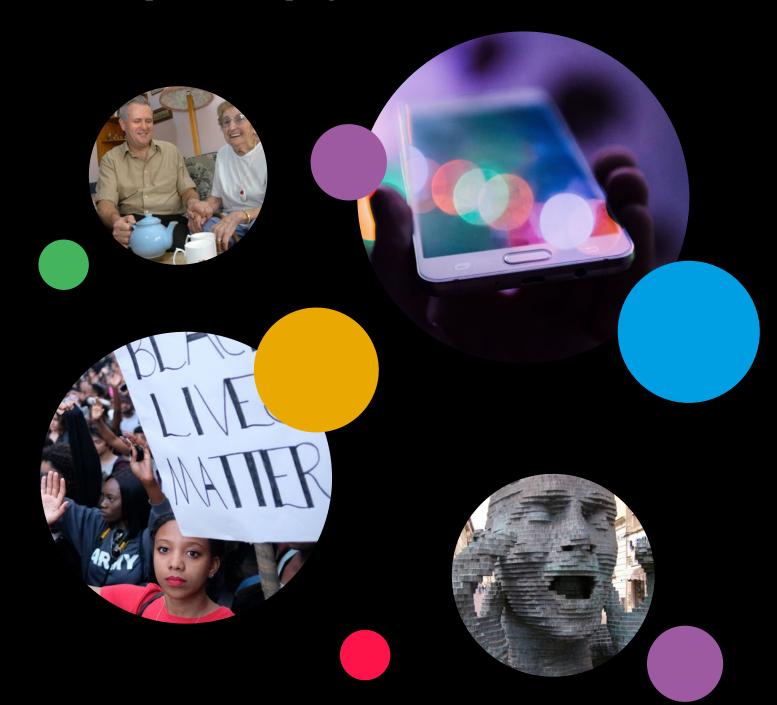
Civil Society Futures.





The independent inquiry



The Story of Our Times: Power in Our Hands?

April 2018 Work in Progress

Civil society is shaped at times of change and also has its biggest impact at just those times.

Looking back we can see the historic arc and civil society's response. From the Industrial Revolution and the transformation of our cities, to the post war settlement and the identity and protest movements of the 60s and 70s, there is a golden thread: civil society responding, reshaping, reinventing and making a difference.

Born from resistance, reminding us always of the importance of people, ensuring that powerful forces do not overwhelm those without power, and doing so most creatively when the world is changing.

And we are now in just one of those times - a time of huge opportunity and possibility. A time when technological advances can help us to communicate and collectively develop solutions in ways that our grandparents in civil society could never have imagined. A time of change which we can shape.

Doing so will not be easy. If it were easy we would have done it long ago. It demands deep change of the world around us, and ourselves too. But what we have heard from so many people across England is that these changes are not optional.

The future of our society depends upon a revived, re-energised, connecting civil society that puts people in the lead, asserts the value and contribution of every human being, and enables people to bridge very many divides with confidence and imagination. **Let's get going.**

Julia Unwin, Civil Society Futures chair

Civil Society Futures so far.



"Civil society" isn't a phrase most people use, but it's all around us, it is all of us everything we do with each other or for each other that's not the state and not for profit. From faith groups to Facebook groups, social enterprise to social media to social movements, working or volunteering for a charity, community action or caring for a relative. We are now twelve months into our inquiry into the future of civil society in England how can it thrive in the next ten years? What are the challenges? What are the possibilities? We have spent our first year listening hard, engaging over 1,500 people in deep discussion. We're sharing this as a workin-progress: we want you to help strengthen the analysis — and take part in making change.

Find out more about who we are: civilsocietyfutures.org/about





"It's a time for real opportunity... everything's up in the air – actually anything can happen "¹



It is evident that civil society really matters it is a valuable and essential part of our daily lives. It is clear to us that civil society, in all its forms, from neighbourhood action to national charity, from communities of faith to social activism, from clubs and societies to self-help and social enterprise, really matters. Without the many social benefits produced by civil society the state could not cope and the private sector could not flourish. Against the many challenges we have faced, including the recent austerity pressures, civil society has played, and continues to play, a big and necessary role in our lives, locally and nationally: bringing people together, building their confidence and capability, offering a helping hand to those in crisis, delivering services, challenging injustice.

