RADIX

Community Involvement
in Levelling Up:

FROM GESTURE
TO STRUCTURE

A RESPONSE TO THE WHITE PAPER

by Gabriel Chanan

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FOREWORD

The call to 'Level Up' was to the 2019 election what 'Take Back Control' was to the Brexit referendum. It was the Conservative rallying cry which ultimately played a major part in taking out the 'red wall' and winning them the election, and yet it has remained vague and ill-defined.

Nevertheless, unlike 'Take Back Control', levelling up has ultimately to be more than a slogan if the Conservatives are to hold on to their 2019 advances. From Redcar to Stoke, people will expect to see an upturn in the fortunes of their local communities in return for their votes or they may yet return to the Labour fold. Brexit is 'done' but even its most fervent supporters would struggle to argue that it is (yet?) delivering on the ground the type of changes these areas believed they were voting for.

> THE GOVERNMENT'S CURRENT EGGS ARE NOW FIRMLY IN THE LEVELLING UP BASKET

For this reason, the Government's current eggs are now firmly in the levelling up basket. Without much new money, by 2024 at the latest, Michael Gove et al will need to persuade voters the slogan has real meaning or potentially pay the price. The Levelling Up White Paper has, therefore, been eagerly awaited and should bear much more scrutiny than a more typical paper of this kind.

The paper's narrative and direction of travel is strongly argued, but delivery requires a laser focus on structures and processes. What Gabriel has done in this anaylsis is to show what needs to happen next if the Government's 'missions' are actually going to make a real difference to ordinary people.

What is most interesting to me about Gabriel analysis is how closely it ties together with two other pieces of work currently being undertaken by Radix:

- *In Professor Stephen Smith's series of Radix pamphlets on NHS reform he argues time and again for the need for more localised, more joined up social prescribing to keep Britain healthy, rather than simply to treat the sick.*

- *And in our report from our London summit on regeneration, contributors time and again present ideas to engage local people in changing their communities, through community trusts, citizen's assemblies and more localised decision making.*

Radix is the think tank for the radical centre. By 'centre' we mean practical, mainstream and non-aligned; by 'radical' we mean concerned with system change. But while system change can derive from major reforms such as the establishment of NHS or the introduction of old age pensions, more frequently it requires us to identify the right levers to change how things are done in the long term.

There are many who accuse levelling up of being a cynical or meaningless slogan designed to garner votes. It might yet turn out to be just that, but as Gabriel argues here, and taking into consideration Radix's wider programme, it is certainly addressing real issues and seems pointed in the right direction, even if the focus is a little hazy.

Whether levelling up turns out to be a new NHS or merely another 'big society' will depend on the Government's readiness to listen to contributions such as Gabriel's to turn vision into delivery. I look forward to their response.

Ben Rich
Chief Executive, Radix Big Tent

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COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN LEVELLING UP:

FROM GESTURE TO STRUCTURE

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Levelling Up White Paper, issued in February 2022, puts forward a comprehensive regeneration framework based on driving up national prosperity while equalising the gains across regions and their disadvantaged areas.

2. Major schemes are to be driven by:

    - *better regional distribution of existing government procurement;*

    - *better regional impact of all public services; and*

    - *attracting new investment to regions and subregions through partnerships of research and industry, especially at the frontiers of new technology and green industries.*

Some short-term funds, already partly allocated, are focused on improving towns, high streets and a variety of local initiatives.

3. The plan is unclear on how the regional and subregional schemes will interact with disadvantaged localities. Reliance is placed on 'local leaders and their communities' but what takes place between these levels is vague. What is needed are concrete plans to:

    - *channel benefits of regional growth to disadvantaged neighbourhoods; and*

    - *strengthen the capacity of neighbourhood communities to work on social and economic issues across the board and link into regional initiatives.*

4. This requires that regional institutions and companies (including those in subregions and large localities) become more aware of how neighbourhood communities work and how to work with them. Research shows that most local community organisations feel disconnected from local public bodies, including local authorities, let alone regional ones.

5. Previous regeneration schemes show that it is difficult for neighbourhood-based plans alone to achieve major economic development and, conversely, difficult for regional or subregional plans to connect with disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Levelling Up has the potential to become a new model of regeneration through continuous collaboration between regional schemes and local neighbourhoods (including parishes, towns, villages and other small areas). This should include links with local businesses and community enterprises.

6. Social capital, meaning primarily strong local communities, is seen in the Levelling Up plan, as a key factor in the analysis of inequality, alongside economic and institutional factors. But in the corresponding missions and objectives social capital is reduced to 'pride of place' and supporting local leaders.

Pride of place is too tangential to represent social capital, and could be a distraction from more fundamental issues. It should be replaced by a mission squarely focused on strengthening community life as a whole.

The top priority objective under social capital should be increasing the capacity of residents across the whole sector of local community groups in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to drive their own improvement projects, link with regional schemes and make proposals for projects at all levels. Community capacity needs to be built both to widen participation within the neighbourhoods and to boost the effectiveness of community groups and organisations, including micro social enterprises.

8. Neighbourhood communities should be seen as people who are already engaged in their own forms of coping and regeneration activity which need to be strengthened under their own control. Improvement of disadvantaged neighbourhoods is not the action of an external force on a 'forgotten' place but engagement between different types of productive forces from within and without.

9. A Co-Production Unit should be established in each region, working to Levelling Up Directors, to:

- *guide and facilitate regional players in understanding and involving communities;*

- *facilitate communities in accessing, benefitting from and contributing to regional development; and*

- *deploy community capacity building teams in neighbourhoods, in collaboration with local authorities, local businesses, existing community work and the front-line work of public services.*

10. Community capacity can be measured by community activity and social capital amongst a given population, not by trying to define communities. The White Paper's commitment to develop better data in this area should be pursued with urgency. Profiles of the local community sector should become a standard item in local data.

11. Allocation of the remainder of the Shared Prosperity Fund should prioritise community capacity building, with an immediate start so that local communities can make input to regional plans.

12. In designing regional / subregional projects, 10% of funds should be allocated to projects focused on or proposed by disadvantaged communities.

13. Using its Cabinet position, LU should guide all public services in reviewing and strengthening their community engagement practices to enable front line workers to contribute to community capacity building.

14. The health service should link its frontier policies to local levelling up strategies, building further on its plans for better engagement with local communities through primary care networks, social prescribing and a better balance between prevention and treatment.

15. Community capacity building skills and traditions mostly reflect a long history of marginalisation and work with small isolated projects. New, outward-looking, strategic community capacity building curricula and training need to be devised for the LU agenda.

16. Long-term resources for community capacity building and neighbourhood projects should come from (i) a percentage of profits anticipated from private sector regional investments, on the model of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL); (ii) savings generated by reductions in exceptional demands on public services as neighbourhoods become wealthier; (iii) upgrading the community engagement policies and practices of all public services. New CIL guidance should foster creative collaboration between public, private sector and voluntary inputs to produce liveable, healthy, empowered communities.

1. THE LEVELLING UP WHITE PAPER

The White Paper Levelling Up the United Kingdom[1] was published in Feb 2022. It is a substantial document of 300+ pages containing in-depth analysis of regional inequalities across the UK and the Government's plans to overcome them. Alongside Brexit, the promise to 'level up' the country was part of what got the Conservatives under Boris Johnson elected in December 2019. The phrase was much criticised as an empty slogan. A White Paper was promised providing the substance. Covid intervened. The theme was reinvigorated with the appointment of Michael Gove to lead the newly named Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in September 2021.

Ambitious cross-sector regional economic projects are foreseen, combining cutting edge science and technology with private sector investment and government support. Better regional delivery of public services is promised, and a number of projects to improve conditions in disadvantaged localities have been set in train.

The big difference between Levelling Up and other regeneration schemes is that this is a national programme, targeted primarily at regional level but intended to reach down to localities, and within them to disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The Conservatives' *Single Regeneration Budget* of the 1990s, the Welsh Government's *Communities First* programme, and Labour's *New Deal for Communities and National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* of the 2000s, were targeted directly at neighbourhood level.

