

**The pursuit of wellbeing**

**James Wilson** asks how we can create nurturing states

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**Anna Severwright** looks at how the social care system could improve

**Sunder Katwala** makes the case for an English civic identity



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The RSA Journal is published

for the RSA by Wardour,

2nd Floor, Kean House,

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London WC2B 4AS

Tel +44 (0)20 7010 0999

[www.wardour.co.uk](http://www.wardour.co.uk)

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Anthony Painter



## “At the RSA we recognise the importance of building wellbeing into the systems that surround us”

As I write this, England and Wales have recently come out of lockdown and infection rates seem to be falling. The number of vaccinated people is continuing to rise and we wait to see what a new ‘normal’ might mean.

But some things from our period of lockdown living are worth holding onto, and one of these is an increased awareness about the importance of wellbeing. The pandemic has highlighted the relationship between health and broader wellbeing and the unequal distribution of both across and between nations.

At the RSA we recognise the importance of building wellbeing into the systems that surround us and its relationship to poverty, wider economic insecurity and discrimination. In this edition of *RSA Journal* we explore how collective wellbeing can be embedded into our thinking.

Professor James Wilson addresses the relationship between subjective wellbeing and government policy. If this is governments’ only end goal, he writes, we could lose sight of other values important to the public good. But this is not a call for governments to ignore wellbeing; he argues for a move from a neglectful state to a nurturing one, based on a deeper understanding of the complexity of our societal systems.

All of the RSA’s core programmes start with an analysis of this complexity. In her article, my colleague Hannah Webster outlines the work we are doing to better understand the relationship between place and wellbeing and the implications for how we engage local people.

It has been apparent for many years that we do not yet have an effective way of integrating health and social care. Anna Severwright of the Social Care Future movement shares her vision of a social care system that can deliver wellbeing to every individual. Having personally experienced the sometimes disjointed nature of social care, she knows the importance of listening to those with lived experience of the system.

Can we act now to promote the wellbeing of future generations? Tatsuyoshi Saijo encourages us to embed this question in the decisions we are making today. If we adopted the idea of future design, we could avoid making choices – such as the introduction of single-use plastic bags – that, although offering short-term convenience, create future problems on a larger scale.

Of course, caring for future generations also means thinking about the wellbeing of children today. Having spoken to children around the country, Rachel de Souza, the new Children’s Commissioner for England, has gained insight into their thoughts about the pandemic and more. Mental health and wellbeing are top of their concerns, but so is getting a good education and being able to go on and achieve their career goals.

The past year has demonstrated that fear over lost productivity from homeworking for those able to tended to be overstated. With RSA and Vitality research showing that only a minority of workers would prefer to work mainly away from their home, Alan Lockey, Head of the RSA Future Work Centre, puts forward the argument for a permanent well-managed hybrid working arrangement. The shift in values that longer-term hybrid working could bring could be a major step in creating ‘good’ work for all if handled carefully, ensuring a vibrant organisational culture is nurtured.

In his piece, Iqbal Wahhab writes about the potential for food to improve prisoners’ lives, not just in relation to the health and wellbeing effects of a highly nutritious diet, but also by enabling people to gain skills that can be used upon their release.

This edition of *RSA Journal* offers many ideas as to how to promote wellbeing. In September, Andy Haldane officially starts his tenure as Chief Executive and we will continue to explore with our Fellows and others how we can all support individuals, business, government and communities to meet the widest range of human needs. ■

**Anthony Painter** is Chief Research and Impact Officer at the RSA

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- 2 In real terms, spending on social care in England is £300m less than 10 years ago (page 18).
- 3 One in five children who responded to the Children's Commissioner's 'Big Ask' said they were unhappy with their mental health and wellbeing (page 20).
- 4 The 2020 Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission said that equality and wellbeing should be put at the centre of public policy (page 25).
- 5 Thirty-one million people in the UK watched the Euro 2020 final (page 30).
- 6 On average, there is a budget of £2 to feed each prisoner per day in the UK (page 35).
- 7 About three in 10 social enterprises have a turnover of under £50,000 (page 39).
- 8 The Third Agricultural Revolution took place from 1950 to the late 1960s (page 41).
- 9 Only 16% of homeworkers would prefer to work mainly in a separate location away from their home (page 45).
- 10 Global space activity could generate \$1trn annually in 2040, up from \$350bn today (page 48).





## Slowing down fast fashion

Are we considering the environmental impact of our wardrobes?

According to a recent RSA report, *Fast Fashion's Plastic Problem*, fast fashion is awash with new plastics and brands are doing very little to stem the tide.

After reviewing thousands of items on the websites of four big fast fashion brands – boohoo, ASOS, Missguided and PrettyLittleThing – the research found that on average 80% of newly listed items contained virgin plastics. In some cases, 60% of items were made entirely of new plastics. The amount of

recycled fabrics used by these brands is vanishingly small, at 3% on average.

Fossil-fuel-derived textiles, like polyester, have boomed in recent years, but have big environmental impacts, including intensive energy use in production and microfibre shedding during washing.

The RSA is recommending that the UK government disincentivises virgin plastic use by introducing extended producer responsibility for brands and exploring a tax on new

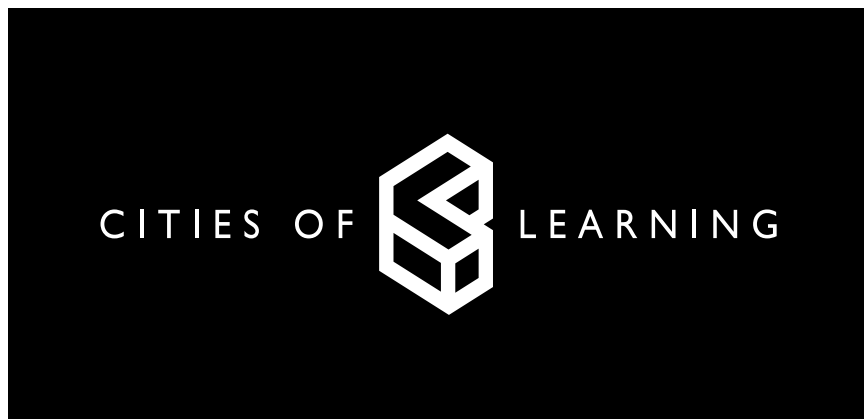
plastics, income from which could be used to invest in innovations in biomaterials and circular economy infrastructure. Brands and retailers should be more transparent with their customers and explore circular economy models, such as resale and rental, which could extend the use of the clothing.

As part of the Regenerative Futures programme, the RSA is exploring how a different future for fashion could look, one rooted in healthy environments and communities.

■ To download the report, visit [thersa.org/reports/fast-fashions-plastic-problem](https://thersa.org/reports/fast-fashions-plastic-problem)

## Skills

### Cities of Learning



The RSA's partnership, Cities of Learning, has demonstrated direct impact, helping thousands of young people to recognise skills that are not captured by traditional exams.

In an independent evaluation, the Learning and Work Institute stated that "Cities of Learning and digital badges are

clearly in a strong position to respond directly to the needs of young people as well as to align with government support programmes during the pandemic and economic crisis."

Over the past two years, the RSA has worked with partners in Plymouth and Brighton, the Real Ideas Organisation

and Future Creators respectively, to co-design a shared vision for local learning. The Cities of Learning programme helps places to recognise learning wherever it happens and direct people towards local opportunities, making learning visible, measurable and connected.

Cities of Learning convenes local stakeholders and uses digital badging to map and connect learning opportunities to employability outcomes. Pilot projects were launched last year during lockdown and have since helped more than 2,000 young people to articulate their skills in a way that is meaningful to employers.

Cities of Learning is expanding and is currently looking for places and partners to join the programme in 2022 and beyond.

■ To find out more, visit [thersa.org/cities-of-learning](https://thersa.org/cities-of-learning)

## RSA insights

### Jackson Lane

Monique Deletant FRSA is Executive Director and joint CEO of Jacksons Lane, an arts centre on Archway Road, north London. It runs several creative learning activities for young and older participants, with these programmes moving online during lockdown. Activities include JL Circus, which teaches young people circus skills, and creative lunchtime sessions for those in sheltered accommodation. "We have a ringside seat to monitor wellbeing through our work," says Monique. Participants have particularly benefited from the sense of community created by the centre during the pandemic.

■ To find out more, email [monique@jacksonslane.org.uk](mailto:monique@jacksonslane.org.uk)

# 6

Local authorities should create Local Offices for Public Engagement and Innovation, according to *Transitions to Participatory Democracy*, a new report by the RSA in conjunction with the UK Inclusive Growth Network. This is just one of six transitions recommended by the report, which explores how local policy and practice can encourage participatory democracy.

■ To find out more, visit [thersa.org/reports/transitions-participatory-democracy](https://thersa.org/reports/transitions-participatory-democracy)

# 42%

This is the percentage of young people who say they are feeling the pressure to return to work even if they have Covid-19 symptoms, according to a recent RSA report, *Back to Work*. Published prior to 19 July, when all Covid-19-related restrictions were lifted in England, the research found that another wave of the virus would push a quarter of workers over the edge financially. The RSA is calling for a support package to aid the back-to-work effort, including sick pay and UBI.

■ To find out more, visit [thersa.org/reports/back-to-work](https://thersa.org/reports/back-to-work)

## Agenda

### The Learning Society



The RSA is developing a new programme, the Learning Society, to help people who have struggled in formal education to access learning throughout life. Using its Living Change Approach, the RSA is consulting with Fellows and partners to develop the programme. The vision informing the project is: "a society that enables, recognises and values learning for everyone, throughout life and across multiple settings, to promote economic security, social equity and individual wellbeing."

■ To get involved, contact Tom Kenyon on [tom.kenyon@rsa.org.uk](mailto:tom.kenyon@rsa.org.uk)

### Good Work Guild

The RSA is launching the Good Work Guild this September to bring together 'future of work' practitioners from around the globe to help develop solutions in relation to such issues as worker voice, economic inclusion, skills and training, and labour market transforming technologies. The Good Work Guild will generate opportunities for learning, collective action and advocacy, creating a community of practitioners to shape policies, practices and markets with the aim of making sure that everyone can pursue good work in an age of technological change.

■ To find out more visit: [thersa.org/future-of-work/good-work-guild](https://thersa.org/future-of-work/good-work-guild)

## Fellowship

### New Fellows

Impact entrepreneur **Joshin Raghobar** was one of the founding members of the Cape Innovation and Technology Initiative (CiTi), and is now the Chair of the Board. CiTi has developed a tech ecosystem in Cape Town and trained and placed thousands of disadvantaged youth in digital jobs. Joshin is also the founder and Executive Chair of iKineoVentures, a venture studio that looks to encourage the most innovative projects.

**Jaime Toney** is a professor of environmental and climate science at the University of Glasgow and the co-founder and Director of the Centre for Sustainable Solutions at the university. The centre aims to enable individuals, communities and organisations through research, education and partnership to make change towards a sustainable future, creating equitable and just conditions for current and future generations.

**Make the most of your Fellowship** by connecting online and sharing your skills. Search the Fellowship at [thersa.org/fellowship](https://thersa.org/fellowship). While you're there, don't forget to update your own profile: [thersa.org/my-rsa](https://thersa.org/my-rsa).

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[www.linkedin.com/groups/3391](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/3391)

Where possible, Fellowship events have moved online; to find out more and connect with Fellows in our global community visit [thersa.org/events/fellowship](https://thersa.org/events/fellowship)

Grow your idea through RSA Catalyst, which offers grants for Fellow-led and new or early-stage projects with a social goal.

■ To find out more, visit our online Project Support page [thersa.org/fellowship/project-support](https://thersa.org/fellowship/project-support)



## Events



### Catch up online

Leading public thinkers, innovators and changemakers take to the RSA Great Room and digital stage to share and debate the ideas, events and movements that are shaping the future of our societies, our economies and our world.

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### Philanthropy today

Writer and development expert **Paul Vallely** is joined by philanthropic activist **Sir Bob Geldof** and charity director **Fran Perrin** to explore the big questions for philanthropy today: what does charity mean in an age of increasing inequality? How should charities and the state interact? How can philanthropic giving connect us to one another, and redistribute not just money, but power?

■ *Watch now: <https://bit.ly/370XNNI>  
#RSAPhilanthropy*

### How women can save the planet

Gender inequality has helped cause climate catastrophe and gender equality is needed to help us solve it. We must see women not simply as the victims nor the sole saviours of our global situation, but as holders of power to make systemic change. Sociologist **Anne Karpf** speaks with activists **Daze Aghaji** and **Stella Nyambura** about building movements for gender-inclusive climate action.

