RSA

Action and Research Centre

On the Road

Findings from the RSA's Economic Inclusion Roadshow

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About the RSA

The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) believes that everyone should have the freedom and power to turn their ideas into reality – we call this the Power to Create. Through our ideas, research and 29,000-strong Fellowship, we seek to realise a society where creative power is distributed, where concentrations of power are confronted, and where creative values are nurtured. The RSA Action and Research Centre combines practical experimentation with rigorous research to achieve these goals.

This report forms part of our growing body of research and action on economic democracy. Our goal is to make the case for citizens' agency, influence and power over the modern economy. It is the supplementary report to the RSA Citizens' Economic Council interim report, 'Citizens, Participation and the Economy.'

The RSA in partnership with

Executive Summary

This research was commissioned in immediate aftermath of the EU referendum vote, which revealed a profoundly divided Britain; a Britain divided on the basis of place, as well as the basis of identity including age, ethnicity and income. As analysis at the time suggested, and recent Populus polling has confirmed many of those who voted for Brexit felt left behind by a pursuit of economic growth at the expense of a more inclusive understanding of growth and who it benefits.[1] If it was not clear before, it is now clear that the way economic and political institutions engage citizens and respond to their voices needs to change.

This paper provides an analysis of findings from the RSA's Economic Inclusion Roadshow. As part of this research, we spoke to citizens from some of the UK's most socially and economically excluded groups on the basis of identity or place. We engaged with young people in schools, with people from a range of ethnic minority backgrounds, with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people, with care workers, and with people who identified as disabled. We met citizens in Clacton-on-Sea, and citizens in Port Talbot, Oldham, Glasgow and inner and outer-city Birmingham. The research aimed to understand these different groups' perceptions of the economy and provide a platform for the voices of those 'left-behind'. We did so by focusing on the following questions:

- What does the economy mean to you?
- What is your experience of the economy (based on place and/or identity)?
- How can the economy better work to serve your and wider societal interests?

Despite the considerable differences in views shared and very unique experiences evident in these different places, people's sense of inequality – in treatment and in ability to influence the system – was a consistent theme. As this research shows, our democracy is not functioning as well as it could be. What it also shows, however, is that tackling social and economic inequality offers opportunities to connect with those 'left behind', as well as to create a more inclusive economy. To do so we must achieve three key objectives. First, people must be heard, not just listened to. Second, we must promote a model of active citizenship. Finally, we must invest in people and their places.

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1. Case, R. and Wright, D. (2016) *Leave voters felt ignored and left behind as post-Brexit poll reveals extent of economic division across UK*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/leave-voters-felt-ignored-and-left-behind-brexit-poll

Introduction: Forging a more inclusive economy

> **"We contribute to the economy through paying our taxes, a good society is receptive to the needs of its people."**

Participant, UNISON

An inclusive economy is one in which political and economic institutions create incentives that mean the interests of all in society are served.[1] This means having effective ways for the public to hold politicians and policy-makers to account, and for the public to have a voice in shaping policies to tackle social problems. If society fails to address issues such as inequality and poverty, not only can it be considered to have an economy which excludes citizens, but also one which is undemocratic.

> **"Bills have doubled. Wages have remained stagnant and people are eating into their savings while prices continue to rise."**

Participant, Oldham

Economic exclusion is when groups or individuals, and the places in which they live, are excluded from opportunities and resources considered to be the norm within society. It is complex and multifaceted, and can be experienced as discrimination or marginalisation from decision-making or decent standard of living.[2] Poverty is recognised as causing economic exclusion by placing additional burdens on those who have low incomes. A recent Joesph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) report found that life can cost up to 10 percent more for those living in poverty.[3] For example, people on low incomes with poor credit ratings may only be able to access high-cost credit, such as pay day loans, as they are considered too risky by mainstream banks, effectively paying a poverty premium.

Whilst there is inevitably a relationship between poverty and economic exclusion, not all those who are economically excluded are necessarily poor. Some groups or individuals may be excluded through direct or

1. Acemoglu, D. and Robinson, J. (2012) *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty.* New York: Crown Publishing Group.

2. O'Hara, P. (1998) *Action on the Ground: Models of Practice in Rural Development.* Galway: Irish Rural Link.

3. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2016) *UK Poverty: Causes, costs and solutions.* Available at: https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-causes-costs-and-solutions

indirect discrimination towards their race, sexuality, disability, age, gender and/or other characteristics, understood as 'protected characteristics' in the Equalities Act 2010.[4] The intersection of people's characteristics, their economic status and where they live can mean they are discriminated against or disadvantaged in a multitude of ways. This, in turn, can have a compound effect on their ability to take part in the economy. Take two very different examples: first, young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) community members who are concerned about their employment prospects or their ability to be themselves in the workplace, and second, immigrant women on low paid jobs in the care sector.

"They don't care, they don't want to help. I definitely felt like I was on my own, like a complete individual. For a period I was even homeless."

Participant, Birmingham Settlement

The British sociologist Peter Townsend was among the first to introduce the idea that poverty is not only about the shortage of income, but also about the inability of people who are on low incomes to actively participate in society.[5] Recent research based on Townsend's work suggests that levels of civic participation (measured by lack of deprivation, social participation and trust) correlate to levels of income, reducing as income falls, but that it stops doing so once it reaches the poorest 25 to 30 percent of citizens in the UK.[6] This is explained by the fact that income decreases for people in this group, forces them to make difficult choices about the essentials of living such as food, shelter, and clothing, rather than whether or not to engage in civic participation.

If the voices of those most disadvantaged in society are not represented within our democracy, it is unlikely that economic policymaking will adequately take their needs into account and remove the barriers they face to inclusion. Not only is this a problem for those groups and individuals affected, but as Russell Dalton explains in his book 'The Participation Gap', both low levels of overall participation and high levels of inequality in participation are significantly related to poor democratic governance.[7] Thus, inequality in participation has reverberating effects on wider society through poorer quality of public services, civil service performance, and policy formation and implementation. Ensuring that everyone who wants to participate can do so, regardless of their income, identity, or where they live, is a necessary step in building a stronger democracy and a more inclusive economy.