The LU narrative stresses that levelling up is not about improving some places at the expense of others. An economic analysis is set out showing that the whole society gains by improving regional equality, and the whole society loses by regional inequality. Eight-year objectives are framed in terms of improvements across society at the same time as narrowing gaps between richest and poorest.

The programme has a limited amount of money directly attached to it. But the most ambitious parts of the plan are about how existing government money, and money from other sources, could be used better. For example, government procurements of £300bn a year are skewed heavily towards London and the East and South East of England. So, a shift in where these are directed could see new opportunities for other regions.

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1. *Levelling Up the United Kingdom, Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, www.gov.uk/official-documents, CP604*

> **A SCEPTIC MIGHT VIEW THE LUWP AS A PUBLIC RELATIONS EXERCISE, BUT IT PROVIDES AN EXCEPTIONALLY COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF INEQUALITY, COMING CHALLENGES AND FAR-REACHING IDEAS FOR MEETING THEM**

A sceptical view might see the LUWP largely as a public relations exercise. Regardless, the document provides an exceptionally comprehensive analysis of the causes of inequality, assessment of coming challenges and far-reaching ideas for meeting them. To what extent political and economic circumstances will allow it to unfold as planned is unpredictable, but its analysis and policy framework will remain an important reference point for attempts to overcome inequality by any government for some time to come.

The White Paper can claim to present a new approach to regeneration, linking national, regional and local action. It dismisses previous regeneration schemes since the 1960s as largely having failed, irrespective of which government they were under, because they were too short-term, lacked scale and coordination, and were hamstrung by poor data and governance.

This judgement has some force but is too sweeping. An analysis by Onward, for example[2], shows that significant advances in local conditions were made under New Labour's *New Deal for Communities*, and that local community involvement was an important factor in this. The same claim could be made for the Conservatives' *Single Regeneration Budget*. Nevertheless, many gains were not sustained, and it is widely acknowledged that neighbourhood projects on their own cannot overcome inequality. Even with successive regeneration programmes there is long-term persistence of disadvantaged areas.

The LUWP opens a wider policy vista with the potential to link different geographical levels of prosperity and equality, accompanied by better data and analysis of what works. If this is carried through, it should stand a much better chance of reducing inequality than programmes which were focused only on disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

But if this new government-wide policy framework is to achieve its over-arching goal its effects must reach people in the most unequal neighbourhoods and link with their own efforts to cope with and improve their conditions. The response set out here is about whether the policy is likely to do that, or what can be done to make it more feasible.

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2. Onward, Turnaround, 2022 (undated)

2. COMMUNITIES

The LUWP recognises that there is major inequality not only between one region and one local authority and another, but between wards and neighbourhoods within single local authorities:

> *Geographical disparities across the UK are hyper local… Differences within UK regions or cities are larger than differences between regions… Often the differences are large even within a restricted geographical area such as a borough or district…[3]*

The people who live in a given neighbourhood can loosely be called a community, and the LUWP uses the term mainly in this sense. Other types of community could be anywhere, linked by ethnicity, interests or culture. The following analysis and proposals concentrate on the geographical aspect of community life because of its clear connection with inequality, but this must be accompanied by a caveat against wholly equating community life with localities. Other forms of community life are too various to be described here but should be included in a fuller analysis.

The meaning of a local community is fuzzy if we try to think of a it as a 'thing'. You cannot measure a community but you can measure levels of prosperity or poverty, education, crime, health and environment in, for example, an electoral ward (population average usually around

6,500) or a 'super output area' (7,500 population) or 'lower super output area' (LSOA, 1,500). Measurements at LSOA level are the basis for the widely-used Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), which provides the statistical picture for how deprivation varies across the country. The IMD judges deprivation on the basis of income, employment, education, skills and training, health and disability, crime, barriers to housing and services, and living environment.

These statistical divisions may only roughly align with what people think of as their local community or neighbourhood (or parish, village or town) but are useful when we need comparative geographical information. It is through these that we know about, for example, stark differences in income, education and life expectancy between the residents of different neighbourhoods even within the same local authority.

NEIGHBOURHOODS ARE MORE THAN A USEFUL LEVEL OF STATISTICAL ANALYSIS. THEY ARE ALSO THE MAIN SETTING IN WHICH PEOPLE INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER ON A DAILY BASIS

3. LUWP, p27

But neighbourhoods are more than a useful level of statistical analysis. They are also the main setting in which people interact with each other on a daily basis, in shops, on the streets, at stations, at primary school gates, in friendship networks, in day centres, youth centres, sports clubs, local businesses, community groups and so on. This is the primary geographical level where people get together to manage their lives, solve shared problems and improve local conditions. Community activity unlocks positive changes in health and other areas. Confidence, friendship and motivation are all boosted when people come together around a local issue or interest. In terms of the White Paper's categories, this is largely where social capital is generated.

But the IMD rankings, and most of the policies that are based on them, are only about the condition of communities, not people's own actions. A stronger meaning of community includes people's relationships, things they do together, social networks, participation in governance and sense of ownership of local developments. This active side of community can also be measured to some extent, for example by surveying people's feelings of involvement, volunteering and the range of independent community groups and networks operating in the place. Numerous local projects and the experience of past regeneration programmes suggest that this active community factor is vital in coping with inequality, making some inroads against it and sustaining local gains when regeneration programmes end.

The LU plan speaks frequently of 'local leaders and their communities' but the phrase rather obscures the question of how projects designed at regional / subregional or even local authority level (covering populations of 150,000+) affect conditions or link with people's own actions in neighbourhoods (around 5 – 10,000).

We are left with two interrelated concerns:

(i) how are benefits of regional initiatives to be transmitted to the local areas of greatest disadvantage? And

(ii) how are communities in those areas to participate in and help shape and multiply the actions to reduce inequality?

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3. WHAT DETERMINES EQUALITY AND INEQUALITY?

In the WP analysis, equality and inequality between regions and places is traced to the presence or absence of six types of capital:

- **PHYSICAL CAPITAL**
  infrastructure, machines and housing.

- **HUMAN CAPITAL**
  the skills, health and experience of the workforce.

- **INTANGIBLE CAPITAL**
  innovation, ideas and patents.

- **FINANCIAL CAPITAL**
  resources supporting the financing of companies.

- **SOCIAL CAPITAL**
  the strength of communities, relationships and trust, and

- **INSTITUTIONAL CAPITAL**
  local leadership, capacity and capability.

The WP emphasises that the six capitals all interact to produce growth and equality or decline and inequality. 'Levelling up is about aspiring for every place in the UK to have a rich endowment of all six capitals.'

The local community element figures under the heading of social capital. However, social capital is not well integrated into the plan, and evaporates when it comes to the detail.

FOUR AIMS AND TWELVE MISSIONS

The 'six capitals' analysis furnishes four main aims:

a. boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging;

b. spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest;

c. restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost; and

d. empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency.

AT FIRST SIGHT 'COMMUNITY' APPEARS TO BE A MAJOR CONCERN [OF THE LU PLAN], BUT THIS TURNS OUT TO BE INDIRECT AND UNCERTAIN... THE CONDITION AND CONTRIBUTION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMUNITIES SLIPS OUT OF SIGHT.

At first sight 'community' appears to be a major concern, sitting under the third and fourth aims. This turns out to be indirect and uncertain. As the detail unfolds, 'Restore a sense of community' is channelled primarily into 'Pride in place', exemplified by 'people's satisfaction with their town centre'. And 'Empower local leaders and communities' is channelled into local leadership, which in turn is channelled into 'the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement'. The condition and contribution of neighbourhood communities themselves slips out of sight.

These four aims are then populated with twelve 'missions' with eight- year objectives (see Appendix 1). Again, the headlines of the 12 missions invoke communities boldly enough but the detail doesn't.

For action at local level the plan initiates some important projects and these are to some extent already on stream. A group of small funds have been allocated and there are some further allocations to be made over 2002-4 (p240 ff). 101 towns have received up to £25m from the Town Deals fund to invest in regeneration (total £2.3bn). 72 places have received grants of an average of £11m from the Future High Streets Fund to renew and reshape high streets (total £830m). The Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) has allocated £2.6bn of funding to a variety of local projects and promises to allocate £3bn more over the next two years.

