Rethinking Poverty

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A key message of this book is the need to rethink the problem of poverty. The welfare state narrative that informed social policy in the 30 years following the Beveridge Report has lost its power, and needs to be replaced if we are to make progress. ‘Poverty’ cannot be the starting point because the word divides people emotionally and politically, so that policies to address poverty always have limited support.

**Where we have got to so far**

This book has developed an alternative formulation based on building ‘the society we want’. The advantage of this approach is that it frames the task positively. Rather than solving a problem that many people feel is of doubtful importance, the goal is to develop an asset that everyone has a stake in. The process should be creative, and avoid the destructive feelings that surround the word ‘poverty’.

Notwithstanding the complexity of the issue, five principles have been developed that express what many people want from their society:

1. We all have a decent basic standard of living.
2. So we are secure and free to choose how to lead our lives.
3. Developing our potential and flourishing materially and emotionally.
4. Participating, contributing and treating all with care and respect.
5. And building a fair and sustainable future for the next generations.

In developing these principles, ‘the tyranny of perfection’ has been put to one side. The principles are a ‘good enough’ starting point to address the gap between the society we have and the society we want. There is an impressive consistency in what people want – security, fairness and independence – with an emphasis on social values rather than economic ones.

The term ‘security’ is important as the first building block of a good society. It is also a better entry into social policy than ‘poverty’, because it is positively framed, has resonance across society, and finds favour among all political parties. This makes it easier to build agreements, which is essential if society is to make the social advances needed to heal the divisions exposed by Brexit.

It is one thing to produce a narrative; quite another to use it to bring about social advance. Society has been drifting for more than 30 years, guided only by the mantra of ‘growth and more growth’. During that period, social policies have not worked well and there is nothing immediately on offer to dig us out of the hole that we are in. The thousands of reports published each year by universities, think tanks and charities typically make recommendations to government as rescuer, when it is not at all clear that government wants to act to reduce poverty further or has the capacity to add more policies to its existing commitments.

If we continue to hide behind rational appeals to government, we will not make the advances that we need. The answer lies with people, ordinary citizens and their organisations. Rather than looking to the supply side of governance, we need to look to the demand side and develop people-led action. Only by developing society organically from within, not by seeking technocratic policy fixes, can we develop the society we want. A good society is found as much in the process as in the product, so we need to do this for ourselves. This entails using a new model of power, one that is more inclusive and ensures that the agents of social progress include a wider set of actors than at
present. It is particularly important to involve people who are affected by poverty. This entails disturbing the power pyramid to develop a society that everyone feels part of, while reframing the role of the market and public authorities.

The question arises: how to develop a new approach in such a way that it can take root? A blueprint and recommendations would not work: that approach would be a top-down one, a replication of the practice that has become so inimical to social progress. What can be done is to develop a framework based on the research findings that may enable people to think about creative ways to reform society. As a starting point, a clear, broad-based agenda for the society we want must be developed. The next section expands on this and subsequent sections consider pathways for achieving it.

The society we might have

What kind of society would we have if we were to get what we want? It is hard to imagine this when our conventional behaviour is based on tinkering with this or that policy to adjust the system at the margins, rather than looking at the whole thing and envisioning what we might want. As noted in Chapter Three, we are rusty when it comes to thinking about the big normative questions around how to live. We tend to think within a frame of narrow realism and base everything on immediate practicalities, rather than use our moral imagination to design our world afresh.

In addressing the big picture, it is helpful to draw on ‘Economic possibilities for our grandchildren’ – the article by John Maynard Keynes referred to in Chapter Four. Writing amid the economic turmoil of 1930, Keynes looked ahead to the world of 2030. He suggested – despite the 1929 economic crash – that our long-term economic prospects were bright. He predicted that a combination of growth in wealth and developments in technology would free us from the tedium of work within 100 years.

Such advances would produce a state of ‘economic bliss’. This would enable us to ‘occupy the leisure, which science and compound interest
will have won’ and to ‘live wisely and agreeably and well’. We would be free from the need to concern ourselves with economics, and able to ‘prefer the good to the useful’. Our greatest problem would be to rid ourselves of the work ethic and find constructive ways to use our leisure.

