



Local Economies: the role of local authorities and learning from the transition movement

Panel Discussion – Local Responses to Economic Growth

Has Government helped or hindered community action?

- Kickstarted something that was already underway; putting new ideas into town and parish councils.
- Over time, there has been disappointment that the legislation is not helping greatly apart from Neighbourhood Planning.
- Legislation has promised a great deal but been difficult to deliver. But some town and parish councils have stepped up to the mark.
- Community action happens organically and you can't legislate. It can set local groups against each other.
- Can you do it without legislation? Without the same level of public and government attention?
- Nation state legislation is not always helpful at the community level - people are creative and able to come up with their own approaches (e.g. responding to flooding). The hindrance is people being forced to think inside not outside the box because Government structures do not encourage people to think the unthinkable (i.e., we are led by experts).
- How can we integrate local knowledge into Government and the culture of Government?
- Many communities are full of ideas and operate informally to deliver services for residents (e.g. helping with transport).
- How can communities make the transition from informal volunteering/provision to formal provision – the process of doing this can be problematic as it takes decision making away from the local community.
- 'Bank of Dave' example in Burnley.
- To be sustainable you have to be local.
- Concern over the closure of shops and services in rural communities (e.g. post office).
- Workable plans going to the next tier of Government can scupper so many good ideas.
- How can you build consensus within a rural community (e.g. Neighbourhood Plans can drive economic growth or hinder it).
- Whose advice and knowledge do you take?
- There is a disconnect between national policy and a rural resident/community.
- Reduction in local government finance and resources is impacting upon rural communities.
- 'Watchet Community Plan' has been a collaborative community approach but finding local authority backing has been difficult.
- Power dynamics and who's in control?

Does local action provide an alternative to a market driven approach?

- The challenge is around taking this local action message and engaging people that have not until this point been engaged (NB: this is about more than mere communication or dissemination and is about empowering residents).
- Moving the story beyond traditional communities of interest - 98% of the pressure and trajectory of travel is not in this direction it's in the direction of economic growth and a traditional market driven

model. Transition needs to be contextualised in this wider picture and how/where it works (as counter culture not mainstream culture).

- Has counter culture become more popular (e.g. Countryfile has a prime time TV slot)? Has this national attitudinal shift changed what is happening at a very local level?
- There are two sides to the local economy: sustaining business and education (keep the money circulating locally – such as barter markets, street school economics and other local trading schemes happening in Stroud).
- What is the role of town and parish councils in local economic development? Is it on their radar?
- What is the benefit of local economic development for the community versus the big corporations - too often the community is on the receiving end of the market but the community also has the potential to change the character of the local economy: what can we do?
- Who is best placed to take a community leadership role? How can we bring people together? Communities are developing new skills as they answer these questions.
- Language - formal words in documents produced by Government and other agencies such as Local Enterprise Partnerships (e.g. sustainability, growth network) are off-putting and perceived as process driven by local groups.
- Everything is expected to be aligned (community, local authority, local enterprise partnership, central Government).
- How can something happen at a local level? Residents have to fight the process to get something done. "A knot not a golden thread".
- 'Greying localism' – 'how the localism act hands power to older generations (report: http://www.if.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Localism_IF_defin.pdf)
- Some successful initiatives can lead Government or Local Authorities to think they no longer need to support rural communities. But this leads to a widening of the 'haves' and 'have nots'.
- So much dependency on individual volunteers causes people to reach burn out and leave.
- Are parish councils conduits to local enterprise partnership?
- European model of 'LEADER' versus national model of 'LEADER' which focuses upon transformational growth and job creation.
- Identify rural ambassadors who can invest in the national economy.
- Finding grassroots knowledge and information.
- Do we learn from history or do we forget what has gone before? The need for integrated rural development.

Some examples of successful local economic initiatives

- St Werburghs City Farm (Bristol) http://www.stwerburghs.org/index.php?section=local_groups&page=st_Werburghs_City_Farm
- £17-£19 million brought into North Dorset as a result of community engagement (e.g. open spaces, LEADER, Lottery, S106). Finding money in the right places and having match.
- Real Food Store in Exeter. <http://www.realfoodexeter.co.uk/> This initiative demonstrates the importance of getting your marketing right and selling things people really want to buy and eat not occasional things you would purchase at a farmers market. The store has moved from a niche market to a wider market.
- Sturminster Newton Cheese Festival <http://www.cheesefestival.co.uk/>
- Dornen – Dorset Business Mentoring <http://www.dornen.org.uk/>
- Transition Stroud <http://www.transitionstroud.org/>
- Gloucestershire Village Agents <http://www.villageagents.org.uk/>
- How can we lock in the benefits of community projects? How can we encourage a community to take responsibility and ownership long term for assets and buildings?
- A list of things that communities have struggled to do and influence: reinstating community market, parking, health and health facilities, roads, traffic, planning, education (all controlled by other agencies that influence how the community can have a stake in their delivery).