These initiatives are promising, even if the sums are small compared to the extent of need and the scale of losses which local authorities have endured over the past decade. Prominent choices include renovating town centres and city centres, creating new training centres, renovating vacant city centre buildings, boosting technology centres, improving travel links, renovating a bridge, renovating a canal. More hyper-locally focused are a community wellbeing hub and a community sports hub.

But being mostly capital projects, and delivered without visible involvement of local communities, they fall under the heading of physical, not social, capital. They could ultimately link to social capital, which is presumably the intention, but they do not embody it and could even distract from it.

On the Shared Prosperity Fund the narrative adds:

> *'The £2.6bn Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) will be used to restore local pride across the UK by focussing investment on … improving communities and place, people and skills and supporting local business… Local leaders will be empowered to direct funding towards their own locally identified priorities, whether that be promoting new outdoor markets, reducing litter, graffiti and antic-social behaviour, reviving high streets, supporting local businesses or introducing skills provision…'[4]*

The examples of what local leaders might choose to do reinforce the impression that the LU planners have difficulty focusing on social capital itself. No doubt many local leaders' preferred projects would be useful and well-intentioned, but it would be better to use what remains of the SPF, and what other money can be garnered for local development, on fundamental community capacity building, as explained below.

> NO DOUBT MANY LOCAL LEADERS' PREFERRED PROJECTS WOULD BE USEFUL AND WELL-INTENTIONED, BUT IT WOULD BE BETTER TO USE WHAT MONEY CAN BE GARNERED FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT, ON FUNDAMENTAL COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

Where strength of local communities is concerned, a conceptual shrinkage appears to take place between the process of turning the capitals into aims and the aims into missions. Amongst the six capitals, social capital is at first seen as 'the strength of communities, relationships and trust'. In the aims this becomes housing, crime, local leadership and 'Pride in Place'. The main practical programmes flowing from 'pride in place' are then restoring town centres and high streets. Social capital is largely displaced by physical and institutional capital.

Important principles about community involvement do emerge near the end of the White Paper, under a section on the Community Ownership Fund (pp214ff), such as 'enabling groups to come together to set local priorities and shape their neighbourhoods'. Positioned as a subcategory of a subcategory, these principles have not been integrated into the mainstream thinking. The architecture and sequencing of the plan as a whole conveys the impression that involving local communities actively is an afterthought and could drop off the agenda.

4. LUWP, Summary, xxiv

'*Pride in place*' is a desirable thing but it cannot carry the weight of social capital as a whole. The part of the Technical Annex that deals with how this mission will be measured shows researchers struggling to give substance to it:

> *Survey-based measures of pride in place are still in their infancy… The government intends to carry out further work to identify and develop the most appropriate measures… There is currently no recorded measure of satisfaction with town centres… The mission is exploratory…*[5]

It is disheartening to think of the effort being put into trying to make this improvised headline substitute for social capital when there is a pressing need for consolidating and improving measures which address the fundamental issue of community involvement across the board.

What is needed is to subsume pride in place under a mission which embodies social capital itself, aimed full-frontally at strengthening communities, and measured by fundamental criteria. This should be furnished with actions which a theory of change would suggest most likely to generate stronger community life across all issues and all sections of the population, and most likely to enable neighbourhood communities to interact with regional economic development and the other five forms of capital.

THE NEED FOR A DEDICATED SOCIAL CAPITAL MISSION

A fuller concept of building social capital, or community capacity, in the context of Levelling Up can be described as working in four dimensions:

> *(i) drawing isolated and alienated people into community activity of any constructive sort, often through a community group;*
>
> *(ii) strengthening the ability of community groups to achieve whatever constructive objectives they set themselves;*
>
> *(iii) creating better community engagement policies across the local public and private services; and*
>
> *(iv) fostering a co-productive relationship between local community sectors and regional regeneration projects.*

THE LU PLAN NEEDS CONCERTED ACTION HEADED BY A MISSION FOCUSED CENTRALLY ON SOCIAL CAPITAL ITSELF

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5 *Levelling Up the United Kingdom, Missions and Metrics, Technical Annex,*
  HM Government, CP 604, 2 Feb 2022, p35

It is unlikely that the LU plan will achieve these effects as automatic by-products of regional level plans or local flagship capital projects. They need concerted action headed by a mission focused centrally on social capital itself. On the model of the other missions, this could read: By 2030, social capital will have improved in all areas, especially the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, shown for example by stronger social networks and increase of independent local community group activity across the spectrum of social issues.

THE NEW MISSION SHOULD BE:

BY 2030, SOCIAL CAPITAL WILL HAVE IMPROVED IN ALL AREAS, ESPECIALLY THE MOST DISADVANTAGED NEIGHBOURHOODS, SHOWN FOR EXAMPLE BY STRONGER SOCIAL NETWORKS AND INCREASE OF INDEPENDENT LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUP ACTIVITY ACROSS THE SPECTRUM OF SOCIAL ISSUES.

Action flowing from this would include:

(i) a community capacity building strategy for each local authority area, with special focus on the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods;

(ii) mechanisms to create dialogue and collaboration between local/ regional/ subregional initiatives and disadvantaged neighbourhoods;

(iii) integrating the 'afterthought' community involvement principles on pp 214ff of the LUWP into the mainstream policy thinking, for example that local communities should have a say in local and regional planning at an early enough stage to influence them;

(iv) improved community engagement by local public and private services;

(v) devising a specific mechanism to tie economic growth at regional level to funding the growth of social capital and equality in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

4. ACHIEVING A
   DEEPER EFFECT

Many examples from previous regeneration schemes or local projects could be adduced to illustrate how much richer and deeper local developments are when building social capital is part of the foundation rather than a gesture. Here is one:[6]

> *An outlying estate cut off from a nearby prosperous area by a single steep road had a high degree of poverty, crime and poor health. Its single open space was dominated by drug users and rubbish dumpers. A small community-work team brought together some of the most motivated local residents from amongst the 4000 population and helped them set up their own neighbourhood organisation. This then invited front-line workers from police, housing, health and environment to hear about what it was like to live in the area and how the residents would like the agencies' help in improving it. One of the residents' priorities was to turn the open space into the park it was originally intended to be. The professionals were sceptical about finding enough resources to convert the space and keep it in order. Residents who had never been active before volunteered to do some of the physical conversion work, the professionals helped get a small regeneration grant for cash costs,*

> *and the residents set up a volunteer warden scheme to look after the place. Once the work was under way, many more residents came forward to volunteer, and more after them to set up a children's play area. Other activity groups for exercise, socialising and childcare coalesced around the new amenity. The experience for the core activists was transformational, whilst the benefits for others multiplied as people became less isolated, did more exercise, were healthier, picked up on the atmosphere of hope and development, and pursued numerous other local improvements, many of which bore fruit.*

The point is not simply that the derelict ground was turned into a park. That could have been done by a top-down decision (though in that case it would still have required community pressure). The more fundamental point is that by being community-led, the process generated a momentum of multiplying social networks and benefits. These undoubtedly involved many more residents, boosted mental and physical health and generated motivation to further improvement. Created this way, the park was not a single gain but a stage in long-term self-regenerating improvement.

6. A Can-Do Community Partnership, Steve Griffiths, Health Empowerment Leverage Project, 2012

PERSONAL SOCIAL CAPITAL

At a personal level, social capital is the strength of people's social networks, relationships, personal effectiveness or 'agency', and ability to co-operate with other people. Some of the key features are captured in the annual Community Life Survey (CLS) produced by the DCMS[7]. Although this is carried out on a national sample, the method allows findings to be related to whether the respondents live in areas of greater or lesser deprivation as measured by the IMD (Figure 1).

Clearly there is poorer personal social capital in the more deprived areas. Many people who score low on these criteria are likely to be less involved in social networks and community activity, and may well have poorer mental and physical health. They are less likely to have their voice heard and their needs met though community groups. A basic function of community capacity building is enabling these least involved people to participate in some way, which will often be through some kind of community group.

