being 'self starters'. We should consider carefully what support is needed to ensure the new opportunities to get involved are accessible to everyone.

Finally, we need to take account of what motivates people to get involved. A lot of research has been done to this already, but it is necessary to have a deeper understanding of the values that underlie and shape these motivations, and therefore the different incentives that work for different types of people, in order to get significantly greater numbers involved in civic life.

Part Four: Limited Techniques

Summary: Whilst it is important to look at the specific techniques of involvement, what we really need is a more fundamental change in our civic culture. We must firstly understand the limits of the current dominance of top-down, consultative approaches to involvement (4.1), and move towards approaches that both harness and create civic energy, and support social action (4.2 & 4.5). We should also understand the skills needed to facilitate such engagement, how online tools could be more effectively deployed, and how VCS organisations could be supported to play a more active role in civic involvement (4.3), while at the same time acknowledging the challenges posed by the various demands on people's time and attention (4.4).

Over the last 15 years the UK has witnessed an exceptional period of investment, experimentation and innovation in our involvement apparatus. From the New Deal for Communities (NDC) in the nineties, to the Department of Health funded Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH) launched in 2003, and the Channel 4 funded Talk About Local hyperlocal website project, there have been numerous significant interventions to increase civic involvement in Britain. Each of these initiatives alone has increased levels of involvement^[51]; and yet as a whole between 2001 and 2010, civic involvement has either slightly declined or remained stable.^[52]

In this Chapter we do not analyse the specific involvement techniques themselves, partly because this has been done well elsewhere^[53], but more because we do not believe this is a 'technical' issue as such. Instead, we would suggest that it is our civic culture that is the problem and that an emphasis on techniques, although critical, is only useful if those techniques foster the emergence of a new culture. It is civic culture change which must be our overall goal.

4.1 Lighting Fires Not Ticking Boxes

The poet William Yeats famously said that *"Education is Not the Filling of a Pail, but the Lighting of a Fire"*. The same could be said of civic involvement.

Too often civic involvement activities are done to fulfil a legal or best practice requirement as opposed to helping and inspiring people to improve their situation. Rhion Jones, director of the Consultation Institute, thinks that *"Consultation is very fault intolerant. Even small mistakes can have a disproportionate effect on the credibility of the exercise – and I estimate that 80% of all consultations have something significantly wrong with them."* He goes on to explain that:

51. According to the evaluation of New Deal for Communities, levels of involvement increased "across all NDC areas throughout the lifetime of the Programme, from 16 per cent of those who had heard of their local NDC in 2002, to 22 per cent by 2006". See www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1488479.pdf

52. NCV0 (2011)

53. See Involve (2005). People & Participation: How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making. www.involve.org.uk/assets/Uploads/People-and-Participation.pdf; Gibson, A, Courtney, N, Sample-Ward, A, Wilcox, D and Holtham, C (2009). *Social by Social: A practical guide to using new technologies to deliver social impact*. www.socialbysocial.com/sites/www.socialbysocial.com/files/social_by_social_pdf_download_creative_commons.pdf; Gibson, A (2010). *Local by Social: How local authorities can use social media to achieve more for less*. www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/17801438

"If you approach a consultation as a tick-box exercise you will frequently find that there was another box that should have been ticked, and no-one spotted it. It is far better to start from the opposite end by identifying those people or groups who are likely to be most affected by proposals, and try to understand what would engage them in a proper dialogue. If this is done well, engagement is more likely to be spontaneous and genuine – far better than a reluctant, sceptical response to anxious officials trying to tick the box marked 'participation'"

It is not simply that consultations are not following best practice that is a problem, however - it is that too much civic involvement is consultation and nothing more. As far back as 1969, Sherry Arnstein, in her famous Ladder of Participation, described consultation as 'tokenism' and said that "citizens may indeed hear and be heard. But under these conditions they lack the power to ensure that their views will be heeded by the powerful."^[54]

After 40 years, consultation remains tokenistic and too much civic involvement is consultation. Although there have been some notable exceptions such as some aspects of the New Deal for Communities, participative tools such as Planning for Real, and Participatory Budgeting, the vast majority of civic involvement activities undertaken by the public sector have been consultative. We have some anecdotal evidence^[55] that before the recent local government cuts, over 80% of their civic involvement budgets were going to consultative activities. This includes citizens' panels, focus groups, citizen summits, residents' surveys, and the list goes on. The vast majority of the citizen involvement apparatus built in recent times has involved essentially listening tools for government and other power holders. There is nothing wrong with this in and of itself. Indeed it is a very good thing that government has been listening, but when one scrutinises whether this listening has influenced decisions, the picture becomes less clear.^[56]

The Involve 2007 Engage for Change report, which interviewed senior decision-makers working on climate change (an area which has seen a very large amount of consultation), found that most consultations were either consciously dismissed as having too small a sample to be representative; or when representative processes were run, the very fact participants had been through 'special and unique' consultation processes made them by definition unrepresentative and therefore not worth taking on board.

Similar problems have been identified locally - the following quotation from a local consultation officer is typical: *"Either you get too few responses to take a consultation seriously, or very occasionally you get such a huge response that we often don't have the resources to read them all"*.^[57]

Polls and surveys, especially those quoted in the press, in contrast tend to have a disproportionately large impact upon politicians locally and nationally, precisely because they seek to identify 'pure' representative public opinion - often regardless of the probity, or the funders of the research. A poll has a unique ability to grab a politician's attention. This is in part due to the persistent error of assuming that people's unreflected views are more representative of what they really want, as opposed to the findings of deliberative exercises which point to what people would want had they the proper opportunity to reflect on different options and their implications.

54. Arnstein, S R (1969). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216-224.

55. Izwe (2010). *Mapping Engagement: NHS Telford and Wrekin; Torfaen; Tower Hamlets Partnership*. Internal research reports.

56. Creasy S, Gavelin, K, Fisher, H, Holmes L and Desai, M (2007). *Engage For Change: The Role of Public Engagement in Climate Change Policy*. www.involve.org.uk/engage_for_change/

57. Quotation given to us in confidence.

Whether polls have an impact or citizen summits do not, the point is that they are both essentially listening exercises which do not change the balance of power, and have little positive impact on organisational culture. The fact that over 70% of the public funds for civic involvement in recent times have been allocated to these types of one-way listening exercises goes some way to explaining why, despite the exceptional activity and investment, involvement rates have not increased. Citizens tend to be framed as subjects to be listened to, and whose opinions will be 'taken into account'. It is no surprise that citizens still feel disempowered because there has been no change in the power dynamics.

Case Example: Citizen Summits Vs 21st Century Town Hall Meetings

On 29 October 2005 Britain held its first 'Citizens Summit' style event as the centre piece of the Your Health Your Care Your Say national public debate process. 986 randomly selected people from around the country took part, which involved discussing health care policy and voting on proposals for action. And it was considered by many a great success. The event was organised principally by Opinion Leader Research, who worked closely with America Speaks, who had developed the process in America, where the approach is known as a 21st Century Town Hall Meetings. It has been famously been used to involve the citizens in deciding how to redevelop Ground Zero after 9/11 and develop a plan for New Orleans after hurricane Katrina.

Your Health Your Care Your Say marked the start of a series of Citizen Summit-style events across the UK, often exclusively run by large social research companies. What is interesting is how Citizen Summits and the American equivalent 21st Century Town Hall Meetings compare, when essentially the same process is placed in different management and cultural contexts. Citizens Summits in the UK were almost always funded by the government, and consequently they very often had a clear route into policy and had a sense of official 'clout', that was sometimes lacking in the States. In contrast 21st Century Town Hall Meetings were almost always funded by trusts and compensated for their lack of official clout by supporting all participants to campaign for the proposals they supported after the event. In essence what happened is that Citizen Summits in the UK became excellent and effective focus groups supporting a genuine conversation between government and citizens. And 21st Century Town Hall Meetings were media and campaign events which created citizen campaigners. It is not clear which model had greater impact. It is however clear that funding and culture matter, fundamentally affecting the nature of involvement. Ideally we would seek to get both the official influence and the citizen empowerment. But this needs specifying particularly by government funders who would need to be clear they want to support this kind of direct citizen empowerment.

Civic involvement as currently configured simply fills the intelligence and information 'pail'. Some have gone further in suggesting that this culture of consultation channels valuable civic energy down consultative 'cul-de-sacs', away from real power politics.^[58] Alison Seabrooke, CEO of the Community Development Foundation, argues that *"in times when getting people involved can be difficult, we need to be dramatically enhancing the quality of the involvement experience and the ability to reach all sections of our communities. Consultations very rarely do this and with a plethora of rights, responsibilities and referenda on the horizon, the potential to overlook marginalized individuals and groups is likely to grow"*.^[59]

We are not suggesting here that there has been a widespread conscious attempt by government to use consultation processes to manipulate public opinion or manufacture consent, although on occasion some have argued this.^[60] Even if consultations work with the upmost probity, they still remain simple listening exercises with a cosmetic impression of influence, and will do little to improve our culture of civic involvement or get more people involved. In such resource-constrained times we would recommend that government explicitly seeks to move away from a culture of consultation to one of social action and third generation engagement. We will outline these in Chapter 6.

RECOMMENDATION: Stop pointless consultation and prioritise social action:

The real limitations of consultation as a core component of civic involvement should be recognised, and consultation should only be carried out if it can be done to excellent standards. Social action approaches, where participants have actual control over the issues they are addressing, should be prioritised over consultative activities. When consultative activities have to be undertaken, they should follow the principles of 'third generation engagement' outlined in Chapter 6.

4.2 Too Top Down: Understanding Your Audience

Underpinning and causing the consultation culture outlined above is the fact that civic involvement as currently configured is too top-down. It is driven by professionals and institutional communications teams and is often deeply disconnected from people's aspirations and passions.

In 2002, the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH) was established by act of Parliament. Through nine regional offices across England, the commission supported the existence of a patient forum for every primary care and NHS trust in England. The goal of the commission was "to establish a new system of patient and public involvement in health for England involving traditionally hard to reach groups". This was a significant and very expensive exercise in public involvement, which to all intents and purposes failed. It was officially abolished in 2008. The CPPIH experience has many lessons for us today for building a better civic involvement infrastructure, but at the heart of its failure was that it poorly understood both the communities it was set up to serve and, perhaps more critically, how to serve them.

58. See www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/jun/06/gm-crops-biotech-lobbyists-fsa;

59. Email correspondence, March 2011

60. See www.greenpeace.org.uk/climate/greenpeace-formal-complaint-to-mrsc-over-nuclear-power-consultation; www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/sep/20/highereducation.nuclear

It would be quite wrong to say that all patient forums were dysfunctional, but many were. David Gilbert, formerly a director of the National Centre for Public Involvement in Health and now Director of InHealth Associates, reflects that *"Local PPI (patient and public involvement) fora - and perhaps all statutory mechanisms for public voice in health before then and since - have suffered from lack of local clarity about their role and often an inability to connect with communities. So much also depends on relationship building and trust. I've come to realise that learning and support - in the jargon 'building capacity' - is more important than any structural changes and reforms"*.^[61]

Many of the big emotive issues that people wanted to discuss such as the 'post code lottery' availability of services or the MMR vaccine were simply off the agenda. Instead, the discussions often focused on detailed elements of service provision, which were of very limited interest, especially for traditionally hard-to-reach groups. The Department of Health also faced criticism for failing to give CPPIH a sufficiently clear role; a problem that has undermined many attempts at health involvement in recent years.

