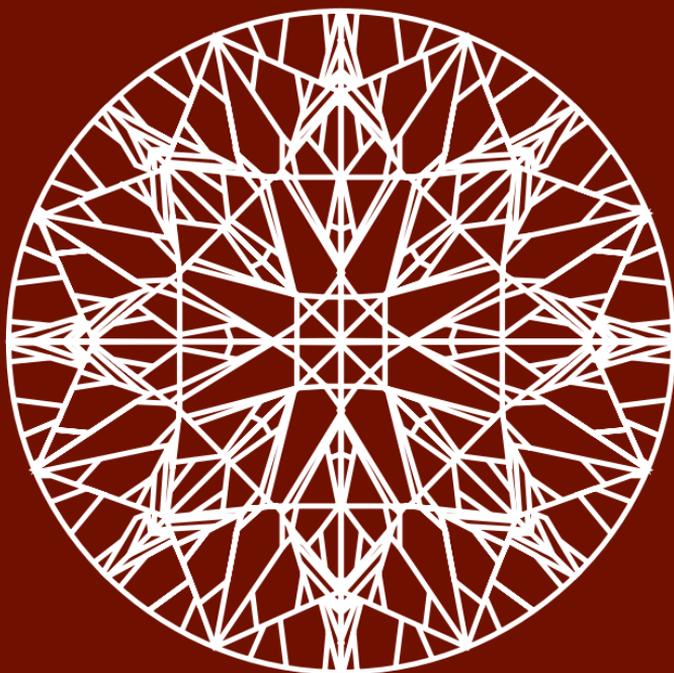# Talking for a Change

A Distributed Dialogue Approach to Complex Issues

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involve

Talking for a Change

A Distributed Dialogue Approach to Complex Issues

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About Involve

Involve are public participation specialists; bringing institutions, communities and citizens together to accelerate innovation, understanding discussion and change. Involve makes a practical difference by delivering the highest quality public participation processes possible as well as undertaking rigorous research and policy analysis into what works.

Involve is a registered charity providing advice, training, research, events and networking services to organisations and individuals interested in public participation.

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About this Pamphlet

The seed of inspiration which led to this report was first planted following a large deliberative global process in November 2009, World Wide Views on Climate Change. This event started us thinking about the ways in which dialogue with the public on the most complex, large scale and interconnected of issues might be improved.

Our theory has been informed by our experiences of delivering this process and others. Additionally we have drawn on the knowledge of colleagues from around the world who have been involved in similar dialogue processes.

In this report we situate the act of involving the public in an understanding of the quality of the issue. We believe that there is a class of issue which policy makers have yet to adequately engage the public in dialogue on. These issues are often global, interconnected and chronic, and require concerted action both by citizens and their governments. We make the case why the government needs to change the way it converses with the public about these problems.

We then go on to discuss the developments in dialogue, setting out how engagement has been used across the three types of issue. We present the rationale for why and how public engagement and dialogue needs to adapt to meet new challenges.

Foreword

The politicians competing in the recent election were haunted by a spectre that threatens the legitimacy of parliament and the government, and democracy as a whole. The expenses scandal, still making its effects felt more than a year after the story broke, the use of the Royal Prerogative to take a sceptical nation to war in Iraq, and the continued presence of hereditary peers in the House of Lords, for example, all contribute to a system where citizens feel their views are ignored.

However, democracy faces challenges beyond these. Issues such as climate change and an aging society are a new class of issue which representative democracies are ill-equipped to deal with. These issues will have effects decades into the future, require a sophisticated understanding of uncertainty and risk, have implications across disciplines as varied as economics, science and politics, and demand a new mix of institutional and individual action. In addition, individual countries are incapable of dealing with these issues alone. Yet, the world lacks the infrastructure to enable nations to cooperate together to solve them either.

Both domestically and internationally the systems and processes of government have been exposed as being unfit for purpose. The role of elected representatives making decisions on behalf of citizens is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for democracy to flourish. This pamphlet explores how new forms of democratic process and citizen participation might work in order to strengthen democracy and deal with the significant challenges that threaten society.