Figure 1: Community Life Survey 2020/21, Selected Findings

	Community Life survey item	% RESPONDENTS FROM LEAST DEPRIVED AREAS	% RESPONDENTS FROM MOST DEPRIVED AREAS
1.	Feel belong to their neighbourhood	72	57
2.	Satisfied with the local area as a place to live	90	62
3.	Chat with neighbours at least once a month	80	66
4.	Agree the neighbourhood is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well with each other	90	75
5.	Feel there is someone could call on for company	96	88
6.	Feel isolated	6	14
7.	Feel lonely often or always	4	10
8.	Volunteer informally (not through organisation) at least once a month	36	30
9.	Volunteer formally (not through organisation) at least once a month	23	12
10.	Have given to charity in the last four weeks	67	60

7. DCMS, Community Life Survey 2020/21, Community Life Survey 2020/21 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

A further function is to assist groups to be more inclusive and effective, leading to improvements in local conditions both directly through their own activities, such as running a youth club, sports club, choir or carers' group, or through collaboration with outside bodies, such as involvement in a regeneration plan. An inclusive, vigorous, skilful neighbourhood community sector is an essential partner for a regeneration scheme aiming to reach into disadvantaged areas.

GROUP SOCIAL CAPITAL

What neither the IMD nor the Community Life Survey covers is the profile of group activity when people get together to pursue interests, make friends, help each other, organise activities for other residents, or work for improvements to the locality – the kind of positive, productive social capital that shows up as independent community groups, initiatives and networks.

Studies commissioned by Local Trust include a number of additional indicators that go some way towards capturing a fuller concept of community involvement[8]. But there is no regular measurement of the community groups sector. This is a gap which should be addressed by the data improvement agenda of the Levelling Up plan.

The largest study of the local voluntary and community sector ever carried out in England was done by Ipsos Mori for the then Department for Communities and Local Government in 2008 and 2010[9]. It surveyed every local voluntary or community organisation that could be identified from all 149 upper tier local authority sources and local umbrella groups in England. This produced a sample consisting of 104,391 organisations, i.e. an average of about two per thousand people. From these, it obtained a response rate of 47% to a set of questions about what they did, what helped or hindered them in doing it and in particular how they were affected by the statutory bodies in their local area (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: National Survey of Charities & Social Enterprises, 2010

Areas of work	2010
Community development and mutual aid	17%
Coheseion/civic participation	6%
Culture (inc. arts & music)	13%
Leisure (inc. sport & recreation)	21%
Economic wellbeing (inc. economic development, employment & relief of poverty	8%
Accommodation / housing	6%
Education & lifelong learning	28%
Training	10%
Environment / sustainabilty	4%
Equalities / civil right (e.g. gender, race, disabilities)	2%
Heritage	5%
Health & well-being (eg medical, health, sickness, disability, mental health, councelling)	17%
International development (e.g. overseas aid, famine relief)	4%

8. Local Trust/ OCSI, Left Behind? Understanding communities on the Edge, 2019; and Community Needs Index - measuring social and cultural factors - OCSI
9. https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/migrations/ en-uk/files/Assets/Docs/Polls/nscse-national-survey-2010-topline.pdf

Religious / faith based activity	13%
Criminal justice	1%
Animal welfare	1%
Capacity building & other support for charities, social enterprises and/or voluntary organisations	5%
Other charitable, social or community purposes	5%
Cannot say	1%
No answer provided	5%

This uniquely rich source of data received far less notice than it deserved because its publication coincided with the atrophy of regeneration policy following the financial crash of 2008 and change of government of 2010. Its methods are just as relevant now and its findings remain a useful baseline.

An important caveat is the researchers' acknowledgement that they could not capture the many 'below the radar' groups which do not appear on official lists such as the register of charities or local authority grantees. These would generally be small groups which have little funding or paid staff and no premises of their own, but which are still important to local regeneration, being deeply embedded in some section of their community.

The real extent of the community groups sector can be partly seen in the fact that even amongst this sample of officially listed groups, 56% had no full time employees and 36% had income of less than £10,000 pa. At the higher end of the scale 20%

56% OF COMMUNITY GROUPS HAVE NO FULL TIME EMPLOYEES AND 36% HAVE INCOME OF LESS THAN £10,000 PA.

of respondents were professionally-led charities with £100,000 or more.

The profile of issues worked on by groups shows that, between its many small and fewer large organisations, the sector was involved in every aspect of social and economic policy. But only 16% of respondents felt that they had a positive relationship with local statutory bodies[10]. 14% felt negative about the relationship, and 69% had few or no dealings with statutory bodies. Those that had a positive relationship were largely the better funded and staffed organisations.

This big gap which most of the organisations felt between themselves and the public sector was not mainly about funding. It was about lack of communication, recognition, influence, support and, yes, funding too. To put it bluntly, most community groups were ignored by most public bodies.

DENSITY AND SPARSITY OF GROUPS

The researchers didn't ask what seems in retrospect an obvious question – why they found so many more groups per head in some areas than others.

10. Thriving Third Sector, Office of the Third Sector, Cabinet Office, 2010.

Exact comparisons are difficult in retrospect but there were clearly some immense differences in the sheer number of groups from one place to another. For example the London Borough of Camden has about 30 per cent more people than the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham but had eight times as many listed groups. Brighton has about 16 per cent more people than Torbay but had three times as many listed groups. The general level of prosperity was no doubt a factor, and possibly the age of the population, but probably also the differential history of community capacity building.

More recent evidence confirms the divergence. Drawing together a variety of sources across England, Corry[11] found fewest registered charities in the localities that need them most. The average for England is 1.8 per 1,000 people. But it is much higher in well-off areas, for example 5.5 in the Cotswolds; and lower in disadvantaged areas, for example around 0.7 in Blackpool, 0.8 in Knowsley and 1.0 across Manchester.

MOST SMALL GROUPS CREATE THEMSELVES 'FROM THE BOTTOM UP' BUT, ARE STILL VERY MUCH AFFECTED BY THE AVAILABILITY OF INFRASTRUCTURAL SUPPORT

The pattern for smaller community groups (unregistered charitable organisations) is likely to show an even more acute differentiation, except where there may have been a sustained community development strategy.

Most small groups create themselves 'from the bottom up' but, despite 'Big Society' assumptions, are still very much affected by the availability of infrastructural support. For example, few will have premises of their own, so their ability to carry out activities will often depend on a local community centre or similar amenity. The community centre will be a registered charity, so in places where there are fewer registered charities there is also likely to be a dearth of unregistered community groups.

BRINGING THE SMALLER GROUPS TO LIGHT

On the whole small groups are more fully voluntary (many having no staff at all), more participative and more fully part of their community, while the large organisations (who are fewer in number) tend to be professionally staffed, specialise in providing particular services and are geared to delivering public service contracts.

Whilst we should not make an absolute division between the large and small groups, since there are a number of important organisations which manage to straddle both types of function, it is primarily the small groups and the community centres and hubs that support

11. Corry, D., *Where Are England's Charities?*. London: New Philanthropy Capital, 2020

them that are more indicative of the life of the community. There are also far more of them, especially bearing in mind high estimates of those that fall below the radar of official surveys. While some of the large organisations mobilise large numbers of volunteers as well as staff, others don't, and overall the bulk of volunteering is mobilised by the small groups. In addition, there is informal volunteering such as neighbourly help that doesn't go through even small organisations.

A number of studies of community and voluntary groups in particular localities were carried out using methods based on the national survey and the best of these studies were able to get a fuller picture of this low-profile sector. In particular, a series of studies of Greater Manchester and its constituent authorities by a team at Sheffield Hallam University captured a far larger number of the small organisations. In 2013, the Bolton study, for example[12] found 1,418 community and voluntary organisations across its 280,000 population, about five per thousand people. 78% of these were 'micro', i.e. had less than £10k cash turnover a year. The researchers estimated that these mobilised 100,900 hours of volunteering per week, which is equivalent to 2,727 full time jobs. Here, and across Manchester, relations with the local authority were much better than in the national picture, but the sector as a whole faced an uncertain future, with increasing demand outstripping diminishing resources.