Keynes was remarkably prescient. We have made enormous economic advances and are now on the threshold of an age where technology could largely banish work from our lives. We have sufficient resources for people to be economically secure and socially free to pursue leisure in ways of their choosing. Rather than seeing automation as a threat that will take our jobs, it gives us the option to remove the drudgery of tedious jobs from our lives. Keynes quotes the traditional epitaph of the charwoman:

Don’t mourn for me, friends, don’t weep for me never,
For I’m going to do nothing for ever and ever.

Keynes’ imagined world of 2030 gives insight into how we might realise the five principles identified as central to a good society, while becoming both ‘secure’ and ‘free’. Economic bliss brings security and the resulting leisure brings freedom. Such a scenario could be the salvation of humanity. As individuals, we could use leisure to develop our creativity, engage in lifelong learning and, if so inclined, enhance our spirituality. As social beings, we could spend more time with our families and friends. As active members of society, we could contribute through voluntary work and concentrate on making our planet beautiful and sustainable, developing a new respect for nature while reaching out to people from different cultures to improve the cohesion of our societies. Our world would resemble the Buen Vivir movement in Latin America, which is based on the principles of harmony between human beings and nature, as described in Chapter Four. In short, we could create the social bliss to accompany the economic bliss. In so doing, we would banish the fear and hatred that stem from our insecurities.
Organising for a good society

Having set out a narrative for a good society, the next step is to organise it. As soon as we begin to think about this, we encounter a major stumbling block. This is Keynes’ mistaken assumption that, once a certain level of wealth had been achieved, people would feel that they had enough so that making money would play second fiddle. Keynes predicted that in 2030:

The love of money as a possession – as distinguished from the love of money as a means to the enjoyments and realities of life – will be recognised for what it is, a somewhat disgusting morbidity, one of those semi-criminal, semi-pathological propensities which one hands over with a shudder to the specialists in mental disease.

Far from taking second place, money continues to be an obsession with the rich. In 2010, according to Oxfam International, the wealthiest 388 people on the planet possessed as much wealth as the poorest half of the world’s population. By 2012 this figure was 159, in 2014 it was 80, and in 2015 it was just 62.2 Luna Glucksberg and Roger Burrows have recently reviewed the literature on how the very rich create infrastructures to ensure the reproduction of dynastic wealth.3

While so much of the earth’s wealth belongs to so few people, it is hard to see how the rest can be secure and free. With such wealth comes enormous power, and rich people show few signs of wanting to change anything. Although new wealth has produced new foundations, they typically address charity rather than justice.4 If we want to see a fairer world, civil society organisations will need to play a key role. This entails shifting the power so that it comes from below not above.

Chapters Two and Five showed the strength of thousands of people and organisations working for a better world; but also the weakness of efforts that are splintered, divided and competitive. There is no social movement that joins together efforts to improve the environment, reduce poverty, raise the status of women, guarantee human rights for
oppressed groups such as migrants and refugees, and combat racism. Civil society lacks a coordinated strategy so that there is a cacophony of voices. While some see infighting as a democratic virtue, significant advance has been made only when good leaders with an explicit change agenda organise a mass of people. Chapter Four traced the link from John Ruskin through to Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Citizens UK. There is a thread of change-based literature running through the work of Paulo Freire, who saw education as a process in which people can transform the world about them, to Saul Alinsky in his community-organising manual *Rules for radicals*, and Anne Firth Murray, whose *Paradigm found* has become the basis of women’s empowerment across the world. These books demonstrate that real progress can be made when people organise for change with a noble aim, use a responsible method, and ensure that they serve both the self-interest of the participants and the wider public interest. Effective approaches entail replacing standard methods based on hierarchy and competition with feminist principles of respect, reciprocity, cooperation and inclusivity. The work of the Global Fund for Community Foundations to #ShiftThePower in international development is an example of how this can be done.

A critical step is to develop the narrative about the society we want. Setting out five principles for a good society without poverty is a first step. A 2014 YouGov survey suggests that this would be popular. The survey suggests an ‘inequality moment’ has been reached since 56 per cent would like to see a more equal distribution of wealth even if it reduces the total amount of wealth, while only 17 per cent would choose greater overall wealth even if it leads to greater inequality. The Trust research supports this view, a common observation being, as one focus group participant put it, “While there is such a divide in wealth, I don’t think we can ever have a good society.” “It’s all down to resources and wrong distribution that creates the imbalance in the world”, said another. This has consequences for who has opportunities. “It’s wrong that we don’t all start from a level playing field”, said one. “We need equality of opportunity”, said another, while a third said, “It’s absurd that some people have so much, while so many have so little”.