This dislocation from the audience is commonplace across the public sector. Through the izwe local authority community empowerment programme, engagement audits were undertaken for many of the communities the programme worked with. Frequently it was found that whichever way the councillors and officers thought they should involve people, the community thought very differently. In a number of communities there were stark differences in views on how to engage the disengaged. Very often, for example, officers assumed that an event-based approach would be the best first step to engage people, whereas using Facebook, email or telephone were almost always preferred to an event by the people. The point is not that events are bad, but that we need to stop assuming we understand how and why our communities want to get involved, and instead ask them.

Although in many senses this is just a simple case of knowing your audience, your community, better, it has some far-reaching consequences for how civic involvement is currently delivered.

As we will detail in Chapter 6, knowing your audience is not likely to mean carrying out more frequent or more in-depth surveys (although these can help), but having a more conversational style of interaction between people and organisations in a community. This will mean a clear step towards continuous forms of interaction and engagement, and a clear break from the set-piece communications campaign. And herein lays the challenge: the centralised model of communications control.

Too often civic involvement is strategically shaped by established communications teams either within the VCS or public bodies, and the guiding principles of these teams, such as campaign management, brand protection and reputational risk management, sit uneasily with a more continuous conversational approach. Despite the rise of social media such as Twitter and Facebook, which demand a more continuous approach to engagement, and the undoubted success of projects such as LocalbySocial^[62] and the Local Government Group's communities of practice^[63], too often good bottom-up civic involvement is blocked by centralised communications teams, who fear that a citizen-led approach will mean them losing control of the agenda.

61. Email correspondence, March 2011

62. See www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/17801438

63. See www.communities.idea.gov.uk/

There is some truth to this, as bottom-up (as detailed in Section 6.2) by definition means that control of the process is shared, but with this sharing of control can come a shared responsibility for the process and its impacts as a whole. Bottom-up approaches also mean that going with the grain of civic energy and getting people involved is, almost by definition, much easier. In the fast changing world we now live in, traditional methods of opinion measurement and communications are both too blunt and too distant to build strong relationships between individuals and organisations in a community. And it is only upon such strong relationships that better civic involvement will be built.

4.3 An Emerging Expertise

4.3.1 Rubbish Meetings

We all know and probably agree with the famous Margaret Mead quote to "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has" - although it might be more realistic to acknowledge that "citizens can occasionally change the world." And herein lays the third central challenge facing civic involvement: we are not very good at coming together and creating change. Most of our face-to-face meetings, public or otherwise, are dull and unproductive, and most of the online activities we have so far invested in have yet to transform civic life. The reason for this is again simple: we do not value the process of civic involvement as an expertise, a specialism that can be learnt.

From meeting facilitation and chairing, to understanding which online platform to use, too few people see these skills as a priority. Indeed, many of our elected officials in particular believe that through the process of democratic election they have acquired, osmosis-like, the gift of meeting management. They, like many of the rest of us, are sadly mistaken. Many of us are unconsciously incompetent about how to create good civic involvement, and this goes across the board, but is especially endemic in the public and voluntary sector.

We are not here advocating the creation of a professional class of civic involvement specialists, far from it. But just as to read a book you must learn to read or to drive a car you must learn to drive, to run civic involvement processes you really must learn how to do it properly, or accept the consequences of wasting time, money and perhaps most serious: sapping the civic energy from our public realm.

RECOMMENDATION: Supporting better civic involvement practice & innovation: During the period of transition to a new, more engaged society, Government should commit long term investment towards developing the organisations, expertise and resources necessary to drive the civic involvement challenge.

4.3.2 Creating effective social action

Since it is generally accepted that even the most ancient form of civic involvement, the meeting, is often ineffective^[64] and in need of overhaul, it seems reasonable to conclude that the challenge of creating effective social action and civic involvement is considerable.

When one starts to consider the emerging field of community social media, consisting of e-petitions, journalistic hyperlocal websites and the more community relationship focused online neighbourhood networks, it is not difficult to see why there is some uncertainty about what is good practice. In the world of online communities, there is a particularly fervent debate about which platforms and tools to use - whether Facebook, Ning, Wordpress, Citizenspace or Citizenspace - but there is surprisingly little thoughtful evidence of what works and when.

Last year it became a legal requirement for local authorities to have an e-petition capability. One of the first actions of the Coalition team upon entering Number 10 was to disable the No. 10 e-petition tool. It is possible the reason for this was that it had become clear that e-petitions are an excellent tool for stopping things; road pricing being the famous national example, where 1.8 million people signed up to oppose the government's proposals for road charging, forcing the policy into the long grass. We still have no substantive policy programme to tackle road congestion in the UK.

There are numerous other local examples^[65] of how e-petitions have stopped policies, but there are few, if any examples of them stimulating solutions to problems. The market has responded and created tools such as Simpli^[66] and Calls for Ideas^[67] to fill this gap. It is however petitions which have been legally mandated. This is not in itself a bad thing. Indeed an online petition is a valuable tool of direct democracy and making government accountable. But if we step back and take a longer view, thinking how we should configure the civic realm to help us as a society meet the challenges we face, it is not clear that petitions would be the obvious first choice for legislative requirement. The point being that we need a better reflective capability to understand how best to build our civic realm.

Nowhere is this more obvious than online where a minority of enthusiasts are driving the field forward without bringing along the rest of us. There are helpful publications and blogs such as the excellent SocialbySocial and the Online Neighbourhood Networks study^[68], but these projects often fail to cross over into the mainstream of the public or voluntary sectors; and they also tend to fail to be sufficiently discerning about the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches. With limited resources we need high levels of independent discernment, which is at present lacking.

Case Example: 2010/11 Online PB Explosion

In the wake of the local authority budget cuts, the autumn of 2010 saw a great flowering of online participatory budgeting projects with around 100 across the UK. Driven in most cases by a desire to share tough choices with the community and help explain the challenges they were facing, many local political leaders took the brave decision to open these critical decisions up to public debate. One of the most valuable products of this was the wide-ranging array of approaches adopted by different authorities. From the survey-led approach of the Tough Choices website in Devon; to the social network approach of Cumbria County Council; to the wordpress approach of AskBristol. This diversity of approaches was to an extent a product of the different council's priorities, but also a product of the limited knowledge of what is possible online. A widespread critique of many budget consultations is that some did not require identification of users to vote on proposals. For a number of cases this brought the integrity of the processes into question, as it was fairly clear that certain questions had been captured by interest groups voting repeatedly for the same outcome. For example, in one case the protection of back office staff received over 70% support - a result unheard of in public consultations. Such interest group capture does not always invalidate the processes as a whole, but it does highlight how we need to learn to navigate this territory.

One of the principal concerns raised over this round of participatory budgeting was that it did not involve real cash and real citizen empowerment, which previous community level participatory budgeting had. Phil Teece, director of the government funded Participatory Budgeting Unit, explained that "the recent wave of budget consultations didn't give residents real power and so I believe it's unlikely they will on their own do much to improve civic involvement." The recent strategic participatory budgeting explosion was entirely consultative, but it could have been nothing else, as we have councillors to make key decisions such budget setting. They have however in many instances stretched the approaches to civic involvement; both in terms of the communications, with many councils using video to communicate the responses; and for the first time integrating face-to-face and online approaches into a coherent strategy. The next step, as we advocate in Chapter 6, is moving away from one-off budget consultations to a continuous conversation of how to manage our budgets, services and assets.

This lack of thoughtful discerning thinking also permeates commonly held ideas of who will use the different approaches. Widely held assumptions, such as that the old and poor will come to community meetings and the young and rich go online, are clearly a gross caricature, but nevertheless commonly held. These kinds of assumptions are in many senses a product of our inability to accept that our anecdotal experience of what works for civic involvement may not be transferable. Or, as Chapter 3 outlines, that those designing citizen engagement may not share much in common in terms of values, motivation and experience with the people they are trying to involve.

64. www.matthewtaylorsblog.com/uncategorized/my-bad-apple-it-turns-out-was-second-hand

65. See, for instance: <http://epetitionsmk.firmstep.com/petitions/stop-storey-homes>; www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/modgov/mgEPetitionDisplay.aspx?ID=26&RPID=2994011&HPID=2994011

66. See www.simpli.co/

67. See, for example, www.dialogue-app.com/info/

68. Harris, K and Flouch, H (2010). *The online neighbourhood networks study: a study of the social impact of citizen-run online neighbourhood networks and the implications for local authorities*. http://networkedneighbourhoods.com/?page_id=409

There are of course many examples of excellent civic involvement littered across the country, such as many of the Take Part projects, Envision, Streets of Growth, the Paddington Development Trust, and others.^[69]

A core characteristic of these excellent projects is they are often deeply embedded in the communities they seek to serve and have been led by passionate individuals largely free of the bureaucratic culture which exists in the public sector and many larger members of the VCS. This has allowed them to deploy and experiment with bottom-up, online and face-to-face processes freely.

Case Example: Innovative Engagement that changes people's lives

Participatory Budgeting in Newcastle has already transformed the lives of many people, old and young, by bringing them together across conventional divides to talk and think together in deciding what should be most supported with the available public funding for their communities. Instead of people being distrustful of public bodies spending money with scant regard for their real concerns, or being suspicious that 'others' are always getting an unfair share of funds, the 'Udecide' initiative, which has been going since 2006, has not just led to new facilities and improvements across the city, but crucially it has nurtured and sustained the civic belief of local people in how they can play a real part in achieving positive changes. In a recent poll, nearly 80% of respondents believe people are keen to get involved in solving community problems.

http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/udecide_home

4.3.3 The Voluntary Sector Driving Better Civic Involvement

Better civic involvement is to an extent a classic chicken and egg scenario, where in order to get better at civic involvement we need to be closer to people and better understand their needs, but to get closer to people we first need to be better at engagement. Specific strategies for doing this are outlined in Chapter 6, however we also need to take decisive steps towards creating a much clearer sense of what is good and bad practice. This is essential to break the cycle of mediocrity which has dominated the last 15 years of civic involvement. Best practice organisations do exist, such as Involve, Take Part, the Participatory Budgeting Unit, the Consultation Institute, Urban Forum, NCVO and others; these organisations need to be brave about clearly stating what is working but also what is not.