The community sector also includes social enterprises which can make some direct contribution to the neighbourhood or local area economy[13]. Neighbourhoods or clusters of neighbourhoods can host micro economic initiatives such as co-operatives, community interest companies and timebanks. And any community organisation large enough to run premises, such as a community centre, operates to some extent as a small business or co-op, hiring out space to smaller groups, and running courses or activities to cover its costs, often creating a handful of jobs in the process. Plans for regional economic initiatives should include nurturing micro enterprises and buying services in deprived neighbourhoods wherever possible.

12. Dayson et al, Bolton State of the Voluntary Sector, Centre for Regional and Social research, Sheffield Hallam University, 2013.

13. Described from various angles by contributors to Tomorrow's Communities, ed Henry Tam, Bristol: Policy Press, 2021

5. LINKING WITH PUBLIC SERVICES ESPECIALLY HEALTH

A further element in local community capacity is the contribution of local services, both public and private. In addition to delivery of the service itself, front-line workers are sometimes able to support community groups and organisations. Conversely, community activity is sometimes about collaboration with a particular service, benefitting from the problem-solving skills of front-line workers in education, housing, health, police, fire and rescue, welfare, faith organisations and charities. Some proportion of local community organisations are public service user groups - tenants' associations, friends of parks, GP practice participation groups, parent-teacher associations, police liaison groups and so on. Through these, community activity helps improve a service, and sometimes activists and front-line workers are able to work together on creative local solutions.

> **THE PUBLIC SERVICES ARE FACED WITH EXCEPTIONALLY HIGH DEMAND IN DISADVANTAGED NEIGHBOURHOODS. THE SERVICES, LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THE TREASURY ALL HAVE A LOT TO GAIN FROM LEVELLING UP IN THESE AREAS.**

The public services are faced with exceptionally high demand in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where pressure is highest on health, policing, social work and welfare benefits. The services, local authorities and the Treasury all have a lot to gain from levelling up in these areas. The Big Society approach dubiously promoted community activity as an alternative to public services. The potential of Levelling Up, by contrast, is to improve public services and local community effectiveness together.

All services have some form of community engagement policy. Sometimes it means little more than formal consultations, which elicit responses only from small numbers of residents. Instead, all services need to create, or recreate, scope for productive interaction between front-line workers and active residents, through listening meetings, citizen assemblies and collaboration on neighbourhood improvement projects. These opportunities cannot be governed by standardised targets, but they can be recognized by whether they widen resident involvement and thereby improve local health, mental health, safety, learning and motivation. They, therefore, require that the services listen not only to the community but to feedback from their own front line workers who daily interface with the community and grapple with their adverse conditions.

Some local officers are natural community workers who could play a more creative role in the locality if their institutions and managers understood the added value this brought to the community and the effectiveness of their service.

This is an area where Levelling Up's cross-government reach should be activated to ensure that each Department builds more collaborative forms of community engagement into the delivery chains of its front-line services.

Solving the problem is not, then, only a matter of building the capacity of the community sector but of changing the culture of the public bodies. What is particularly relevant to regeneration from the England-wide picture of 2010 (note 9) is that so few groups had a good relationship, or in most cases any relationship, with the local public bodies. Any new regional initiative created by a partnership of public and private bodies will exhibit the same remoteness from local communities unless it is specifically designed to overcome this tendency.

It is particularly important for LU to link with the NHS, where the issue of community involvement is crucial to the long-term effort to promote good health. 'Fundamental…is a shift in the lead responsibility for health care and promotion from hospitals and organisations which treat sickness to the public and GPs, with a focus on keeping us all well… A third of NHS illness would disappear with healthier lifestyles… A lot of money is spent in a non-optimal way… A missing ingredient has been a systematic engagement of, and integration with, non-traditional healthcare actors and activation of the public as co-producers and problem-solvers'. [14]

The Health Creation Alliance has crystallised principles for working with communities which are central to the local LU agenda: 'Community insight is needed to inform effective decision-making… Co-create solutions with communities, because ideas that come from people will work for them… Give the workforce permission to try new things and develop new solutions in partnership with communities… ask them what's working and how you can support them to develop their approach further and spread it'[15]

NHS experiments in cost saving through better public engagement point the way to a better balance between formal services and community activity. A formula should be devised for calculating savings to public expenditure from increased community productivity, and a proportion of those savings should be remitted to support further growth in community capacity, thus creating a virtuous circle of collaboration.

14. *Localise, Equalise and Untick. The Future of Healthcare Post-Covid, by Dr Paul Goldsmith, Dr David Colin-Thomé and David Boyle, RADIX paper No 16, July 2020, p6/8*

15. *Addressing National Health Inequalities by Taking a Health Creation Approach, Health Creation Alliance, 2022 https://thehealthcreationalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/THCA-Report_Addressing-national-health-inequalities-priorities-through-Health-Creation-March-2022.pdf*
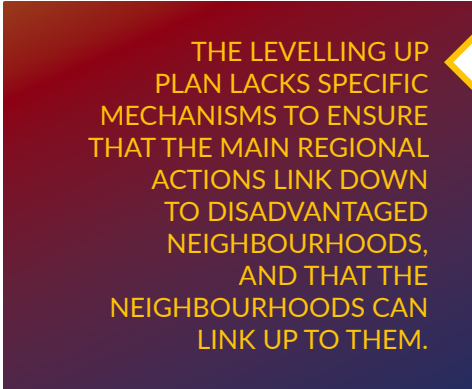
6. LINKING THE SPATIAL LEVELS

The LUWP missions are to be populated by major projects in each region. The plan is visionary about the regional level. Its ideas and commitments for the local level, especially disadvantaged neighbourhoods, are more limited and arbitrary. But unless sustained progress is made in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods, regional inequality as a whole is unlikely to be reduced.

Each spatial approach has strengths and weaknesses. Targeting neighbourhoods enables you to focus on the concentrations of greatest need and inequality. But most such areas are too small and have too few assets to generate major economic growth. Neighbourhood-level growth can include significant micro economic initiatives, but these are not enough on their own to turn around local economic conditions. Other neighbourhood projects can also create improvements in local life which are valuable in themselves, but without economic revival they are continually fighting against poor conditions.

Targeting regions (and subregions) enables you to bring together major economic players for new economic initiatives and investment, but conversely can fail to spread improvements to the places where disadvantage is concentrated. It can even exacerbate inequality.

The centripetal pattern of economic development which leads to some regions being richer than others in the first place is reproduced at regional and even local authority level where, without specific countervailing action, the economic centre may thrive while the periphery declines.

> **THE LEVELLING UP PLAN LACKS SPECIFIC MECHANISMS TO ENSURE THAT THE MAIN REGIONAL ACTIONS LINK DOWN TO DISADVANTAGED NEIGHBOURHOODS, AND THAT THE NEIGHBOURHOODS CAN LINK UP TO THEM.**

The Levelling Up plan attempts to bring all spatial levels into play. It is strong on ideas for the regional/subregional level and has planted some short-term projects in localities. But it lacks specific mechanisms to ensure that the main regional actions link down to disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and that the neighbourhoods can link up to them. The experience of the Lottery-funded Big Local scheme which allocated £1.15m each to 150 local communities in England to spend over 10-15 years suggests that it is difficult even for relatively

well-supported neighbourhood projects to get co-operation from larger regional or subregional players if those larger organisations are not geared to recognising and working with community-based initiatives. [16]

LOCAL LEADERS: NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT

There is, throughout the plan, an assumption that 'local leaders' will knit together regional economic initiatives and disadvantaged neighbourhoods. But how this is to be done is just what is at issue. 'Local leaders' does not mean community leaders but leaders of local authorities and other large and complex bodies such as major regional companies or investors, Health and Wellbeing Boards, Local Economic Partnerships, Clinical Commissioning Groups or universities.