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Having said that, the research also suggests that the word ‘inequality’ is not a good basis for organising. There is a widespread perception that activists who promote equality are ‘left-wing’ and their language, as one focus group member put it, “smacks of communism”. In contrast, the idea of ‘security’ works well. “What we need”, said another focus group member, is “security for all.”

Security first

‘Security for all’ offers a starting point. It has the potential to rally disparate interests in the way that Citizens UK did when it developed the idea of the ‘living wage’. If civil society organisations could think and act collaboratively, share assets between organisations and think about long-term systemic change in favour of ‘security for all’, they could not only develop a new way of seeing but also ensure that other sectors took it seriously.

To investigate the idea of a joint approach to security, the Trust sponsored eight workshops between November and December 2016 in various parts of the UK. They were organised and led by Michael Orton. A total of 145 people attended. Around a third of participants were frontline advice workers. Another third were from third sector organisations including charities, campaign groups, housing associations, think tanks and organisations such as credit unions. There were some local authority workers and academics. Some had direct experience of poverty.

The workshops came up with many suggestions for the future of the social security benefits system but there was no consensus. The debates within groups were often fruitless. Interviews with 12 leading social security experts confirmed that there is no consensus on social security and no forum to develop agreement on ways forward. This is clearly an area that requires further attention.

One promising area for further work is the idea of a basic citizens’ income. This is a simple idea, growing in popularity, to pay an unconditional monthly allowance to cover basic needs such as food, shelter and education to every individual as a right of citizenship.10
Rutger Bregman’s research claims that the approach works because it removes the sense of scarcity that leads to the failure of anti-poverty programmes. This finding is supported by Mullainathan and Shafir, whose research demonstrates that people on low incomes are so preoccupied with meeting their basic needs that they have insufficient ‘bandwidth’ to take advantage of educational or training programmes designed to help them get out of poverty. In a recent *Guardian* article, Bregman notes:

> When it comes to poverty, we should stop pretending to know better than poor people. The great thing about money is that people can use it to buy things they need instead of things self-appointed experts think they need. Imagine how many brilliant would-be entrepreneurs, scientists and writers are now withering away in scarcity. Imagine how much energy and talent we would unleash if we got rid of poverty once and for all.

However, financial modelling shows that it is hard to design a revenue-neutral basic income scheme that pays a decent sum without creating significant numbers of losers among people on means-tested benefits. This is because the current benefits system, with its reliance on means testing, can pay relatively large sums to groups with complex needs. A flat-rate scheme cannot compensate for the withdrawal of both personal tax allowances and most means-tested benefits without becoming expensive.

At the same time, all the evidence suggests that radical reform of the benefits system will become necessary and desirable as it become clearer that well-paid work will no longer support the mass of the people. In his bestselling book *Homo deus*, Yuval Noah Harari predicts that the ‘data universe’ driven by algorithms will produce a world where labour is redundant and society is divided between the ‘super rich’ and the ‘useless class’. Without economic or military purpose, new fictions will be needed to make sense of the world. This dystopian vision is the converse of Keynes’ economic bliss.
Avoiding such a world would mean national government taking on the role of guaranteeing people’s basic needs to enable citizens to take responsibility for moving to a higher platform in their lives. Such a perspective is found in Beatrice Webb’s Minority Report, in which the job of the state is ‘to secure a national minimum of civilised life open to all alike, of both sexes and all classes’, by which she meant ‘sufficient nourishment and training when young, a living wage when able-bodied, treatment when sick, and modest but secure livelihood when disabled or aged’. So long as there is the sense that the system is for everyone, the method of achieving this is less important than the principle of doing so. While any method would be expensive, costs could be set against the £78 billion estimated to be spent on compensating for poverty each year.

People power

While the state guarantees the basics, Beatrice Webb’s view was that voluntary action should provide services ‘that are placed firmly on the foundation of an enforced minimum standard of life and carry out the work of public authorities to finer shades of physical and moral and spiritual perfection’. This ‘extension ladder model’ involves a sharp distinction between state and voluntary action. The state does the basics; voluntary action the rest.