4. *Equalities Act 2010* (c.15) London: The Stationary Office.

5. Townsend, P. (1979) *Poverty in the United Kingdom*, London: Allen Lane and Penguin Books.

6. Ferragina, E., Tomlinson, M. and Walker, R. (2013) *Poverty, Participation and Choice: The Legacy of Peter Townsend*. Available at: https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/society-poverty-participation-full.pdf

7. Dalton, R. (2017) *The Participation Gap: Social Status and Political Inequality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

About this research

The RSA Economic Inclusion Roadshow was our intervention which aimed to ensure that the voices of those who are economically excluded were engaged with and listened to throughout the RSA Citizens' Economic Council programme. We worked with a range of socially and economically excluded groups across the UK, engaging with individuals and groups on the basis of identity or place. Some had 'protected characteristics', as defined by the Equalities Act 2010.[8] Others were citizens within a particular geographic area which ranked as high on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation.[9] In total we met with 190 citizens over the course of this research (see Table 1). In order to protect their identities, we maintain the anonymity of our workshop participants throughout this paper.

To address barriers to participation, we provided access support which included reasonable adjustments for disabled people, and translators for those who had language barriers. To acknowledge the time participants dedicated, we provided 'thank you' vouchers for purchase of goods from local retailers, and when we worked with partner Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations (VCSOs), they were paid for their time recruiting and engaging participants. In workshops where we engaged with students, we offered reimbursement to the schools for the cost of their time spent out of school. For a couple of place-based workshops, we worked with a recruitment agency to recruit participants as we did not have a VCSO relationship in the area.

The Roadshow deployed and experimented with a range of techniques including Augusto Boal's 'theatre of the oppressed'[10] forum theatre method, the use of Lego Serious Play,[11] and the use of other deliberative design techniques in order to design engagement that could work effectively. These were blended with more conventional focus-group style questions with a view to drawing out rich, deliberative insights from a wide diversity of groups. In order to understand what each group's perception of the economy was, what barriers they may face to economic inclusion, and, consequently, what actions they felt were necessary to remove these barriers, we asked the three following questions:

- What does the economy mean to you?
- What is your experience of the economy (based on place and/or

8. *Equalities Act 2010* (c.15) London: The Stationary Office.

9. Department for Communities and Local Government (2015) *Official Statistics: English incidences of deprivation 2015*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015

10. Boal, A. (2000) *Theatre of the Oppressed*. (3rd ed.) London: Pluto Press.

11. The LEGO Group (2017) *Lego Serious Play: The Method*. Available at: https://www.lego.com/en-gb/seriousplay/the-method

identity)?

- How can the economy better work to serve your and wider societal interests?

Full details of the workshops commissioned are laid out in the table below:

Details of Roadshow Workshops				
Theme	Location	Date	Participants	Partner(s)
Industrial Decline	Port Talbot, Baglan Community Centre	Saturday, 15 October 2016	14 residents of Port Talbot. The participants were from a range of age groups, and mainly from socio-economic groups D, as well as some C2 and E.	Opinion Research Services
Low paid work	UNISON, London Offices	Tuesday 18 October 2016	13 members of UNISON's Homecare Workers Panel. 12 care workers (all female) and one care receiver (male). The participants were middle-aged; they were predominately white British but two participants were from black and Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups, and there was one white South African.	UNISON
Disability discrimination	Islington, Disability Action in Islington Offices	Wednesday 26 October 2016	21 members of Disability Action in Islington. The participants were from a range of age groups and ethnic groupings.	Disability Action in Islington; Tamsin Curno
Ethnicity and low income	Oldham, Coppice Neighbourhood Centre	Tuesday 8 November 2016	19 local residents from ethnic minority backgrounds: Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi. Many participants were from low-income backgrounds; 13 of the participants were female; and the majority were middle-aged but there were also some participants aged 18-30.	Doing Social; Coppice Neighbourhood Centre
Youth perspectives	Tipton	Tuesday 22 November 2016	Two groups (of 14 and 16 participants) at post-16 level. One group of nine participants at Year 8 level. Predominately white British, with several international students from Norway and Italy.	RSA Academy Tipton
Industrial decline	Clacton-on-Sea, Baptist Church Hall on Pier Avenue	Saturday 3 December 2016	11 residents of Clacton-on-Sea, Holland-on-Sea, and Jaywick. The participants were from a range of age groups, and primarily from socio-economic groups C2, as well as some D and E.	Opinion Research Services

Theme	Location	Date	Participants	Partner(s)
LGBT discrimination	Central Birmingham	Wednesday 7 December 2016	10 members of Birmingham LGBT Network, around a third of whom were from BAME groups and one Eastern European.	Birmingham LGBT
Debt and money	Birmingham, Aston	Thursday 12 January 2017	14 participants, the majority of whom were women. Participants were recruited from the Money Advice Service and the English as a Second Language (ESL) groups. Participants were predominately from BAME groups.	Birmingham Settlement
Declining community services	Birmingham, Kitts Green	Thursday 12 January 2017	19 participants, from a range of age groups. Predominately white British but a few participants from BAME groups. .	Birmingham Settlement
Community resilience and housing	Glasgow, Ardenglen Housing Association	Wednesday 18 January 2017	Nine participants, all white British women aged 40+.	Ardenglen Housing Association
Youth perspectives	London, Camden Town Hall	Tuesday 31 January 2017	30 participants from a range of ethnic backgrounds, aged between 15- and 19-years-old. Schools were invited to partake on the basis that they had a free school meal intake of over 40 percent.	Greater London Authority (GLA) Fiona Tycross Assembly Member (AM)

Structure of this report

This work revealed three key themes that need to be considered in order to address both democratic and economic exclusion within the UK.

- First, people must be heard, not just listened to.
- Second, we must promote a model of active citizenship.
- Finally, we must invest in people and their places.