In British political discourse 'local' generally means the level of a unitary local authority – mostly upwards of 150,000 population. And in this plan 'local' is often used to mean upwards of 500,000 people. This is a long way, both administratively and psychologically, from neighbourhoods, which in practice cover populations of around five to ten thousand. It is helpful that GP practices are now beginning to collaborate in Primary Care Networks to address health promotion across populations of 30-50,000 people.

In previous regeneration programmes, local authorities were the main vehicles for coordinating and delivering special help to disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Indeed, many LAs ran programmes of their own for this purpose, or continued government programmes for a time after the end of special funding. But few LAs are in a position to do so now.

Local authorities are still vital to local programmes, but the massive cuts of the austerity decade reduced not only resources but the democratic scope of LAs and their ability to strengthen weaker neighbourhoods. Since they could not reduce their statutory obligations, cuts fell draconically on discretionary areas. One result has been the decimation of neighbourhood projects and the amenities that neighbourhood groups and initiatives depend on to carry out their activities – community centres, youth clubs, old people's day centres, libraries, swimming pools, sports clubs and other venues.[17]

DAMAGED COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Most local community sectors are struggling since austerity and the decline of amenities. A number of local authorities have valiantly sought to maintain their community support role despite the losses.

16. McCabe, A., Wilson, M and Macmillan, R. (2018c) Big Local: Outside In, Birmingham: Local Trust, Sheffield Hallam University and Third Sector Resource Centre https://research.birmingham.ac.uk/en/publications/big-local-reflections-from-the-outside-in   and http://www.ourbiggerstory.com/Reports/TSRC%20Building%20on%20Local.pdf
17. Gregory, D., Skittled Out? The Collapse and Revival of England's Social Infrastructure. London: Locality, 2018

But in many disadvantaged places the community centre has gone, the youth club has gone, the library is only open two days a week, and many community groups have folded for lack of somewhere affordable to meet.

> THE FACT THAT A NUMBER OF AMENITIES HAVE BEEN SAVED BY TRANSFER INTO COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP IS ADMIRABLE, BUT IS UNLIKELY TO BE A LARGE-SCALE SOLUTION.

The fact that a number of amenities have been saved by transfer into community ownership is admirable, but is unlikely to be a large-scale solution. It also sometimes raises other problems. In practice, assets are not owned by that amorphous thing 'the community' but by a particular community organisation, which may run them well or badly just as a local authority might. Even those managing groups that do their utmost to be affordable and available across the community confront costs which push them to hire space to companies and private events to whom they can charge higher fees than they can to community groups. The primary question is not who owns community assets but, first, whether they are there at all and, second, whether they are run in such a way as to facilitate growing community activity.

Community sectors tend to be smaller and weaker in disadvantaged areas. Some of the neighbourhoods that need to be targeted are places where previous regeneration efforts fizzled out. So far from these being 'forgotten communities' (other than by government and large institutions), local residents have long memories – often much longer than government initiatives. Onward makes the point that even if improvements are made, whether they are sustained after the funding has gone depends on whether local residents identify with them and can sustain them.[18] As one local activist said to a government project officer who asked what the exit strategy was, 'We have no exit strategy. We live here'.

A DEDICATED CO-PRODUCTION UNIT

What is needed is a dedicated unit which would work alongside regional initiatives to facilitate a co-productive relationship between them and disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It would help the regional players to relate to the neighbourhoods and deploy local teams to help the neighbourhoods to grow their community sectors, so that they can better contribute to, influence and benefit from regional initiatives.

A proportion of funding from every regional initiative, possibly 10%, should be set aside for strengthening the capacity of disadvantaged communities and to implement ideas arising from them.

18. Onward, Turnaround, Jan 2022 (undated)

Regional bodies should be geared to listening and responding to input from communities. In parallel, the local teams would build the capacity of communities to access the benefits of regional growth and to contribute to growth through their own activities. It would thus integrate social capital into regional planning.

This won't happen easily through existing structures. The regional co-production unit and local teams need to be flexible enough to transmit ideas and support both 'up' and 'down', and to work across all the relevant agencies.

The unit should therefore be accountable to the regional Levelling Up Director, with a steering group selected from the relevant bodies and communities. But it should be largely independent of existing structures and have the expertise and credibility to influence both regional level planning and neighbourhood development, and to align the two. It would not in any way displace the role of authorities or community representatives but work with them.

The positioning of the regional unit and the local teams might be as in Figure 3. To emphasise that the CU is a facilitative unit, not an additional layer of bureaucracy, it is perhaps best imagined as inscribed within a '45°' degree concept of the government-citizen relationship, as advocated by Compass,[19] which seeks to dispel the persistent idea that power is always at 'the top' and local citizens at 'the bottom'.

Figure 3: Organisational position of a regional social capital unit and local teams
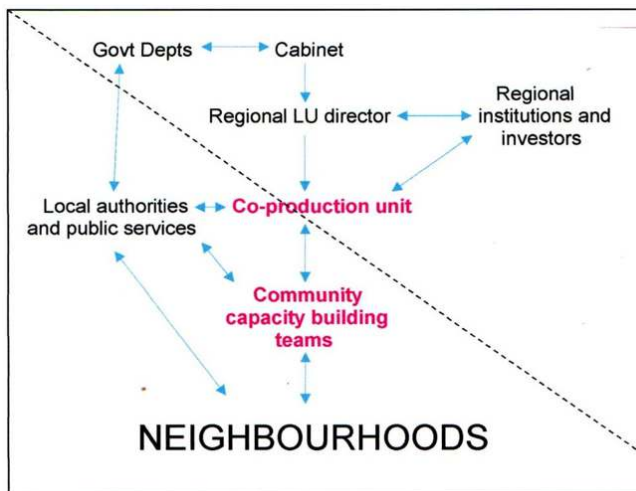
19. *Neal Lawson, 45° Change: Transforming Society from Below and Above, 2019. https://www.compassonline.org.uk/publications/45o-change-transforming-society-from-below-and-above/*

Working with regional partners, the co-production unit would:

- *ensure an understanding and a living sense of how local communities work;*

- *help assess regional plans for impacts on disadvantaged neighbourhoods;*

- *ensure that the timetable for development of regional projects allows for meaningful input from local communities;*

- *facilitate meetings and networking between key actors from regional and local bodies and disadvantaged neighbourhoods;*

- *help establish mechanisms for allocating an agreed percentage of new regional investment to long-term community capacity building;*

- *help establish mechanisms for identifying savings in public expenditure from growth of prosperity in disadvantaged areas and channelling them into further growth of community activity;*

- *advise regional project planners on including employment and business opportunities for residents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods; including support for social enterprises and buying services from local businesses; and*

- *deploy local community capacity building teams.*

7. BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

The local community capacity building teams will need to link to different LA departments, local businesses, Primary Care Networks, Police, and other agencies, as well as neighbourhood-based organisations. It would be difficult to carry out this flexible facilitative function from within an LA department, but an LA might well host and facilitate the CCB team.

The team would be responsible to the regional Co-Production Unit and be advised by a steering group drawn from communities and local bodies. It would judge what sort of capacity building to deploy at what level, for example on some issues across LAs, on others in particular neighbourhoods, linking with relevant community groups at each level.

A CCB TEAM WOULD:

- *initiate surveys of the condition of community activity in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, set baselines and outcome objectives and design capacity building work programmes to meet them;*

- *ensure that all relevant pre-existing community projects and workers are involved in new CCB plans;*

LOCAL COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING TEAMS WILL NEED TO LINK TO DIFFERENT LA DEPARTMENTS, LOCAL BUSINESSES, PRIMARY CARE NETWORKS, POLICE, AND OTHER AGENCIES, AS WELL AS NEIGHBOURHOOD-BASED ORGANISATIONS

- *carry out or commission the work programme at all levels from involving isolated residents in new activity, to helping groups reach out more widely and achieve more ambitious aims*

- *facilitate collaboration of the sector with relevant public bodies and regeneration plans;*

- *facilitate the development of regeneration proposals to be forwarded to regional level planning;*

- *provide or organise technical assistance to community representatives if needed*

- *commission or co-operate with evaluation and learning, and continuously improve action.*

Whatever the official bodies' policy objectives for the locality, the communities' home-grown initiatives first need to be supported to meet their own objectives, however low-profile and fragmentary these may be.