"My hope is that civil society is part of the fabric of a future Britain."²

But every generation faces new challenges as well as new opportunities. The world has changed and today it's changing more than ever becoming more unequal, more disconnected from power and more divided. We face the real risk of an 'us and them' future. As robots replace people in the world of work, as artificial intelligence amasses our personal data, as impersonal transactions replace human relationships in public services, as decision making, ownership and power becomes further and further out of reach for most of us, we increasingly face the prospect of a future in which more and more people feel unheard, feel a loss of control and lose trust in the institutions that frame their lives. And yet those same changes herald the possibility of positive, life enhancing transformation.

In just the past year of the inquiry, major events have shown what a changing world we live in that civil society must respond to: the tragedy of Grenfell Tower, terror attacks, the implications of Brexit, the exposure of sexual harassment and exploitation - including in the charity sector, and more.

"People are just that tired... they've seen that no one's been listening to them."³



Emerging from what we've heard, the big role for civil society in the coming years is to generate a radical and creative shift which puts power in the hands of people and communities - preventing an 'us and them' future, connecting us better and humanising the way we do things. We are talking about people as citizens, individually, and in families, in groups of shared identity, experience or interest, and as whole communities. Helping people to discover their full potential, hearing their voices, trusting them, their strength and skills, the value they can add. Recognising the abundance of skills and capabilities around us, seeing not just the problems but the great strengths in communities.

"I'd like to see more power being given to the people."⁴ "[We need] a punk era."⁵

Is it time to search out what democracy - both the big and the everyday - could become? Can and should civil society be leading the way? Not allowing people or communities to be pushed around, or left behind, or ignored, or reduced to labels, or silenced. Enabling people to find ways to come together, to experience solidarity, compassion, love, for those who are different from them. Providing opportunity and support for people to design and control and own the things they care about, that affect their lives. Recognising participation may not be open to all - education, ethnicity, age, gender, poverty, disability, place and more play a part. Creating deep democracy, not tinkering at the edges with vet another consultation or putting more and more information online if it excludes some and doesn't lead to real power.

"People can't volunteer if they have to feed their children."⁶

But civil society is not yet fit for this purpose, and there are too many examples of charities and institutions being part of the problem.

Many people inside and outside civil society organisations are concerned they have lost their connection with the people they are there to serve, become too focussed on protecting reputations and income streams. Too often things are done to and for people, when it could be about creating conditions for people to do things on their own terms. Too often it's about perpetuating patriarchal command-and-control,



holding power close, fighting your corner, rather than letting go, building alliances, allowing others to step forward. Some are already trying to change but funding systems, organisational structures and culture often make it hard for anyone.

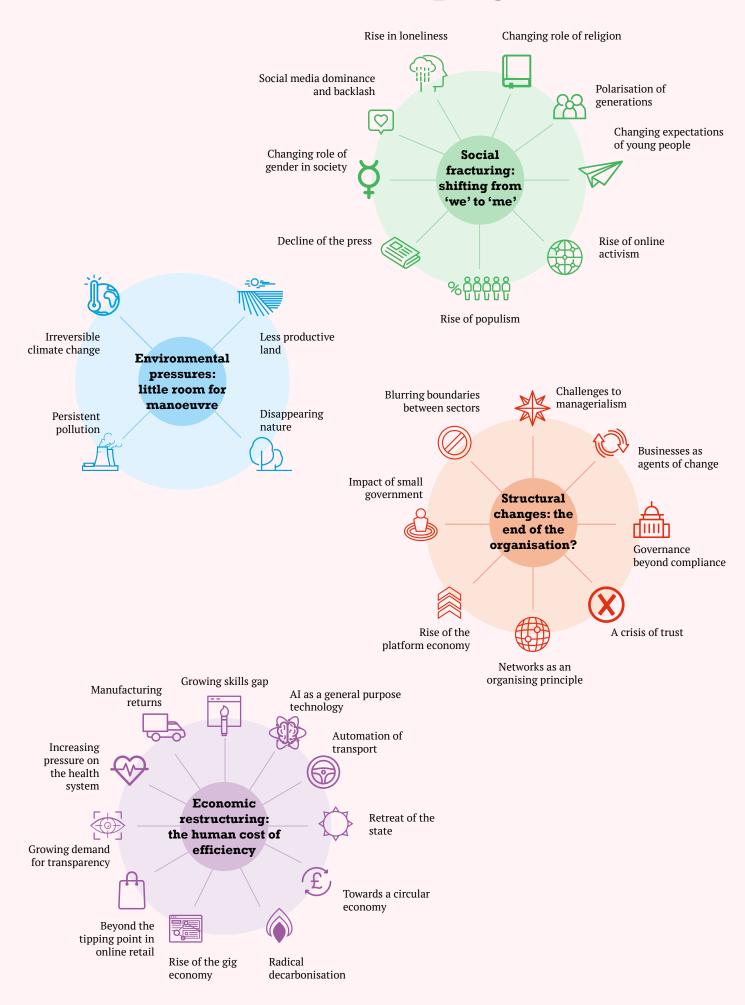
"It's about being brave change is coming, we can either let it happen to us or be in front of it."⁷