Some organisations fear criticising practice amongst their peers or the public sector, from which much of their funds come. As Toby Blume, CEO of Urban Forum, explains:

69. See www.takepart.org/manageContent.aspx?object.id=10344&mta_hm=show_selected_resource¶m.1=12756; www.envision.org.uk; www.streetsofgrowth.org; www.pdt.org.uk

"We need to have the confidence as a sector to be able to both applaud effective civic involvement and criticise the poor practice. Some voluntary sector leaders are mistakenly reluctant to acknowledge mistakes and be honest about things the sector does not do so well because they don't want to bite the hand that feeds them. Not only is this misguided, it is also not in the interests of our beneficiaries, as it means failing to grasp the opportunity to learn and improve."^[70]

This fear partly has its roots in views expressed by members of the coalition government, who question the voluntary sector's role in holding government to account. Speaking at the 2010 NCVO campaigning conference, Oliver Letwin, then Shadow Cabinet Office Minister, said that he regretted that "so much of the effort of some parties in the voluntary sector is devoted to campaigning. They are free to do it, but what I treasure about the sector isn't its campaigning role."^[71] There are risks in defining a role for the voluntary and community sector which explicitly rules out the holding of government to account^[72], not least because of the importance of not undermining its capacity to both critique and promote civic involvement.

Writing in The Times on 8th February of this year, Francis Maude, the Cabinet Office Minister, explained that "I believe too much time is spent asking the taxpayer to prop up traditional organisations, rather than innovating and finding new ways to inspire people."^[73] If this is the case, then the question is surely how can the government help the voluntary sector drive innovation in civic involvement? One way will be to take on board Francis Maude's challenge and explicitly back their role in critiquing civic involvement approaches across the board, which will mean them challenging government and campaigning, if you like, for better, more effective involvement.

4.4 Competing in the Market for Our Attention

Too much civic involvement is not prepared for the intense battle for people's attention. This battle is the basis of the market: companies live and die by their ability to grab our attention. In the battle for our time and attention, as described in Chapter 3, civic involvement needs to compete with the many irresistible offers of the internet, the high street, TV, family, friends, work and much else. We are both busier and more saturated in offers to do things than ever before.

The reason that advertising is such a big industry is because it works. We are bombarded with messages from the moment we wake up until we go to sleep, and more importantly, we are often not aware of the messages we have received or that they are affecting our decisions.^[74] According to Harvard Business School Professor Gerald Zaltman, 95% of our purchase decision making takes place in the subconscious mind.^[75]

70. Email correspondence, March 2011

71. See www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/news/civil-society/tories-challenge-charities-lobbying-role

72. See www.thirdsector.co.uk/Resources/Communications/Article/983530/Mirella-von-Lindenfels-Why-Oliver-Letwins-words-charity-campaigning-reveal-insidious-hidden-agenda/

73. See www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/archive/1053626/Francis-Maude-denies-spending-cuts-undermining-big-society/?DCMP=ILC-SEARCH

74. See <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/3246.html>

75. Zaltman, G (2003). How Customers Think: Essential Insights into the Mind of the Market. . A summary of the original text. *Audio-Tech Business Book Summaries*, 12(2). <http://media.imaxws.net/912/howcustomersthink.pdf>

When many people are asked why they have bought certain products or undertaken certain activities, they are not clear.^[76] When you go through all the messaging they will have received that day - online, in newspapers, from friends, or through advertising - some of those messages will have been choreographed from advertising agencies that are getting ever more sophisticated and subtle in their approach. Gone are the days of the blunt campaigns of Michael Jackson's 5-minute Coca Cola advertisements or Blue Pepsi.^[77] The reason so many advertisements seem so ephemeral and unclear is that the skill in good marketing is to give the impression that people are making individual choices unaware of the powerful messages they are in fact receiving.^[78] This is a powerful challenge to the notion of individual choice held in high regard by many, especially in the voluntary sector.

Concerns about manipulation have already been much debated^[79], especially around the ideas expressed in the highly influential publication Nudge^[80], which outlines strategies for what the authors call 'choice architecture', or helping people make more socially responsible decisions - an approach also known as libertarian paternalism. The point here is rather that, if we are to genuinely increase civic involvement, we need to acknowledge the realities of the context we are operating in and the stiff competitors for our time and attention.

Communications techniques such as Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), which are common place in the private sector, are seen as manipulative or lacking sufficient rigour by the public and voluntary sector. The challenge is that those in the public and voluntary sector are clearly losing the battle for people's attention and time, to those who are making use of the full range of tools available. It is time for us to take another look at our arsenal for making greater civic involvement a reality and ensure we are ready for the battle.

We are not however advocating a simple deployment of more aggressive and sophisticated marketing techniques, but rather being aware of them and their pros and cons, and using them when we see fit. Civic society may not be able to compete with the advertising budgets of big business, but we can be equally creative and we have strings to our bow which others do not have, such as our values, authenticity, community networks, armies of volunteers, and reserves of affection, reciprocity and common purpose, which way outstrip anything you see in other sectors. These assets put us in an excellent place to compete in the battle for people's attention - but only if used wisely and creatively.

76. Bargh, J A (2002). Losing Consciousness: Automatic Influences on Consumer Judgment, Behavior, and Motivation. *The Journal of Consumer Research* 29(2). www.jstor.org/pss/10.1086/341577

77. See Zaltman, G and Zaltman, L (2008). *Marketing Metaphoria: What Deep Metaphors Reveal about the Minds of Consumers*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press; Barabba, V and Zaltman G (1991). *Hearing the Voice of the Market: Competitive Advantage through Creative Use of Market Information*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

78. Plassmann, H, Kenning, P, Deppe, M, Kugel, H, Schwindt, W and Ahlert, D (2006). *How brands twist heart and mind: Neural correlates of the affect heuristic during brand choice*. <http://129.3.20.41/eps/exp/papers/0509/0509004.pdf>

79. See <http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/2010/06/is-it-better-to-nudge-or-to-think/>

80. See <http://nudges.org/>

Case Example: Social Marketing through Healthy Communities Collaborative

The Healthy Communities Collaborative approach was launched in the UK in 2002, and shows how using the potential of people living in communities to get key messages to others they regularly meet can change awareness and behaviour more than most conventional marketing techniques. In Gateshead, elderly people were involved in spreading the message about how to reduce injuries from falls. Community health workers joined forces with them in making deals with local retailers for bulk orders of light bulbs, finding "handymen" volunteers to install them, and arranging for medical experts to do screenings at Saturday morning health fairs. Their efforts led to an impressive 32 percent reduction in falls among older citizens in the area. More recently in East Lancashire, the HCC approach was used in enlisting the help of local hairdressers in raising awareness amongst their women customers of early signs of cancer.

<http://www.ihl.org/IHI/Topics/Improvement/ImprovementMethods/ImprovementStories/ReducingFallsintheUKsHealthyCommunitiesCollaborative.htm>

<http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/utilities/atozindex/013981>

4.5 Energising Engagement

Put simply too much civic involvement is too dull. This does not mean that everything should be exciting. Indeed many critical activities such as volunteering in libraries or in social care are not always 'exciting'; but they are almost always satisfying. The British voluntary sector knows how to manage and support volunteers, ensuring that their efforts are both useful and satisfying. This cannot always be said of other areas of civic participation, such as MPs surgeries or public meetings. These more 'consultative' parts of our civic life are often inexcusably dull and de-energising, when there is no need for them to be so. Public meetings can be energising and exciting, but either the skills or inclination to make them so are worryingly lacking.

The secret of many of the great projects outlined elsewhere in the Chapter is that they do not depend on external parties for their agency. Projects like Envision and Streets of Growth do not depend on influencing other power holders to affect change - they are premised on the notion that they can achieve their goals themselves, which gives them a great sense of agency and energy. This energising quality is the 'je ne sais quoi' of civic involvement - an unquantifiable characteristic that imbues a project with purpose and the participants with belief.

One of the great benefits of the implicit thrust of the big society towards divestment of assets and co-production of services is that, if arranged properly, it will put citizens in the driver's seat, and we will get away from the inevitable but awkward power imbalance of the more consultative processes such as user involvement and planning. It will always be challenging for such consultative processes to have the same energising quality of processes where all the power holders are part of the process, or where the process itself is imbued with specific power such as the responsibility for cash, an asset or a service.

But consultative processes can also be energising. Many of the AmericaSpeaks processes are deeply empowering and inspiring (see Section 4.1), and the evaluation of their one major foray into the UK, 'Your Health, Your Care, Your Say', suggests they had a big impact here.^[81] Similar examples are the States of Jersey and Lambeth's Say and Play both of which were consultative but did have that energising quality that marks out a good process.^[82]

What characterised these processes and the many others like them is that they went out of their way to understand the participants, to give them agency, as well as a good time. As detailed in Section 4.1, a key characteristic of the AmericaSpeaks processes is that although often consultative, each of the thousands of participants leaves with a pack to campaign for their views after the event. Say and Play was 90% fun days with 10% consultation and engagement as part of these; and the States of Jersey were in a genuinely challenging situation which the political leaders discussed openly and in person. From this we can see that simple lessons such as the following go a long way: integrate into existing fun activities such as festivals or Facebook; support people to get involved after the event; and involve the key decision-makers.

Conclusion

When thinking about civic involvement, we should consider whether the forms and techniques of participation are relevant for people's needs, expectations and lifestyles. If we want to build a stronger culture of civic involvement, we should start by looking at the more formal spaces of participation. It is clear that consultative activities are still very often the 'method of choice', especially in public services, despite the widespread recognition that consultation is often tokenistic and lacks links to real power. Especially at the local level, people often have the greatest incentives to get involved as they can directly experience how decisions about local issues and services affect their lives; but are often faced with limited opportunities to get meaningfully involved. We should therefore seek to move away from a culture of consultation towards ongoing, 'real' engagement in the field of formal decision-making.

It is also important that those designing engagement exercises have a good understanding of their audience, as well as the purpose of engagement as not only identifying public opinion but also empowering and building more active communities. There should be more focus on allowing bottom-up, organic forms of engagement to emerge and building links between these and the formal channels of participation; as well as understanding the need to build and maintain the relationships between individuals and organisations that form the foundation of better civic involvement.

81. Warburton (2006)

82. Creasy, S, Casey, A and Waller L (2008). *Say&Play: A report and toolkit for improving Local Government consultation*. <http://www.involve.org.uk/assets/Publications/SayPlaySchools-report.pdf>

In practical terms, the skills for facilitating good engagement should be recognised and supported; there should be more thoughtful and discerning thinking about what methods, both offline and online, work best in different contexts; and examples of good engagement practice should be better publicised and disseminated to encourage innovation and discussion about what good engagement really looks like. In this context, the experience and expertise developed in the voluntary sector, as well as the public sector, should be supported and utilised.

Finally, we need to acknowledge the individual barriers to involvement (eg lack of time), and think how engagement can 'compete' with other demands for people's attention and time (looking at marketing and communications methods) and how to make engagement feel fun, energising and meaningful, where people can feel a sense of agency and ownership and see the impact their involvement can make.