■ *Watch now: <https://bit.ly/2UTu7zF>  
#RSAClimate*

### How to manage fear and find fulfilment

Cultures of fear in the workplace, in family relationships and friendships undermine intimacy, honesty and creativity. **Dr Pippa Grange**, a psychologist who has worked with some of the biggest names in sport and business, encourages us to look closer at what fear is costing us, and to make changes that can help us find connection, fulfilment and purpose.

■ *Watch now: <https://bit.ly/3BHiooB>  
#RSAFearLess*

### Rethinking Education

Continuing the RSA's Rethinking Education season, an expert panel of educators ask whether the disruptive events of 2020–21 provide an opportunity for a fundamental rethink of the capabilities that school curriculum and assessment focus on. With **Bill Lucas** of Rethinking Assessment; **Mary Richardson** of the UCL Institute of Education; **Stephen Tierney** of the Headteachers Roundtable; and **Jeffery Quaye** of the Aspirations Academies Trust.

■ *Watch now: <https://bit.ly/375rnBC>  
#RSAEducation*

# THE INTERVENING STATE

Embracing complexity means greater accountability

by James Wilson

🐦 @jamesgswilson

The main ethical aim of governments is uncontroversial and longstanding: to pursue the common good. But best practice in how to specify, measure and seek the common good has changed significantly in recent years. One salient feature has been that greater attention is being paid to the idea that adequately pursuing the common good is helped by using direct measurements of citizens' wellbeing to drive public decision-making, particularly by incorporating subjective measures such as life satisfaction scores. Attention to subjective wellbeing has made apparent how deep the effects of circumstances, such as unemployment, and mental health issues, such as depression, are on overall wellbeing and given strong reasons to think that these were previously taken less seriously than they should have been.

However, the relationship between subjective wellbeing and the main end goal of government policy needs to be interrogated. If taken as the only goal it will tend to curtail and impoverish our understanding of the kinds of public values that governments concerned with promoting the common good should be interested in. For example, it is important – yet unsurprising – to note that being the victim of a violent assault reduces subjective wellbeing. More important, however, is to notice that the reduction in subjective wellbeing is a response to and an interpretation of a sense of personal violation. So responding to these concerns is not just one of a number of ways in which government can increase wellbeing in the aggregate: it is something that individuals have a right to require of governments. Pursuit of the common good means governments must respond to the normative structure of situations, rather than just attempting to shift the

subjective experiences of individuals. It is problematic if a government responds to a crisis in public trust – such as threatened the UK's recently delayed GP Data for Planning and Research policy – by treating it purely as a communications challenge, rather than a signal that it is the trustworthiness of the policy that needs to be ensured. Rising to the challenge of demonstrating trustworthiness requires articulation and reconciliation of shared values.

## Societal stigmatisation

This is true not just in extreme situations, such as interpersonal violence, but also in a range of cases related to health and wellbeing. For example, many long-term health conditions are subject to stigmatisation. Stigma requires picking out some human differences as significant, and labelling them. A distinguishing feature will become stigmatising only if it is associated (or comes to be associated) with existing negative attributes. A sense of shame or being stigmatised will affect individuals' willingness to engage with healthcare, to disclose their conditions to others, or to continue to maintain an outgoing focus, as Russell T Davies's *It's a Sin* powerfully dramatised in the case of HIV/AIDS.

Many long-term illnesses are subject to stigma, and being stigmatised significantly worsens the experience of having a long-term condition. As sociologists Bruce Link and Jo Phelan argue, the relationship between stigma and status loss is bidirectional: stigma itself causes status loss, but low or diminished social status can itself be a cause of further stigma or discrimination. Power inequalities easily lead to stigmas being created where they previously did not exist; and lack of social power is one of the things ▶

**James Wilson** is a professor of philosophy at UCL. His latest book, *Philosophy for Public Health and Public Policy: Beyond the Neglectful State*, will be published in September





**“We are not spectators  
or detached scientific  
investigators of  
social reality”**

that is often stigmatised. Stigmatisation is bad in itself for subjective wellbeing, and also tends to lead to further negative effects.

Because of all these factors, it is short-sighted to think, for example, of mental health stigma as just a matter of subjective experience. Stigma is by its nature a kind of othering of less powerful groups by more powerful groups. We need to think of it as a structural cause of unfair inequalities in health and wellbeing, and policy responses to it need to take this into account. As stigmatisation arises from systematic differences in power, and further magnifies these power differentials, attempting to remove stigmatisation without changing the underlying power structures is difficult, and can easily backfire.

Better awareness of these challenges explains why, despite the very welcome improvement in the volume and quality of data available to decision-makers, the task of government has become, if anything, more, rather than less, challenging. There are now many more ways in which a government can fail. Especially where, as in the case of stigma reduction or tackling structural racism, the problem that governments need to solve requires change of deep-seated social attitudes. Success is fragile and cannot be secured through legislation alone. Persuading rather than coercing is crucial. To make matters worse, the greater

availability of data makes it more obvious when public policy fails to achieve its objectives.

### **Complex systems**

Responding to these challenges, the RSA, among many other thoughtful commentators, has been arguing for a deep reorientation of public policy away from new public management approaches that focus on efficiency through setting targets and key performance indicators, to complex systems approaches. There is a range of approaches to public policymaking that draw on complexity science, but all are united in arguing that top-down or command-and-control systems in policy will often suffer from, among other faults, a failure to anticipate their systemic effects. This tends to lead to policies either not achieving their intended results or having unintended additional effects – what the American systems theorist and ecologist Donella Meadows called “policy resistance”.

Taking a long view, it is striking not just how intellectually strong the case is for the shift to complex systems approaches, but also that similar arguments have been made with relatively little effect for over 40 years. While complexity science has often recommended a much greater reflexivity in the approach to interventions, it has not always reflected sufficiently on the reasons why it has itself struggled

for acceptance in public policy. Doing so will allow us to make progress on how governments should go about attempting to promote citizen wellbeing, and in particular the relationship between citizen wellbeing and the public good.

The paradox at the heart of systems thinking is that it is both familiar and deeply counterintuitive at the same time. It is hard to work in a large organisation, or to attempt to interact with government services such as social care, without becoming vividly aware of the ubiquity of unintended consequences and the myriad ways in which something that clearly seemed like a good idea in theory ends up being highly problematic in practice. For example, the Northern Ireland renewable heat incentive policy aimed to encourage businesses to shift from fossil fuels to renewables by subsidising the burning of wood pellets in boilers. However, the subsidy per kilowatt of energy produced ended up being higher than the cost of the fuel, meaning that it became profitable to run the boilers to heat empty sheds, leading to the ‘Cash for Ash’ scandal. While such experiences are universal, they will be interpreted differently, depending on the presuppositions we bring.

The mental model of causation that politicians and citizens alike tend to start from is akin to something like a billiards table: everything is static until a force is applied from the cue to the cue ball, which then strikes another ball and causes it to sink into the pocket. In such a world, causes are easy to identify, and responsibility is easy to parcel out. In reality, social systems, institutions and biological systems behave very differently. Where they exhibit stability, it tends to be a dynamic stability. Things do not stay the same because nothing is changing, but rather because they are kept within boundaries by dynamic interactions within a system. This is most obvious in the case of the processes of homeostasis in living organisms, where the maintenance of a fairly constant internal environment requires continual dynamic adjustments. The composition of a neighbourhood or rates of violent crime can be seen to also be affected by a process akin to homeostasis; stability and change should be understood in terms of the interaction of mechanisms, rather than presupposed as a constant.

## **The problems of complexity**

Thinking in terms of complexity increases the range and density of interrelations that need to be taken into account in policymaking, and leaves policymakers better equipped to avoid certain obvious problems of policy resistance. However, better understanding systemic interrelations does not by itself reduce the

difficulty of the ethical problems policymakers face in determining, measuring and pursuing the common good. Complex systems approaches are premised on a shift of our understanding of what causes what, and the implications this has for our planning: they do not by themselves tell us what our goals or aims should be. This is one reason for the otherwise surprising bedfellows that complexity brings together, cutting across political divides, from ecologists such as Donella Meadows, to market enthusiasts such as Hayek, and urbanites such as Jane Jacobs.

Complexity does not, however, leave everything the same when it comes to government policy. It has more radical implications too, as it compels a deeper reflection on the kinds of contingent reasons why policies can fail, and how to avoid this. Feedback loops and sensitivity to initial starting conditions can lead to unpredictable results even within deterministic systems. Where human beings are involved, as they always are in public policy, the ways in which citizens incorporate expectations of each other’s behaviour into their own actions is crucial. How the human beings who partially compose a system interpret elements of the system, and how easy or difficult the expectations of others make it for them to get what they want, will alter the behaviour of that system. I call this performativity.

The basic idea is simple, but mind-bending in its implications. As philosopher and psychologist William James remarked in his classic essay ‘The Will to Believe’, if you assume that someone is hostile to you, and then act on that basis, they may respond to your apparent distrust. If you then take their response as evidence of their hostility, things can easily escalate into a full-blown enmity in which it is true that the other person is hostile to you, even though this is true only because of your initial assumption. Start with the assumption that the other is trustworthy and likeable and act on this basis, and the cascade of behaviour may go the other way; the other returns the openness and compliments, which are interpreted as signs of friendliness and as the cause for further friendly moves. How many friendships and enmities have their basis in the contingent workings of performativity?

We are not spectators or detached scientific investigators of social reality, but the actors who are creating the show. As pithily summed up by the British economist Charles Goodhart, in what has come to be known as Goodhart’s law: “Any observed statistical regularity will tend to collapse once pressure is placed upon it for control purposes.”

One implication of performativity is that many of the problems that need to be tackled by governments ▶



**“Moving on from a neglectful state to a nurturing one will not be easy in the current circumstances”**



will not be solved more easily by stronger or more directive government action. To take just one example, the dynamics of vaccine hesitancy are significantly shaped by judgements about trust in state authorities, and so replacing a model that previously encouraged vaccination on a voluntary and solidaristic basis with a mandatory one is liable to reduce public confidence in the programme. If the coercion is perceived to be heavy-handed or unmerited, it may increase vaccine refusals, and fail to increase overall vaccination rates, achieving the exact opposite of its aim.

This is a message that has been appreciated by those on the political right who emphasise market solutions, but generally resisted by the left and centre-left. However, this debate needs to be reconfigured. The theoretical reasons that economists advance for thinking that the deliverances of a market will be optimal for wellbeing hold only under assumptions such as perfect information and zero transaction costs, which never in fact obtain in real-world circumstances. Looked at from the perspective of a rigorous complexity approach, competition in an economy is no more likely to lead to results that are optimal for wellbeing than is the process of natural selection. Without firm government intervention, the interrelated systems that make up society will often act to exacerbate existing inequalities and increase the risks to those who are most vulnerable. In such circumstances, government inaction is neither neutral nor a way of maximising wellbeing,

but amounts to allowing the vulnerable to come to harm.

However, nor is the idea that ambitious governmental intervention must fail supported by complexity approaches. While there are many instances in which public policy breaks down because systemic interactions have not been adequately attended to, it is simply mistaken to draw the conclusion that complexity approaches provide blanket support for government inaction. One obvious reason is that there is a range of cases in which the mechanisms that lead to disease and ill health, or conversely to health and wellbeing, are well understood, and there are many interventions that can be scaled cost-effectively to the level of a society without undermining their effects, or where wider take-up in fact enhances their effects (such as philanthropist Melinda French Gates argues is the case for women’s empowerment).

The main lesson that performativity should teach us is a greater flexibility in the way we think about value conflicts. There will be different ways of sustainably ‘solving’ a problem posed by conflicts of value such as population protection and liberty in the Covid-19 recovery period. What matters ultimately for policy is establishing effective control of the disease as the economy returns to normal, and doing so in a way that both maintains public confidence and leads to norms that encourage the behaviours required by the policy becoming more firmly embedded over time. What combination of social norms, restrictions and

technologies will best succeed depends on the different perspectives, values and strategies that other citizens in fact have. It is something that policymakers need to develop in dialogue with publics rather than seek to impose upon them.

## Whose responsibility?

Simple models of causation – because they discount the role of systems – tend to conflate causation and responsibility. Their first instinct is that if someone comes to harm then someone must be to blame; their second is that if no one can be found to blame, then the result is unfortunate but not unfair. Both instincts are mistaken.

Complex systems approaches require that policymakers not only see more interconnections, but also take ownership of more of them; it is no longer plausible to disclaim responsibility for unanticipated side effects of policy. As systems scientist John D Sterman put it, “there are no side effects – only effects”. As he explained, “‘Side effects’ are not a feature of reality, but a sign that the boundaries of our mental models are too narrow, our time horizons too short.” Complex systems accounts require us to acknowledge that it will often be the case that systemic harms and injustices occur without it needing to be the case that anyone intends to create harm or act unfairly.