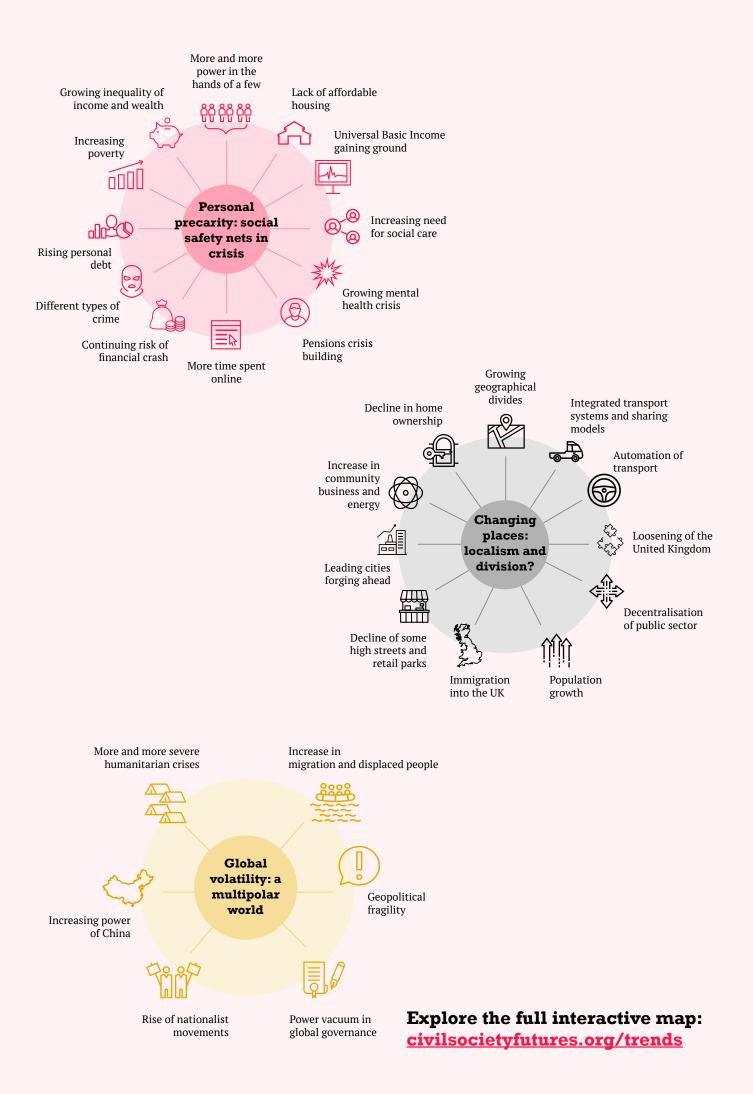
And yet we can see, from countless examples, glimpses of the civil society of the future capable of putting people first, listening to the voices of many, practising shared and generous, open hearted leadership, building real citizen and community participation, and doing it with creativity and flair often in networked, fluid and informal ways. Now is the time for all of us who make up civil society to lead our own future

Will you help make it happen? These issues are urgent and call for all of us across civil society to be part of the change that's needed. Read on to discover more and see the solutions we want to explore this year. Find out how to get involved, share your experiences and ideas at civilsocietyfutures.org

"How can we rise to the challenge - what are the moonshoots of today?"⁸

What are the trends shaping our future?