The last decade or so has seen an extraordinary global movement experimenting to reconfigure politics to meet these challenges. Connected by the internet, this movement is developing and sharing new ideas, processes and even institutions. Through innovations such as e-petitions, participatory budgeting, citizen summits and hyper-local social networks, new relationships between the citizens and the state are being forged.

Throughout human history, as societies have become more complex, they have generated new technologies that have revolutionised how people interact and work together. Paper, roads and the printing press have all have facilitated new ways for citizen collaboration, creating new infrastructures and institutions. These in turn have generated new and often unforeseen opportunities for citizens to get involved in decisions. The internet has brought another great revolution; people need to be flexible enough to respond to the unpredictable opportunities that will emerge.

Given the nature of the internet, the next incarnation of democratic re-engineering will be characterised by interaction, innovation and responsiveness. Where historically governments 'offered' engagement, democratic engagement can now be delivered on a more level playing field. Citizens are able to develop their own e-petitions and mobilise engagement through their social networks on the issues they care about. The idea that engagement, on issues that government deems important, can still be choreographed through the communications department is outdated.

The internet, and the new forms of democratic engagement that it heralds, need not lead to a loss of control by government; the hoards are not about to storm the town hall smart phones in hand. The internet can give citizens the power to share and generate information and

so hold those in power to account. It strengthens old networks and forges new ones. It also gives governments themselves new opportunities to reach citizens who might not engage in more traditional ways. The best governments will harness this energy to deal with issues that are far too complex and politically intractable for more traditional forms of decision making.

Perhaps the greatest shift over the past decade, in the UK at least, has been in government culture, though. Walk into many town halls and primary care trusts and the comparison with 15 years ago is palpable. Many once inhuman waiting rooms (though these still exist) have been transformed into hives of community activity bringing together community services, cafés and council businesses. These places are being reclaimed by their communities and it is the staff of these organisations who have galvanised this revolution.

That is not to say it is perfect. Participation remains, in parts, infected by the need to inform officials rather than to empower individuals. Even worse it can channel valuable civic energy down consultation cul-de-sacs when it would be better spent in traditional campaigning.

However, the search for the perfect democracy is never ending. What is critical now is that people embrace the uncertainty of the communications revolution and harness it to deal with the new class of issues which are emerging. One cannot know which methods will emerge, or if current tools will last. Although people must accept that they do not know exactly where they will end up, it is clear that the crew of the ship will have to play an important role in determining the course and navigating it safely.

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Director, Izwe　　　　　　　　　　April 2010

Introduction

This chapter introduces one of many innovative approaches to dealing with complex, distributed issues.

On 26 September 2009, 4400 citizens in 38 countries across the globe gathered to debate the challenge of climate change. But these were no ordinary kitchen table conversations; they were highly organised, connected events aiming to feed the views of ordinary citizens into the United Nations Copenhagen summit on climate change.

The citizens were selected to reflect the demographic diversity of their countries in age, gender and socio-economic background. The diversity of events was staggering; in hotel board rooms, community centre halls and university auditoriums people met and discussed. Outside the venues the weather varied from snow to tropical sunshine. Participants ranged from stay at home carers to university lecturers. Climate change sceptics sat next to convinced greens.

The challenges were multiple. In Indonesia the participants in the room spoke a dozen different first languages between them. In Switzerland linguistic considerations meant that the organisers held three events, one for French, one for German and one for Italian speaking citizens. In Egypt, and other countries where democratic deliberation is unusual, the citizens were first taken aback by the process; they had assumed they were going to listen to experts giving a lecture, not speak themselves. The scale was vast; when, after a full eight hour day, the Japanese participants went home it was still another seven hours before the participants in California would even start their event.

From start to end the process lasted over 24 hours. All participants were given up-to-date information on the matters under discussion in Copenhagen based on

the latest report from the International Panel on Climate Change (IPPC). They were asked the same questions and their answers were uploaded to a server allowing observers to compare, analyse and understand the results from different countries in real time. Participants interacted across countries at various stages over the day. For example, in the UK participants spoke to participants in Australia, Sweden and the US, making it a truly global experience.