The idea that people are set up to fail or are victims of systemic injustice creates a more complex set of questions about whom to hold responsible and how to do so. In my forthcoming book I describe what we need to overcome as the “Neglectful State”. This is a state that fails to attend to systemic risks to health and wellbeing, and as a result allows significant numbers to come to avoidable harm or death. Neglectful states often also attempt to deflect attention from their failings by redescribing systemic harms as failures of personal responsibility.

Moving on from a neglectful state to a nurturing one will not be easy in the current circumstances. The wider the range of effects that governments admit are relevant and that they can be held accountable for, the larger the target they create for opponents. This is one reason why, despite the preponderance of thoughtful voices over decades advocating for complex systems approaches to public policy, take-up of complex systems by governments is often resisted in practice.

Another reason is that complexity frameworks require us to think more creatively about the goals of public policy, what success looks like, and how to measure it. As we have seen, performativity implies that the ends at which policy should aim are not fixed and straightforward, and that we should not expect that the effects of interventions will be predictable.

What is the best way to specify the common good in such circumstances? I argue that the idea of public value can help: public value is created, or captured, to the extent that public sector institutions further their democratically established goals. Such a perspective helps to articulate what is at stake in a policy decision such as whether to extend the scale of commercial use of NHS data, but importantly does not prejudge whether doing so will create (or destroy) public value. What matters is the extent to which doing so would enable the NHS better to pursue its goals as set out in the NHS Constitution, including the need to maintain trust in a confidential health system.

In order for governments to genuinely adopt complexity policy frameworks, they must not only have a real commitment to deep change, but also the confidence that there is a common understanding that shifting the dial on systemic problems is hard. Tackling a problem such as structural racism is much less like applying a force to get a cart moving down a well-maintained road, and more like rolling a stone up a steep hill. Even this image somewhat underestimates the difficulty of the task. The slopes and difficult terrain that challenge governmental attempts to dismantle systemic inequalities were not created by slow geological processes that predate human beings; they are created by us, and in certain respects they are us. ■

## RSA Fellowship in action

### Her Pivot

Mie Kajikawa received a £2,000 Catalyst Seed Grant for her project, Her Pivot, which aims to empower women in the Japanese sports business industry. In 2020, Japan was ranked 121st out of 153 countries in terms of gender equality, according to the World Economic Forum. There are few women working at leadership levels in the corporate side of sports, and women make up only about 10% of the audience for sports business seminars. “As the first Japanese woman who worked with the National Basketball Association, I wanted to inspire young women in Japan, especially in the sports business,” explains Mie.

Her Pivot is developing a programme which will provide support and professional advice through events such as public speaking training, expert talks and forums. Mie plans to expand the project in the future. “I would like to develop the programme internationally, as well as establish a mentor programme for women in Japanese sports organisations.”

■ To find out more, contact Mie at [herpivot2021@nextbigpivot.org](mailto:herpivot2021@nextbigpivot.org)

# RESHAPING SOCIAL CARE

A brighter future for people who draw on social care means looking to a more localised, personal approach

by Anna Severwright  
🐦 @AnnaSeverwright

While Covid-19 has been tough on us all, and has shone light on many aspects of our lives and wellbeing, when lockdown started I remember thinking that it did not feel that different for me. Actually, I felt more a part of society than I usually do, because everyone was experiencing a life more like mine; for a time, everyone was unable to lead the lives they wanted to lead.

For me and many others who need to draw on social care for support, entering ‘serviceland’ can mean that aspects of our lives that we value are changed without our say, or lost altogether. For me, it is that I want to be able to go out more to see my friends but do not have the support to do so. For others, it may be having no option but to leave their loved ones and their home to go into institutional care, or not being able to choose what time they go to bed in their own home.

Social Care Future is a movement consisting of people who have lived experience of social care, people who work in social care and other allies. We want to bring about positive change in the system, to achieve the following vision: “We all want to live in the place we call home, with the people and things that we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing the things that matter to us.”

This vision deliberately does not talk about the care and support someone may need but about the things

that matter in all of our lives and lead to our wellbeing. This is what social care should be about: people living good, ordinary lives, regardless of disability and at every stage of life.

The Care Act 2014 gave local authorities a duty to promote an individual’s wellbeing. Recently at Social Care Future, we launched the first findings of our inquiry called ‘Whose social care is it anyway?’, which was led by people with lived experience of social care. We heard from over 500 individuals, and what was clear was that most were not having the life experience as described in the vision. In many cases, the current social care offering was not having a positive effect on their wellbeing, with people telling us they felt isolated from their community, unable to choose where or who they live with and living in fear of their support being cut.

So why has the system struggled, and what might some of the solutions be?

## The nature of wellbeing

Wellbeing is both innately human and gloriously intangible. We can all identify aspects of our lives that do or do not contribute to our wellbeing; these interact to form an ever-changing web. Current commissioning systems do not like this, because it cannot be easily measured or given a neat cost per unit. ▶

**Anna Severwright** is a convener of Social Care Future, a movement that looks to bring about change in social care







Wellbeing will look different for each person and at different times in their life, so it needs a truly personalised approach. For me, watering my plants boosts my wellbeing; for you, going fishing may be important. But believe me, if I was supported to go fishing it would not boost my wellbeing!

Again, this challenges systems that love well-defined pathways but within which most of our lives do not neatly fit. Current systems also demand evidence-based models; this is more difficult, but not impossible, for truly personalised approaches.

### **Wider than social care?**

Because wellbeing and our lives are complex and do not fit neat commissioning and service pathways, we end up in multiple systems. At one point I had eight different NHS consultants, a GP, two physio teams, wheelchair services, social care, occupational therapists...the list goes on. All were involved in my care, yet they did not talk to one other, or even usually take into account what the others were doing.

This led to an uncoordinated approach, which is not only frustrating and exhausting for the person living it, but cannot be that satisfactory for the people working in it either. I would like one plan that focuses on what I want from my life and then details how each piece of the system contributes, rather than there being a set of unconnected pieces each in its own narrow silo.

The formation of Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) – partnerships between the organisations that provide health and social care which aim to coordinate services and reduce inequalities between different groups – could be an opportunity to shift from reactive care to community-based, preventative approaches that focus on keeping people well and happy rather than fixing them when the system has failed to. It is also vital that ICSs focus on the wider determinants of health and wellbeing; for example, poverty and poor housing, which shorten lives, and inequalities in care experienced by some groups, such as the ways in which women from ethnic minorities receive and experience maternal health care. Social care is, and needs to be recognised as, a vital part of ICSs, supporting people to live their lives how they want to, being able to be a part of and contribute to society. For too long it has been seen only as a last resort or a ‘place’ to which to discharge someone from hospital.

### **A system under stress**

I cannot ignore that another reason social care is struggling is the huge impact that austerity and the massive budget cuts to local authorities have had over the past decade. Health charity The King’s Fund states that in real terms (after adjusting for inflation) spend on social care is £300m less than a decade ago.

This is at a time when there are more people, of both working age and in later life, needing support (likely



## **“Wellbeing will look different for each person and at different times in their life”**

to be exacerbated by Covid-19). Often framed as a problem or burden, our growing old-age population should be celebrated, as it shows we are living longer and have made wonderful medical advances. Less often talked about is that almost half of the social care budget is spent on working-age adults, a group generally ignored by the media and politicians. Last year, a survey of directors of adult social care found that only 4% were confident they had the budget to meet their statutory duties.

Although in some places this has led to innovative approaches, in many it has led to increasingly high eligibility requirements to receive support, reduced care and support offered, and increased charges. These have direct, negative impacts on people and their families, with many describing the “fight” with the system and stress around reviews due to their fear of care being cut.

### **Power**

Yes, money is tight. But with restricted budgets has often come an increase in over-rigorous monitoring and control from local authorities. Where this has been most keenly felt is in the area of people having choice and control over their care, often through the use of Direct Payments, which were introduced 25 years ago and meant that disabled or older people could choose and buy their own care and support, meaning they could fit it to how it best suited their lives.

However, we are now seeing that a lot of that choice has been removed, with increased rules and restrictions limiting the use of Direct Payments. People feel they are not trusted and there is increasingly a larger power imbalance between local authorities and individuals and their families.

When Social Care Future started we co-produced our vision, so we know what people want from life. The good news is that this vision has received widespread support from people who draw on social care, their families, people working in social care, sector organisations and the public. What is still being debated is how we get there.

In our inquiry, we wanted to try to start to answer that question. We identified five key changes that would bring us closer to experiencing the movement’s vision, bringing us out of a permanent lockdown and into an equal life. They are: communities where everyone belongs; living in a place we call home;

leading the lives we want to live; more resources, better used; and sharing power as equals.

These are not new ideas, nor are they simple to achieve. So for phase two of the inquiry we will collaborate with people working in the sector and people who draw on social care to develop the five key changes further, including clear actions and solutions. We made some initial asks in the report; for example, we made a recent request of all directors of adult social care of each local authority that they adopt our vision and use it in their localities alongside Making it Real. Making It Real is a tool published by Think Local Act Personal (TLAP), a partnership of organisations committed to transforming health and social care through personalisation. Using a series of ‘I’ and ‘we’ statements to describe what good personalised care looks like, it puts people at the centre of decisions about their support. We have already had positive responses and will be working with a group of local authorities over the next few months.

At Social Care Future we have also been collecting ‘Glimpses of the Future’. These are places or people who are doing things differently already, but who in the current system are not able to grow or multiply.

Some of these innovative models, like Community Circles, are looking at the relationships a person already has and working with their ‘circle’ to look at ways to support them. Others, like Gig Buddies, connect people with a similar taste in music or interests so they can go to and enjoy events together. In Derby since 2012, the local authority has been using local area coordinators to support individuals and local communities, supporting residents to ‘get a life, not a service’, helping to connect them to activities in their local area, build personal resilience and explore solutions within the community. They have found that, as a result, people feel more connected and less isolated, there has been a lower use of traditional services, and the project has made a return on investment of £4 social capital per £1 spent.

Wellbeing is at the heart of Social Care Future’s vision for an individual’s life and gives us a clear aspiration to aim for. But to achieve this, health and social care need to stop just delivering traditional, transactional services in narrow silos and look instead at how they can support the conditions needed for different approaches that strengthen communities, build wellbeing and allow everyone to flourish. ■

# “My job is to truly understand and represent the voices of children”

Rachel de Souza, Children’s Commissioner for England, is interviewed by Patrick Butler

🐦 @patrickjbutler @Rachel\_deSouza

**Patrick Butler:** What do you think you bring to the role of Children’s Commissioner?

**Rachel de Souza:** Throughout my career my commitment has been focused towards working in disadvantaged communities. I was a teacher for 30 years, 15 years as a headteacher, nine of which were as a CEO running a family of schools, and I was an early sponsored academy principal. What I bring is this experience and a belief that children deserve the best education possible, that every child – and particularly those from vulnerable groups and disadvantaged areas – deserves to be able to thrive and achieve the best outcomes and be supported to do that.

My job is to truly understand and represent the voices of children and to be able to amplify them; to take those voices to government and the public sector and make a difference. The first thing I did on taking on the role was to ask children about their thoughts and concerns – particularly coming out of lockdown – and what they wanted for their futures. We particularly made sure we asked the most vulnerable children, including those in young offenders’ institutions, in mental health wards and in care.

We need to transform children’s social care services, with a focus on early help for families who

are struggling, including family hubs and expansion of the Supporting Families programme. We need to ensure that all children in the care system have a safe and caring home, tackling the problems of instability and the scarcity of high-quality foster and children’s home spaces for children, especially older teens.

**Butler:** You kicked off your tenure by launching your Beveridge Report-style review of children’s life chances and wellbeing. How is that progressing?

**De Souza:** I’ve been stunned and delighted by how well it has gone. We had 550,000 responses; this represents around 6% of all the young people aged between four and 18 and there’s coverage across every single local authority area. We can look at the data in terms of geographic areas and also by disadvantage, and who children have identified they live with, for instance, whether they are in care. I’ve read through a wide range of comments from children’s responses and cannot wait to share these.

Mental health was the biggest concern – 20% of the children who responded said they were unhappy with their mental health and wellbeing. There are some very powerful themes coming through about life at school, about mental health, but also about children’s own ▶

**Dame Rachel de Souza** is Children’s Commissioner for England. Patrick Butler is social policy editor at *The Guardian*



Images from Si Barber

communities. There's no lack of ambition in England's children. They have an absolute desire for a great job and career, a great life ahead, and there's some really mature thinking in the responses. We're also seeing passionate responses on issues like climate, equality and fairness in society from many different angles, and some really touching stuff from children about self-confidence. The hope is that these insights can really inform policy. I went out to Grimsby, Scunthorpe, Gateshead, Manchester, Bristol, Luton; right round the country talking to children.