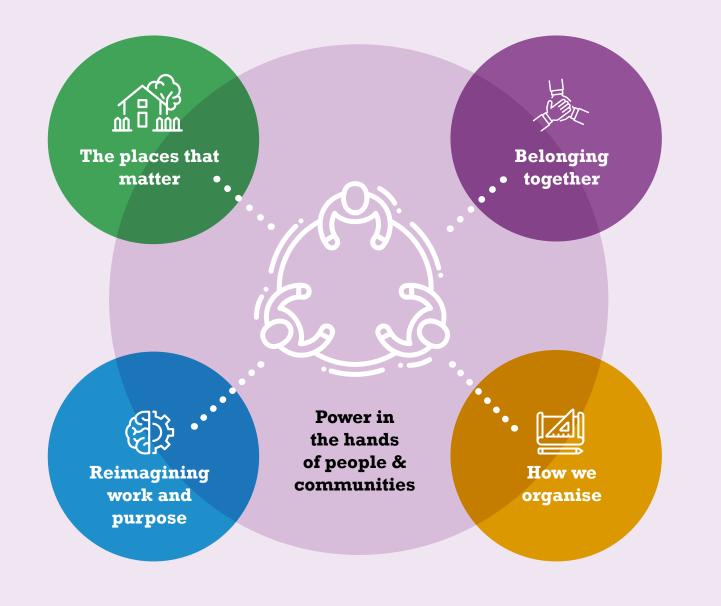




Where is change most needed?



How can we put power in the hands of people and communities? How can we prevent an 'us and them' future, connect us better and humanise the way we do things? The following are the big, overlapping areas we've heard about where people want change.





The places that matter



Local places matter to many of us, perhaps even more in a digital age - to meet real people, talk eye to eye. Healthy civil society is rooted in places and even big organisations need local networks of engagement. But - as the Brexit vote showed - people in many places feel unheard, neglected and ignored and are hungry for a new vision and the power to make it happen.

Too many feel the places where they live are forgotten...

"Central UK Government thinks the north ends at Manchester."⁹ "90% of individual giving goes to organisations in London."¹⁰

"A whole part of the city which should be the creative kind of hub, that's just completely derelict now and no vision."¹¹

...And they have too little power to transform them.

"If the council didn't do it then nobody did it, but we actually need to get away from that."¹²

"59% of charities said that their boards were not representative of the communities they serve."¹³

Initiatives imposed from outside rarely have the answers.

"The Big Society was actually the state doing nothing and leaving everyone else to pick up."¹⁴ "They send in consultants for hundreds of thousands of pounds to tell us the bleeding obvious. It's like, thanks, but just give us the money and we would have done that 10 years ago."¹⁵

There's a desire for collective visions for the places where we live — and local action to make them happen.

"Yeah Marks Gate' not 'Urgh Marks Gate'."¹⁶

"What we have in Cornwall is more sun and more wind than anywhere else. Let's harness that and let's use it for the people in Cornwall, rather than it going to EDF."¹⁷

"Individuals need to be given 'permission' to change things in their neighbourhood, and to understand that it is both everybody's right, and everybody's responsibility to do so."¹⁸

People want more spaces and ways to come together, to be heard and to hear each other.

"More common meeting spaces where people feel they are part of something."¹⁹

New types of spaces are appearing such as Living Rooms, makerspaces, Fab Labs, cafes and coworking spaces. And existing spaces are opening up and inviting people in, like <u>Visit My</u> <u>Mosque</u>, community pubs and libraries, <u>20's</u> <u>Plenty for Us, Living Streets</u> and the Church Urban Fund's <u>Together Network</u>.

Local authorities are reimagining their role this is a crucial moment of opportunity. There are many places already starting this journey: Oldham with their Cooperative Council ambitions, Essex Council's priority for people to "control and contribute to their communities"²⁰, the Wigan Deal and the Everyone Everyday

participatory project in Barking & Dagenham to name just a few. Local authorities in each of these places are catalysing new and different relationships between groups, organisations and people who live and work there. Longstanding local and national support and infrastructure networks are exploring what role they need to play now and how best to bring people together.



CoLab Dudley is a social lab working in Dudley town centre. Run out of a coffee shop on the high street, it initiates and supports ongoing experiments, bringing together unique mixes of local people to address complex social challenges and encourage 'everyday activism'.

"[My friend], she has got loads of ideas, she wants to set up a community centre for people suffering from mental health disabilities. [...] Coming here and seeing the different types of people who come in, it has opened her up to so much."



How can we take control of the places and spaces that matter to us?