> REGENERATION PROJECTS WON'T WORK WELL IF THEY ARE CONCEIVED AS THE ACTION OF AN INCOMING FORCE ON AN INERT BODY RATHER THAN A MUTUAL ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN TWO SETS OF FORCES FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT

Communities are in effect already in the midst of regeneration programmes of their own, both individually and through groups. They are working to earn money, run a household, care for children, older people and others in need, nurture family relationships, maintain friendships and interests, volunteer, do sports, look after their health, learn from - and in some cases run - clubs, groups, organisations and networks. Regeneration projects won't work well if they are conceived as the action of an incoming force on an inert body whose existence has been forgotten rather than a mutual engagement between two sets of forces from within and without.

In a disadvantaged area there may at first be little obvious collective activity. Caring responsibilities and fear of crime may prevent people from going out, lack of jobs and money may have shrunk social networks, collapse of amenities and transport may have left few places for community groups to meet.

It is in the nature of many community groups to be small, and therefore little known, even to some residents, precisely because they are about personal networks and participation. The individual groups may not think of themselves as part of a sector, and many people in the neighbourhood may not be involved in any group, but these are key footholds for development. Nowadays some groups would of course be online.

Community capacity will need to be nurtured over a sustained period, varying according to levels of activity from one neighbourhood to another. Where there is already a relatively flourishing community sector the need may be for better networking, liaison with public and private sector bodies, and outreach to less active pockets. Where activity is thin on the ground, extensive basic community development may first be needed to bring people together and help motivate them around common problems to form groups and develop activity.

OUTCOMES AND MEASUREMENT

Community capacity building has traditionally been measured largely on a qualitative small project basis. The approach required here is a population basis, both qualitative and quantitative. It therefore needs to start with specification of the target population. This would normally be a whole LA population, and within that a targeting of populations of specific disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This does not mean that the CCB strategy has to be strictly limited to these boundaries if they are not 'natural' neighbourhoods. It is also about all groups and activities that operate in those neighbourhoods, not only those based there.

While IMD criteria such as income, employment, education and crime are the principal measures of equality, they are not measures on which CCB is likely to have much direct impact. More relevant, especially in the early years of a CCB programme, would be: (i) the kinds of personal measure used by the Community Life Survey, such as overcoming isolation, volunteering, co-operating with others and improvements in mental health; (ii) increasing volume, reach and achievements of community groups, such as are seen in a Sheffield Hallam-type survey of the community sector (note 12); and (iii) beneficial effects of improved collaboration between the community and public services and regeneration initiatives, for which new types of measure may need to be devised. In addition to countable measures, there will also be the unique story of each neighbourhood, with particular achievements by particular groups and activities.

It is only once growth in involvement and community activity has been verified on an appreciable scale across the target population that we can analyse what contribution they are making to IMD-type criteria of equality. These are not the product of social capital alone but the interaction of social capital with the other capitals invoked by the levelling Up programme.

SCALE

Community capacity building needs to be applied on a multiple scale in order to make an impact on inequality, with many small groups and initiatives building up to a critical mass, so that larger numbers of residents are animated by the buzz of optimism and join in to create a widespread momentum of improvement, and networks of groups have credibility in their negotiations with outside bodies.

What matters therefore for the community life of a neighbourhood is the community sector as a whole, and its potential for wider and more coordinated action. But this has to happen without in any way compromising residents' freedom of action or the independence of their groups and organisations.

Capacity building will need to be applied flexibly at different spatial levels within a local authority area. Working at the ward level is often appropriate because:

> *it links with the local democratic structure, through ward councillors and, where they exist, parishes and town councils;*
>
> *it often approximates to what residents perceive as their neighbourhood;*
>
> *ward profiles are easily accessible online via the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) for any local authority area;*

JSNAs are used primarily for local health strategies, but they should be a standard reference point for levelling up strategies across all social issues. What the health planners see as the social determinants of health are in fact the whole spectrum of social issues and services – housing, education, environment, employment, crime, mental health.

But local issues and people's networks do not, of course, stop at statistical or political boundaries. Without necessarily any recourse to statistics, local community groups gravitate variously to different spatial levels. The 2010 national study, for example (note 9), shows that 38% of local groups and charities see themselves as focused on a particular neighbourhood, a similar number across the LA as a whole, and 15% on the region. No doubt most of the additional 'below the radar' groups would be neighbourhood based.

A project which set out, unusually, to boost the community sector of a whole town between 1984-90 and, even more unusually, was systematically monitored,[20] provides a picture of what a wide CCB project might look like:

Population: 46,200

Community groups helped intensively: 39, 25 of which were started with the project's help.

Groups helped moderately: 93.

Main subjects of the intensive groups: tenants and residents; young people; education; unemployment; welfare advice; arts and crafts; health; play facilities; women's concerns.

Less intensive groups included: elderly, sports; churches; scouts; community associations; skills training; community newspapers.

Involvement of individual residents: 278 intensively; 591 regularly; 1,550 occasionally.

Groups' services used by: over 16,000 people.

Outcomes of the 39 intensive groups were: mutual aid (30 groups); services to others (25); community participation (23); fundraising (22) influence on authorities (17); stimulating other local development (15); setting up of additional groups (11); and influence on policies (11).

12 tenants' groups set up a tenants' federation which the Council acknowledged to be a major help in tenant-council relations.

The project was staffed by a team of ten, including youth and education workers seconded from the County and Borough Councils, and was led by a community development specialist. It focused on wards with high unemployment. An estimate of staff input in relation to groups' activities suggested that one hour of professional CCB work produced 15 hours of volunteering.

20. John Bell, Community Development, Measuring the Impact, Wrexham Community Agency 1984-90. London: Community Development Foundation, 1992

CAPACITY BUILDING THE CAPACITY BUILDERS

There are numerous examples of projects which have successfully built community capacity under difficult conditions.[21] Workers with these complex skills will be vital in getting to the roots of levelling up. At the same time the community work tradition itself needs some rethinking to meet the new scale and complexity of development that Levelling Up requires. Many community workers in the past have found themselves in isolated situations, working with two or three community groups on short-term, low-funded projects with vague objectives and attached to a department for whom community work is a side-issue.[22]

There are relatively few examples where Community Capcity Building teams have been able to take a sustained, neighbourhood-wide, objectively evaluated approach. Where Community Capcity Building has been part of a major regeneration project it has often been regarded as just a background factor or lubricant of other services' objectives, and therefore not evaluated in its own right. Ironically, this has meant that the Community Capcity Building input could not be correlated with other inputs and assessed for its distinct contribution.

There's a considerable body of literature, case studies and theory on how to work with individual groups but little on how to work across the whole community sector of a neighbourhood, cluster of neighbourhoods or local authority. This dearth is partly an effect of fragmentary, spasmodic funding and partly a certain unease amongst many practitioners in this field about working with state agencies and systems. Coping with tensions between different social perspectives is part of the job, but in the LU framework, where the declared intention of government is to 'level up' across the whole social landscape, it should be possible to create a collaborative understanding between neighbourhood workers and corporate planners.

> WHERE COMMUNITY CAPCITY BUILDING HAS BEEN PART OF A MAJOR REGENERATION PROJECT IT HAS OFTEN BEEN REGARDED AS JUST A BACKGROUND FACTOR OR LUBRICANT OF OTHER SERVICES' OBJECTIVES, AND THEREFORE NOT EVALUATED IN ITS OWN RIGHT.

21. *The Short Guide to Community Development by Alison Gilchrist and Marilyn Taylor (Bristol: Policy Press, 2011) provides an overview of this field and pointers to other sources;*
22. *Many examples of working in this kind of situation are given in Alan Twelvetrees, Community Development, Social Action and Social Planning, Palgrave, 2017 (5th edn)*

8. RESOURCES FOR THE LONG HAUL

Overcoming inequality is a long-term job. For how long will social capital development or community capacity-building be needed, and how will it be paid for?

The main resource that goes into social capital building is residents' own voluntary labour. But there are cash costs for projects, amenities, community workers and other needs.