**Butler:** Do you see the solution to some of those issues as being primarily through schools and education, or do you think that solutions come from a much wider arena?

**De Souza:** One of the reasons I was so excited about the Children's Commissioner role was that it reaches across the boundaries between education and the wider services supporting children, families and communities. Having been part of the education reform movement right from that first Blair academy school, I felt we needed to look at the services and the tier around vulnerable children with the same zest that we've looked at curriculums and improving schools. So, for example, special educational needs and alternative provision need to be seen as part of meeting children's mental health needs.

Children are very thoughtful and concerned about education; it's important to them both in relation to their life at school now and also to the education they need to get the future they want. That's what they're telling us.

**Butler:** Last autumn, *The Guardian* published an article about young people's experiences of lockdown. One boy said: "I've pressed pause on my life and though I'm dying to resume it I don't even know if there's a play button anymore." That encapsulated for me that sense of profound uncertainty, of a life interrupted that many young people felt.

**De Souza:** I talked to a 15-year-old captain of a football team in Bolton and he said that he was totally bewildered during lockdown and didn't know what was happening. Everything that he was used to being able to do, like sport, the things that helped him to make sense of the world, he no longer had access to and he felt terrible.

And then there are children who have been bereaved. In Bolton, where they had the Delta variant first, I went to Essa Academy where a number of close relatives of the schoolchildren had died. A lot of the children said

they wanted to be doctors because of these deaths; they wanted to be able to do something about it.

They also told me they needed support, that they wanted someone to talk to but they didn't know who. While preferences were very much around the idea of digital online counselling, they also thought it would be good to have counsellors in schools.

In Bolton they were talking about their physical health and how that had gone downhill for them. Particularly the primary school children; they wanted to be able to play sport and to be out and about.

In Luton some of the children talked to me about parents who'd lost jobs or parents they were worried about who were going out in delivery vans, mums who were nurses. They had fear about that but were also wanting to be able to get out and have places to go.

What we really need to be doing is ensuring that children and young people know how to achieve the things they want to achieve. They worry they've missed so much learning that they're not going to be able to get back on that horse and get a fulfilling career. It's important to help them understand different careers and apprenticeship pathways and so on, making them aware of opportunities and reassuring them about what is going to be available. Because it's been a shock.

It's very welcome that the government is promising additional funding for tutoring and extra support. I want to work with the government to build on this and ensure that we have a longer-term focus on tackling the disadvantage gap for the most vulnerable learners. We need to ensure all children get a good education, support to promote their wellbeing and access to additional help if they need it.

**Butler:** In some ways the already serious issue of children's wellbeing was pushed even more to the forefront by the pandemic. Do you think this'll be a generation who are mentally scarred by their experience, or do you think that perhaps young people are more resilient than we give them credit for?

**De Souza:** There is no question we have an increasing mental health problem and it has been exacerbated by Covid-19. The NHS Digital stats show that, in relation to five- to 19-year-olds with a mental disorder, this has gone from one in eight before Covid-19 to one in six. I was very heartened talking to Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, who wrote *Inventing Ourselves: The Secret Life of the Teenage Brain*. She assured me that the plasticity and flexibility of teenage brains means they should be able to bounce back. What we know is that having good-quality relationships and spending time with their peers – it doesn't need to be too many – is important, and that's why I'm really supportive of



**“There’s no lack of ambition in England’s children”**

talk about extending school days, summer activities, all the programmes to get teenagers back together. In short, I don’t think children have been scarred for life but we do need to take the problem seriously.

**Butler:** Pre-Covid-19, there was growing anxiety about the influence of social media on young people. How, regardless of class or background, it was facilitating excessive introspection, the impossible pursuit of perfection, online bullying and easy access to porn. Is this something you are concerned about?

**De Souza:** It was tech and digital that allowed us to remain connected and for children to continue learning during the pandemic, so we don’t want to throw away the gains we’ve made. Many children are telling us how they’re now able to use digital in a more confident and capable way; although I do think there’s an overwhelming feeling that it’s good to be back at school and you learn better there.

On the question of online harms, obviously we’ve got the Online Safety Bill coming back, which we need to take incredibly seriously.

I’ve made sure since I’ve been in post that I’ve been thoroughly briefed by the National Crime Agency and others to see what the real problems are. I am concerned about what children and young people are exposed to on social media sites and the internet. I’m concerned about very young children and any children under 18 just stumbling over porn. Oliver Dowden and Gavin Williamson have written to me to advise

them on what we can do about that, so I have already been speaking to adult content tech companies about how we can keep children safe.

If we’re going to do that properly we’re going to need to make age verification universal on these adult websites. This means challenging tech companies and supporting parents. I’m getting 16- to 21-year-olds to write the guidance for parents: getting them to think along the lines of what they wish their mums and dads had known. I think that’s the best voice to do it in. These issues form a real central plank of what I’m doing this next year and I think, if anything, this side of things has probably worsened during lockdown.

**Butler:** In March you said “I’ve seen first-hand the effects of this crisis on young people’s hopes and dreams and sometimes our answers simply haven’t been good enough.” Could you elaborate on that?

**De Souza:** I was making a comment about all adults to be honest. What young people have told me is that they didn’t feel visible or that their questions were answered. I wish we’d been talking directly to children more about the pandemic and what was happening, that we’d been getting messages out on children’s programmes. I never wanted to see a day that schools were closed. You have to listen to the science, but we also have to look at the harms of school closure. I suspect we will all think long and hard about the impact of closing schools and try our best not to let that happen again. ■





Artwork by Kerry Hughes

# A LOCAL FOCUS

The promotion of local wellbeing centred around individuals and communities will mean rethinking our provision of many overlapping services

by Hannah Webster

The RSA is exploring what it means for our collective wellbeing to motivate us to design a better, more equitable future. In short, we are thinking about how we might organise ourselves and our systems in a way that supports people to lead a good life, through their health, work, networks of support, economic security, housing, community and more. To understand what contributes to a good life means acknowledging a self-defined interpretation of wellbeing that is necessarily broad. My wellbeing, for example, is derived from my circumstances, and while the areas of my life that contribute to it might overlap with yours, the specifics will differ.

While few might disagree with the sentiment of supporting the wellbeing of people and places, in many instances it is a priority that falls behind a complex web of financial and institution-specific incentives. And at its worst, our current system meets this complexity by setting up the ability to attain good wellbeing as something that only the individual can achieve themselves, if they just spend enough time, or energy, or money. It commercialises and outsources what could be a collectively supported and maintained experience if we designed our society to work towards it.

Within this scenario, personal resilience and responsibility become the weapons of choice against poor wellbeing, leaving an absence of systemic

support and coordination. Without coordinated and active design towards improved wellbeing, and with this absence filled with individual responsibility, we see instead that inequalities within and between places are allowed to emerge and proliferate.

But, as the 2020 Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission concluded, there is a necessity for “equality and wellbeing goals to be put at the heart of public policy and across the private and voluntary sectors”. As we look to our emergence from the Covid-19 pandemic, we need a system where the state, communities and those who live in them participate and collaborate at a local level towards a shared aim of collective and individual wellbeing.

This importance of working locally was put under the spotlight in the early days of the pandemic. Mutual aid groups, local supply chains for personal protective equipment and pivoting community groups brought to the fore the benefits we already knew about working in small geographies. But much of this new activity operated in the context of an emergency response and relied on individuals or communities taking on additional labour. What would it mean to take a locally led and sustainable approach to our systems, services and support by design? And what value does this hold for our wellbeing?

By local, we tend to mean place under geographical parameters, but we should acknowledge that this ▶

**Hannah Webster** is a Senior Researcher in the Public Services and Communities team at the RSA



**“What would it mean to take a locally led and sustainable approach to our systems, services and support by design?”**

brings a degree of the subjective. The local of one person might differ to that of a neighbour, while the administrative boundaries are likely to differ even further again. Boundaries of local authorities overlap rather than overlay with the boundaries of constituencies, or clinical commissioning groups. With no fixed conception of a locality, it might feel complex to use this as the guiding scaffolding for our society.

But this complexity is not insurmountable if we change the lens we have on how decisions are made about local areas. To navigate between the scale at which people live their lives and our geographical political landscape, we might use a person-centred approach as our compass. Being flexible about geography, boundary or coalition allows us to meet the needs of individuals on their own terms. It is here where our contention that participation – as a process and as a principle – can help us to navigate the complexity that comes into play.

Centring the experience, ambition and challenges of residents in local places, and drawing collaboration and shared purpose between the services that support them, require a participatory approach to defining what both the ‘local’ and ‘wellbeing’ means to residents. Without this driving ethos, we continue to use the idea of local as an administrative function rather than an actor in its own right.

The good news is that, although this is never going to be easy, currently there is a huge opportunity to think locally and be guided by individual and collective wellbeing. We are at the intersection of a number of shifts in our policy landscape that, together, could set us up for a moment of real change across our personal, collective and planetary health.

There is a latent opportunity in the levelling up agenda. Though loosely defined – in Boris Johnson’s Queen’s Speech in May 2021, the commitment was to levelling up “opportunities across all parts of the United Kingdom, supporting jobs, businesses and economic growth and addressing the impact of the pandemic on public services” – the government’s headline policy ambition has potential to advance a wellbeing agenda. But to work, the approach must be tailored and local to ensure that residents genuinely see improvement that will support their wellbeing.

For communities identified for levelling up, the economic, social and political will inevitably bleed into each other. Yes, more infrastructure is needed in these areas, and high streets may be a necessary focus, but we also need to consider what changes local people want to see. Without such a consideration, any support will be superficial and unsustainable.

It is listening to these voices that will ensure that communities feel the benefit of levelling up, and that

the experience is not just seen through the metrics that the government chooses to measure. The current infrastructure associated with levelling up quite clearly risks going in the other direction; in Stocksbridge, for example, the levelling up fund board included the local MP, her husband and his business partner. Concentrating power in this way actively undermines the ambitions of government.

Levelling up is not the only agenda currently speaking to our local systems. The Department of Health and Social Care White Paper establishes Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), a new infrastructure, which changes the geographical boundaries around our health and social care system and actively encourages collaboration between services within the sector and across related local anchors. With local collaboration a specific part of the remit of ICSs, getting this right from the start might set up a local anchor for our health and wellbeing.

### **What are the implications?**

This approach will, of course, require a complete reframing of how we manage, commission and fund our local services. The establishment of the combined authorities and mayoral positions is one step towards devolution, but we need to continue to consider increasing the power of local and hyper-local institutions and communities. The levelling up agenda speaks directly to this ambition but, as yet, does not let go of the centralised power to make it a reality.

In July of this year, Boris Johnson alluded to a county-level devolution to improve local services but called for leaders to “come to” government with a vision. The radical redistribution of power needed will never stem from such a case-by-case, centrally assessed basis, especially when political motivations are at play. Instead, such an approach will bear out further inequalities within and between places, where local areas with fewer resources or less political capital to engage with central government are left unsupported. To follow through on such a promise, we need greater devolution by default.

A more systemic redesign could overcome the limited nature of funding mechanisms between local and national government. As the RSA’s newly appointed Chief Executive, Andy Haldane, explored in his recent Community Power Lecture for the Local Trust, “competitively-bid central pots of finite, short-termish money tend to lock-in the advantages of those who already have resources.”

The Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose argues that mission-led vision and systems might help us to address the major challenges of our time.

Missions – which the institute defines as “concrete targets within a challenge that act as frames and stimuli for innovation” – in this instance frame a complex, ambitious change. For example, applying a mission-led approach to innovation-led economic growth. Setting our collective wellbeing as a mission for local systems might be one way to practically move towards true levelling up, with participatory approaches helping to define the detail of what will support residents’ wellbeing.

In addition, there is a pressing need for residents to be more meaningfully engaged in the decisions that affect them. The Institute for Community Studies at the Young Foundation recently published “*Why don’t they ask us?*”, an exploration into the role of communities in levelling up, in which a key finding is that “the majority of ‘macro funds’ and economic interventions over the last two decades have not involved communities in a meaningful nor sustainable way.” The risk is that this disempowers the very people who these funds or services seek to serve and creates a misdirection of resources as the geographical framing is too broad for clear participation and targeted delivery.

Pockets of innovation, best practice and redistributive participation are happening across the UK but these are often reliant on the energy of individuals in a professional, and personal, capacity to make such a change. To move towards a genuine shift in power and a reframing of the priorities of our society we need to join up innovations, learn from each other and understand what role different levels of the system might play.

Such an approach could learn from innovation happening now. In Barking and Dagenham, the community-led Every One Every Day programme spans over 24,000 opportunities for participation and 150 neighbourhood projects. Its aim is to “make everyday life better for everyone”, but their non-prescriptive, participatory approach means that the work spans what is important to residents. Their impact evaluation found that a key outcome of the process was linked to improved wellbeing; eight in 10 participants reported increased confidence and 90% reported enjoyment and happiness.