We want to hear more about... mainly digital communities - online spaces for gamers to Freecycle forums to Mumsnet ...large national organisations who've become disconnected and are working hard to reconnect locally ...young people

We want your great examples of change...

How can we support local organisations to connect with each other and work together more effectively?

How can people shape and drive the change they want in their communities, instead of just being consulted on top-down proposals from outside?

How can we avoid the unintended consequences of place-based approaches, such as exclusion and inequality and competition for resources?

How can we channel more sustainable funding to place-based communities and support people to spend it effectively?



We're also thinking about... Community control of assets: We will be exploring what resources/assets could and should be put directly in the hands of people, acting together in the interests of all parts of their local community, how we can make that happen and learning from existing examples like communities owning their own energy, pubs or <u>Big Local pilots</u>.

Get involved now: civilsocietyfutures.org #civilsocietyfutures



Belonging together



We all want to belong and to be treated fairly and equally by others in society. Relevance and meaning in our lives come from relationships, expressing our own identities and being heard, but also part of something bigger. This is central to civil society's purpose in an increasingly changing, global, individualised and digitalised world.

Many feel our society has become too much about individuals, about competition.

"Me instead of we. We all build our own little empires, we all have our own little gates at the front of our houses."²¹

"We're pushed further apart by competition for smaller resources and a desire to find our uniqueness, not our common ground."²²

There is both concern, and complacency, about racism and our collective identity as a society. Tensions are often heightened by the media and the internet.

"Brexit is changing our notions of cultural identity and what it means to be British and brown."²³

"Between 2014 and 2015 there was a 326% rise in reported streetbased anti-Muslim incidents."²⁴

"Social media can narrow horizons and create an echo chamber of own views."²⁵ Civil society sometimes reinforces divisions, cutting us up into single identities.

"We regularly talk about and campaign for the black 'community', the Muslim 'community', the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans 'community'... We can miss opportunities to respond to bigger, structural challenges.. to improve the things that could make us all most happy."²⁶

People want a shift in values, less individualism and more community, mutual support.

"We've got to get away from this every man for himself business."²⁷

In Mansfield they have created a Welcoming Committee in the town for new arrivals and strangers in the town to meet each other. <u>CoLab</u> <u>Exeter</u> works with formerly isolated people to connect them with others locally.

There is a strong desire for ways to come together that transcend divisions based on ethnicity, class and religion. All parts of civil society need to focus on defeating racism and division.

"We need to recognise the many identities we all hold simultaneously and to create routes to civic engagement and representation that can cope with that complexity."²⁸ With <u>Sisters Uncut</u> groups sprouting across the country, people banding together around <u>Community Land Trusts</u> all over England, it demonstrates there are other ways of coming together.

Civil society has an important role to play in shaping the future of the digital world.

"Only 12% say [the internet] has had a very positive impact on society... There is a public demand for greater accountability."²⁹

"We need to make sure that we can shape the way in which we are able to participate in public spaces and this is as true of Twitter as our town squares."³⁰



The Forgiveness Project collects and shares stories from individuals and communities who have rebuilt their lives following hurt and trauma. The testimonies bear witness to the resilience of the human spirit and act as a powerful antidote to narratives of hate and dehumanisation, presenting alternatives to cycles of conflict, violence, crime and injustice.

"Honest dialogue is important because through that comes understanding... I met people who had wanted to kill me several years before, and vice versa."³¹



How can we rise above disconnection, inequality, division and fear to make our organisations, communities and society places where everyone can belong?



We want to hear more about... people with experience of race and discrimination within civil society itself ...LGBTQI+ communities ...young people ...the media and how it needs to change ...sports clubs and teams (54% of people who volunteer are involved in sport or exercise)³²

We want your great examples of change...



How can we support people to realise their potential through capacity building, working with their multiple identities?

What are the inequalities that we rarely speak about? How do we address these inequalities?

How can people from all backgrounds have an opportunity to thrive and be heard within civil society?

How can we return the internet to its founding vision of connection and access for all, repurpose the internet for social good?



We're also thinking about... Valuing and measuring the right things: If the big role of civil society is to connect us better, humanise the way we do things and put people more in control, then we need to be able to measure different things, with a much stronger focus on the quality and equality of participation and relationships. We will be investigating practical ways to do that.