These three points are inextricable because they are interdependent. To be able to hear what people are saying beyond treating their contributions as a token effort requires the power and ability to respond to them. It also requires us to understand that they are active citizens and potential agents of change, rather than simply passive recipients of public services. Any concept of active citizenship must itself promote a relationship between state and citizens that is collaborative and based on a relationship of equality and trust. Ultimately to make wider participation possible, and more equal, we have to invest in people and place in order to address the material and social barriers to engagement.

This evidence paper covers these three points in turn. The first chapter covers why we need to go beyond listening, to hearing what people have to say about their experience of the economy. In particular, it discusses the relevance listening has to building trust within the political system and the instrumental value it adds to policymaking. The second chapter explains how civic engagement has helped to build community resilience in the face of economic exclusion, and the intrinsic value that participation brings to individuals involved. The third chapter outlines the importance of investment in removing barriers to participation, providing suggestion for what types of investment are necessary. Each workshop forms a case study segment. We have interspersed these throughout the report, in an attempt to centralise the voices of those we spoke to within these arguments. The place-based case studies contain some background information on the local area to contextualise them within the landscape of Brexit and the left behind.

People must be heard, and not just listened to

Many in the workshops intuitively drew the connection between an economy that excludes and a political system that excludes. When we asked residents in Birmingham about the economy in their local area, they told us that despite demand for skills-development and employment opportunities their area was ignored by politicians as the community there was considered 'write offs'. They shared their deep-seated frustration about the lack of power they felt they had in their local area and hence their hopes for influence and autonomy over their own lives.

Case study: Kitts Green, Birmingham

We partnered with Birmingham Settlement, a charity supporting community development, to host a workshop in Kitts Green, Hodge Hill. Hodge Hill constituency is characterised by generally high levels of deprivation. The proportion of 16 to 64 year-olds with no qualification is 24.3 percent of the population (the average across Birmingham is 17.7 percent). In the Birmingham Residents Tracker survey, Hodge Hill residents said that the two main challenges in their district and across Birmingham were 'helping people to find jobs' and 'dealing with crime'.[1] Kitts Green lies across the borders of several wards, including two with the highest leave votes in the EU referendum: Shard End with 75.64 percent and Sheldon with 67.51 percent.[2]

> **"There's no money in the area, no facilities, because we don't have the right postcode so no one wants to invest."**

Two strong themes arose out of this workshop: that the community felt they had been forgotten about, and that they had a strong sense of pride and fight in response to this. This was explained as a consequence of a lack of facilities in the local area, with many shut down, or ones that did exist inadequately replacing previously appreciated services. 'The Pump', one such recently established community centre, was described as a top-down intervention which did not respond to the community's needs. Our participants placed blame on the lack of extracurricular and employment opportunities as a reason for high youth crime and drug use, and they pointed out that some entrepreneurial youth may even see drug sales as an opportunity to make some money.

1. Browne, R. (2015) *Hodge Hill District Profile*. Available at: https://fairbrum.files. wordpress.com/2015/03/template-hodge-hill-2015-final-draft.pdf
2. Brown, G. and Sorrentino, A. (2016) *EU referendum results: Did your area of Birmingham vote to Brexit?* Birmingham Mail, 28 June [online]. Available at: http://www. birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/eu-referendum-results-your-area-11536368

"There is 'the pump' but it doesn't cater to the community's needs – you need personal connections to a space for the community to start using its assets, we need more conversation, participation and sharing."

The strength of their community spirit was clear however, with many participants taking pride in their ability to empathise with one another and pull together in times of hardship: "People stick together. There's not much here so we help each other – kids play together. A lot of it around here is all self-help."

The group told us that because there wasn't a high turnover of residents moving in and out of the area, the community knew and supported each other. Ironically, one participant said that regeneration eroded community spirit as it brought in new residents to the area who weren't necessarily willing to make personal relationships with the locals.

When asked about the economy and what changes they'd like to see, participants said they wanted community services that were sustainable throughout times of economic upheaval, for local grassroots groups to be given a chance to lead local change through funding and training support, and that there was a need for the wider economy to move beyond profits to the rich towards an agenda of power sharing.

"It's up to the government but actually the community do better

Trustworthiness of the political system

Participants across the workshops often mentioned a lack of money, good quality housing options, and reduced access to core services. They reported this having a serious impact on the quality of their lives. For many of the people we spoke to, this stress is contributing directly to health and wellbeing concerns, either of their own or of family members. Depression, and even suicide, were discussed. People felt that the economic institutions and systems that they had day to day interactions with lacked the ability to respond to their interests, as there was an absence of effective feedback loops. Those we spoke to felt overwhelmingly that they did not possess the power to put these feedback loops in place, but the demand for change was evident. The conversations we had illustrated the importance of democracy as being more than simply a vote: democracy is about being part of a society shaped by its citizens. But they also shined a light on the failures of the status quo: groups we spoke to felt that everything from decisions about council cuts, to changes in the welfare system, were done to them rather than with them.

Few had much trust in politics, in the media, in councils or in central government to listen to their voices. Many didn't believe that anything they said mattered, or that anyone was really interested in listening to them. On the occasions that they had been consulted in the past, it was viewed as being tokenistic, without genuine respect for their views. We repeatedly heard that power in the economy lies with politicians as well as with financial institutions such as banks, at both local and national levels. However, trust in politicians to act in the best interest of the public was hard to find across our workshops.

A consistent theme throughout the workshops was the recognition that economic decisions are very often political decisions, underpinned by moral and ethical assumptions. Failing to recognise those assumptions shows a lack of accountability and transparency within policymaking. Some people felt that politicians were not able to make good decisions because they are part of a world of 'privilege', and thus unable to understand or empathise with those in the 'real world'. Others felt that politicians are motivated to boost their own power, rather than being there to truly serve the people who had elected them to office. Overall, levels of trust was very low. This is mirrored in national sentiment, with only one in 10 respondents to the 2017 Edelman trust and credibility survey believing that "the system is working."[12.]