Part Five: Financial Limits

Summary: *When we look at the specific challenges posed by the current financial situation, it becomes clear that what is needed is radical, not incremental change, in order to harness the opportunity for significantly increasing civic involvement (5.1). To support this, we should seek to foster a climate of confidence and risk taking, and a desire to get involved, through communication that is ambitious and optimistic, but grounded in reality (5.2). The cuts are undoubtedly 'turning up the heat' of civic energy as people engage with the reality of changes in spending priorities, but they also risk undermining individuals' sense of positivity and self-confidence. We must therefore be creative in designing strategies that can harness this energy, while plugging into people's higher ideas and values as opposed to their fears (5.4 & 5.5). We also explore some of the challenges and opportunities created by the government's current proposals to outsource services to the voluntary sector (5.3).*

No publication examining the scope for increasing civic involvement in Britain today can ignore the impact and consequences of public spending restraint. In this Chapter we touch on some of the practical consequences of the cuts we are already seeing in communities across the UK. Not all bad: the explosion of budget consultations detailed in Chapter 4 have shown how they can be a driver for involvement, and there have also been 'Big Society Conferences' and 'Meeting the Challenge' events in a majority of counties and boroughs. However, the cuts are also having widespread negative impacts, in particular where they have been applied in ways that undermine the capacity of some parts of the voluntary sector and decrease scope for civic action. We start by arguing that, in this difficult context, we need to have the courage to demand radical change.

5.1 Radical Not Incremental Change

To create the doubling of civic involvement that we suggest is necessary for the big society to deliver on its promise, will require radical not incremental change in how we engage and work more widely. Given the significant resources allocated to civic involvement over the past decade and the limited progress made in absolute involvement, we cannot simply do more of the same.

The severity and speed of the cuts are simultaneously supporting and undermining the necessary change. The severity of the cuts is forcing even the most risk adverse local authorities and voluntary organisations to consider working in radically new ways; however, the speed of the cuts is too often leading to activities being cut ahead of the strategic and reflective thinking necessary to support this fundamental change.

The wider public discourse driven by the press and senior government ministers is also hampering the ability of those in local government or the voluntary sector to take the radical steps necessary. For example on the 7 March 2011 the Daily Mail made an example of Cotswold District Council^[83], for spending "£19,000 of taxpayers' money to pay a magician to improve staff morale." The Mail went on explaining that "The local authority has now been branded 'crazy' for spending such sums on a conjurer while wielding an axe to public services." In reality the individual concerned

83. See www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1363693/Cotswold-District-Council-spending-19k-MAGICIAN.html

was a consultant providing support to help the authority navigate their particular challenges in new ways. He may have sprinkled some magic into his training, but that was not what he was getting paid to do. We are not condoning the decision here of the council to use the services of this part-time magician, but it is a good example of how such provocative reporting is making it difficult for local authorities to take risks and do things differently.

In this climate, therefore, there is a very real danger that the opportunity for reform presented by the cuts will be missed - and with it any chances of significantly increasing civic involvement.

5.2 Communicating Involvement in Austerity Britain

To increase civic involvement at the same time as managing significant public sector cuts will require doing a mixture of the established and proven (see Chapter 6), and the radically new. In both cases a climate of confidence, risk taking and desire to get involved will need to be fostered. Creating this kind of climate will require very deliberate action on behalf of government as a whole, the voluntary sector and the media. We are not suggesting some kind of national civic involvement communications plan, but we are arguing for a focused intention among local and national opinion formers to create a climate favourable to civic involvement. In this Section we describe both the limitations of our current communications and some alternative approaches.

Ambitiously Realistic Not Blindly Optimistic

It is unhelpful for opinion formers nationally and locally to suggest that the funding allocated to the VCS will or indeed should be unaffected. This may be the case for some cash rich local authorities or when a political decision is made to protect the sector, but on the whole this will not be the case. Instead, all levels of government need to acknowledge the reality of the significant funding reduction. Accepting this reality means that a constructive dialogue between local government and the VCS could begin.

In a similar vein the government has often looked naïve and inexperienced on civic involvement, for instance by heralding the recent spikes in volunteering requests^[84] or constituency anecdotes as evidence that people want to get more involved. Other evidence^[85] from the voluntary sector challenges this optimism. The truth is no one is quite sure. This could be the start of a sea change. Or it may be a blip in the upward trajectory of time poverty and static levels of involvement as detailed in Chapters 2 and 3. Instead the government should stay true to its core vision for creating a stronger British society (which few would argue with) whilst acknowledging the challenging circumstances we face (which are self evident), especially those on the ground. And it is here amongst the people at the coal face of the big society, delivering civic involvement, that the ungrounded and unrealistic rhetoric has done most damage so far.

When the civic involvement is framed by government in purely aspirational terms, without recognising the inherent challenges and uncertainties, many of those engaged day to day in the struggle to create civic involvement feel the natural need to balance the dialogue with caution and more grounded contribution. And this can easily be seen as negativity.

84. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8008428.stm>

85. See www.guardian.co.uk/society/joepublic/2010/aug/24/big-society-lack-of-volunteers

While this is natural, it is also a big problem for civic involvement. The government has issued a challenge, for everyone, to increase involvement. To do this, those inspired by the notion need to be able to 'stay positive'; particularly as the cuts will bite hard in the sector many of them are closest to. It is very hard for community leaders, whether inside or outside the public sector, to be aspirational and inspiring against a background of organisational and budgetary uncertainty.

We therefore need a more balanced communication from government sources, grounded in both the challenges and the inherent uncertainties of the big society conversation, with a continued call to those interested to not only keep contributing, but also to keep co-creating it. We also recommend that the government directly engages with community groups to explain their vision for the big society, going beyond the vanguard authorities and working with both overarching groups like Our Society, as well as local voluntary groups, who can tell the story as it is emerging in their community.

Such grounded communication between opinion formers and community groups will foster the more genuine dialogue that is required; helping the debate move beyond detached conjecture and directly tackle important questions and long held assumptions.

RECOMMENDATION: Government should be ambitiously realistic not blindly optimistic. Some of the rhetoric and commentary around the big society coming from government has appeared more like wishful thinking than a concrete policy programme. The big society debate now needs to focus on tangible actions, being simultaneously ambitious and grounded in practical reality.

5.3 Will opening up procurement drive involvement?

On Valentine's Day this year David Cameron was broadcast live across three national news networks defending the big society^[86]. The purpose of the event was to address a series of key critiques of the big society, with a central one being that the financial crisis is doing such damage to our communities now that it fundamentally undermines the viability of the project. Speaking to the Big Society Network, the Prime Minister responded by saying that *"the really big opportunity for charities and voluntary bodies is, instead of getting a sort of drip feed of handout money, is as we open up public services and say we will pay you by the results you achieve."*

The belief that the increased opening up of services to the voluntary sector will protect civic involvement through bolstering the financial sustainability of the VCS has become widely held amongst the government, even if it is not wholly shared by the voluntary sector.^[87] We will not dive in to the details of this issue here, but it should be noted that there is limited evidence that the outsourcing of public services on its own, whether to not-for-profit or for-profit providers, has a significant role to play in increasing engagement and participation. There are strong reasons for increasing diversity in the range of providers of public services and breaking down procurement barriers to involve smaller businesses - not least to increase plurality of supply, competition and

86. See www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2011/02/pms-speech-on-big-society-60563

87. See www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12378974

value for money, and because services are often delivered better by organisations based close to the beneficiaries. Personalised budgets and self-directed care offer examples of genuine participation through devolution of responsibility and control.

But evidence shows that outsourcing, even to not-for-profit bodies, does not in itself produce greater civic engagement. The transfer of some 1.3 million homes and up to 3 million tenants from local authority to housing association ownership since 1988 - in what has been described as "the biggest example of state asset transfer to voluntary sector control ever in the whole of Europe"^[88] - has not, despite its scale, been accompanied by any clear, measurable step change in involvement and engagement beyond that required by the housing regulator. This is because the transfer was largely driven by a desire to transfer borrowing off the government's balance sheet and raise private investment for repairs and development. Increased tenant and resident participation was usually only offered as a way of securing a vote in favour of the transfer, but was not usually the core motivation behind the shift.

That is not to say that transferring delivery responsibility cannot bring about increased engagement and involvement. Poplar HARCA, a landlord based in Tower Hamlets, East London which manages some 8500 homes transferred from its local authority, provides a service based around extensive resident involvement and control. The Community Gateway Housing Association in Preston is similarly based around resident and community ownership and participation. However, examples such as these remain the exception rather than the rule. Housing associations generally provide high quality services to their tenants, but transfer has not increased overall civic engagement significantly.

It is therefore crucial to include measures of participation within new service delivery contracts (see Section 6.1.4).

5.4 Austere and Angry Britain?

In Spring 2011 Britain is arguably an angrier place than it was a year ago. Fuelled by continuing economic worries, perceived injustice - for example in relation to bankers' salaries, and controversial national and local spending decisions, there is a climate of discontent in some of our communities, reaching across sectors and issues^[89].

Some have suggested that this in itself has the potential to reinvigorate Britain's civic life, particularly amongst those not currently part of established forms of civic participation. Julian Dobson, the driving force behind the Our Society project, outlines the opportunities of harnessing the power of the protestors, explaining that:

"Of course you don't change the world (at least in the short term) by staging sit-ins and occupations or marching on parliament. But you can change the most important thing, which is your own willingness to get involved. Mr Cameron is a great fan of nudge theory - Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein's idea that you can get people to act pro-socially by making it easier to make a small positive choice than

88. Purkis (2010), Housing Associations in England and the Future of Voluntary Organisations

89. See www.bettertransport.org.uk/media/oct-5-yougov-poll-fare-increases; www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/at-a-glance/top-stories/barclays_fuels_anger_with_huge_bonuses_for_bank_staff_1_3155044; www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12257835

a negative one. Perhaps he should reflect on the effects of shove theory - that if you implement policies that push people hard enough, they will react against them. If you want to build social capital quickly it may prove remarkably effective.^[90]

Whether or not the Prime Minister agrees with Dobson's description of 'shove theory', it is clearly already happening as campaigns against specific local spending decisions are springing up across the country.^[91]

The question is therefore not whether shove theory is happening (or indeed the extent to which particular spending decisions can be justified), but how this civic energy can be translated into a sustainable reinvigoration of our civic life. When the government first announced its plans to train 5,000 community organisers explicitly in the Freire or Alinsky community organising approach, eyebrows were raised across the voluntary sector. Firstly impressed by the bravery of a government prepared to invest in techniques proven to give communities a genuine voice and governments a very hard time; and secondly surprised at how these traditionally adversarial approaches would fit into the more collegiate rhetoric of the big society. The apparent u-turn in giving the contract to the broad-based Locality^[92] coalition suggests some reservations about working with the strict community organisers of CitizensUK, who were considered by many a certainty before the announcement.^[93]

Whatever the case, the community organising programme represents a rare opportunity to create approaches which can balance the essential need for supporting citizens to effectively organise, whilst reinvigorating civic life and driving improvements in our quality of life. As Toby Blume of Urban Forum, a member of the Locality-led consortium, explains, we must take a risk on the community organisers, because:

"It represents a deliberate attempt to inject 'creative disruptors' into communities to shake things up and to challenge the status quo. My assessment is that without this disruption the government's ambition for public service transformation and the big society agenda will be thwarted by vested interest, much as New Labour's neighbourhood renewal goals to 'narrow the gap' were impeded."^[94]

We agree with Blume's analysis and develop the argument of creative disruption as a broader driver for civic involvement in Chapter 6. It does however represent a valuable commitment from the government to back this form of resourcing of civic involvement, for which it should be applauded and prepared. If community organisers are able to build the strength and confidence of communities to organise and articulate their needs, the consequences of this programme will be felt in communities and by the public sector across the land. It represents a dramatic shift from the consensus and consultation based approaches of the past 15 years. And it will therefore require a very different response, for which the public sector is not yet prepared. Some of these are explored in Section 6.1.4

90. See <http://livingwithrats.blogspot.com/2010/12/what-place-for-protest-in-big-society.html>

91. See www.guardian.co.uk/culture/culture-cuts-blog/2011/feb/05/save-our-libraries-day-live-coverage; <http://anticuts.com/>; www.campaignagainstcuts.org.uk/; www.communitycare.co.uk/blogs/childrens-services-blog/2011/03/westminster-parents-campaign-against-cuts.html

92. See www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/Article/1055870/Locality-wins-15m-community-organisers-programme/

93. See www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/14/citizens-uk-big-society-coalition

94. See www.socialenterprisealive.com/your-blogs/item/we-must-take-risk-community-organisers

RECOMMENDATION: Treat Participation as a Frontline Activity. National and local government need to invest in promoting civic involvement and engagement. At a time of cuts, this will not be easy, particularly when there is understandable pressure to protect frontline services. But to achieve the step change in community ownership, responsibility and participation needed, some resourcing will be needed, whether through investment in hyper-local consultation mechanisms or the seeding of local organisational capacity. Given the importance of participation to the future of our public services, it should be considered a frontline activity, rather than an overhead cost.

RECOMMENDATION: Engage Directly & Constructively With Cuts Campaigns to Create On-Going Engagement Platforms. As opposed to adopting traditional adversarial or communications based approach to 'managing' anti cuts campaigns. The government should seek more creative approaches which channel this civic energy and political interest into permanent platforms for civic engagement

Case Example: Engagement as a key frontline service

Neighbourhood Management established itself as a mainstream service in the decade, 2000-2010. The practice of locating public officials as frontline champions and monitors of improvements requested by local residents gave neighbourhoods a new confidence in being served by local agencies. The impact had included higher levels of resident satisfaction with services, savings generated from a reduction in the number of empty properties and fewer cases of fly-tipping and graffiti.

According to the CLG report, Neighbourhood Management: An overview of the 2003 and 2006 Round 1 Pathfinder Household Surveys (2006), where neighbourhood management operated there were higher levels of satisfaction with the police and other local services. Public perceptions of problems in the areas fell, while concerns about vandalism and graffiti fell by 10% compared to just 4% in comparable neighbourhoods. And satisfaction with street cleaning increased by 8%, though it fell by 2% in comparable neighbourhoods.

See also: <http://www.neighbourhoodmanagement.net/index.php>

5.5 Austerity and Individual Involvement

Section 3.4 of this document looks at the importance of personal values and motivations and how these might be addressed. Of equal importance is the impact of context in which individual decisions to get involved are made. Tougher economic circumstances may affect how we feel about ourselves, our community and the wider society, and through that how we undertake civic involvement.

Self Confidence & Involvement

In 2009 Ipsos MORI and Involve published 'Activating Empowerment'^[95], funded by CLG, which found that over the decade that Labour had been in government a great deal of power (in the form of cash, transparency and new laws) had been made available to the British people, but that there had been little widening of the core group of people who were involved. So during that time the same group of people had in effect become more powerful, thus creating an empowerment gap.

The main reason for this is that many people outside of the civic core do not have what the report called 'subjective empowerment', the belief that they could make a difference. Sometimes this is a rational response to power politics, sometimes a function of personal self-confidence. As outlined in Chapter 3, the current climate of economic hardship and uncertainty risks further undermining this self confidence, particularly amongst those not already involved.

Speaking to people's higher ideals

When organisations and individuals are faced with pressures, they have two basic choices: i) to transcend the difficulty and explore new possibilities, or ii) to regress to a previous level of concern with a smaller horizon. While we would like to think that the response from the majority would be the former, in many circumstances, it is more likely to be the latter. Unfortunately, as we feel pressured, we end up tending to look after 'us and ours', prioritising the lower tiers of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

This is a key challenge as we go forward and there is a very real danger that if we simply accelerate civic involvement through traditional approaches to community organising or consultation, we will create an army of people who will use involvement simply as a means of blocking change. E-petitions, as explored in Chapter 4, are a good example of how some methods of involvement can channel civic energy into blocking change rather than galvanising it.

We will therefore have to be exceptionally creative in designing the community organising strategies which are able to plug into people's higher ideas and values as opposed to individual fears. We will need to explicitly seek to minimise regression and reaction and maximise the willingness and ability for empathic action.

95. McLean, S and Andersson, E (2009). *Empowering Britain from the bottom up*.
www.involve.org.uk/assets/Uploads/Activating-Empowerment-Empowering-Britain-from-the-bottom-up2.pdf

Conclusion

Although transforming civic involvement and building a bigger society is a long-term project, we cannot ignore the impact of the current economic situation, especially public sector cuts, on these efforts. Difficult circumstances can create both the need and opportunity for pursuing radical, rather than incremental change. If we are confident about the change we want to see happen, then we should be brave enough to create and advocate for new approaches to civic involvement, and allow more citizen-led, bottom-up forms of involvement to emerge and shape society.

The starting point is to clearly communicate this need for change, by actors from all sectors, and to be optimistic about the opportunity we now have of achieving this change, whilst acknowledging and addressing the challenges we have presented in this paper. A forward-looking but grounded dialogue is needed to create the foundations for turning words into action.

We should seek to identify ways of utilising the anger and discontent created by the cuts and channelling this into the positive outcomes of people coming together and taking action to build stronger communities. Here the community organisers promoted by the government have a potentially crucial role to play, and we need to make sure they have the appropriate support and training to help communities organise from the bottom up instead of imposing centrally agreed objectives and plans upon them. At the same time we should recognise the important role of people and organisations who are already mobilising their own communities and who have invaluable and unparalleled first-hand experience of those communities – we should also support them and help them connect and benefit from the work of the 'professional' organisers.

Here we also need to look at the role of the VCS as a whole and the great opportunities for engaging more people as this sector becomes more involved in delivering public services. But we also need to be aware of the risks of making easy assumptions and seek to identify appropriate support to help VCS organisations make the most of the new opportunities while actively seeking the involvement of larger sections of society.

Part Six: Civic Unltd

Summary: We outline here the new approaches we believe should be adopted by Government, Local Government, the Voluntary and Community sector and Business if we are to transcend current limits on involvement. And we propose eight initial but concrete measures for tackling the challenges presented in this paper and transforming our civic involvement, building on the approaches advanced in Chapters 2-5:

1. Supporting transformative leadership at the local level, both in the public and the voluntary sector
2. Understanding the interplay between civic involvement and the cuts, in order to develop effective responses
3. Moving towards third generation engagement: bottom-up, continuous involvement which uses mixed methods
4. Ensuring that service commissioning drives and builds in meaningful involvement
5. Building upon existing civic structures, knowledge and experience, and utilising proven involvement models
6. Supporting reflective capacity and learning through doing
7. Harnessing the time, skills and energy of the economically inactive
8. Giving people time to fail...and succeed.

Finally, we present a set of principles to steer us towards this goal.

6.1 Breaking The Limits

In this Section we describe some initial proposals for breaking through the civic limitations outlined in the previous Chapters. These are not fixed or sufficient for the challenge on their own; instead they are intended as a starting point for a new shared commitment to participation. Key to all of this will be creating a climate where people who have not done so before can work together, and where all can take risks, succeed and fail, but critically learn from these attempts to enhance civic involvement.

6.1.1 Supporting Local Transformative Leadership

At the heart of achieving a transformation in levels of civic involvement is the need to support change at the local level, in the voluntary and public sectors. As all organisations feel the pinch, they will be faced with two central choices with how they make their cuts: i) do we sustain our current approach (even if curtailed by spending constraints); or ii) shall we do something different. The latter will require a commitment to innovation.

Too often innovation is confused with creativity. However, just because you hold a ‘creative’ workshop involving flipcharts and post-it notes, does not mean your organisation is being innovative. Innovation is the adoption of something new. The point is whether action builds upon what you already do (sustaining innovation) or forces you to reinvent what do you (disruptive innovation). A classic example of this comes from how banks responded to the internet during the 90s. Most banks supplemented their high street stores with an online offer, ‘sustaining’ their current approach; new entrants like Egg were entirely online forcing the customer to behave

differently. Egg is still in operation but the big banks still exist and still do much of their business through their local branches. In contrast the introduction of digital music in the music industry has put many the traditional music businesses, record labels, high street stores out of business, unable to adjust to a rapidly changing business model.

Such examples highlight the tensions put forward by Clayton Christensen in his book ‘The Innovator’s Dilemma’^[96] where he suggests that businesses need to choose between investing in disruptive innovations (e.g. iPhone) which create something new and separate or sustaining innovations which will supplement the existing (e.g. HSBC’s online bank).

Table 3 below provides a basic framework for differentiating between those actions, both in the public and voluntary sector, which are likely to sustain the current business models, and those which will disrupt and potentially transform them. It provides a basic tool to help leaders think through the options that they face and consciously select those which have a chance of supporting transformation.

Table 3: A framework of sustaining & disruptive innovations

Sector	Public	Community/Voluntary
Sustaining	<i>Examples...</i> • Service productivity/efficiency • Best practice adoption • Social Media (communications) • Service Co-Production	<i>Examples...</i> • Service provision • Knowledge sharing • Social Media (communications) • Service Co-Production • Volunteer involvement
Disruptive	<i>Examples...</i> • Service closure • Significant service change (e.g. all resident queries online) • Third Generation Engagement • E-petitions • Participatory Budgeting • Community Social Networking Websites (hyperlocal) • Significant devolved power through employee engagement initiatives	<i>Examples...</i> • Asset Transfer • Campaigning • Service closure • Staff mutuals • Social enterprise • Community organisers

96. Christensen, C M (1997). *The Innovator’s Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

As table 3 illustrates announcing a service closure will create disruption, but that is clearly not on its own a good thing, the key then is to be responsive and flexible in helping people to invent and build alternatives. During a period of change in the balance of responsibility between state and community, there will be a need to divert resources from direct delivery to help build capacity for others to take responsibility.

Transformation should not be adopted for its own sake but where there is potential for transformation, some of which will be happening anyway, the public sector should look to harness the disruption to deliver positive outcomes. The public sector, in particular, has rarely sought to embrace disruptive (as opposed to incremental) change. It should not be assumed that the solutions will be limited to involving public participation in service delivery - whilst volunteer run libraries provide one example of disruptive change at a local level, radical change may involve participation replacing layers of decision making within local government. As hard decisions are made on prioritising resources, the latter will be critical to securing public support to changes in funding being proposed.