Get involved now: civilsocietyfutures.org #civilsocietyfutures



Reimagining work and purpose

Dependable, well-paid, meaningful work continues to disappear and technology is bringing more change — shifting our relationship to work and workplaces, impacting our sense of belonging, affiliation and loyalty. Can civil society help people and be communities be heard and take charge of creating a 'human' future for work? Can civil society provide relationships and activity that give other ways of finding purpose?

Work has become increasingly insecure, low paid and with long hours. It's making life harder for people — and affecting how much they can take part in civil society.

"We've lost the main industry that supported the town."³³

"You pick your wages up on a Friday. You get told there and then if you're working the following week. You can't plan your life. You can't get a mortgage."³⁴

"Only 7% of employees are able to have some time off work to volunteer."³⁵

And the nature of work is expected to change more radically than at any time since the industrial revolution. People are concerned about the future but feel like they have little say over what happens.

"I fear robots will replace workers."³⁶

"I fear a future where our ability to support cohesion of a society

where digital tech / AI create such different relationships across and between communities."³⁷

Civil society has a vital role supporting people to be heard, to experiment and create visions of how the future of work can be more fair, safe and humane. More and more places are supporting people to work differently including co-working, co-living and makerspaces.³⁸ There are new organisations forming, unions representing gig economy workers, <u>The Future of Work is Human</u> and the <u>East End Trades Guild</u>. There are pilots into different models like a Universal Basic Income, Universal Basic Infrastructure and the <u>Enspiral Network</u> founded in New Zealand, driven by a vision to make the world a better place through meaningful work.

And civil society offers ways of finding a purposeful life as both a place of work and beyond work - if it can adapt.

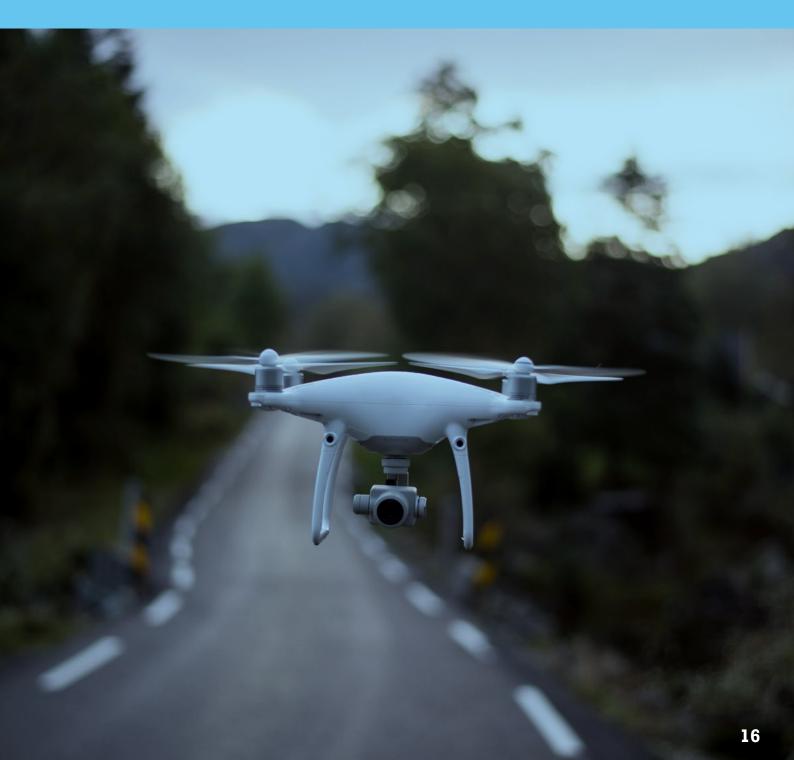
"People want to give their time in different ways to a generation ago - for example, online, remotely, in micro units, as a one-off, intensively then not again. Civil society has been poor to respond to this shift."³⁹

"In the past decade, there has been a noticeable rise in online campaign initiatives (e.g. 38 Degrees), citizen engagement platforms (e.g. They Work For You; Fix My Street) and grassroots movements organising themselves via online platforms (e.g. Momentum)."⁴⁰



Birmingham Impact Hub is blending what it means to live, work, collaborate and dream. It hosts co-working spaces, schools to learn new trades, radical experiments in childcare, support for social entrepreneurs and tea clubs. The common thread is bringing people together to build a better Birmingham and a better world.

"It's the perfect place for start ups or for people trying to get to know people in the city like me."⁴¹



How can we shape the future of work and all find purpose inside work or out?