Initial pump-priming should be a priority call on the remainder of the Shared Prosperity Fund, and this should be extended.

The longer-term objective needs a larger and longer-term plan.

It should firstly be established as a principle that resources for community capacity building should grow in some proportionate relationship to growth in regional economies, allowing for some redistribution between the richer and poorer, or the faster growing and slower. Overall, investment in CCB should track growth in regional GDPs. This could be called the Regions and Communities Growth Dividend.

The funding itself could come from two sources: (i) a levy on profits from new investment in the region generated by the regeneration scheme; and (ii) savings from reductions in exceptional demand on public services and benefits. A third resource would be input in kind from improved community engagement across the public services and private companies.

(I) A GROWTH DIVIDEND

The levy on profits can be based on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) that is applied to housebuilding. But it should have a very different ethos, which should retrospectively be applied to CIL as well. CIL (formerly known as planning gain or section 106) requires property companies to remit a small proportion of anticipated profits on new building to help pay for required new infrastructure such as roads, parks, schools and community centres. The ethos surrounding CIL, however, is couched in terms of penalties imposed on reluctant property companies. It is assumed that companies will pay the minimum they can get away with and that local authorities will need to press them for the most they can obtain. This needs to be replaced with an ethos of shared community building, whereby both the property companies and the local authorities take pride in, and get recognition for, seeking the best ways to build communities in both a physical and social sense. [23]

23. *TCPA produces helpful material in this vein, e.g. Securing Constructive Collaboration and Consensus for Planning Healthy Developments, 2018*

Infrastructure should include integrating considerations of how community activity is affected by spatial design – meeting spaces, amenities, focal points for activity, and ease and safety of access to them. NHS England's 'Healthy New Towns' project sought to combine new housing in a disadvantaged area with environmental design to encourage healthy eating and outdoor activity. The design of the Barton project added co-location of a new health centre with a sports and neighbourhood centre which enabled residents to move easily from the surgery or pharmacy to community activities both physical and social. [24]

(II) SAVINGS FROM REDUCED DEMAND

Areas of high disadvantage make exceptionally high demands on public services, particularly in terms of health, policing and social benefits. If neighbourhoods become richer, they automatically make fewer demands on services. The NHS is already pioneering ways of reducing demand by making more use of community activity, in the form of social prescribing. This is only a beginning. It needs to follow through the logic that if it wishes to make more use of the community sector it must also boost the sector's capacity. Without that, the increased traffic from surgeries to communities hits a limit of capacity.

The system could grow larger and faster, yielding greater savings, if it boosted the community sector itself, not just the social prescribing officers who mediate with it.

The same principle should be applied to benefits, policing and other areas. As regional growth leads to more employment, better off neighbourhoods, better health and better prospects for young people, the state saves, and those savings should be passed back into the communities to continue the virtuous cycle of increasing community self-improvement. But this should not be taken to the illogical conclusion that it justifies cuts in services or entitlements. It is merely about enabling disadvantaged areas to achieve the better equilibrium between public and private inputs that is characteristic of average and better off localities.

For the first few years of the Levelling Up policy a stream of pump-priming money from government is needed to boost community growth, but the other two sources should be structured to provide long term support for community growth. A commitment to this mechanism should be built into the overall design of regional Levelling Up planning so that it becomes a standard component in new investments and developments and is protected from the shocks of political turbulence and fashion.

24. *Barton Healthy New Town Evaluation,*
    https://www.gabrielchanan.co.uk/community-development

(III) IMPROVED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACROSS PUBLIC SERVICES

A third addition to resourcing CCB is not in cash but in kind, through a reorientation of front-line work across existing services. All public services have some history of community engagement. It is not news to local managers and workers in health, policing, fire and rescue, schools, housing, welfare and environment that successful delivery of their service depends on the co-operation of users. But methods of community engagement are often limited to consulting users as beneficiaries, not involving them as collaborators. The aim is mostly seen as being to enlist users in helping to meet the service's objectives, not assisting the community to pursue its own complementary objectives. Yet the interface between services and users is full of potential for a more co-productive relationship. Government should reactivate the principle of 'empowering the front line' but modernise it to mean converting services' community engagement practices into supplementary community capacity building, linked into neighbourhood strategies.

GOVERNMENT SHOULD REACTIVATE THE PRINCIPLE OF 'EMPOWERING THE FRONT LINE' BUT MODERNISE IT TO MEAN CONVERTING SERVICES' COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES INTO SUPPLEMENTARY COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING, LINKED INTO NEIGHBOURHOOD

9. CONCLUSIONS

Previous regeneration schemes show that it is difficult for neighbourhood-based plans to achieve major economic development, and difficult for regional plans to connect with disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Levelling Up has the potential to become a more successful model if it develops genuine collaboration between regional players and people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (including parishes, villages and other small areas).

Local communities are already engaged in their own forms of regeneration activity. Overcoming inequality through regeneration is not the action of an external force on an inert locality but a mutual engagement between different types of productive force from within and without. Regeneration programmes need active communities as their partners on the ground.

Community activity and organisations at neighbourhood level are the basic vehicles by which local residents can respond to, participate in and benefit from regeneration. The capacity of this sector needs to be built up into an ever-growing force. It cannot be created and should not be controlled by government or official projects, but government and its initiatives should create the best conditions for it to flourish.

Community capacity can be measured by focusing on community activity amongst a given population, not by trying to define communities. The White Paper's commitment to develop better data in this area should be pursued with urgency. Profiles of the local community sector should become a standard item in local data.

Strengthening the capacity of communities to participate in official regeneration plans needs to be begun at an early point so that communities can make meaningful input to the design of regional and local projects.

Community capacity building skills, training and methods need to be upgraded to meet the challenge of Levelling Up.

The remainder of the Shared Prosperity Fund should prioritise community capacity building, and 10% of regional development funds and investments should permanently be allocated to community capacity building and projects proposed by disadvantaged communities.

Further funding should be allocated over time from savings in demand on public services as inequalities are reduced.

A Co-Production Unit should be established in each region, supported by local community capacity building teams, to guide and facilitate regional players in understanding and involving communities, and to organise help to communities in building their strengths and their ability to influence and participate in regional projects.

The community engagement policies of all the public services should be upgraded to contribute to local community capacity building, which will help achieve their own objectives as well as those of the community. The health service, with its long-running effort to create positive health as well as treatment for ill-health, should play a key role in regional and local levelling up planning.

Community capacity building traditions and literature mostly reflect a long history of marginalisation and work with small-isolated projects. Community work skills, methods and roles need to be upgraded to meet the needs of the Levelling Up agenda.

Appendix: the LUWP 12 Missions

Table 2.1 Levelling Up Missions

Focus Area	Mission
Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging	
Living Standards	By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each area containing a globally competitive city, and the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.
Research & Development (R&D)	By 2030, domestic public investment in R&D outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40%, and over the Spending Review period by at least one third. This additional government funding will seek to leverage at least twice as much private sector investment over the long term to stimulate innovation and productivity growth.
Transport Infrastructure	By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing.
Digital Connectivity	By 2030, the UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population.
Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest	
Education	By 2030, the number of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths will have significantly increased. In England, this will mean 90% of children will achieve the expected standard, and the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the worst performing areas will have increased by over a third.
Skills	By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high quality-skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.
Health	By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years.
Well-being	By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.
Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost	
Pride in Place	By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.
Housing	By 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas; and the government's ambition is for the number of non-decent rented homes to have fallen by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest performing areas.[20]
Crime	By 2030, homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst affected areas.
Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency	
Local Leadership	By 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement.

Abbreviations

CCB — Community Capacity Building
CIL — Community Infrastructure Levy
CLS — Community Life Survey
COF — Community Ownership Fund
DCMS — Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
IMD — Index of Multiple Deprivation
JSNA — Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
LA — Local Authority
LSOA — Lower super output area
LU — Levelling Up
LUWP — Levelling Up White Paper
MSOA — Medium super output area
PCN — Primary Care Network
SC — Social capital
SPF — Shared Prosperity Fund

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