The research found many examples of local voluntary action playing an important role. In 2014, following the sad and unexpected death of a popular member of parliament, the Trust supported the All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty to administer the Paul Goggins Memorial Prize. This sought nominations from members of parliament for the best voluntary project in their constituency with evidence to show that it was reducing poverty. The 34 entries contained a high proportion of foodbanks. What was interesting was that the projects did many other things as well as addressing food poverty. The winner was the Whitefoot and Downham Community Food Project. In accepting the prize, Councillor Janet Daby noted that food is important, though she also stressed:
'the story is of a community building relationships and being mutually supportive. We need each other, to offer support and to help one another. Building strong communities is needed, whether it is to listen, to socialise, to give advice, support with decision making, finding employment, support with child care and so on. We also need to reduce the isolation and fear that many people really do experience. As people, we are stronger when we do things together.’

This is an example of local grassroots action that is taking place up and down the country. Small in scale and often operating below the radar, such efforts rely heavily on local people as volunteers. Such behaviour is found in every community; it is a naturally occurring asset often overlooked by large funders seeking large-scale impact. Being small is a virtue because it allows intimacy, and the value of such work is in the social and community cohesion that it produces.

Recognising and supporting such work is vital if we are to address the sense of disconnection people feel from their societies which found expression in the Brexit result. Small-scale local action can transform culture away from the money-making ethos to one based on the five principles set out in this book. Association and participation of ordinary people are not only the underlying processes that make communities work but also the means through which our understanding of values is transmitted in our society. Such processes of association and participation were the building blocks of the great transformative movements of the 20th century, including civil rights and feminism. In planning the future, it is vital that we harness the energy of people in their relationships. It is clear from the research that there is much energy for a more participative society and that, given the opportunity, people want to move forward. What follows is a selection from 42 statements about what they intend to do next made by Hull University students at a workshop to develop the #hullwewant:
• ‘Find people’s strengths to facilitate their learning journey, create a positive cycle.’
• ‘Bring communities together to work with what they have and what they want for the future.’
• ‘Raise critical consciousness in young people about their rights.’
• ‘Develop a collective project across communities to stimulate communication and build the foundations of Hull together rather than in individual areas.’

An ecosystem of local relationships

This sort of local action needs to take place within the context of a supportive framework of relationships with other organisations. As Amy-Grace Whillans-Wheldrake, winner of the New Statesman/Webb Memorial Trust 2016 essay prize, put it:

The debate around community resilience must therefore move beyond placing sole responsibility on communities to develop a holistic approach … This will require the commitment and development of long-term relationships between key stakeholders, services and communities, alongside significant time and resource commitments.\(^\text{18}\)

This implies that progress depends on an ecosystem of supportive relationships. The Trust commissioned work on this from Neil McInroy, who drew on extensive research by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies.\(^\text{19}\) The following sections owe much to his work and are designed to give tools to people who want to develop a good local society.

McInroy began by asking: ‘Can we begin to recouple the fundamental link between the social and economic drivers within our economic systems and harness them to reduce poverty and create a more equal and just society?’ The answer is yes, he says, and is best expressed in local places with local identities. It is here that the intimate relationships
and reciprocity between citizens, state and businesses can be remade. It is also where families live and where poverty is experienced.

The current push for the devolution of powers and resources to local government and cities represents an opportunity to link economic, public service and anti-poverty goals. The devolution of powers and resources to local government and cities could facilitate a greater democratisation of the economy and create an important forum for addressing poverty. Indeed, argues McInroy, freed from the constraints of central government, the development of forms of economic activity that fit more securely with local characteristics and social needs could bring a significant anti-poverty dividend. First, we need to address our values.

McInroy suggests that, to build a good local society, we need a ‘local economy that develops empathy’. He uses the work of Enlightenment thinker Adam Smith. While Smith is best known for propagating the idea of self-interest in economic exchange, he also considered the wider moral motivations and institutions required to support economic activity in general. Smith recognised that sympathy, ethical considerations and societal norms and values play an important role as motivations for an individual’s economic activity. Smith tells us we have two vital interdependent elements in society: benevolent self-interest and a need to empathise with the social plight of others.