More generally, asset-based models of community services and in particular health and care can – if supported – ensure we lead from within communities. For example, Think Local Act Personal is based on the ethos that local places and the people that live within them can achieve more together when they share an asset-based mindset, focused on the potential of what places could, and do, produce with the people involved or affected. ▶

In Northern Ireland, the 2016 local-authority-led Belfast Conversation asked residents what they wanted for the future of the city and created an agenda focused on 2035 based on their input. Residents wanted for “everyone in Belfast [to benefit] from a thriving and prosperous economy” and for “everyone in Belfast [to experience] good health and wellbeing” as two of five key priorities. This conversation will be repeated this year to ensure that resident voices continue to be heard.

In Wales, it is a national policy that encourages the creation of participatory approaches focused on wellbeing. The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 makes a legal obligation of public bodies to embed the “social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being” of those they serve as a driving force. Within this macro framework, local community anchor organisations are seen as critical to supporting communities. Enabling communities to thrive includes embedding meaningful participation where public bodies create the right conditions for this to lead to real change.

We can learn from examples like these – and the many other initiatives operating at the community, local and national level – how an inclusive and community-led approach to wellbeing might be supported. They demonstrate that trusting communities and individuals with leadership and ensuring that system-wide incentives are aligned with a wellbeing agenda

and resources can embed engagement over the long term, not just for a snapshot in time.

## What is the RSA doing?

The RSA’s Living Change Approach is based on the belief that it is not possible to address systemic challenges at the level of single interventions or from single actors. Instead, central to any successful story of change is a clear ambition that is supported by those for whom it seeks to drive improvement, and which drives alignment across the local and national system of influence.

The RSA is committed to a world where everyone can participate in creating a better future, and we have been exploring how we might contribute towards such a participatory future that centres on collective wellbeing. Our ambition is for local systems to be designed to actively support individual and collective wellbeing in places. This requires us to understand how systems work, what the incentives across different actors are and, crucially, what the wellbeing needs and aspirations of residents are.

The RSA is by no means the first to arrive at a wellbeing agenda. In recent years there has been a swell of activity around this topic, with a number of organisations – the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, the Centre for Thriving Places, What Works Wellbeing and more – articulating what a wellbeing-led economy or policy landscape might look like. We hope to bring a contribution that unites participation and place to support a vision of wellbeing driving the systems that surround us.

Our starting point is to gain knowledge about this area, testing ideas and interventions that might shift the dial towards participatory, wellbeing-led systems in local places. We are approaching this through three lines of enquiry: What are the wellbeing needs in different places? What do residents want to see change? And how can local areas become genuinely participatory to see such a change happen?

The RSA has embarked on this journey through a range of projects. First, if we are to meaningfully set wellbeing as a local ambition we need to understand what this means in context. Our broad definition means that there is no one route to wellbeing but – by understanding the experiences of residents, the context of the assets and opportunities in local areas, and how local systems operate – we can start to create a picture of what change is needed.

Crucially, we need to understand the drivers of inequality and how these shape people’s ability to lead a good life. Only by understanding the roots

### RSA Fellowship in action

#### Adding care planning to the Plait system

Mark Chapman FRSA was awarded a £10,000 Catalyst Scaling Grant for his project, which will add care planning to the Plait business administration software system.

Plait is used by a growing number of homecare providers, but it lacks an integrated care planning function, meaning users currently have to employ other platforms alongside it. Mark and his team at ReallyCare CIC will use the Scaling Grant to evaluate homecare providers’ wants and needs and then create a joined-up system, which will provide a more streamlined, accessible service.

“What is different about ReallyCare and Plait is that the company is not for profit and the software will be open source. This will drive innovation and be a brake on relentless price increases by the major software providers in the vastly underfunded care market,” says Mark. “We would love to hear from any Fellows who have expertise in care planning,” he adds.

■ To find out more, contact Mark at [mark@reallycare.org](mailto:mark@reallycare.org)





**“Our ambition is for local systems to be designed to actively support individual and collective wellbeing in places”**

of inequality can we work towards an equitable future. For example, in our work supported by the Health Foundation, we are exploring the role of economic security in the future health of the next generation. Understanding the links between economic circumstances and physical and mental health and wellbeing will be critical to enabling the next generation to lead a good life.

To this end, later this year the RSA will be running place-based research enquiries in four locations across the UK to understand what drives young people’s sense of economic security and wellbeing, and what future they want to see for themselves and their local area. Our aim is to ensure that the voices of young people are heard by the key actors in the local area.

We will build on this learning in our second line of enquiry around what residents want to see change and how they get a meaningful say.

Later this year, the RSA will publish its findings from a neighbourhood assembly it facilitated in Nechells, Birmingham. Supported by the Oak Foundation, this brought together a diverse group of residents over a series of deliberative sessions to understand what role their housing and neighbourhood plays in their ability to lead a good life, co-designing with them ideas for policy and practice that they want to see done differently.

This project represents an important shift in the move to genuinely participatory places, by starting the conversation with people – in a neighbourhood

that is often overlooked – rather than policymakers. We have purposefully brought a broad and malleable question to the group: “What do you need from your home and your neighbourhood, now and in the future, for everyone in Nechells to lead a good life?” This offers a contrast to a consultative or ‘light-touch’ approach to participation that is often conducted with a predetermined issue or solution and seeks only feedback.

Of course the RSA is just one organisation and, alone, it cannot bring about a more participatory future. However, our work will provide important evidence and, we hope, inspiration, helping to drive new inclusive ways of doing things. To support local places to adopt a more participatory approach, our *Transitions to Participatory Democracy* handbook considers the complexity and scale of the challenge and offers practical examples of how different participatory approaches can be embedded and tailored to local needs.

Central to these examples and suggestions are a need to equalise participation opportunities, including compensating people for their time, supporting specific requirements and using technological participatory methods, along with support and resources to enable participation in this way. Doing this well requires investment of time and money and the divestment of power. But if we successfully and equitably move towards participatory places, everyone’s wellbeing will benefit. ■

# BINDING MOMENTS

What the England football team's manager, Gareth Southgate, can teach us about social connection

by Sunder Katwala  
 @sundersays

The dust has long since settled on a Euro 2020 football championship in which the England team became a focal point for public conversations about national identity, racism and so-called 'culture wars'. Their manager Gareth Southgate, declaring that "I have never believed that we should just stick to football," earned praise for engaging constructively with these divisive, long-term issues, with a bridging voice that politicians have struggled to emulate. So what did we learn from Southgate and from Euro 2020?

## The power and limits of sport

As technology fragments audiences, major sporting events offer a rare moment when millions (31 million in the UK, in the case of the Euro 2020 final) of us still do the same thing at the same time. Earlier this summer, the unscripted human drama of live sport seemed more compelling than ever to many fans across the continent. Yet this unpredictability should make us wary of sport's power to shape identity narratives. It seems a risky gambit to stake the future politics of anti-racism on how far the England team progress through a football tournament, if three missed penalty kicks can transform the national narrative overnight.

What we need to understand is what sport can do, and what it cannot. What sport does best is provide an idealised vision, such as the image of a national team of which we can all be part. Sport has the power to bridge 'them and us' identity divides by offering a 'new us' identity that we can share. This was the idea promoted by the England Together campaign, with faith and civic society advocates sending the message

that "football is coming home, and it is a home we all share", as Imam Qari Asim put it. Symbolism matters. Sporting events can demonstrate the breadth of public appetite for an inclusive story of who we are. But such heightened moments are, by their nature, ephemeral. If we find the vision attractive, we need to work out how to do the spadework to bring it closer to reality.

## Setting boundaries

Euro 2020 has not called off the idea of a 'culture war' over identity, but it has begun to draw some useful boundaries. The political right has been reflecting on why fence-sitting, over calls to boo or boycott the England team when players took the knee as an anti-racism gesture, backfired. There is a common-sense lesson about the limits of a 'war on woke'. It is legitimate for social conservatives to contest arguments about culture and identity from the left, but public arguments cannot be won by raging against the modern world. Rather, successful challenges to perceived 'woke' excess in the 2020s need to be founded on an acceptance of social shifts of the past half century that are deep-rooted. Mirroring this is the challenge the left faces to preach beyond its own tribe: a team which belted out the national anthem before taking the knee may offer insights into how to broaden the audience.

## The UK's many identities

Over the past quarter of a century – since Euro '96 and devolution – the United Kingdom has become more conscious of being a multinational polity. Sports fans moved on from cheering for England, Scotland ▶

**Sunder Katwala** is Director of British Future, which conducted the Talk Together research on behalf of the Together Coalition. The *Talk Together* report can be read at [together.org.uk/talk-together/](https://together.org.uk/talk-together/)







and Wales at Euro 2020 to supporting Team GB in the Tokyo Olympics. This intuitive understanding that most of us have more than one flag and more than one national identity is seldom seen in civic society.

We need identities at every level to be civic – open to those who wish to belong – rather than the property of an ethnic group. UK governments achieved that with British identity, the citizenship identity, while there have been significant efforts, after devolution, to shape civic identities in Scotland and Wales, and to formally recognise Northern Ireland’s multiple national identities. But few civic institutions in England can confidently navigate when and how to talk about England.

England has remained a ‘90-minute nation’, rarely recognised outside its football, cricket and rugby teams. There has been a dramatic, underestimated shift towards Englishness being understood to cross ethnic lines, yet both white English and ethnic minority citizens express much more confidence about this as a principle reflected in England’s sporting teams, with more uncertainty about whether it extends to the flag and St George’s Day. This suggests that those seeking to bridge ‘them and us’ divides across class, ethnic and faith lines in England should focus at least as much on English as British identity. Over 32 million people gave their national identity as English in the last census; only half that number identified as British. Yet the leaders of London-based national institutions, whose liberal tribe feels more British than English, often seem unaware that theirs is a less widely held view.

## **How to join the dots**

On the first day of this new decade, a broad coalition of civic voices pledged to make this a “decade of reconnection” in British society. Nobody had heard of Covid-19 then, although the pandemic has increased the public appetite for this cause. There are several lessons from this summer about how to put that aspiration into practice.

The UK is a more anxious and fractured society than we want to be but with the potential to be more cohesive than we sometimes tell ourselves. Narratives matter, and making effective use of major national moments offers a powerful opportunity to shape them.

It is now 15 years since the former prime minister, Gordon Brown, observed that the United Kingdom is one of the few countries without a national day, though such a proposal is more fraught in a multinational UK. There should be no bar to the invention of new traditions, such as the Neighbour Day proposed in MP Danny Kruger’s social connection report, *Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant*,

to the Prime Minister last year. The greater gains in public reach will usually come from making use of the many national moments we already have. A stacked 2022 calendar includes a Platinum Jubilee, the UK Festival 2022, the centenary of the BBC, the hosting of the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, another football World Cup, and more besides.

The gradual reinvention of existing traditions can institutionalise recurring practical opportunities to bridge divides. Remembrance, for example, has begun to significantly broaden its appeal across ethnic and faith groups in recent years. The armies that fought the two world wars resemble the Britain of 2021 more than that of 1914 or 1940 in their ethnic and faith make-up. A significant rise over the past decade in public awareness of the scale of the Commonwealth contribution deepens the opportunity for Remembrance to become an annual moment of bridging social contact. According to a survey by Number Cruncher Politics for British Future, over three-quarters of white and ethnic minority Britons support this; the challenge is to unlock and reflect that in the local practice of Remembrance.

Efforts to create new moments can repurpose pegs that already have a public resonance. The birthday of the NHS – the most cherished of British institutions – was chosen by the Together Coalition as the occasion for its first national Thank You Day during Covid-19, generating impressive public reach for a new initiative. The Windrush story has become the key symbolic origin moment for the rise of modern multi-ethnic Britain, and the anniversary of the ship’s arrival has been marked as Windrush Day by a broad civic coalition since 2013, later adopted by government. The 75th anniversary in 2023 offers an important opportunity to entrench the story of migration and diversity as part of our national story.

Those working for social connection now need a stronger public story to join the dots, engaging local and national partners in practical strategies that use these national moments to forge a sustained movement to bridge our divides.

The Talk Together project, the largest ever public engagement exercise on what unites and divides, captures how narratives that emphasise what we share can resonate broadly but only if they are combined with a clear plan about what needs to change in policy and practice. Otherwise efforts to celebrate what we share risk being received as a Panglossian establishment-led endorsement of the status quo. The solution is to recognise clearly the divides in our society too, and to challenge us all to play our part in bridging these together. ■

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# COOKING IN CUSTODY

Providing nutritious food and opportunities to learn about healthy eating can have a dramatically positive impact on the lives of people in prison

by Iqbal Wahhab  
 @IqbalWahhab

**T**he first time I visited HMP Wormwood Scrubs, just over a decade ago, I was shown around the kitchens, where I met a prisoner who had worked his way up the line over two years. Starting with pot washing, he had progressed to what we would call head chef, responsible for hundreds of meals a day. I asked him what he planned to do on release and, when he said he had no idea, my heart sank. Why had nobody instilled in him the fact that he now had skills that restaurateurs like me were in desperate need of?