Looking forward, community and public sector leaders need to analyse their current and proposed activities for involvement and ask 'what will disrupt current power structures and service provision, enabling radical quality improvement and citizen empowerment?'. Many of the disruptions outlined in table 3 will have a significant impact on relationships between organisations, transforming 'dependent' relationships, which may well then become more independent or interdependent in the future. The successful innovation required to increase and improve civic involvement will affect relationships moving from overly dependent or independent relationships to healthier interdependent ones.

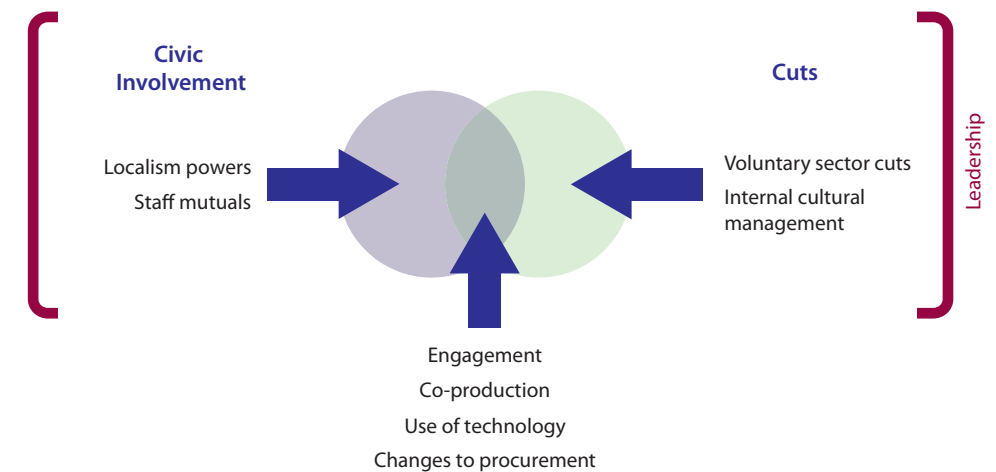
RECOMMENDATION: Both public and voluntary sectors need to embrace transformative change: Leaders of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and the public sector need to support transformative, not incremental change. Many local authorities will face a choice after the May 2011 elections to either sustain or transform large parts of their operations; and it is vital that they choose the latter option (see Section 6.1.1). This need not be new activities, but they will need to ones that transform existing power structures, placing communities at their core.

6.1.2 Making Investment Count: Civic Involvement and the Cuts

Many have argued that the big society is a fig leaf for the cuts, dressing them up as positive social engineering. Others have responded to this by saying that the Prime Minister and his team are long standing 'Big Society believers'. Both are arguably true.

Figure 7 below describes in very simple terms the interplay between the cuts and civic involvement, and the potential consequences. It illustrates how this interplay is creating powerful pressures to deliver in areas such as service innovation and co-production - approaches that have tended to perform better in think tank pamphlets than on city streets.

Fig. 7: Civic Involvement & the Cuts



It is those activities in the overlapping central space which are likely to form the core foundations of any lasting civic involvement strategies. This is where key service delivery and civic involvement come together, making involvement part of essential services, not optional extras, while also delivering efficiencies and therefore making the 'business case' for the big society. This diagram therefore also helps organisations prioritise, which is critical during a period of intense budgetary pressure.

We have identified the following activities in this central space:

- New forms of more efficient engagement for better relationships, legitimacy and bottom-up innovation (what we call third generation engagement (See Section 6.1.3 below))
- Service innovation and co-production
- Use of ICT, especially social media, for enhanced feedback and relationships
- Changes to procurement to enable more creative solutions to emerge.

As noted in Section 5.3, simply reforming provider markets will not always deliver increased engagement. The significant reforms taking place within the health service represent an example of how this is not being done. Rather than distributing power to and promoting engagement with communities, they merely shift power and funding between participants within the existing system.

RECOMMENDATION: Test new policies for their impact on civic involvement: At present, major new policies are subject to a range of impact assessments, to consider their regulatory, environmental and other impacts. There is a strong case for considering whether a new test should be introduced, to assess the extent to which new policy approaches contribute positively or negatively to community strength and self-sufficiency. New metrics should be developed and introduced to do this, to enable informed debate on the balance between the range of drivers for reform, which will include efficiency and affordability, alongside the impact on broader priorities around civic engagement and participation.

6.1.3 Improving Involvement: Third Generation Engagement

Where, historically, governments have sought to be reactive or proactive in 'offering' engagement, civic involvement can now be delivered on a more level playing field. Citizens are today able to e-petition when they want, and mobilise through their social networks for what they care about. However, as we explore in Section 4.2, the idea that engagement can be choreographed through a government communications department no longer holds. The next incarnation of civic involvement must be characterised by interaction, innovation and responsiveness. We call this third generation engagement (see Figure 8 below). Common examples of this include the use of the open space approach to meeting and conference management that has spread around the world through social innovation camps, as well as the neighbourhood-level community social networking.

Third generation engagement is by its nature disruptive to existing power structures as the agenda setting power is in the hands of the participants. As we have argued throughout this publication, disruptive interventions can play a key part in ensuring we reach the targets we have set ourselves. The three principles of 'third generation engagement' are:

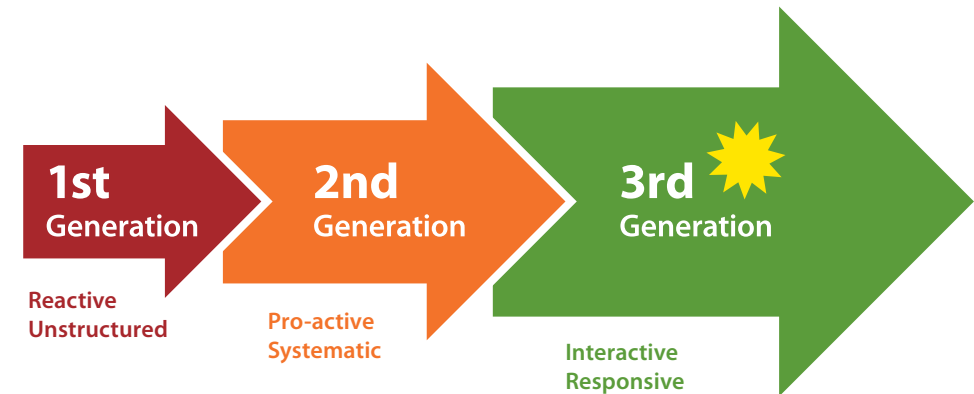
- *Bottom-Up Involvement:* Involvement activities need to be designed to reflect the motivations and interests of the participants, not the institutions
- *Continuous Involvement Not One-Off:* We need to move towards continuous conversational involvement, not set-piece one-off activities
- *Combining Face-to-Face and Online Processes.*

At present many of these approaches lie outside of formal decision-making structures, although pioneering government officials, elected members and others are already integrating them with formal processes. One such pioneer was James Barber, Councillor for East Dulwich, who recently won the Online Councillor of the Year award from the Local Government Information Unit by working with his community website to radically enhance his role as a representative. The judges complemented him on going to the people rather than expecting them to come to him. They noted that "If social media is about anything, it is about being where people are".^[97]

97. See <http://lgiu.wordpress.com/cllr-awards-2011/>

Many authorities are already reclaiming their place as community hubs, and employing the principle of third generation engagement of going to where people are and giving them the tools to get engaged on their terms.

Fig. 8: Third Generation Engagement



That is not to say it is perfect, far from it. As described in Chapter 4, participation remains fragmented, infected by a focus group mind-set, designed to inform officials but not to empower individuals. Four findings in particular have emerged from the experience over the past decade, which lie at the heart of third generation engagement:

More embedded professionals: over the last 15 years we have relied too heavily on 'detached' consultancies to deliver involvement, limiting the reach and scale of the processes. This is not to say the consultancies have done a bad job or are no longer needed; quite the contrary, they have done, and must continue to do an excellent job in innovating and driving quality. But we need to prioritise investment in professionals who are embedded in communities and have good process and facilitation expertise. This is not a simple case of increased reliance on community workers and neighbourhood wardens, or indeed on new community organisers, but rather focusing on people who are already embedded in communities, such as a youth workers, providing them with up-to-date information and support around how to run a great events or online engagement.

Case Example: Developing communities' home grown expertise

In Guide Neighbourhoods (such as Pembroke Street Estate Management Board, Plymouth; Goodwin, Development Trust, Hull; Royds Community Association, Bradford; Neighbours4U, Kent; Perry Common, Birmingham), communities rely, not on external consultants, but local residents themselves to learn from other community mentors to strengthen their networking, lobbying, and planning skills, and use them to use them to improve their communities' capability in secure the improvements they seek. They in turn share their learning with other communities. This helped, for example, 'Danny's Dream', a community group in Hull looking to give support to young adults with severe physical disabilities and/or learning difficulties but without sufficient know-how, to obtain the help from one of the Guide Neighbourhoods, and it was able to set itself up as a charitable organisation to support a major disadvantaged group of the city.

<http://www.guideneighbourhoods.net/>

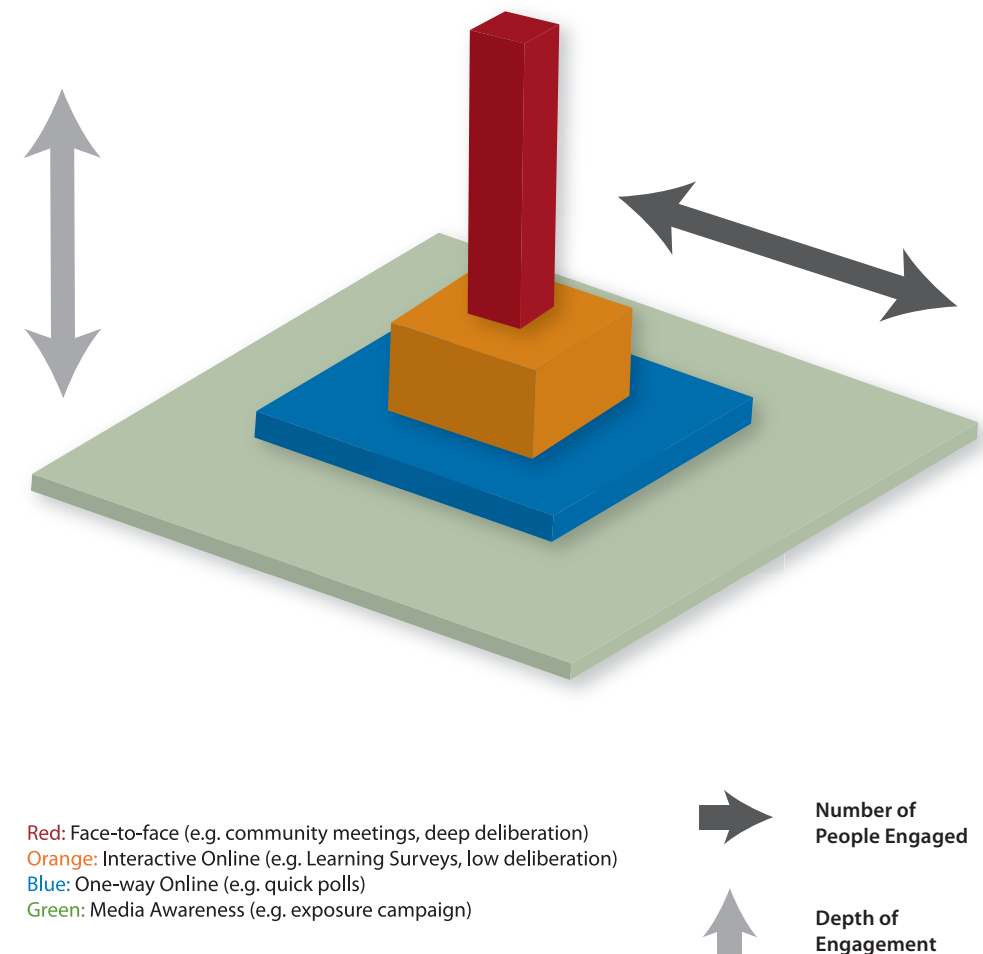
The Reach & Cost-Effectiveness of Online: when considering the need to reach more people, the power of online becomes impossible to ignore. The challenge with online, clearly illustrated by the infamous No. 10 e-petition on road charging, is that it has so far been good at mobilising people against something, but not at creating solutions. In fact mass engagement in general, from traditional petitions to street marches, tends to be against things rather than for a specific change. This is a crucial challenge that third generation engagement will tackle head on by specifically designing processes that are solutions-orientated.