This process, the World Wide Views on Climate Change (WWViews), was the first time that ordinary citizens across the globe were given the chance to deliberate simultaneously on key issues in advance of a UN Summit, indeed on any issue. While the WWViews process was unique in its global nature, in many ways it was a natural development from similar initiatives giving citizens the chance to influence key issues at the national or local level. This report looks at what people can learn from these new developments in order to help societies to deal with some of the most challenging issues the world has ever faced.

This pamphlet looks at successful case studies of how involving citizens directly in decision making about complex issues can yield better outcomes for all involved. We analyse these examples to find the lessons that leaders in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors should apply in the future. Society's trajectory is towards more complex issues, involving larger populations, longer time-frames and more complex interactions between different factors. Engagement must change to meet these new challenges.

In *chapter one* we argue that dialogue with the public has evolved over the past ten years in response to the quality of the issue. There have been serious moves towards moving dialogues 'upstream' in the policy-mak-

ing process, to do it proactively and in a more systematic way.[1] This has included a plethora of guidelines, codes of conduct and duties. It is now more widely acknowledged that dialogue should occur earlier in the policy process and often takes place simply because it is the *right thing to do*.

In *chapter two* of this report we argue that there are three types of issues which the public are engaged with and discuss:

Type one issues – issues which the government has a large amount of control over and affect a local, contained or specialist population

Type two issues – issues which the government has significant direct control over and yet have the potential to impact on a widely dispersed section of the population; these issues are often, but not always, scientific or technical in nature

Type three issues – highly complex issues, which are difficult for authorities to deal with; they have the potential to impact on a large and dispersed section of the population over long periods of time and in unpredictable ways

We celebrate the achievements of the last ten years in dealing with type one and two issues. Yet we maintain that it is the third type of issue which urgently needs attention. Type three issues are the most complex and interconnected in nature and have not yet been adequately addressed using public engagement. These issues, we argue, require a distributed dialogue approach.

Type three issues often necessitate action and consent at the individual level, and it is clear that, in the com-

ing decades, governments will be asking their citizens to make compromises. For example, on their carbon consumption, the age at which they retire, the amount of care that the state is able to provide during ill health or old age, or lifestyle choices such as diet and exercise. It will also be increasingly necessary to tap into the skills and capabilities of citizens themselves to define complex problems, identify possible answers, and implement solutions. To do this government, and elected representatives, will need to find ways to work with citizens rather than dictating to them.

People have much to learn from previous attempts at engagement from around the world, and for this reason this report draws on the learning from past attempts to engage with the public. In *chapter three* we present case studies of some of the most seminal engagement processes from the last ten years. There are many achievements to celebrate: pioneering processes engaged hundreds, thousands and sometimes tens of thousands of people on issues like rebuilding New York after the 9-11 attacks; influencing the Copenhagen climate change summit; making local authority budgeting decisions; and changing the electoral system. The new millennium has seen unprecedented investments in dialogue.

In chapter four, building on the learning from the case studies, we explore how dialogue might be developed to address the most complex of issues. We make the case for a distributed dialogue approach and, drawing from our own research and the body of evidence available to us, provide a breakdown of what a distributed dialogue approach might be.

1 Willsdon, J. and Willis, R. 2004. *See through science: why public engagement needs to move upstream*. London: Demos.

Chapter I

The Problem with Democracy

This chapter summarises the problem with democracy and makes the case for improved dialogue.

The democratic structures and institutions in the majority of democratic nations were built for another age. This is as true of the UK's largely Victorian and Edwardian democratic structures as it is of other countries. Pressures of time and events, combined with changes in technology and society, are increasingly exposing their limitations. In many countries, whether it is seen in the rise of the tea party movement[2] in the USA, or in decreasing voter turnout in Europe,[3] the legitimacy of the institutions of government is being called into question.