The prospect of prisoners being taught culinary and service skills to offer them a career in hospitality rather than a return to crime is thankfully more sophisticated now, most notably with the great success of the Clink Charity's Clink restaurants, which started in HMP High Down and this year announced the roll-out of Clink Kitchens to 70 prisons in England and Wales over the next three years.

Yet what we have historically failed to act on is the neglect that we continue to show for the food that prisoners can access. This ignores the damaging consequences of not seeing food as part of prisoners' self-care; both in improving their mental health and resulting behaviour and placing them in a positive frame of mind to learn skills that could secure them a job on release. These factors form part of the prison service's duty of care.

While there are many charities working on ex-prisoner employment issues, there are only two that highlight the consequences of poor nutrition. Think Through Nutrition has made this their priority for the past 37 years. In 2002, their double-blind controlled trial at HMP/YOI Aylesbury showed that improved nutrition led to 37% fewer violent offences and 26% fewer offences overall. Their 2009 study, involving 856 young people at three young offender institutions, showed similar results. In both trials some participants were given nutrient- and vitamin-rich capsules and others were given placebos. Neither group was told which they were given. Those receiving the active supplements recorded a reduction in committing serious offences.

There is much work still to do to calculate the cost implications of this. In addition to reduced violence (to prisoners and prison staff) and self-harm, the studies reported improved brain health, development of positive social connections and relationships, concentration, mental wellbeing and cognitive function.

Tahani Saridar, Director of Development and Programmes at Think Through Nutrition, says: "Poor nutritional provision can not only have a lasting impact on the wellbeing of an individual in custody, but it is also costly to the custodial estate. Various medical complications that arise from poor nutrition,

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including nutritional deficiencies, mental ill-health, cognitive decline, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and high cholesterol, add extra burden to prison health resources[...] Learning to better balance their diet and lifestyle can have a dramatic impact.”

Last year, the charity undertook a pilot involving 33 prisoners at HMP Eastwood Park. Using a learning toolkit and new healthy menus, this aimed to understand how food can shape how the brain functions. It found some improvements in cognitive and mental health and that participants had better concentration levels, were more likely to engage in activities and felt more sociable.

The average budget allocated to feeding a prisoner is around £2 a day. This does not leave catering managers with much scope for improvement but it is not an impossible task, as proven by David Hill, who won a Butler Trust award for his work at HMP Buckley Hall. Engaging kitchen workers and prisoners in baking cakes, which were then sold to other prisoners, brought in £52,000 in one year to subsidise Dave’s ambitions for better food.

More can be done using resources that are readily available within the prison estate. For example, prisons could use their land to grow high-quality food to stretch their food procurement budget, engaging prisoners in the process and building understanding of the nutritional quality of food.

In 2016, journalist Lucy Vincent set up Food Behind Bars to engage prison catering managers and prisoners in exploring the many layers of complexity and opportunity around food. She says: “We educate prisoners in a practical and engaging way on the benefits of cooking and eating well[...] Together, we help cultivate a culture around food in prison that equips prisoners with the increased knowledge and wellbeing they need to help them achieve a good quality of life on the outside.”

During lockdown – when prisoners were sometimes confined to their cells for 23 hours a day – access to work and education was limited. Lucy organised a recipe-writing competition for prisoners at HMP Brixton and was deluged with entries, which were then passed by high-profile judges like Asma Khan of the Darjeeling Express restaurant. The winning dish, a Bangladeshi chicken curry prepared by ‘J’, featured on the menu of nearby Brixton restaurant Nanban.

J said: “A few months into my sentence, I realised how badly I missed my mother’s Bangladesh-infused curries. The curries you have in jail don’t compare to the traditional ways of a curry made with love. So the dish I have prepared is filled with and infused with a lot of passion, traditional methods and spices.”

Let’s hope that when he’s released, J gets a job where he can cook that dish in person, making both him and his mum proud. Perhaps I could take him on. ■

# TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Has social enterprise proved it is not fit for purpose?

by Belinda Bell

Ideas can sometimes suit a moment in time, and social enterprise shone brightly as the new millennium dawned. In the UK, the 1997 election of Tony Blair and the New Labour government, after 18 years in opposition, could be seen partly as a rejection of the consumerist, individualist dogma of the 1980s and partly as a reflection of the increasing social consciousness of the time. The New Labour thesis was that through an amalgamation of capitalism and socialism – the so-called ‘Third Way’ – free markets could be utilised to deliver economic prosperity and social justice. Hopes for the future were high.

Social enterprise was an attempt to use the power structures and business methodologies of conventional, capitalist systems but translate them so that social justice was at their core. This was a powerful idea, representing innovation at the intersection of social and financial paradigms and potentially even marking the start of a new economic era.

I have had the privilege to teach, support and work directly with thousands of dedicated, committed, bright and bold social entrepreneurs. And now, looking back, what has been achieved by their enterprises, my own, and the sector as a whole? Very much less than I had hoped. And I have come to think that, actually, we have even done harm.

## What even is a social enterprise?

A social enterprise is generally understood as an organisation that seeks to solve social or environmental problems by using business as a tool for change.

There has been precipitous growth in ventures identifying as social enterprises. A database search from sources including mainstream newspapers, journals and broadcast transcripts shows mentions of social enterprise growing from fewer than 100 per year in 2000 to over 10,000 every year since 2014. Non-profits, community businesses and co-operatives, as well as more mainstream businesses that have social impact as a core purpose, are all often gathered under the heading of social enterprise. You also hear about impact businesses, social ventures, social businesses and B corps; the result is that the seemingly simple question of whether social enterprises are non-profit organisations or not is met with a caveated response.

And yet the question of distribution of profit goes to the heart of the radical endeavour that social enterprise represents. Social enterprise was meant to be about reshaping capitalism, enabling the capture and release of social and economic value to communities. Some social enterprises extract profits for private gain; this enables social enterprise thinking to permeate the mainstream, but also allows uncertainty to enter, creating a lack of clarity about the underlying ethos of the sector. It opens the door for ‘social washing’ of regular businesses.

## Problems, problems

Different forms of social enterprise are problematic in different ways. For instance, organisations that are akin to traditional charities might be seen to undermine voluntarism, while those that are ▶

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more traditionally commercial might fail to create significant, genuine impact.

Take, for instance, a non-profit social enterprise that provides services to vulnerable young people and whose revenues mainly come in the form of annual contracts from the council. What is the difference between this and a charity doing similar work? Largely, it is in matters of culture. The social enterprise will think of the council as a customer, will expect contracts instead of grants, will perhaps have a less deferential relationship with the council. And what are the advantages of this? Charitable legislation can be a little clunky to work under, but it is wrong to suggest that charities per se are somehow less professional or efficient than other organisational forms. So, for a case like this it is a matter of choice – a social enterprise or a charity – with little real-world impact.

Or so it seems. I often meet people intent on establishing a social enterprise when a charity or community organisation would be a better fit, as the organisation is not intended to be revenue-generating. The prevalent social enterprise discourse tends to cast charities as somehow behind the times and suboptimal. Charities often feel pressure to convert to a social enterprise model in pursuit of ‘sustainability’, turning social problems into commercial opportunities, and abrogating public and philanthropic funders of their traditional responsibility to maintain social services.

Important things can be lost when work with vulnerable young people is undertaken by a social enterprise rather than a charity. Despite some difficult media coverage in recent times, charities are widely understood, well regarded and trusted. Social enterprise, perhaps due to the definitional ambiguity, has never really become a movement in the public eye. As many social enterprises have found over the past year, the business-like independence they seek has not built the type of relationship where a council sees much value in their organisation surviving. It is relatively easy to replace one contract delivery organisation with another. Social enterprises have often fallen between the gaps of support packages designed for either charities or businesses.

To turn to an example at the more commercial end of the social enterprise spectrum, let’s picture an ethically minded entrepreneur with a slow fashion business. Staff and customers are attracted to the explicit mission of the business: this is the classic win-win scenario. The organisation can be an exemplar that demonstrates that doing good business is possible.

But with no robust standards it is tricky to differentiate an ‘ethical dress’ from the myriad of other not-actually or not-quite-so ethical dresses. There is marketing power behind the story of social

impact and it is hard to compete on price with other businesses that are actually cutting corners. Our genuine social entrepreneur risks legitimising less ethical businesses, while also not being able to make the numbers stack up.

Realistically, there is a cost to being a social enterprise. There are structural challenges in business models that make the social entrepreneur’s job harder and, almost always, the margins lower. Our fashion business may break out of this conundrum and become large and profitable. However, if it is structured to allow profits to flow to the owners, rather than back into the business, this then exacerbates inequality in terms of asset accumulation among the wealthy.

### **Reaching the wrong destination**

Importantly, both organisations are failing to explicitly critique the systems within which they work. They are trying to apply a business solution to a social problem, but they are not looking at the root causes of the problem.

Much of the work undertaken by social enterprises in the education and health sector would not be needed if adequate public services were in place. This is an argument long levelled at charities, and social enterprises are no different; the challenge should also be made to them. When an organisation patches up such problems downstream, there is less incentive for the problems to be eliminated at source. If the only tools in our box are social enterprise or charity, then we are missing the opportunity to use other properly different levers, such as addressing disadvantage by reforming the benefit system or introducing innovations such as a universal basic income.

Similarly, an entrepreneur motivated to consider making changes to the fashion industry is likely to be thinking of the impact of cotton farming on water usage and the exploitation of workers in garment factories. But they may not focus on the fashion industry’s systemic problems. The industry exists within an economy that systemically exploits people (particularly women) in service of fashion cycles and consumer spending. Now that is a problem worth addressing, but the tools to address it are not in the shape of a social enterprise but, for instance, in educating our children differently, in campaigning and in consuming less. In general, social enterprises undertake little campaigning, as it is not a revenue-generating activity. It is therefore more frequently the domain of charities.

### **Neoliberal at heart**

In practice, endeavours that appear to be radical often serve to maintain the status quo. This is the case with





**“In practice, endeavours that appear to be radical often serve to maintain the status quo”**

social enterprise. The focus on markets, scale and investment is telling: social enterprise is neoliberal at its core.

The implicit and explicit focus on markets reinforces the hegemony of market-based approaches and an assumption that markets will produce optimal outcomes. This construction is firmly open for debate. There are many ways to get things done that are not market dependent: the UK’s response to the pandemic, for example, has included both massive, non-market-based public interventions and an extraordinary galvanising of community-based mutual aid.

According to Social Enterprise UK, around three in 10 social enterprises have a turnover of under £50,000, and the lack of scale of much of the sector has been recognised as a concern for some time. Yet scale is a normative business concept and so it is worth interrogating. To take one example, the Body Shop was a venture with a deeply ethical founder at its core who was unable to retain control of the business – or its impact – when it was sold on to a larger organisation. The evidence is clear: bad things happen literally every time organisations become very large. We must challenge the presumption that scale is inherently positive in any organisation – regular business, social enterprise or charity.

And then there is impact investing. Any critique of the social enterprise sector reaches its apogee in this arena. The topic deserves a full airing in its own right, but, in summary, those who seek social

equity should question the process that leads to such uneven distribution of resources that a class of investors exists in the first place. And we need to face up to the fact that the underlying facilitating condition – a growth economy – is unsustainable for the planet.

Social enterprise has taught us that there is huge appetite for a different way of doing business: from entrepreneurs, from customers and yes, even from investors. I draw some hope from the fringes of the movement; a pocket of activity in which there may be an antidote to the anomie and isolation of modern commerce. This radical transformation of our economies and communities rarely calls itself social enterprise. It is taking place in organisations such as co-operatives and community land trusts that have a clear ideological and governance framework and an intentional approach to creating fair forms of work and sustaining communities. This is how social enterprise could have been and, perhaps, still could be.