12. Edelman (2017) *Edelman Trust Barometer 2017: Crisis of Trust in Post-Brexit Britain.* Available at: https://www.edelman.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/UK-TB-2017.pdf

In the deliberation days we ran with the RSA Citizens' Economic Council, we once again encountered the issue of trust. Working with the citizens to develop our thinking, we came to the conclusion that the real problem is not a 'lack of public trust', but rather a 'lack of trustworthiness' in our economic institutions. While this is detailed further in our interim report, the key message from the roadshow workshops was that our political elites can only earn public trust if they engage with them in a meaningful way, and are prepared to share power and co-create solutions.

On the Road

Instrumental value to citizen engagement in policymaking

Case study: RSA Academy Tipton

On a visit to RSA Academy in Tipton, we held workshops with two groups of post-16 students, and one group of Year 8 students. Using Lego Serious Play we invited the pupils to build models which represented their ideas of the economy. This facilitation method was used to encourage creative thinking and help students to engage by creating visual metaphors of their experiences.

The older groups were also asked to think of different sources of information in their lives and place them upon a scale of trust. Students placed politicians at the very bottom of the scale, while the media, teachers and parents were amongst the most trusted as students felt that they were most likely to provide information and advice with the students' best interests at heart. The issue of trust was not limited to this exercise. One group created a model to represent democratic exclusion: "There is a wall around the politicians who are standing on a higher level. Beyond the wall there are some people who don't get to participate and vote. There are also adults beyond the wall that can participate; they see some of what's going on, but only what the politicians decide to show as they are partly hidden behind the wall. It is important that we all participate and see what's going on behind the wall where the politicians are, as the decisions they make about the economy affect all of our lives."

Another group depicted imbalance within the economy through a 'tower of industry'. The tower was initially linked to people working, accruing savings and thus being able to buy a home and attain financial security. As the model developed, pupils decided that it could demonstrate that only one area of the economy was being invested in, creating instability: "The taller the tower is, the more likely it is to fall as it becomes unstable."

The younger group's models contained many references to the environment and acts of human kindness: "A car is going around giving things and food to homeless people. This is because they have lost their jobs, can't pay their bills and mortgage so have become homeless. There is a wind turbine and Asda nearby, the windmill is producing electricity for Asda and local homes, as well as for the car." One group made a model of the HS2 rail development, making sophisticated insights on trade-offs between the economy and the environment: "They say we need it because it's faster and allows people to get to their jobs easier but on the other hand some people don't want it as it costs a lot of money to build and is going to damage the environment."

Many participants told us that engaging with citizens has instrumental value through creating more responsive and effective policy-making. We heard innumerable examples of initiatives which once had created strong, effective feedback loops between citizens, the community and the state. Some of these were community-based initiatives that had lost their funding due to budget cuts, but had played a vital role in brokering dialogue and providing meeting places for discussion. In a workshop with home care workers from both the private and public sector, we heard how poor feedback loops to decision-makers contributed to declining standards of employment terms and conditions, and poorer service provision, as a consequence of a 'race to the bottom' in social care provision.

A recent RSA report on the relationship between citizen engagement and more inclusive growth supports our findings. It suggests that citizen participation in economic development and decision-making can deliver a range of benefits. As well as creating public service cultures that are directly accountable and responsive to those who both shape and benefit from them, they can also have the effects of:

- Strengthening people's sense of belonging and community attachment, which has been associated with higher employment rates and economic growth.
- Helping to re-shape an economy, making it more inclusive, including re-structuring for places such as post-industrial towns and supporting economic recovery.
- Developing the confidence, networks and skills of participants, enabling them to better take advantage of labour market opportunities.

Case study: UNISON National Panel of Homecare Workers

This workshop was held in partnership with the trade union, UNISON who represent both public and private homecare workers from all over the UK amongst its membership. The main activity we used to explore key interactions participants had with the economy, was asking them to plot out and then discuss what a day in the life of a homecare worker looked like.

Participants spoke of increasing workplace insecurity with shifts towards more agency and short-term work in the care sector, connecting these shifts in work to a reduction in public spending and cuts to care services. Several participants (particularly those living in urban areas) also spoke about the need they felt to move to cheaper areas outside where they work. We were told that cuts to funding affect not just the care workers' own pockets, but also the quality of the work they felt able to deliver. Participants keenly felt the negative effects of this on their service users, and on their own sense of professionalism, wellbeing and pride in the work they undertook. They expressed strong concern about what they saw as the de-professionalisation of care work across the UK over a period of time.

"**You give us less, we can only do less.**"

Participants wanted service users to be recognised as valued individuals in society, and saw this as deeply connected to the importance of also valuing those who provided care. They thought that there needed to be a shift away from a perception that disabled and elderly service users are a burden on society, towards a culture of increased respect for the elderly and vulnerable: "A good society would value people and more specifically the elderly. Care given should be person-centred to the individual."

The participants saw many of the issues that they experienced as stemming from a lack of respect for the contribution their work makes; a devaluation of care by society. Their suggestions were for homecare to be treated as a profession, not simply as a service: providing better work conditions, regulating the profession, providing training and recognition for experience and expertise. Valuing the profession more in terms of respect and resources would then attract and retain the best staff.

We were told that service user needs are currently met in "a postcode lottery", but that good quality care should be accessible to all. The group suggested that these principles were key to delivering good care:

- Choice
- Independence
- Privacy
- Dignity

Promoting active citizenship and participation

Active citizenship and participation does not simply have the effect of improving the nature and quality of dialogue, and thus policymaking within our democracy. It also holds political institutions to account, because democratic governments are accountable to their citizens and subject to uncensored criticism from the media. As well as the instrumental value that active citizenship and participation has in strengthening democracy and addressing economic exclusion, Amartya Sen proposes there is an intrinsic value independent to this: the proper goal of a society and economy is the advancement of what humans are capable of and able to do.[13.] Active participation is a means by which to do this. Unfortunately, conversations we had in these workshops show precisely how far we are from any ideal of an inclusive or democratic economy.