Importance of Deliberation: linked directly to the previous point, is the importance of deliberation. The fact that deliberation is very often key to creating solutions to problems is well established by academics across the world.^[98] Deliberation has proven to be central to the success of processes in going beyond polarised opinions towards creating foundations of mutual understanding, and basis for progress. Critically, deliberation has to be supported either through good involvement design or individuals acting as facilitators.

Integrating Online & Face-to-Face: Because different people respond to different incentives and processes we advocate using both online and face-to-face and integrating them. Figure 11 outlines how a multi-channel approach can work, allowing the transparent comparison of in-depth community meetings to wide-reaching communications campaigns.

98. See *Debating Deliberative Democracy*, James Fishkin (Editor), Peter Laslett (Editor) - Wiley Blackwell (2003)

Fig. 9: Integrating Online & Face-to-Face



RECOMMENDATION: Government (Local & National) Should transform themselves into 'hubs' for Participation & Engagement Government should re-invent itself as highly interactive hubs of conversational engagement – where partnership and participation are core competencies not optional extras, and they should support the development and growth of other hubs and places of engagement

6.1.4 Ensuring Service Commissioning Drives Meaningful Involvement

As noted in Chapter 5, the opening up of public services to a wider range of delivery players will not on its own increase participation and may, if mishandled, create greater bureaucracy and less accountability. However, it also provides a massive opportunity to hardwire public participation and involvement into service delivery.

VCS providers have been encouraged by the previous and the present government to get involved even more with the delivery of public sector contracts. But the more public contracts they take on, the more they become dependent on public finances. At the same time, they risk losing their independence in having to work according to agendas and conditions set by government contracts rather than their own values and mission. To compensate for this, some of them might be attracted to adopt a more private sector model in concentrating on work with good, stable financial returns, and distance themselves from poorly funded contracts, especially those with the hardest to achieve outcomes involving the most vulnerable groups. Furthermore, with the growth of private sector-led prime contractor models, there is a risk that they may fail to maintain a close relationship with local communities.

It is time to stop telling VCS providers to serve public contracts, and start designing contracts which enable communities to define how their needs are met. Public procurement should be designed to require close and regular community engagement and involvement, and the risks of working with the most vulnerable groups and in deprived areas must be reflected in the contract terms.

Where public services are contracted out, there should be an explicit requirement to maintaining and increasing community engagement with those services. Chris White's Social Enterprise Private Members Bill proposes that "publicly contracting authorities [should] consider how they might promote wider economic, social and environmental well-being". High quality civic involvement should be a core part of this definition of social value, enabling communities to challenge where it is not effectively secured.

RECOMMENDATION: Enable communities to challenge to secure effective involvement:

Chris White's Social Enterprise Private Members Bill should be amended to ensure that community involvement is clearly included in its definition of social value, enabling communities to challenge where it is not effectively secured.

Alongside the introduction of the Right to Challenge in the current Localism Bill, which will enable local civil society organisations to express an interest in providing any service which is supplied by a local authority, this would represent a fundamental rebalancing of public service provision in favour of civic involvement and participation.

We should also build upon the specific experience of user involvement in areas such as social care⁹⁹, and explore how this learning could be applied to the wider services received by neighbourhoods and communities; especially in terms of its implications for GP commissioning and other reforms to public service delivery.

Case Example: Ensuring Communities are partners in service development

When councils contract out services, they should consider requiring service providers to work in partnership with community teams such as the South East Ipswich Community Reassurance Team set up by Ipswich Borough Council to ensure local people's views are regularly sought and fed into the development of a safer and more pleasant environment for local people. The Reassurance Team was created to give a highly visible contact point for members of local communities to influence service standards and delivery on the ground. Resident feedback confirmed that improvements in reduced crime, for example, were matched by a rise in positive perception.

Source: Gaffney, M. Civic Pioneers: a local report by the Civil Renewal Unit (Home Office, 2005)

6.1.5 Working with What We Have

Now more than ever, with tight resources, it will be vital to build on the knowledge, experience and assets we already have, as a basis for transformation. Here we look at building upon existing civic structures which are well used, and utilising proven involvement models.

Going To Where the People Are

It has become an established mantra of the civic involvement world to go to where the people are, so much so that it has in some cases stifled innovation when organisations insist on using Facebook or their community festival for all involvement work. Despite this, and despite the widespread awareness of the adage, it is worth restating; although not in a dogmatic way, as it has too often been employed, but as a nuanced principle to steer the wider involvement transformation we seek.

Organisations across the UK have transformed their engagement through going to the people and explicitly making the engagement process fun. This was exemplified by the Esme Fairburn Foundation funded Say and Play project¹⁰⁰ in Lambeth, South London, which integrated education engagement into fun days and massively increased levels of civic involvement.

99. See www.in-control.org.uk/support/support-for-individuals,-family-members-carers/what-is-self-directed-support.aspx

100. Creasy, Casey & Waller (2008)

We are also starting to adopt a more nuanced approach to using community social networking websites, as explored in the Online Neighbourhood Networks Study^[101], which is a welcome relief from the blind use of platforms such as Facebook and Ning. Although we do not yet go far enough.

Proven Involvement Models

There have been numerous success stories from communities over the last 15 years. For example, those which have used Neighbourhood Management to give residents a focal point to raise issues and review progress, have found that it leads to higher levels of satisfaction with the local police, street cleaning and the neighbourhood in question as a place to live.^[102]

This approach has been applied to other policy areas. Portsmouth City Council, for example, systematically involved local people in key developments, including large scale capital projects such as their £9 million Copnor Bridge project, which was completed one month early and 10% under budget.^[103] Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Police engaged local people in designing community safety action plans which secured a saving of over £6 million in return for a £600,000 investment for five selected neighbourhoods. All crime fell by 14% against a drop of 7% for comparator neighbourhoods in the city.^[104]

To anyone who thinks that these approaches are only relevant for more prosperous times, it should be pointed out that they were developed from the late 1990s, after nearly two decades of rapid growth in income inequalities which had forced many to feel marginalised and disempowered. The burden of this economic crisis is already likely to fall much more on the poor than the rich, and effective engagement approaches will be essential to connect people who would otherwise feel there is no point in getting involved to the key decisions and actions concerning their communities.

6.1.6 Learning Through Doing

Given the uncertainty we face both economically but also in terms of 'what works' for increasing civic involvement, it is vital that we create both the conditions to support risk taking and innovation, but also the grounded reflection of what really works.

Whether manifest as 'Our Society', the 'Good Society', or the 'Big Society', now more than ever this reflection on what kind of civic involvement works is required. While we are gearing up for a significant acceleration of civic involvement, driven by civic anger as well as ideology and personal belief, there is a deep lack of appreciation of 'what works', and an unconscious incompetence around the skills required to make things work. The recent explosion of budget consultations demonstrated this well (see Case Study 2) as, in the dash to involve, the quality of involvement was sacrificed for speed, and money and civic energy was wasted. In such cash strapped times we should do all we can to avoid this.

101. Harris & Flouch (2010)

102. Neighbourhood Renewal Unit/Communities and Local Government (2006). *Neighbourhood management: An overview of the 2003 and 2006 Round 1 Household Surveys*. Research Report 28. London: CLG.

103. Blears H (2009). Community spirit in a cold climate. The CSV Edith Kahn Lecture, 29 April 2009. Annex: Empowerment delivers more efficient outcomes. www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1216306.pdf

104. Blears (2009)

In a field such as involvement where practice leads theory, this is not always easy; but if any country is able to create this reflective capacity, it should be us. We have a range of high-quality specialist organisations across the spectrum of civic involvement; from Urban Forum and Civic Voice at the community organising end; to Involve and the Community Development Foundation, which take a broad but deep view; to The Consultation Institute at the more formal end. Many of these organisations will be feeling the public sector pinch as much as anyone, and yet their capability is vital if we are to ensure that whatever investments are made, are made well.

Resourcing voluntary sector infrastructure organisations is currently highly unfashionable, but we would here recommend ensuring the survival especially of these smaller specialist organisations, many of which are 'guardians' of the foundational knowledge essential to improving the quality and scale of civic involvement. As noted in Chapters 4 and 5, during the coming transition of responsibility between state and community, it will be critical to invest in the support needed to enable communities to get engaged.

6.1.7 Harnessing the Talent of the Unemployed

At present there is a major opportunity to use civic involvement to both bring those outside the labour market inside civic life and to directly harness and develop the skills of the unemployed. Julian Dobson has been making this point central to building the big society, "the greatest resource at our disposal is the time and energy of the economically inactive".^[105]

An excellent example of this the Community Allowance project^[106], which seeks to enable community organisations to pay local unemployed people to do part-time or session-based work that strengthens their community without it affecting their benefits.

Such initiatives can provide particular benefit in focussing on those people in the community who have untapped skills in engagement, events, social media and campaigning. There would appear to be a particular opportunity in terms of young people in the UK, many of whom are over-represented amongst the unemployed and have exactly the types of engagement skills, particularly in using social media, which are lacking in the voluntary and public sectors. There is therefore an opportunity for this kind of latent engagement talent to meet some clear needs.

RECOMMENDATION: Introduce the Community Allowance: The government should introduce the proposed Community Allowance, enabling long term unemployed people, and in particular those some way from the employment market, to take on limited (remunerated) work within their communities without impacting upon their benefit entitlements.