But, for the most part, social enterprise has been unable to demonstrate that it is really possible to make more things count in capitalism than just the bottom line. To be truly radical it is necessary to go to the root causes of things. Those involved in social enterprise – funders, practitioners, policymakers – should perhaps refocus on the systems and context and consider how that broader environment can be adapted, improved or dismantled. For me, it is time to go back to the drawing board. ■

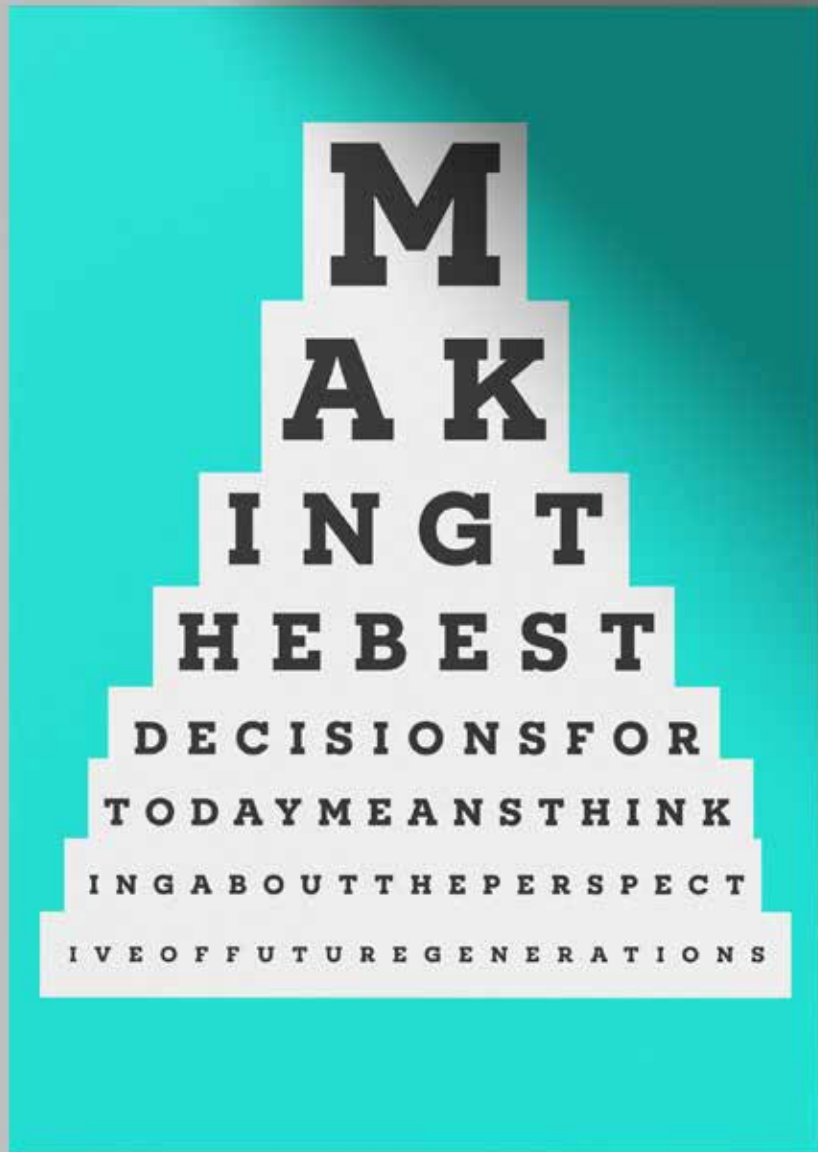


Illustration by Mark Power



# FUTURE FOREBEARERS

Can people be encouraged to take the needs of their distant descendants as seriously as their own?

by Tatsuyoshi Saijo

🐦 @yoshisaijo

In 1898, Sir William Crookes was elected president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. When he delivered his presidential address, it was not on physics or chemistry, but on the food crisis: “England and all civilised nations stand in deadly peril of not having enough to eat.” At the time, Britain imported guano and nitrates from South America for use as fertilisers, but stocks were declining, threatening the nation’s food crop. Sir William suggested instead producing ammonia by reacting atmospheric nitrogen with hydrogen sourced from water. Germany’s Fritz Haber and Carl Bosch responded to his call by building the first commercial ammonia plant in Oppau in 1913. They went on to produce large, marketable quantities of the product, making a steady profit.

Norman Borlaug, who acquired a PhD in plant pathology and genetics from the University of Minnesota in 1942, moved to Mexico in 1944 to work on wheat breeding. There, he developed a wheat variety that considerably increased yield. India imported 12,000 tons of Mexican wheat in 1966 and Pakistan imported 42,000 tons in 1967, not for food, but as seed for cultivation to support people starving in the famine. The success of the new wheat variety would not have been possible without large amounts of fertiliser. In fact, the Haber–Bosch process

was essential in the advance of the Green Revolution, otherwise known as the Third Agricultural Revolution, which took place from 1950 to the late 1960s.

Increased cereal production led to a decrease in hunger and an increase in population. By about 2015, approximately half of our food was grown using organic fertilisers, and half using chemical. And ever greater quantities of grain, which could also be used to support the population, have been diverted to livestock farming. Our quest for a better life has led us to use an increasing amount of energy, which in turn has accelerated the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, altering the carbon cycle and contributing to climate change.

Haber and Bosch were – separately – awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry, while Borlaug was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. They must have believed that their work, which supported increased food production and a better quality of living for many, was righteous. However, they did not consider the long-term social consequences of their innovations and how they might impact future generations.

## Unintended consequences

The criterion for commercial success is marketability, and the Haber–Bosch process has been a tremendous commercial success. However, the market does not ▶

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consider the needs of future generations, as they do not have money to spend in the present day, and so can be ignored in favour of those who do. But can a democracy based on liberty and equity, especially an indirect democracy based on elections, born from the ideas of the social contract of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, overcome the myopia of science and the market to escape the “struggle of all against all”? If political candidates propose new policies from the perspective of future generations, they will not win present-day elections.

Science, the market and democracy are the fundamental pillars of our society. But they are neglecting the needs of the people of the future. What can be done?

### **Futurability**

At a dinner following a seminar I gave, we discussed the problem of listening to future generations, who have no voice in present-day society but are directly affected by its actions. I wondered aloud about the possibility of creating imaginary future generations. Upon hearing this, Laura Stranlund told us that the Native American Iroquois used to do just that, making decisions on important matters as if they were seven generations ahead of their own time. This stimulated the idea of future design and of futurability.

Futurability is the basic concept of future design. When food is scarce, parents willingly reduce their own consumption to provide for their children. Is it possible to extend this idea to future generations? Although it is hard to perceive these as-yet-unborn people as relatives, they are also in fact direct family members of those of us alive today. A person exhibits futurability when she or he experiences an increase in happiness as a result of deciding to, and taking action to, forego current benefits to enrich future generations. Future design is for designing and implementing mechanisms to activate futurability within societies and within participants, thereby, for example, encouraging action on harmful alterations of various biogeochemical cycles, such as carbon and nitrogen.

### **Encouraging future thinking**

Back in Japan, I decided to conduct an experiment to investigate whether decision-making based on a future perspective would change outcomes. A group of three participants (representing a generation) interacted for up to 10 minutes and were given a choice of A (\$36) or B (\$27). They were also asked to think about how they would divide the money. If this is all that they had to do, they would each choose A. Now, we added a condition. If they chose \$36, the amount of

money available for the next generation making the choice between A and B would be reduced by \$9, whichever option they chose. However, if the first set of participants chose B, \$27, the amounts available to the next generation would not be reduced. Even with these conditions, those who cared only about their own interests would choose A.

We then conducted another experiment with the same conditions, but with one change: we randomly selected one of the three participants to negotiate with the other two on behalf of the future generations. Let us call this participant an imaginary future person (IFP).

We repeated the first version of the experiment five times, and out of the 25 pairs, only seven chose B, accounting for 28%. When the IFP experiment was repeated seven times, of 35 pairs, 21 chose B, accounting for 60%, indicating the effectiveness of the IFP.

We continued with these experiments over the years, honing the scenarios each time. We began to make all participants IFPs and to introduce rounds of decision-making; under such circumstances, option B accounted for 85% of choices. And when we tried experiments with no IFPs, but said that the three participants must explain their decision-making to the next generation, option B also accounted for 85% of responses. Information disclosure was clearly a strong influence.

### **Real-world application**

The results of the experiments have already been applied practically in Japan. In 2015, the Japanese Cabinet Office issued instructions to municipalities across the country to create a 2060 Future Plan. Yahaba, a town comprising 28,000 residents, was the first to do so; using future design, it developed a plan in six months. It divided citizens into two groups: one group was asked to consider the future from the present perspective, while the other group was asked to consider the present from the future perspective. To ensure that the latter group developed the correct mindset, they were asked to dress in traditional Japanese costume (Happi) for the Yahaba town festival (to prepare them for the act of doing something out of the ordinary), and then were asked to visualise being sent to the year 2060 via a time machine. They were given the task of planning current town policies from the perspective of those living in the year 2060.

Participants belonging to the present group replaced existing problems with future problems. For example, they emphasised a lack of nursing homes in 2060. Conversely, the future group demonstrated



**“Science, the market and democracy are neglecting the needs of the people of the future”**

a far more original approach. Nansho Mountain – a local point of pride, as it is where author Kenji Miyazawa wrote his most famous novel – had been devastated by floods. The group proposed that it be converted into a nature park that could be enjoyed by both the people of Yahaba and wider Japan, rather than simply being fixed and returned to its original state.

After hearing the proposals of both groups, in 2018 the mayor declared Yahaba a future design town, and in 2019 he created the Future Strategy Office for designing policies from a future perspective. Along with residents, this developed a comprehensive future plan in 2020; 83% of the proposals in the plan originated from future designers. For instance, in rural towns in Japan facing a declining population, it is becoming harder to maintain water facilities, including pipes, without raising water rates – which is very unpopular. But the future designers realised that without tackling this problem they would not leave clean water for future generations. They proposed raising water rates, and residents agreed. They also proposed a plan for which pipes should be replaced first, taking into consideration natural disasters such as earthquakes.

### **The future of future design**

Future design has been applied in municipalities across Japan, such as those of Uji City, Kyoto Prefecture, Matsumoto City, Suita City and Saijo City, among others. In addition, the Tosa Association of Corporate Executives is leading the implementation of future

design in Kochi Prefecture, which faces the future problems of a shrinking population and the likelihood of a potentially devastating earthquake. There are initiatives for future design application in companies and for all residents in a town. The Tosa Association is using future design thinking to seriously consider the sustainability of the region, including issues related to water, energy and food.

Other corporate executives are also using future design, and it is helping them to make more wide-ranging and forward-thinking decisions. For example, if the leaders of a company look to the future, they envision a scenario where AI is more sophisticated and widely used. With future design, they instead start with the happiness of customers who use their products and services, as well as their employees, and make decisions that take these issues seriously.

There have been many events that could have been changed for the better had future design been considered. Think, for example, of the introduction of single-use plastic bags: convenient today but an environmental disaster in the long run. Future design is important and can activate futurability in societies as well as in the individuals who comprise those societies.

What about at the global level? At the T20 (the preparatory meeting for the G20) conducted in 2020, I proposed that world leaders should discuss issues that affect future generations as imaginary future presidents and prime ministers. This proposal was not adopted, but I will keep trying; I would like to one day be thought of as what Roman Krznaric calls a “good ancestor”. ■



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# A HEALTHY HYBRID

Could a more flexible working model offer the opportunity to enhance wellbeing and increase productivity?

by Alan Lockey  
 🐦 @Modern\_Lockey

The experience of working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic will change work in Britain forever. Relative to the 63% of individuals who have not been able to work from home, Britain's homeworkers have been better shielded from the more immediate impacts of the virus. Nevertheless, the toll upon their health and wellbeing has been high. According to Nuffield Health, seven in 10 homeworkers report more aches and musculoskeletal pain, while levels of mental health distress have soared, particularly during the most recent lockdown.

Despite this, the vast majority of homeworkers are determined not to return to the pre-pandemic 'normality' of working exclusively in an office. Recent research by the RSA and Vitality, a health and life insurer, found that only 16% of homeworkers would prefer to work mainly in a set location away from their home. The reason for this is simple: people have found working from home helpful for coping with the wellbeing challenges of the pandemic. But at a deeper level, the way homeworkers relate to work has changed too. Our research shows that Britain's homeworkers increasingly expect work to support their wellbeing, work-life balance, mental health and ability to pursue a physically active lifestyle. When we do eventually go back to our offices, we are going back as different people; people who want, to quote the Brazilian philosopher of work Roberto Unger, work that allows us to "live a larger life".

Organisational leaders should now explore the potential for a 'healthy hybrid' model that can deliver inclusive productivity gains for their business alongside a healthier, happier workforce. The story of productivity during the homeworking experiment is illustrative of the challenges ahead. On one hand,

homeworkers have clearly worked harder; our research suggests they have worked an extra three hours per week on average. Meanwhile, the fact that productivity has not dropped off a cliff should be a stark warning that something has gone badly wrong in the way we design our physical workplaces. Homeworkers told us most tasks were easier at home, including the creative tasks often thought to be a comparative advantage of offices.