However, the world of economic policy continues to overplay ‘self-interest’, seeing the economic sphere as a distinct and opposite pole to the social sphere. The two spheres are and should be one and the same. The aim of the economy should be to improve social conditions. Wealth creation should not just be about private gain; it is primarily about the development of human and social life and a decent standard of living for all. For Smith, the purpose of an economy is to ‘generate the necessary commodities for the support of life whatever the custom of a country renders it indecent for people even of the lowest order to be without’. The aim of an economy must therefore be to enable people to live the lives that they want. Markets must serve to generate both social and economic freedoms and opportunities to
operate effectively. If an economy fails to create these opportunities, it can be said to be unjust.24

On this model, tackling poverty and inequality becomes an intrinsic and fundamental part of achieving local prosperity and reforming public services. Instead of local communities being viewed as mere downstream recipients of economic success (as beneficiaries of actions designed to deliver agglomeration and ‘trickle-down’ growth), they are active upstream parts of a system that creates success in the first place. The example given in Chapter Five of how local people are organising in Hull shows how this could work. On this model, social development and tackling poverty (in the form of more jobs, decent wages, rising living standards and civic pride) should be seen less as a mere consequence of economic development action and more as something that is interwoven with it. Economic efficiency is an important goal, but so too is social equity and fairness. This entails authorities delegating as much power to local action as possible using the ‘principle of subsidiarity’. The Oxford English Dictionary defines subsidiarity as ‘the principle that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level’.

The question again arises of ‘how to make this happen’. Again, following the logic of the research findings, a blueprint for this cannot be set out, but some suggestions can be made about processes that may yield benefits. McInroy suggests following the work of Roberto Unger, who stresses the importance of social innovation.25 The approach entails thinking and working across all sectors – public, private and community – in new ways. The essence is to experiment and use small-scale innovations to foreshadow the possibilities of larger-scale transformations in society.

McInroy gives many examples of this approach. This book will give two: cooperative councils and local currency. Plymouth has a philosophy of working on cooperative principles according to which the council empowers residents to take greater control of their own lives. As part of this, the ‘1,000 Club’ is an alliance between senior public sector leaders and businesses to help young people become ready
for work. Some 580 businesses are involved and 1,639 opportunities for young people have been created. Other local authorities are copying the model. In Brixton, there is an experiment with local currency. The Brixton Pound is about ‘money that sticks to Brixton’; the currency is used among local traders and is exchangeable for sterling at a ratio of 1:1. The idea is that money spent with independent businesses circulates within the local economy up to three times longer than when it’s spent with national chains. The approach has been followed in other places, including Totnes, Bristol, Lewes, Stroud and Hull.

Young people need to be part of these processes. They are particularly valuable when it comes to seeing solutions to old problems. They are adept with technology and need to be inducted into positions of power if they are to help to undo some of the messes created by their elders. In most efforts to involve young people, their participation is tokenistic. Greater openness in thinking is needed if we are to turn this around. This point will be returned to later in the chapter.

A framework for local development

While social innovation and youth involvement are important, on their own they do not provide a framework for developing policy and practice beyond being on the lookout for good ideas and finding ways to bring them to scale. The Centre for Local Economic Strategies has developed an agenda for local development, which may be helpful. The essence of the approach is set out under seven headings as follows:

1. Place

A sense of place is central. The local authority has a key role because, notwithstanding austerity, it is the owner of land and buildings and has considerable purchasing power. It can act as convenor across different institutions and networks, and enable an atmosphere of self-determination and creativity among local people and community groups.
2. **Collaboration**

Local authorities can foster the development of a fully cooperative council in which many actors are involved. The emphasis is on developing businesses owned by local people and creating an environment in which local people have power in their communities.

3. **Anchor institutions**

Organisations that have an important presence in a place (for example, hospitals and universities and other large employers) can be involved in sustainable economic practices, buying goods and services locally and ensuring local people are fairly treated in hiring policies.

4. **Business**

Business is not seen as part of the problem but as a full partner in the development of place. This involves a shift from business policies based on ‘corporate social responsibility’ to ‘corporate citizenship’. This follows the kind of approach set out in Chapter Five.

5. **Citizens**

There are strong links between social capital and economic prosperity that are important in tackling poverty. Local people and their networks are important as co-producers through being partners in a sharing economy. This stresses the value of solidarity and is overlooked in much current thinking about the economy.