Partly in recognition that the legitimacy of representative democracy is under threat, and partly as a result of other drivers, governments around the world are looking for new ways to take decisions. It is for this reason that, over the past ten years or so, citizen engagement and participation has become so widespread. There are strong indications that this is not just a fad, but that the need to engage citizens has become embedded in the approaches of many policy makers and democratic institutions.[4]

In the UK, for example, the government has passed a number of laws which mandate greater citizen engagement. In 2000, the government implemented a code of practice on consultation.[5] A year later, in 2001, a duty was placed on all NHS bodies to involve members of the public and patients in service planning, operations and policy. In 2009, this Duty to Involve was extended to require all local authorities and a range of other public bodies to involve local people appropriately in the exercise of their local functions.[6] Moreover, the government is continually re-evaluating the effectiveness of its dialogue with the public, and public engagement has been audited and measured both by government (e.g. the Place Survey)

and independently (e.g. Hansard Society Audit of Political Engagement) throughout the last decade.

This move to engage the public is by no means restricted to the UK. Indeed many of the ideas which are now being taken up in the UK have come from elsewhere, often from developing countries; for example in participatory budgeting[7] and participatory appraisal.[8]

This transformation in the way decisions are being taken is increasingly assisted, and even driven, by technological changes. Technology is helping the citizen engagement revolution in two key ways: by giving citizens access to the critical information they need to make informed decisions, and by facilitating the sharing of opinions and entry into debate by widely dispersed populations.

In the past few years there has been an explosion in the amount of data that governments are sharing with citizens. From the US Open Government Directive[9] to London's Datastore[10] and Estonia's X-Road technology, which allows any user to connect with government databases,[11] citizens are now able to access crime statistics, departmental budgets, school results and much, much more. New tools are frequently released that allow this information to be combined or 'mashed' in ways that were inconceivable to most policy makers even three years ago.

The current revolution in communications technologies is also affecting democratic debate. The rise of social media and blogs has given anyone with access to the internet the chance to voice their concerns and aspirations in the digital ether. While these often fail to have an impact on decisions because there are few mechanisms to organise and synthesise the opinion, a story can occasionally go viral,[12] or the twittersphere can explode and catch policy makers off-guard. Organisations, whether political, corporate or charitable, are increasingly competing for citizens' time, attention and action.[13] It is no wonder

that authorities are all too often struggling to keep up.

Despite the challenges, there are a number of examples that demonstrate the potential impact that a new culture of engagement, combined with effective use of emerging technologies, could have in engaging citizens in order to gather better evidence for policy making, and to get them to take action and change their behaviours in their everyday lives. Redbridge Council in north London demonstrated how sensible use of new technology can help citizens to engage with difficult choices and influence decisions that are being made. During the latter half of 2009 the council ran the Redbridge Conversation,[14] capturing residents' opinions on the future of the borough and how improvements might be paid for. President Obama's use of the internet and new social media during his highly successful election campaign illustrates the impact of this technology.[15] Time will tell whether his attempts to harness it while in office have been effective. This is a difficult, brave new world for policy makers and politicians.

It is important to note that engagement is not just 'a good thing to do'. Policy makers mainly run engagement projects because it is conducive to better decision making. Research has found that the public can bring vital experience and expertise, and therefore improve the quality and legitimacy of the decision making.[16] Engaging with the public can result in increased public awareness of the issues and a greater sense of shared responsibility.[17] Also the knowledge that citizens bring can lead to better targeted interventions and less wastage of public resources.[18]

Experience and research show that fears that the public are too apathetic, easily-influenced or ill-informed to contribute to a meaningful decision-making debate are not true. As the various case studies in chapter three illustrate, there is now a substantial body of evidence to dem-

onstrate that citizens, governments and policy experts are equipped to have these discussions. Given time, space and balanced information, citizens who are not expert in a subject can engage intelligently with the information, bring other view points to it, and make nuanced recommendations and points of view that had not occurred to the experts.[19]