We want to hear more about... employers and those running organisations – are they worried about these trends? ...civil society groups that have benefited from flexible working patterns and blended approaches to work (like NAVCA transforming into a digital organisation⁴²) ...young people and millennials just entering the world of work ...people who are choosing and designing different lifestyles, be that digital nomads, recently retired and older people.

We want your great examples of change...



How can society evolve to redefine what a purposeful life is, and place work within it (rather than assuming work has to be our main purpose)?

What are the ways for people to spend more time working on the things that matter to them?

As the world of work changes, how can civil society ensure workers are supported and have a voice through forms of democratic governance?

How might the Fourth Industrial Revolution affect civil society directly? E.g. making it more efficient or harnessing tech to help us understand complex or emerging issues and respond rapidly?

We're also thinking about... Could civil society make a significant contribution to the debate about Universal Basic Income, Universal Basic Services and other mechanisms, testing these against the objective of making it possible for people to fully and equally participate in community life?

Get involved now: <u>civilsocietyfutures.org</u> #civilsocietyfutures



How we organise



Trust in big civil society organisations is falling. The media has placed a spotlight on issues from Chief Executive pay to fundraising practices to sexual exploitation. Relationships within civil society have corroded as everyone competes for funding. Big changes are needed to allow smaller groups and more informal networks to flourish — but the large institutions need to change fastest and most profoundly, learning from the best of what's new.

People are losing trust in large institutions, including charities, which are too often rigid, unaccountable and distant from the people they are meant to serve.

"Trust and confidence in charities fell from 6.7 out of 10 in 2014 to 5.7 in 2016."⁴³

"I feel hugely let down by the minority of charity workers who abuse their power."⁴⁴

"Institutions are locked into this concrete mudge of just ticking a box... with the social skills of a traffic bollard."⁴⁵

"Monetising and transactional relationships... values are becoming economic value."⁴⁶

Civil society organisations have too often lost their independence and willingness to stand up to government and business as boundaries blur between them.

"Professionalised, brand-driven and beholden to government for their multi-million contracts and big business for their 'partnerships', charities are seen to have become part of the very system they were set up to challenge."47

There is inequality within civil society. Larger organisations dominate, while barriers including funding are holding back smaller and informal groups and projects — leaving a hollowed out middle between the two.

"Fewer than 1 in 2 charities are confident they will still be operating in 2021." "Micro-organisations, with an average annual income under £10,000, make up around half of all civil society organisations, and contain significant place- or sectorspecific expertise. Yet they are under-researched, overlooked."⁴⁸

Many are hungry to have a say in reimagining how organisations and networks work — new models of membership, participation, governance and accountability, putting people and communities in power.

"I'd love to be in a place where we have joint decision making, where we co-produce things, co-deliver things."⁴⁹

"Without the internet and social media, there would not have been a #MeToo movement."⁵⁰ "The rise of social media has contributed to an increasingly dynamic process of forming and disbanding communities of interest, in contrast with a more static organisational model dominated by institutions."⁵¹



Edge Fund is a grant-making body with a difference. They support efforts to achieve social, economic and environmental justice and to end imbalances in wealth and power — and they give those they aim to support a say in where the money goes, including disabled people, the working class, women, people of colour, LTBTQI and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

"Edge Fund don't just distribute funds but redistribute power."



How can today's movements, organisations and institutions transform - and tomorrow's emerge - to put more power with people and communities?



We want to hear more about... those involved in large scale movements that have grown ...people with experience of transitioning from an informal group to something more ...organisations which are in the midst of changing the way they work and organise ...people who have closed and shut down organisations.

We want your great examples of change...

What are new models for people-led decision making, governance and accountability that work? What are some of the unintended consequences of these approaches?

How can we work with shifting and fluid networks rather than single solid organisations?

How you can start to change cultures and ways of working in your own network or organisation? What are some of the hurdles and challenges that need to be overcome to do this?

What is the funding ecosystem required to support these different models and approaches?



We're also thinking about... The shape of civil society organisations of the future: We want to investigate how organisations need to radically transform and what a future organisation looks like. Being more open and accountable, finding new models and alliances, networks and social platforms, embracing different cultures and ways of organising, reimagining roles and relationships and understanding what relationships need to be cultivated in order to put people and communities in power.