> ### Case study: Aston, Birmingham
>
> We held another workshop in partnership with Birmingham Settlement, in Aston. We reached out to groups based on their identity rather than place; it included a mix of people who had gone to Birmingham Settlement to access its Money Advice Service and classes for English as a Second Language.
>
> Those learning English spoke about their difficulty in accessing services, finding work and consequently their ability to provide their children with adequate heating, housing, and a nutritious diet.
>
> **"When my daughter is home we use a heater in one room and stay in there. When she is out I wear more clothes and turn off the heating."**
>
> The participants seeking financial advice sympathised, as many of them had also struggled with accessing benefits under a system undergoing modernisation, or a change in employment status and the associated paperwork, which is what led to their financial difficulties in the first place:

13. Sen, A. and Foster, J. (2010) *On economic inequality*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press

Challenging stereotypes of identity and community

We frequently heard stories of economic marginalisation; that people were being treated differently and demonised or 'othered' as a result of their economic status or identity. Speaking about the welfare assessments they had experienced, both those looking for work and those receiving disability benefits, described the loss of dignity they suffered by the blanket application of procedures without any flexibility to respond to an individual's needs or concerns. A few participants also felt indignant at not being given access to, or stigmatised for using, these services when they had spent most of their life working hard and paying into the system that was now failing them. The negative portrayal of individuals suffering from financial hardship was also echoed in the negative stereotyping of the localities they lived in and the communities they belonged to. As described within the interim report, residents in both the Port Talbot and Clacton-on-Sea workshops told us of unforgiving and biased media reporting on the areas they lived in.

Throughout these workshops we heard stories of communities facing unprecedented pressure in the face of local government cuts. We also heard stories of profound personal and social resilience, often because of the hardship they experienced. These were the stories of those in Clacton-on-Sea and Port Talbot resisting the stigmatising language of deprivation and poverty, proudly proclaiming that their localities had greater potential, natural beauty and opportunity than acknowledged by commentators. We also heard people call for a cultural change to the way policy is shaped, towards one based on understanding, empathy and mutual respect.

We found that citizens experiencing economic exclusion demonstrate, benefit from and value social leadership. Very often, social leadership is forged from necessity; building more informal social networks and relationships to build resilience. Many spoke of the untapped potential people had to demonstrate social leadership, that could have been realised had they access to greater (financial and non-financial) support that understood the needs of the community. We came across several initiatives that individuals within a community had set up in response to a local service being cut, or just through recognition that there was an unmet need within their area.

Case study: Disability Action in Islington

We partnered with Disability Action in Islington to hold a forum theatre workshop, where participants acted and engaged with the hardships faced by a fictional character, Eva, as she experienced direct and indirect social discrimination on the basis of her disability: arthritis. Forum theatre is a useful tool for exploring issues which may be personal or difficult to share. In addition, by acting out scenarios and allowing participants to intervene and suggest different scenes, they are able to consider multiple perspectives and imagine different responses and potential outcomes.

These were the experiences that participants viewed and engaged with:

- Work capability assessment – Eva was found qualified for work despite her disability. Her appeal took a long time, and she received no benefits due to her during this time.
- Discrimination experienced during a job interview – An interview panel was prejudiced towards Eva although she has the skills and experience to suit the role advertised.
- Experience in the workplace – Eva experiences much difficulty in doing many of the tasks as there is no support in place for disabled employees (for instance, a lift). Management at the workplace is unsympathetic, and the workplace is unsuitable causing tension and misunderstanding on both sides.

As explored through the theatre pieces, many participants had struggled with finding appropriate work, working with sympathetic employers, or with navigating the welfare system: "The problem with our system is that everything is black or white, yes or no. A different GP will give you a different answer. They are only given five minutes to spend with each patient and can only discuss one problem."

We heard that many disabled people experience their workplaces as thoughtless, making no effort to make adjustments for them. We also heard that throughout the economic system disabled people face barriers to real inclusion: a lack of transparency in the welfare assessment processes, an inability of the system to respond respectfully to individual cases, and experiences of stereotyping and discrimination. Participants told us that they wanted to make meaningful contributions to society, but that whenever they attempted to do so their efforts were undermined. They felt disempowered and frustrated by their interactions with workplace and welfare systems, and spoke of the negative impact these experiences had on their confidence and wellbeing.

"Just because we are disabled doesn't mean we shouldn't engage, this kind of behaviour perpetuates the system we suffer under and needs to change. We need to act for wider social change, not what may best serve us as individuals."

Case study: Clacton-on-Sea

For the workshop in Clacton-on-Sea, Tendring, we worked with a social research organisation to gather a group of residents and speak about the local economy. Clacton-on-Sea was founded as a holiday resort in the late 1800s, and expanded with the opening of a Butlin's in 1938. Its population grew with the booming tourist industry until the 1980s, when it lost its draw as a holiday destination and the very basis of its economy fell apart.[1] Over time the population declined and younger generations left the area to find work, so by the 2011 census, 28 percent of the population were aged 65 and over. There is a 62 percent employment rate in Clacton-on-Sea, and the neighbouring village of Jaywick only has 48 percent in work. With 25 percent of 16- to 64-year-olds in Clacton and 42 percent in Jaywick reporting that they hold no formal qualifications, opportunities are likely to be few and far between.[2] Discontent with the status quo was strikingly obvious in the EU referendum; Tendring District chose to leave by 69.46 percent with a voter turnout of 74.5 percent.[3]

> **"When the council allowed Butlin's to leave, that's when Clacton declined."**

The effects of a decline in domestic tourism have been keenly felt. The closure of Butlin's, a chain providing holiday short breaks, affected employment prospects for those in Clacton-on-Sea, several participants voicing concerns about decisions they felt they had little involvement or influence over. Others thought that Clacton was undergoing profound demographic change, and was experiencing the effects of attempts by London local authorities to move London's social challenges further out, rather than to tackle them head-on:

> **"Clacton has gone down rapidly over the last few years. This may be the influence of population movements from across the UK, transferring blocks of people from London to rural areas, in particular the seaside, is bad. This has been a change over the last 15 years, moving London's problems, and ex-prisoners from Chelmsford prison into bedsits in Clacton."**