Despite the mounting evidence about the positive impact that engaging citizens can have, from neighbourhood, through national even to global level, there is not yet a redefined, effective relationship between citizens and government. However, there appears to be an emerging consensus about how engagement should happen in a range of circumstances. Engagement has until relatively recently, in national government at least, been a reactive event. Most efforts to engage with the public used to be the result of public outcry or policy failure, or happened late in the decision-making process.[20] Engagement carried out in this way has been used to rebuild trust in discredited decision-making processes. Clearly dialogue still happens in this way, but there has been a visible trend towards making it more proactive, particularly when the issues are emerging and have the potential to impact on a great number of people. The theory of dialogue has moved towards favouring "upstream"[21] or early engagement with citizens. Clearly preventing loss of public trust is better than trying to rebuild it following policy failure.

The challenges facing government also challenge democracy

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It is not only concerns about legitimacy and technology that are driving governments to engage more directly and meaningfully with citizens. The nature of the challenges

that governments are dealing with have also changed – they are now much less simple, less bounded and more intractable problems. From climate change and the ageing population, through to the rise in the prevalence and cost of chronic illnesses, the problems governments face today are complex and interlinked in many different ways. The solutions to these problems cannot be solved by simple central planning; solutions are more likely to be controversial and demand a potentially radical change in lifestyle. As a result, they will require the consent, and often the active participation, of citizens. These issues permeate our daily lives. They affect and are affected by the way people behave, consume and communicate. There are no clear solutions to these problems; they are almost impossible to deal with using a traditional, expert driven, policy-making process.

We investigate these issues in greater detail in subsequent chapters in order to better understand them, to distinguish them from other types of issue that government deals with and to explore how the nature of citizen engagement needs to change if people are to find solutions to the challenges that are raised. However, a relatively simple example will help to illustrate the profound difficulties that these new kinds of issues present to policy makers.

Cholera, while still a significant problem in the world's poorest countries, has largely been eradicated from the world's richest nations. It is a relatively straightforward problem for government to solve once the cause has been isolated. While governments may need to commit significant investment, once they have done so, top down and centrally planned interventions, such as the instillation of better sanitation facilities and clean water sources, will largely stop the problem dead. In the industrial age public engagement was often limited to public education and

awareness raising. In addition, government could easily monitor the success of such interventions and demonstrate the benefit to the public.

Today, in the West at least, many significant public health concerns are chronic conditions, often associated with lifestyle choices, such as type II diabetes. It is impossible to think of a top down, centrally planned and implemented government action or set of actions that can make a significant impact on these types of diseases. These problems therefore demand fewer directives and more individual behaviour change.[22] Many health professionals believe that public engagement and co-production have a significant role to play in helping government to manage the costs and social impacts of these chronic public health issues.[23] Clearly there is a new class of issue that lies outside the government's direct control. Government has a role, but one which is radically different.

For the purposes of this report we have split the issues into three categories: type one, type two and type three.

Type one issues are straightforward concerns that government has extensive experience of dealing with, either through traditional top-down directive processes, or by tried and tested public engagement processes. Type two issues are more complex in nature, often scientific or technical, and warrant more upstream[24] engagement processes.

We focus on the type three issues. These are complex, interconnected and distributed across multiple levels. They are highly problematic for governments as, in addition to government action, they necessitate citizen action and consent. If governments and citizens are to deal effectively with type three problems like climate change and the challenges of changing demographics, then the relationship between government and citizens will have to be reset.

As we have summarised above, and illustrate in greater detail in the case studies in chapter three, we have some experience to build on. While these foundations are relatively solid, government now needs to develop new forms of citizen engagement to deal with these emerging, highly complex issues.

2 Stop! The size and power of the state is growing, and discontent is on the rise. *The Economist.* 21 January 2010.

3 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. 2004. *Voter turnout in western Europe: since 1945.* Stockholm: International IDEA.