105. See: <http://livingwithrats.blogspot.com/2010/06/time-hidden-backbone-of-big-society.html>

106. See <http://www.communityallowance.org>

Case Study: The difference Community Allowance can make:

Community Allowance would give community organisations the freedom to pay people to do part-time work that strengthens their neighbourhood, while supporting them on their journey back to work, without it affecting any of their benefits for a limited time period. Maximum earnings on top of benefits would be capped.

The employment cost of people working under the scheme would not be met by Government, but by the community organisation itself. However, the fact that those on the scheme could continue to claim benefits for a fixed period would make very part-time and relatively low wage jobs in communities viable for people to take on, whereas without benefit, they would not be. The CREATE Consortium (DTA, Community Links, Social Firms UK and the National Community Forum) has estimated that as many as 80 very part-time jobs (averaging 4 hours per week at the minimum wage) could be generated on a single estate, unlocking £95,000 in investment through wages into each community and achieving local work that would not otherwise be done.

<http://www.communityallowance.org/>

6.1.8 Giving people time to fail...and succeed

People need time to experiment, try, fail, learn and try again. This requires time, patience and support. If we do not provide this, there is a danger that confidence in involvement will be lost before it is developed. The Neighbourhood Planning and Community Right to Buy components of the Localism Bill both offer significant opportunities for the community to take greater control, but there are questions over whether the community capacity exists to make the most of these opportunities or whether communities are being exposed to risks of failure that could in the long term undermine community confidence and participation. In the light of this it is critical that Eric Pickles reviews his decision to reject calls for a longer moratorium period for public asset sales.

Where public bodies seek to dispose of assets, there should be an obligation to offer communities a "right to try", whereby a community can - over 2-3 years - lease an asset to try to establish a viable use, with an option to buy at the end. Current provisions on asset transfer give little time beyond that needed to raise funds, and risk setting up communities to fail, rather than helping them to find ways to succeed.

RECOMMENDATION: Introduce a right to try: The Localism Bill should be amended to ensure that where a community asset is publicly owned, the moratorium period should run for up to three years, to enable the community to develop a sustainable use, with an option to buy at the end of the period.

6.2 Roles

In this Section we touch on the roles that the different sectors will need to play if we are to meet the involvement challenge. Table 3 gives an overarching summary of some of the current and future roles. It is clearly a simplification, but it attempts to surface some of the challenges we will face in terms of the skills and capabilities of the organisations required to support increased involvement.

6.2.1 Transforming Business to Facilitate Engagement

In good economic times, it is relatively easy for businesses to build its corporate social responsibility programmes, and promote approaches based around caring for its wider community. It will be during tougher economic times that businesses can be judged on whether they can truly look beyond the bottom line in helping out the communities in which they operate. Small to medium size businesses may not be able to give large donations to local groups or spare too much of the time of their few staff to do voluntary work, but they can set an example in what they are prepared to invest in and the flexibility they are willing to show.

Big business must however lead the way in promoting a culture change; and the onus is on them to support society voluntarily, without the state having to step in, both through their CSR and through the pursuit of pro-social business models. Some have argued that the UK Uncut protests show that the public demand is not for private sector philanthropy, but for accountability. This might support the case for a US style Community Reinvestment Act, which requires commercial banks and savings associations to help meet the needs of borrowers across society, especially amongst the poor. But looking beyond banks, there is a need to move beyond conceptions of business support which revolve around pro bono advice, to a broader vision based around a willingness to share space and provide community leadership.

As noted in Chapter 3, there is a need for local businesses leaders - whether business owners or the local managers of banks or shops - to rediscover their role as pillars of their communities as part of a new community focused vision of CSR. Recent research suggests that these sort of approaches are increasingly demanded by employees, and may even contribute to higher productivity.^[107]

107. Management Today, 28 April 2011, "How CSR can boost the UK economy by £17bn+ a year" <http://www.managementtoday.co.uk/news/1067417/how-csr-boost-uk-economy-17bn-year/>

Case Example: Business support for community action

Pfizer, the pharmaceutical company, develops initiatives to help tackle health inequalities in deprived areas and marginalised communities where help is needed most. Its national programme provides both funding and practical support to grass-roots organisations dealing with local health challenges. It encourages all staff to spend five days a year of their time to provide practical and professional support to local organisations improving community health. Pfizer also supports communities local to their sites by offering grants, time and in-kind donations. In 2008, 141 projects were funded which improved the health and well-being of over 200,000 people. Positive changes in weight, blood pressure, mobility, smoking cessation and sexual health testing were measured and reported.

http://www.bitc.org.uk/resources/case_studies/afe2049a.html

Central Government: Central government has two central roles here: unblocking barriers to involvement; and creating a climate to support civic involvement. One prominent barrier is the government's own bureaucracy, with DCLG positioning itself to tackle barriers when the Office for Civil Society is set up to liaise with the VCS about their concerns. There ought to be a simple way for the VCS to raise their concerns, enter into an open discussion, and have progress monitored and regularly shared with them. Elsewhere in this document we highlight the importance of the government openly recognising the reality of the cuts, the associated pain and the inherent risks of damaging the sector that supports the big society; and on the basis of a grounded commitment rather than blind optimism, invite others in to shape the agenda.

Voluntary & Community Sector: The diversity of civil society makes any generalisations difficult, hence we have included an additional Table in the Annex. The truth is, however, that right now many civil society organisations will be more focussed on trying to survive than on their role in driving civic involvement. But those that do survive will clearly be key to increasing involvement. They not only have the trust and access to people on the ground, but they also (although not always) have a greater propensity for disruption which, as we have already argued, is key to supporting the transformation required. They do however face challenges, such as their need to stay focused on their mission (for example, for the RSPB, Europe's largest environmental charity, it all comes back to birds at the end of the day). Also many of the important engagement and facilitation skills that will need to be developed will not always be well developed in organisations more focused on adversarial organising or campaigning.

Local Government: With many local authorities facing cuts of 25%, there will inevitably be significant and lasting consequences both for how local authorities function and for those who have been dependent on their funds. We argue here that we will only significantly increase civic involvement in the UK, if local government is seen as and supported to be a leader, and the central pillar, of the big society. This kind of approach is already happening in some enlightened councils such as Sutton, Rochdale, the Wirral and Lambeth; and at the national level the Our Society group are having a good go at providing some effective collective leadership.

Central government and the local press need to embrace and encourage them in this role. We argue that the only way we will deliver on our civic involvement goals is by fostering innovative and risk taking local authorities who truly understand their residents and know what makes them tick. They also need to embrace their role as local convenors, bringing together residents and organisations to set local strategy and solve problems.

Table 4: New Roles To Create Greater Civic Involvement

	Current Roles	Priority Roles	Challenges
Civil Society	• Issues Advocacy • Involvement Delivery • Driving Involvement • Practice Innovation	• Issues Advocacy • Driving Involvement • Practice Innovation	• Historic focus on advocacy not engagement • Variable 'involvement' skills • Funding threats
Local Government	• Local Convening • Local Leadership • Local Innovation	• Local Convening • Local Leadership • Local Innovation	• Risk Averse Organisational Culture • Sense of being under attack from Media & Central Government • Variable 'involvement' skills and willingness
Business	• Service Innovation • Service Involvement • Involvement Delivery	• Service Involvement	• Low historic emphasis on involvement • Low level of civic involvement skills
Central Government	• Communications Climate • Blocking Barriers • Funding	• Unblocking Barriers • Defining Big Society • Creating a Climate to Support Civic Involvement	• Not trusted • Building on previous governments successes • Funding 'Big Society' in austerity Britain

6.3 Principles

We conclude by setting out 14 overarching principles to steer the civic involvement work we need to undertake:

- Create conditions that support and allow transformative change
- Treat Participation as a Front Line Service
- Build and account for civic confidence
- Ensure public service contracts drive quality involvement
- Make use of the economically inactive as a valuable resource
- Channel civic energy from anti cuts campaigns into on-going conversational engagement
- Support creative disruptor approaches to involvement
- Account for and respond to participants' values and motivations
- Prioritise social action over consultation
- Support conversational third generation engagement not one off processes
- Do not worry about involving everyone in everything
- Allow time to fail and succeed
- Be transparent, but not just with data.
- To be truly innovative, the changes required are too great to centrally control

Building Civic Unltd

We hope you enjoyed Civic Limits.

We see it as a starting point for discussion rather than anything like the final word. We welcome your help in improving and developing the text ahead of its formal publication later this year.

Over the coming months we will be taking some of the ideas forward and are looking for some inspiring people from the public, private and voluntary sectors to work with. If you are one of these please get in touch!

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Annex

Roles of VCS in supporting greater civic involvement

Type	Examples	Challenges	Possible Role
Large VCS providers	Groundwork; Keep Britain Tidy; Barnardos; WRVS	Greater dependency on public funding when funding could be severely cut.	<i>People Shaping Services:</i> Build relationship with local communities and user groups to champion their concerns in shaping future services.
VCS umbrella groups	NCVO; Community Matters; Community Sector Coalition; Urban Forum;	Financial pressure on member organisations, and lack of external funding leading to sharply reduced capacity.	<i>Bridge to government & business:</i> Provide a shared platform to remind government and business of the need to work with VCS as partners in giving voice to communities and facilitate the transfer of engagement skills within the sector.
Small/Medium groups	Volunteer Centre Southwark; Castle Vale CHA; Royds Community Association	Cut of financial support from local public bodies and fewer people able to find time to volunteer as a result of job insecurity or not having a sufficient income to make ends meet.	<i>Community Convening:</i> Provide a focal point for communities to set out their priorities and organise the voicing of these priorities to public services and the meeting of some of the needs through community activities.
Predominantly advocacy-focused groups	CAB; Greenpeace; Political parties,	Anger with cuts deflecting people from realistic change strategies to counter-productive activities.	<i>Drive Involvement:</i> Provide people with opportunities to formulate solutions to common concerns, and get involved in the advocacy for those solutions.

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Civic Limits seeks to do two things: create a more focussed and practical big society debate and invite others in to be part of the big society conversation.

The success of the big society will depend on a step change in involvement and participation. Whilst the government is creating demand and expectation, government has failed so far to set out the extent of the involvement it wishes to promote, or sufficiently acknowledged the challenges faced in implementing change on the scale needed. We are not calling for top down involvement strategies. Instead government must explicitly reach out with the aim of co-creating the big society from the bottom-up, whilst identifying and acknowledging the challenges faced and explicitly seeking to overcome them.

It is in this spirit that this document has been written. It is our intention to initiate a dynamic conversation about what to do, not to simply state static proposals. It is in that spirit we offer Civic Limits and its recommendations as a starting point, with the expectation that they will be overtaken by initiatives and proposals developed by others.

This document is being purposely launched not as a finished, settled paper document, but as a living text on which we invite input, contribution and comment. It is not perfect; there will be errors and omissions. Please let us know what they are and offer your improvements and together we can try and overcome our Civic Limits.

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