Civil society's ecosystem: What laws, regulations and other systems need to be transformed to help drive the kinds of changes above? For example, is there a case for tax relief to be linked to what organisations do (rather than their form e.g. charity) and if so what are the potential benefits and risks?

Get involved now: civilsocietyfutures.org #civilsocietyfutures



Will you make it happen?



Civil Society Futures continues until the end of 2018. Please be part of it - and together let's create lasting change.

Take part at civilsocietyfutures.org



1) Tell your story

Are you struggling to have power over the things that matter to you? We will be doing more to involve communities from Newcastle to Peckham to Penzance, people who are disabled, LGBTQI+ and others — whoever you are, we want to hear your story too.

2) Share an inspiring example



Have you already been involved in making ambitious change to put power in the hands of people and communities? We know there are great examples of change all around the country — we want to hear yours to help others see how change is possible.

Are you already working on tackling one of the issues raised or have an idea you can pursue? Tell us what you're doing so we can share it.



3) Kickstart change in your community, group or organisation

How can you put power in people's hands where you are? Reflect on what you're doing already, experiment, discuss, run an event. We'll have a DIY toolkit ready by the end of May you can use to help guide you — sign up to our email newsletter to hear when it's ready.



4) Develop a big idea

We'll be exploring some of the ideas for change we've mentioned in the previous sections - want to take part? Sign up to our email newsletter to hear how.

Young people

In the months ahead we're running several events in towns and cities around England to hear more from young people about what they want for the future and to involve them in starting to create it — culminating in a big event towards the end of the school holidays for young people from around the country.

Sign up to our email list to hear when they're happening and how you can take part.

Civil Society Futures Festival

Autumn/winter 2018 — take part in our festival celebrating inspiring examples of change and bringing together people creating the future from across civil society to plan change from 2019 into the next decade. More coming soon...

Go to <u>civilsocietyfutures.org</u> to take part, sign up for email updates on everything that's happening and find a longer report, animation, films, blogs and more.

Who we are



Civil Society Futures is a national conversation about how English civil society can flourish in a fast changing world.

Through community events, academic research and online debate, Civil Society Futures is trying to create space for a much needed conversation among those involved in all forms of civic action – from informal networks to vast charities, Facebook groups to faith groups. Considering how both the nature of civil society and the context it exists in are changing fast, we are investigating how to maximise the positive effects of civic action and provide a guide to how to release its potential to drive positive change.

The conversation is guided by an independent panel of people with perspectives ranging from theatre making in South Wales to tech investment in Gaza, local government in the North of England to the world's alliance of civil society organisations. It is chaired by Julia Unwin, the former chief executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and is made up of Asif Afridi, Sarah Gordon, Debu Purkayastha, Danny Sriskandarajah, Rhiannon White, Carolyn Wilkins, Steve Wyler. Bert Massey was also a member of the panel but very sadly passed away last year.

This panel is powered by a collaboration of four unique organisations. Citizens UK has its roots in communities across England. Goldsmiths University brings skills in academic research, looking at the changing trends in civil society. openDemocracy facilitates wide ranging discussion about the powerful institutions in our society. And Forum for the Future brings years of experience of helping people figure out how the world is changing and how best to respond.

This report was designed by Irene Palacio.



References

Footnotes

- 1. Voluntary Organisations Disability Group discussion
- 2. CEOs of large charities/voluntary groups Conversation
- 3. Newcastle community workshop
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- 6. Epsom & Ewell community workshop
- 7. Penzance community workshop
- 8. NCVO Conversation
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- 20. Essex Council, The Future of Essex
- 21. Epsom & Ewell community workshop
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- 23. Clore Fellowship Conversation
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- 29. Doteveryone, <u>People, Power and Technology: The 2018</u> Digital Attitudes Report
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- 41. Monica Sawhney, The Spice Club

- 42. Jane Ide, <u>Embracing Digital (and</u> reaping the benefits)
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- 45. Penzance community workshop
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- 47. Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, <u>Is it the beginning of the end</u> for the charity sector?
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- 49. Oldham community workshop
- 50. Winnie M Li, quoted in <u>Inspiration and assault: is the future</u> of social media in our control?
- 51. Community Foundation contribution

Pictures

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Natalia and Krysztoff, owners of the Two Flags Restaurant in Shirebrook - Civil Society Futures

Page 10: Junk Food Oldham

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Page 19: People raising arms - Edwin Andrade Unsplash

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