Many of the participants told us that the Jaywick area has received unfair bad press, and that despite how it has been portrayed it has a lot to offer, from its scenery and beaches to its community spirit: "The media wants to sell which is why it chooses sensationalist stories and picked the worst examples of Jaywick to show in the TV programme." A sense of community was very important to several members of the group. There was some consciousness of the ways in which community spirit had been forged, and was a necessity because of the hardships experienced by residents in the local area. One participant said:

> **"I came from a different area, Chingford; there you don't need community spirit because you can pay."**

1. Tendring District Council (2016) *Historic information and images along Clacton and Holland seafront*. Available at: http://www.tendringdc.gov.uk/environment/coast-protection/historic-information-and-images-along-clacton-and-holland-seafront

2. Office for National Statistics (2014) *2011 Census: Coastal Communities*. Available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_382084.pdf

3. The Electoral Commission (2016) *EU referendum results*. Available at: https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/elections-and-referendums/upcoming-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/electorate-and-count-information

Investing in people and place – from rhetoric towards reality

Citizen engagement can and should have a role in policymaking. For that reason, advocating for a model of active citizenship and participation is fundamental to ensuring that citizens are able to be heard in a meaningful way. Political and economic institutions need to understand much better what the right support might be. That requires having processes in place to ask citizens what barriers they face, and understand what investment is required to address those barriers.

Case study: Clamdon, London

In an effort to gather a wider set of youth perspectives we partnered with the GLA to invite students from a range of schools across London to a workshop in Camden Town Hall. Once again we made use of Lego Serious Play to inspire conversation about the economy.

Some of the most pressing issues students mentioned were the cost of higher education and the impact of poor housing on health, wellbeing and educational inequalities. A number of proposals explored by the students took a lateral, systemic approach to connected policy problems, looking beyond silos towards interventions that could have a ripple effect across the system.

"It's now a privilege to own a house – it should be a right."

In a follow up survey, just over one third of children and young people participating said they felt the most important issue facing London's economy was housing. They spoke about the impact of the high cost of housing, poor conditions and overcrowding, their frustration at being paid less to do the same jobs as others, and their desire to see job creation through support for small businesses. The majority of the participants also felt that university tuition fees and the cost of upskilling young people were issues that should be explored further by the RSA.

Students, teachers and policymakers all found the process a good way to share their views on the economy and make connections between the different actors in the system:

"It was great to talk to peers and to important people about decision making. One of the great ideas suggested was a UCAS-style website for apprenticeships." - Student

"It was really good how the students felt as though they could express themselves about issues facing them and their community. It was important to be able to link the different concepts such as housing, poverty, and wages together to see how they linked up." – Accompanying teacher

"It was great to hear directly from young people about their future concerns on jobs, education, the cost of living and housing. Our economy must work for everyone, including young people, so it's essential that we continue to engage and encourage their participation." – GLA Assembly Member

On the Road

Addressing inequality of opportunity

Our dialogue with citizens in Port Talbot revealed that the steelworks and related industry were deeply tied to the identity and economy of the town. In Oldham, reference was made to the old cotton mills; they had been the historic lifeline of the city and their closure had a long-lasting effect on employment and opportunities for progression. In both places, people spoke of the community, social and support ties that had been linked to the industry, which had vanished alongside a decline in the number of jobs available. These industries were significant to people primarily because of providing employment opportunities, but connected to these opportunities was a sense of local pride and hope for the future. The desire to work as a way to meet financial needs, but also as a way to find a place within society was echoed throughout the workshops.

However, for many of the people we spoke to finding suitable work was a serious challenge. Some faced particular restrictions on their time, such as childcare. For others, finding work which suited their health or disability needs was proving impossible; a number of participants in some of our workshops spoke of the direct or indirect discrimination they had experienced through either their visible or invisible characteristics (women, disabled, LGBTQ) in being able to apply for jobs. The decline in support to access work was also mentioned, as well as geographical isolation making it difficult for residents to commute to areas of high employment. Some of those who were in work told us that they were they were not adequately rewarded for their time; we had several conversations with groups about the need for a 'living wage' and for society to place greater value on work that required 'emotional labour' such as care work, or work in the service sector. Lack of work and poor quality work were sources of frustration, as they saw these as being key to improving their economic situations.

In general, participants felt that education was essential to removing barriers to employment; perhaps as a means of changing the system. Those wanting to benefit more from the current system often expressed a desire to take on further training, and dreamt of higher education opportunities for their children to become more attractive to employers. Others perceived the problem to be with the system itself; they felt eligible for the same services and treatment that others received, but prejudice and discrimination was preventing them from access. This manifested in examples such as the high level of homeless LGBTQ youth - a quarter of the total, [14] and the physical barriers that disabled people may face to

21. The Albert Kennedy Trust (2015) *LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK National Scoping of Cause, Prevalence, Response, and Outcome.* Available at: http://www.akt.org.uk/webtop/modules/_repository/documents/AlbertKennedy_ResearchReport_FINALInteractive.pdf

participation in democracy through inadequate access to polling stations.[15.] To combat this, participants suggested the need for educational campaigns addressed at changing society's perception and treatment of these groups. The quality and cost of the education system, however, was frequently cited as a barrier in its own right, demonstrating the need for government investment and support in overcoming this dilemma.

Case study: Oldham

The workshop in Oldham was aimed at engaging minority ethnic groups in the area. We collaborated with Doing Social and Coppice Community Centre to ensure we reached relevant groups and provided necessary translation services for all participants to take part. The use of visual materials was helpful in stimulating conversation, and we collected feedback using a sticky dot voting system.

Many of the issues experienced by people in other workshops, including the decline of the local economy, were also felt by residents here. Participants mentioned increasing pressure on stagnating incomes due to rising costs of living, from food through to electricity bills and housing costs. An overwhelming lack of control over their local area and the types of opportunities available came out as a strong theme: "There has been investment into the work programme but it is not benefitting people – the same people have been looking for work for years. The young people get jobs further away and leave the local area so it's the same people left behind looking for low-paid work. It's just a bullying circle. We need work programmes that actually pay. People need support to use the new IT systems and there are inexperienced interpreters to help them, so the environment is not conducive to helping people find work. There are even cameras now creating a completely different environment. The jobs that are available are not matching skills to needs."