On the other hand, there are concerns that these extra hours represent a 'burnout' model of work that is unsustainable due to its impact on wellbeing. Moreover, some homeworkers have struggled to maintain their productivity due to an increased demand in caregiving, a reminder that the benefits of flexibility are never distributed equally.

For most organisations, finding a 'best of both' equilibrium that can balance the collaborative energy of workplaces with the wellbeing-enhancing flexibility of working from home will take time and patience. Yet, in the main, we should be optimistic. The shift in values that 'healthy hybrid' work represents can help create a movement for good work grounded in the insight that wellbeing and productivity – health and economic competitiveness – are two sides of the same coin: human beings need both in order to flourish.

We must not squander this insight as the acute phase of the pandemic passes. When we look back upon this terrible tragedy, our hope should be that we will also be able to see it as a catalyst for good. One way to achieve that will be to embrace the possibilities of 'healthy hybrid' work. ■



**Alan Lockey** is  
 Head of the Future  
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# RACING FOR SPACE

Tackling the final frontier

by Peter Marber FRSA

🐦 @petermarber

Growing up in the late 1960s, space exploration filled my imagination with awe and wonder. I spent endless hours watching *The Jetsons*, *Lost in Space*, *Star Trek* and the Apollo missions and always thought that, by now, space travel would be commonplace. While my childhood dreams of becoming an astronaut faded as I entered adulthood, it is time to get excited about the cosmos again.

Around the globe, governments and corporations are revving up the space economy: 72 countries claim active space programmes and over a dozen have launch capabilities. While the US has been the perceived leader in the field, China's space programme – along with the country's growing economic strength – has been advancing. India, too, wants in on the action, along with thousands of private-sector companies and universities.

Why the rush to space? Many believe that building infrastructure in space will shape many, if not all, industries on Earth – energy, communications, finance and insurance, and transportation, among others – with incalculable socioeconomic benefits.

Resources certainly will be key. One can imagine a great race to establish lunar mining camps for valuable rare metals needed in batteries, electronic gadgets and sophisticated military equipment. Since China has a near monopoly on production of these on Earth, there is geopolitical interest from many countries wanting to source them from the Moon, thereby reducing their dependence on one country.

Moreover, scientists claim that lunar ice can be converted into hydrogen and oxygen to create rocket fuel, which is crucial for deeper space missions. For

any country interested in exploration beyond the Moon, this opens up a huge opportunity. Scientists estimate that asteroids in outer space could contain more valuable metals – such as platinum, iron, nickel and cobalt – than has been mined in Earth's history. The 140-mile-diameter asteroid between Mars and Jupiter called 16 Psyche purportedly contains enough nickel ore to supply current human demand for millions of years.

Space may also be part of the solution to global warming. Current renewable energy can only be harnessed when the wind is blowing, or the sun is shining, but we need electricity around the clock, every day, and storage is expensive. Space offers an elegant answer: solar power stations orbiting and facing the Sun 24/7, wirelessly transmitting the energy to Earth via microwaves or lasers. While technologies still need to be invented for this to become economically viable, efforts are under way. China has already announced plans to deploy space-based solar power stations by 2035. The possibility of cheap, clean, endless energy alone is reason to forge into space.

Wall Street is certainly excited by the potential of space and lots of capital will be needed to accelerate the industry's expansion. In the past, space was largely the domain of governments, but a new arena of commercial operators such as Elon Musk's SpaceX, Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin and Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic travel effort now operate alongside the public sector. NASA has even awarded substantial contracts to SpaceX and Boeing to kickstart the Commercial Crew Program, giving \$4.2bn to Boeing and \$2.6bn to SpaceX. To this point, only SpaceX has met NASA's ▶

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Image from Einvato

certification requirements. In 2020, Morgan Stanley estimated that global space activity could generate \$1trn annually in 2040, up from \$350bn today. Sensing this potential, both the US Bureau of Economic Analysis and the OECD have already begun significant efforts to measure the global space economy.

Some of the near-term profitable opportunities may not sound as alluring as lunar power plants or exploring the galaxy. In fact, the most likely business opportunities will be launching more satellites to provide greater broadband internet access. More satellites will drive down data costs, just as data demand explodes from autonomous cars, the internet of things, artificial intelligence, virtual reality and ubiquitous video. With more satellites, the per-megabyte cost of wireless data potentially can fall to less than 1% of today's levels. This is how space helps reshape our Earthbound economy.

Governance will be needed to referee commercial and military space activity. Historically, space mining was considered to be prohibited by Article II of the 1967 United Nations (UN) Outer Space Treaty (OST). Even though this helped avoid a Cold War militarisation of space, with over 100 countries ratifying the treaty, since then broad cooperative space accords have largely failed. The ill-fated 1979 Moon Agreement – a treaty to govern private commercial space claims under the UN's purview – has been ratified only by 19 countries, none of which even have space travel capabilities.

The need for governance is heating up. In 2015, the Obama administration granted Americans the right to own any materials they extract in space, blowing open the door for civilian space business. In 2018, China launched a reconnaissance rover on the Moon's far side that has been gathering samples and data for two years. In late 2019, President Trump announced the formation of a US Space Force under military control. And in October 2020, the US led the signing of the Artemis Accords, a set of bilateral agreements on space between America and its allies Australia, Canada, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the United Arab Emirates and the UK, purposefully skirting the UN. This pact claims to affirm the 1967 OST, but critics note it actually expands the interpretation of commercial space law by specifically stating that “the extraction of space resources does not inherently constitute national appropriation under Article II” of the treaty.

Still, the intention behind the Artemis Accords is not to establish new regulations for all activities in space, but those that fall under NASA's Artemis programme, the next phase in lunar exploration. Artemis's main goals include landing the first woman on the Moon

by 2024 and constructing a lunar base (known as The Gateway) that will serve as a long-term base for lunar exploration and aid in future travels to further destinations, such as Mars.

As one can imagine, a future space economy could be the most exciting human endeavour ever; but it will not be without complications. Current agreements like the Artemis Accords may be viewed more as small, cliquish club rulebooks than a true multilateral agreement. At least, that is how Russia sees it; its absence from the Artemis Accords reveals a shift in how the country views the relationship between its own space agency and NASA.

Of course, there is an important distinction between NATO and the Artemis project: one is a military alliance, and the other is a scientific one. Still, Russia is turning to other potential partners, those with more closely aligned governmental philosophies, for future space missions.

Recently, Russia and China signed an agreement to collaborate on a lunar base (a primary goal of Artemis), which could be the defining move that ends years of US and Russian cooperation in space. China, too, believes Artemis is a US political effort instead of a scientific one and state daily *Global Times* praised the agreement with Russia as a way to “promote balance and fairness with strength and real actions”.

As we have seen down on Earth, a lack of international standards often leads to a chaotic, competitive race to the bottom. Unregulated space activity could create myriad problems from accidental (or intentional) blocked data transmission to orbital ‘pollution’ of too many objects. Indeed, just a few uncontrolled collisions could generate enough debris to render near-Earth space unusable. Some observers also worry that the recent Wall Street mania over space companies may create players who launch orbitals but eventually go bust, leaving more potential for collisions and other dangers. In April 2021, a presentation at the European Conference on Space Debris highlighted that this “space junk” problem may be underestimated and could, in a worst-case scenario, increase 50 times by 2100.

And, of course, no one wants to see space militarised with escalating arms races.

To borrow an overused phrase from *Star Trek*, space is the final frontier. The technological, economic and governance efforts for building the new space economy – like other historic transformations – tend to be a series of quiet evolutions that, in total over time, become a revolution. Fasten your seatbelts. Judging by recent developments, the period that future historians will call the Space Revolution is just taking off. ■



# BAT AND CHAT

Table tennis has been shown to be of great benefit to dementia patients

by Ian Craigton-Chambers

**W**hile living and working in the US and latterly Japan, I was inspired and impressed by how the neuroscience fraternities in both countries perceived and subsequently extensively researched table tennis as an effective, drug-free and carer-inclusive therapy for dementia.

Sir Arthur Gilbert, an English ex-pat in Los Angeles, noticed that his wife – who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s – underwent an astonishing transformation in demeanour when they played table tennis socially. He commissioned a study by the Mayo Clinic, and it produced some very promising results.

In Tokyo, two professors, Teruaki Mori and Tomohiko Sato, picked up on these findings and carried out a major body of research, MRI scanning 350 Alzheimer’s patients before and after they played table tennis. They discovered that after just 15 minutes, five more portions of the brain had lit up, instigating the reduction of cognitive decline and substantial symptom delay.

In 2013, I founded the Bounce Alzheimer’s Therapy (BAT) Foundation and, utilising my background in design, set about creating specialist equipment that would markedly enhance the therapeutic effects of table tennis for players with dementia.

I approached the University of Stirling’s Dementia Services Development Centre and, with their input, developed the first design for my Table Tennis Therapy Table. The early onset symptoms of Alzheimer’s affect the visual cortex. For instance, colours of the same hue begin to meld and spatial awareness diminishes, as does peripheral vision. Among other measures, I extended the borders of the table to emphasise

perspective and attached side panels to increase spatial awareness. I took the concept to Tamasu Butterfly, a leading table tennis equipment manufacturer, which agreed to fund the prototype. This was duly launched to great success, in collaboration with the Alzheimer’s Show, in 2015.

With input from RSA regional representatives, version 2 is now installed in hospitals, care homes and community centres across the UK, and a version 3 is to be unveiled at the 2022 Alzheimer’s Show.

In addition, the BAT Foundation has been invited, in collaboration with Table Tennis England, Sport Birmingham and the International Table Tennis Federation, to play a role in the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. We are producing a series of bespoke dual-purpose multiple player tables that will be presented to each participating country under the banner ‘Bat & Chat’. ■

■ *If you are interested in supporting this initiative, please contact Ian on [Ian@batfoundation.com](mailto:Ian@batfoundation.com)*

**Ian Craigton-Chambers** is a founding trustee and Creative Director of the BAT Foundation

## Top tips

- Focused enthusiasm can be very contagious. Do not hesitate to punch above your weight.
- Think beyond the immediate. Join the dots as potential ‘synchronicity’ stepping stones to the future.
- Treat your project as a brand and build it accordingly.



## Millennials

Are there meaningful forms of self-care outside of social-media-friendly gestures and purchases?

by Alex Edelman

🐦 @AlexEdelman

I host a BBC Radio 4 show about Millennials called *Peer Group*. Which is very funny, given the nearly geriatric average age of the typical Radio 4 listener. Hosting a Radio 4 show about Millennials is like hosting a North Korean TV show about democracy. But anyway, I do, and when the show started in 2016, the number one question I was asked was “what do Millennials want?”

A really easy question to answer, because Millennials want what everyone wants, and older generations seem to have. Housing. Financial security. Professional fulfilment. Responsibility.

I do not get that question any more. I get asked why Millennials are so unhappy. The idea that there are millions of Millennials walking around close to blowing our tops is taken as such a given that a whole new buzzword has cropped up around mitigating that unhappiness: self-care.

Smoothies. Staycations. Fancy candles. Products sold by cooing influencers. The behaviour and consumer habits of Millennials that fall under the lavender-scented, terry-cloth banner of self-care have become a key topic in the culture wars. Proponents argue that we need time to ourselves, given our manifest stresses. Opponents from previous generations – who apparently had uniformly hardscrabble lives – insist that self-care and the focus on it is just another example of Millennial self-indulgence.

I hate the term, personally, because it is both maddeningly vague and a giant paradox. One of the biggest reasons we are actually unhappy is precisely because of this focus on the self. Millennials, seemingly overnight, have become supremely isolated. Like

the loser in your high school class, Millennials are creepy loners. In a 2019 poll, more than a quarter of Millennials said they have no close friends at all.

Social media bears a lot of responsibility here. When Facebook appropriated the term ‘friend’ it started to lose all meaning. A friend has devolved from someone you had a shared history and bond with to someone you met once at a coffee shop. I spoke to an actual friend, David Burstein, author of a great book about Millennials called *Fast Future*, and he said something more expansive.

“When technology changes language, it permeates culture, and comes back around to change non-technological behaviour. When things we actually want turn into buzzwords, they become devalued and warped.” This has happened to friendship, and the same is happening to self-care. The urban form of self-care is presented as taking a day off work to get an avocado rice bowl and sit at home watching Netflix. I am not siding here with the old whingers who say Millennials are soft – sometimes you do need mental health breaks, and you should be judicious about the level of toxicity you allow in your life – but a good exercise in self-care might be cultivating habits that build strong relationships with other people.

Self-care can mean putting yourself in difficult situations. Dealing with an issue affecting a friendship. Having discussions where how you feel is genuine rather than emotional currency. Creating an environment where you feel protected, fulfilled and empowered every day? That is actual self-care.

Although, there is nothing wrong with the occasional bubble bath. That counts also. ■



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