6. **Work**

Employment support is best designed and delivered at local level. Local employers have a key role in developing a living wage and ensuring that people have access to training.
7. Wealth and supply chains

Procurement policies need to ensure that, as far as possible, wealth created locally remains in the local economy.

McInroy has developed a table to show the changes under each of the headings that need to take place to realise this agenda (Table 6.1).

**Table 6.1: Changes that need to take place to realise a local agenda for development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agenda item</th>
<th>Traditional approach</th>
<th>Good local society approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Top-down, centralised governance</td>
<td>Devolution of decision making based on systems thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Decisions made by elites (business and local governments)</td>
<td>Plurality of decision making based on cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchor institutions</td>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>Part of connected ecosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Wealth creators and corporate social responsibility</td>
<td>Business as citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens</td>
<td>Recipients of policy</td>
<td>Participants in policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Scant regard for wages or conditions</td>
<td>Decent jobs and place-based employment charters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth and supply chains</td>
<td>Based on efficiency and trickle down</td>
<td>Based on community wealth and local social value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Table 6.1 has been reproduced from McInroy, N. (2016) *Forging a good local society: Tackling poverty through a local economic reset*, Centre for Local Economic Strategies and Webb Memorial Trust. The original is ‘Figure 4. Summary of agendas for a good local society in contrast to traditional approaches’ on page 24.

This is a radical approach. It requires a rethinking of the relationships between local communities, local authorities and central government. Making it work involves double devolution. While central government gives new powers and responsibilities to local government, including
the ability to fund itself, local government gives power and control to local people.

A critical piece is citizen engagement. In Osborne and Gaebler’s view, community members can add special knowledge, motivations and experience that professionals and bureaucrats cannot possess. They quote John McKnight of Northwestern University, who suggests that communities are better able to understand and address their problems than government professionals because they are closer to them. Public agencies can nurture community control by encouraging communities to take control of services; by providing seed money, training and technical assistance; and by removing bureaucratic hurdles. An interesting model to examine would be experiments to offer ‘new careers for the poor’, which were one of the most successful ventures in the American ‘War on Poverty’ during the 1960s. While letting go of the reins, government is still ultimately responsible for ensuring services reach those who need them, that structures are in place to identify corruption, and that decentralised programmes are working properly.

The role of national government

So far, this book has stressed the importance of the local dimensions in addressing poverty and developing the society we want. This is an important corrective to the prevailing discourse which sees national government as the principal agent responsible for policy on poverty and related matters.

We need both local and national. Part of the national role would be to have an overarching plan about what kind of society we want. Such a plan would have two main goals: first, to ensure security for all citizens; second, to empower citizens to develop the society that they want. This is based on Sidney and Beatrice Webb’s extension ladder model of government in which the state provides the basics and people do the rest. As suggested earlier, this will involve building a society based on ‘having enough’ rather than ‘everlasting growth’. This policy framework would ensure that resources are used in favour
of the five principles set out in this book and that social factors are
given as much weight as economic ones. Resource allocation, taxation
and regulation would be developed on that basis.

National government would also act directly on issues that can
only be driven nationally. The main priority would be guaranteeing
the economic and social security of citizens. Again, policy directions
cannot be prescribed, though ideas have emerged from the research
for Secure and free. The issue of social security benefits was considered
earlier in this chapter. This is important because a key part of security
is having enough to live on. Another important issue is having
somewhere to live. We saw in Chapter Two that housing has a big
effect on poverty rates for some groups.

**Housing**

The Trust commissioned Birmingham University to examine the
policies that would underpin the role of social housing in a good
society. Their report suggested that policy makers should look to the
principles that drove early postwar public housing. This entails a flexible
mix of tenures, with councils and housing associations providing both
social and private rented homes. This ‘hybrid’ approach would ‘help
restore civil society roles in housing and allow a greater emphasis on
community stewardship’.

The report was used to stimulate discussion among 15 housing
experts, academics and people in the voluntary sector, who were
asked to write short blogs reflecting on housing policy. Several
important themes emerged from this exercise. First and foremost,
central government has a key role to play in increasing the supply of
housing. At least 250,000 new homes each year are required, but the
private sector has never produced more than 150,000 homes and it is
not in their interests to build more. Private sector construction must
therefore be supplemented with a combination of council, housing
association and community-led housing.