By far the biggest issue faced by the community members we spoke to was the language barrier. Communication difficulties made it harder for them to access opportunities and improve their livelihoods, as well as presenting a barrier to effective community cohesion across different ethnic and religious groups: "There should be more grassroots activities, especially when language and culture are potential barriers. The grassroots stuff is really important for the community."

They said they faced issues in accessing the things they need to progress in life: education, training and work for example. Many participants also felt unable to access the information that would have helped them to participate fully in local, general and referendum elections, as well as to make properly informed voting choices. Community members did not feel their voices were being heard and understood. They felt a better approach to listening is needed, as well as greater empathy and understanding which can be gained through spending more time with communities.

15. Bush, M., Gilbert, C. and Sarb, C. (2010) *Polls Apart 2010: Opening elections to disabled people*. Scope. Available at: http://www.scope.org.uk/Scope/media/Documents/Publication%20Directory/Polls-apart-2010.pdf

"We need an extra hand to help us interact. Currently we are not valued. The wider community needs to have meetings. If people are involved more then they will be willing to engage. It's all about voice, people, and power. We are only consulted during election time when the politicians want to win voters, otherwise it's the same people involved in the decision-making processes and politicians only move in their own circles." - Oldham participant

Case study: Central Birmingham

We partnered with Birmingham LGBT who recruited some of their members to join a workshop with us. Participants identified the types of economic exclusion LGBT members may face, by considering the barriers they had faced at different points in their life.

"It's very hard to prove indirect discrimination. Within a job application process, while interviewing employers will be careful not to put anything discriminative in writing or on record, but that doesn't stop them discriminating."

As with other groups, many difficulties they experienced were in relation to employment; participants described the barriers to coming out in the workplace and navigating social attitudes and expectations. One individual spoke of their concern about the impact of their gender identity and planning a transition on their employment prospects:

"It's difficult considering work and planning a transition. I feel unable to change my job and negotiate time off work. If I want medical treatment I'll need to take quite a bit of time off over the next two years, that's a fair amount of time and thus I feel stuck where I am. There is a more negative attitude towards us asking for time off to have medical treatment for a sex change than someone needing to undergo chemo treatment for cancer for example. There is the same negative perception if we were to claim benefits."

On the other hand, some participants said they were burdened with more work than their colleagues as there was an expectation that: "because you have no family you can work after hours or on holidays."

Critical to this was ensuring that LGBT individuals felt safe and able to disclose information about their gender and sexuality, so that that services could be adapted to meet the needs of individuals: "We need to educate young people to accept LGBT people. Then LGBT people will get the same level of support as straight people." They also felt that there should be greater engagement and follow up with the LGBT community in the early stages of creating new services and new policy.

Access to good quality mental health services was seen as a particular priority. Participants acknowledged high levels of suicide rates within the community as well as an increased likelihood of experiencing mental health problems. These issues in turn affected LGBT participants' overall wellbeing and quality of life, making it much harder to work effectively: "If you are suffering, how are you meant to hold down a job?"

Divided views on immigration

Immigration came up as a key theme in several of the workshops. There was very little by way of consensus within, and indeed across, these groups in terms of the discussion on immigration. This is not surprising given the diversity of voices we spoke to, and the different area we travelled to. Whilst some participants felt strongly that immigration was having a detrimental economic impact on employment prospects for UK nationals, others pointed out the positive economic and social contribution of many migrant communities: supporting the NHS for example, and questioned the scapegoating of migrants whose personal financial circumstances were also adversely affected by recent economic trends. As the 2017 British Social Attitudes survey illustrates, views on the economic impact of immigration were revealed to be amongst the most socially divided in the UK, with a 46 percent difference between graduates under 45, and school leavers over the age of 65.[16.] We did find common themes underpinning these diverse views when we probed deeper. Underlying the discussion about migration and its effects were profound concerns about the effects of rapid change, social, technological, environmental, leaving communities transformed beyond recognition, and individuals struggling to keep up.

16.   Phillips, M., Attar Taylor, E. and Simpson, I. (2017) *British Social Attitudes 34th Report: A kind-hearted but not soft-hearted country*. Natcen. Available at: http://natcen.ac.uk/ our-research/research/british-social-attitudes/

Case study: Port Talbot

Once again we worked with a social research organisation, inviting local residents to speak about the economy in Port Talbot. Port Talbot has been known for its metal works industry for the last couple of centuries. As the biggest producer of steel in the UK, Port Talbot has faced large shocks to its economy with the decline of this industry. More recently, the announcement by the current owners of the steelworks, Tata Steel, that they were intending to sell the business, threw thousands of workers into uncertainty over the future of their work.[1.] Potential job loss is particularly worrying in a community where, as the 2011 census showed, 24 percent of the population aged 16 and over have no formal qualifications, and the employment rate is 63 percent (to put that into context the average for England and Wales is 15 percent and 71 percent respectively).[2.] In the face of decades of economic decline and insecurity, perhaps it is understandable that voter turnout went up from 65 percent in the 2015 National elections,[3.] to 71.6 percent in the referendum to leave the EU. It may also be unsurprising that they voted to leave the EU with a majority of 56.8 percent to take a chance on something different.[4.]

In one activity we used recent newspaper cuttings to discuss the changes in the economy. Many participants described the precarious nature of work, caused in some part by shifts in the global economy, as well as by shifts in the nature of pay and employment in Britain. Younger participants described their frustration at being unable to find paid and permanent work in the local area: "I worked in the steelworks for one-and-a-half years and was then made redundant. Three weeks later there was an agency temp doing my job."

The effects of economic uncertainty caused by globalisation and labour market flows were mentioned by several group members. They had particular concerns about the longer-term effects that immigration had on the availability of resources, support, and training for UK nationals to access in the local economy. One participant said: "They should advertise jobs locally first, then nationally, then go abroad if they can't find someone."

Another said: "Companies used to have a responsibility to train and educate a local workforce. That isn't the case these days because they can go abroad to find the skills."

Economic uncertainty caused by the recent Brexit vote was also touched upon. In a discussion about the effects of the vote to leave the European Union, someone said: **"We need to know what Brexit we voted for. From this room we could leave by this door, leave by that door, or go out of the window, they'd all lead to different outcomes! We need a good public**

1. BBC (2016) *Tata Steel makes commitment to secure Port Talbot future.* Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-38224787

2. Office for National Statistics (2014) 2011 *Census: Coastal Communities.* Available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_382084.pdf

3. Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (2015) *UK Parliamentary Election.* Available at: https://www.npt.gov.uk/pdf/Elections_DOR_UKPARL_2015.pdf

4. Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (2016) *Referendum on the UKs Membership of the European Union.* Available at: https://www.npt.gov.uk/pdf/Declaration_of_Result.pdf

Investment in social infrastructure

A strong theme across workshops was that a decline in community and support services available had affected people's sense of belonging to a single, cohesive community, and their sense of being in an environment that enabled them to reach their full potential. We heard of concerns such as: lack of access to local voluntary and community services, uncertainties about the future of a local community centre, and recognition of funding cuts to community engagement services, the police, NHS, and educational institutions.

Participants highlighted the importance of greater investment, particularly in what the RSA Inclusive Growth Commission called "social infrastructure." This is infrastructure that builds human capacity and capability, so that people may better participate and integrate into society, benefitting from economic activity. Examples include: pre-school programmes, public health and mental health initiatives, and investment into VCSOs.[17.]

We argue that these kinds of initiatives – promoting better dialogue, understanding and community cohesion - form an important part of investment in people and place. Early years support, initiatives that promote education, skills, and lifelong learning; initiatives that promote early action and early intervention; investment into community development and capacity building, are all arguably just as important forms of investment that must move from rhetoric towards reality. Investment must be that which ultimately helps people, communities and places connect to the benefits of economic activity as well as to flourish and become agents of change in their communities.

17. Inclusive Growth Commission (2017) *Inclusive Growth Commission: Making our Economy Work for Everyone*. London: RSA. Available at: https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/final-report-of-the-inclusive-growth-commission

Case study: Glasgow, Ardenglen Housing Association

Oor this session we worked with Ardenglen Housing Association to recruit some of their members. Castlemilk, where the association is based, was one of four post-war housing estates constructed in Glasgow in the 1950s. It was a peripheral estate when it was built and the delayed provision of local amenities did not help its isolation.[1] Despite a 19 percent decline in its population between 1996 and 2012, there is a more even age distribution than we saw in the two seaside towns, with 65.7 percent of people aged between 16 and 64, and only 14.3 percent aged 65 and over. The Castlemilk neighbourhood faces similar issues in the lack of work opportunities with only 46.2 percent of people in employment, and 56 percent in the socioeconomic grade D or E.[2] Other social and cultural factors must have played a larger influence on the Scottish voting choices in the EU referendum however, as Glasgow city voted to remain by 66.6 percent,[3] and the area our participants were from, Castlemilk, formed part of the Glasgow City Ward Linn, that voted to remain by 72 percent.[4] Interestingly voter turnout for Glasgow City was only 56.3 percent.[5]

> "People need a purpose in life. Money means being able to take a course and improve your family's lifestyle – people need hope."

Participants in this workshop discussed the lack of fairly paid job opportunities and recognised the importance a sense of belonging had to individuals' wellbeing. They wanted to feel that their efforts, whether through paid employment or community work, were valued adequately. One participant said that a positive economy would mean "I would be paid for babysitting."

Participants felt a positive sense of agency despite the challenges they saw and experienced describing, for examples, their experiences of getting involved in community initiatives. After an initial 10 week NHS project for older women, promoting health and wellbeing through activities (gardening, walking and outings), the project's beneficiaries (from the housing association) did not want the programme to end, and took action to consolidate it as a longer-term group and network called REVIVE.

1. University of Glasgow (2016) *Castlemilk*. Available at: http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/humanities/research/historyresearch/researchprojects/housingandwellbeing/castlemilk/

2. Glasgow Centre for Population Health (2014) *Castlemilk: Understanding Glasgow: The Glasgow Indicators Project*. Available at: http://www.understandingglasgow.com/assets/0002/1239/Castlemilk.pdf

3. BBC News (2016) *EU Referendum: Local results*. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results/local/g

4. Paterson, S. (2016) *EU referendum: Here is how Glasgow voted*. Evening Times, 28 June [online]. Available at: http://www.eveningtimes.co.uk/news/14583516.display/

5. Glasgow City Council (2016) European Referendum 2016 Glasgow Results. Available at: https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=19666

This group had gone on to secure a regular meeting space with computing facilities, a food bank service, and a language exchange programme, and were determined to provide support to local community members in accessing development opportunities through running various training schemes.

> **"Help people help one another – there is an important role for the government in supporting this."**

They have set up many of these services in response to demand in the local area, stating that they were filling gaps that the state had failed to meet. They did, however, want to work collaboratively with other partners (including the local council), believing there was a strong role for more localised and connected approaches to solving social problems:

> **"We work closely with the government, the local authority – we think we can do a better job as we are crowdsourcing ideas from the bottom up; it's all about what the community want and what they are going to support. Here we have the ideas, we have the enthusiastic volunteers, we know how to solve our own problems – we just need the funding to get on with it."**

Conclusion

Creating an economy that includes everyone must place people at the heart of power. It must involve the sharing of power, which can in turn strengthen the legitimacy of institutions and decision-makers sharing that power. In this paper we have outlined the ways in which engagement has the potential to create more responsive policy, encourage active citizenship, and support community cohesion. Many of the stories we heard on the road illustrated that social and economic investment in people and places could unlock this potential, especially amongst some of our most vulnerable citizens and communities. If engagement is to be meaningful and not tokenistic, so that people are heard and not simply listened to, it must be accompanied with the support, investment and governance seeking to get the best out of an equal partnership of citizen, community and the state. Specific recommendations for how to support more meaningful participation are detailed within the interim report.

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