Since increasing the supply of social housing will not fully solve
housing poverty, other measures are important. Given that poverty
is now closely associated with private renting, where overcrowding, cold, damp and high energy costs are common problems, there is a strong case for the registration of private sector landlords, together with annual inspections and greater powers of intervention for local authorities. Security for tenants could be improved through a ‘right to sell’ and ‘right to stay’, so that those who can no longer afford mortgage repayments can sell their properties and remain as tenants paying fair rents.

One problem is that different housing markets make universal solutions difficult. Brian Robson from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have put in place policies that are successfully meeting their housing needs, while England is making little or no progress.

Although not as extreme as with social security, the issue of consensus also emerged here. According to Kate Henderson, chief executive of the Town and Country Planning Association, we must build a consensus that housing – including housing that is available for social rent, from either a council or a housing association – is good for the nation. Advocates need to explain why new housing is both necessary and desirable as a pillar of a civilised society. This will require reform of the planning system since some of its outcomes are plainly against the long-term public interest. If we want to ensure a legacy of beauty and durability for our children and grandchildren which truly meets the challenges of the 21st century, we urgently need to restore a comprehensive framework of place-making standards, and to rebalance planning policy so that social justice outcomes are given as much weight as the needs of landowners and developers. Much can be learned from the garden cities, as found at Letchworth and Welwyn, which represent the very best of British place making and a successful financial model based upon the capture of the uplift in land values which the granting of planning permission and the development creates. This can be used to fund infrastructure provision, debt repayments and long-term reinvestment in the new community.
Towards the next generation

The task of this book has not been to provide answers but to provide a fresh framework through which others can develop answers. It has also been mindful of the future. Transformation relies heavily on the people responsible for it, and the Trust’s work with children and young people suggests that the coming generation is more likely to make change than the current one. Powerful ideas are coming from young people. They can find consensus because they do not have the baggage of older generations and are not hemmed in with institutional categories that diminish creative thought.

Today, baby boomers run our country. Because of their sheer demographic power, they have fashioned the world around them in a way that meets all their housing, healthcare and financial needs. David Willetts shows how the baby boomer generation has attained this position at the expense of their children. He argues that if our political, economic and cultural leaders do not address the future, the young people of today will be taxed more, work longer hours for less money, have lower social mobility, and live in a degraded environment to pay for their parents’ quality of life. Evidence suggests that the older generation tends to base its attitudes on nostalgia, which is why it was overrepresented in the recent referendum among those who wished to put the clock back to the time before Britain was a member of the European Union.

The research findings suggest that it is time for a new generation of young people to lead the way. Rys Farthing and Sara Bryson, who led the work with children from low-income parts of England, have shown that very young people can produce ideas that will take us beyond the failed narrative on poverty and usher in a good society. They see themselves as having the capacity to make choices, and able to make the ‘right’ decisions to improve their finances when they need to. Far from the accusations of laziness and apathy, these young people are incredibly ambitious and optimistic about their own capacities.

In a recent article, Rys Farthing has demonstrated the multitude of ways in which today’s young people are actively trying to improve their
chances. First, younger generations appear \textit{en masse} to be taking the individual gamble of investing in their education – they are the most educated generation ever despite the personal debt they are incurring. Second, they seem to be trying new forms of collective action, such as occupying and hacking, that sit outside the two-party political regime and which few boomers seem willing to recognise as legitimate. Other groups of young people are actively organising to reduce poverty in more traditional ways. For example, a group in the North East that took part in action research commissioned by the Trust is running a campaign to end holiday hunger.

It’s time to listen to and work with young people to support them in achieving the future that they want. All the evidence suggests that they understand what needs to be done to replace the failures of their elders with a world that offers both security and freedom. What we need is not a set of transactional policies that shift resources, but the development of transformational relationships that shift power.

\textbf{Notes}


The YouGov study is available at: https://yougov.co.uk/news/2014/04/30/equality-more-important-wealth


Information about the devolution agenda can be found at: http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN07029


Financial Times data on the demographics that drove Brexit. Available from: www.ft.com/content/1ce1a720-ce94-3c32-a689-8d2356388a1f