4 For an example of an attempt to embed engagement see the government policy paper Communities and Local Government (CLG). 2008. *Communities in Control: Real People Real Power.* London: CLG Another example is participatory budgeting which has been embedded in the way that Porto Alegre takes decisions, and is spreading much further afield. See Sintomer, Yves, Hertxberg, Carsten and Rockee, Anja. 2004. *From Porto Alegre to Europe: potentials and limitations for participatory budgeting.* http://www.dpwg-lgd.org/cms/upload/pdf/participatory_budgeting.pdf

5 BIS. 2008. *Code of Practice on Consultation* (3rd version). London: BIS. http://www.bis.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf

6 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/ukpga_20070028_en_1

7 A relatively new phenomenon in Britain and Europe had its roots in Porto Alegre Brazil where it has been used since the 1980s.

8 An approach to getting local people to identify their priorities and make decisions in partnership with the authority was first developed for use by development workers in Africa and Asia.

9 See the Whitehouse Memorandum. 2009. *Transparency and Open Government.* http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/transparencyandopengovernment

10 An initiative which aims to compile all the data from greater London authorities for citizens to examine. http://data.london.gov.uk

11 See the Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications. http://www.mkm.ee/8398

12 For example the e-petition on road pricing set up by an individual, which resulted in over a million signatories. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/6349027.stm Another example is a 2009 article in *the Guardian* on a gagging order by companies Carter Ruck and Trafigura, which spread rapidly throughout the "blogsphere" and resulted in the full story being out in the open. See http://techpresident.com/blog-entry/internet-toxic-avenger-trafigura-and-ungagging-guardian

13 Denham, Rt Hon John MP et al. 2007. Competing for airtime: is the future of participation corporate, social or political? In Creasy, S., ed. 2007. *Participation Nation.* London: Involve.

14 Redbridge Conversation website: http://cms.redbridge.gov.uk/conversation

15 See for example, Haynes, Audrey A., Pitts, Brian. 2009. Making an impression: new media in the 2008 presidential nomination campaigns. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42:53-8.

16 See for example this research, which found that engaging with communities around the New Deal for Communities programme has been considerably influential over the programme activities and outcomes: Fordham, G. et al. 2009. *Improving Outcomes: Engaging Local Communities in the NDC Programme.* London: CLG. http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/improvingoutcomesndcp See also Involve research into the costs and benefits of engagement, which explores the difference made by com-

munity engagement: Involve. 2005. *The True Costs of Public Participation*. London: Involve and Together We Can. http://www.involve.org.uk/the_true_ costs_of_public_participation For more case studies of where engagement and dialogue has impacted on decision making, see Warburton, D. 2010. *Evidence counts: understanding the value of public dialogue*. London: Sciencewise:16.

17 For example the write up of the Community X-Change workshop process on climate change issues at http:// www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/ community-x-change

18 See for example case studies relating to the experienced based design approach to improving health services. http:// www.institute.nhs.uk/quality_and_ value/experienced_based_design/ case_studies.html

19 Besides the case studies in this report, there is a wealth of evidence from citizen engagement processes that demonstrates the difference that consulting with citizens can make to the decision-making process. See for example Gavelin, K. and Wilson, R. with Doubleday, R. 2007. *Democratic technologies? The final report of the Nanotechnology Engagement Group (NEG)*. London: Involve and Sciencewise. Dialogue on stem cell research. http://www.sciencewiseerc.org.uk/cms/ stem-cell-dialogue Luskin, Robert C., Fishkin, James S. and Jowell, Roger. 2002. Considered opinions: deliberative polling in Britain. *British Journal of Political Science* 32:455–87.

20 Bishop, Jeff. 2008. *Participation in planning in England: the jury is still out*. Bristol: BDOR Limited.

21 Willsdon, J. and Willis, R. 2004. *See through science: why public engagement needs to move upstream*. London: Demos.

22 See, for example Clarke, M. and Stewart, J. 1997. Handling the wicked issues. In Reynolds, J. et al., eds. *The managing care reader*. 2003. London: Routledge.

23 Wanless, Derek. 2004. *Securing good health for the whole population*. London: HM Treasury.

24 Wilsdon, James and Willis, Rebecca. 2004. *See-through science*. London: Demos.
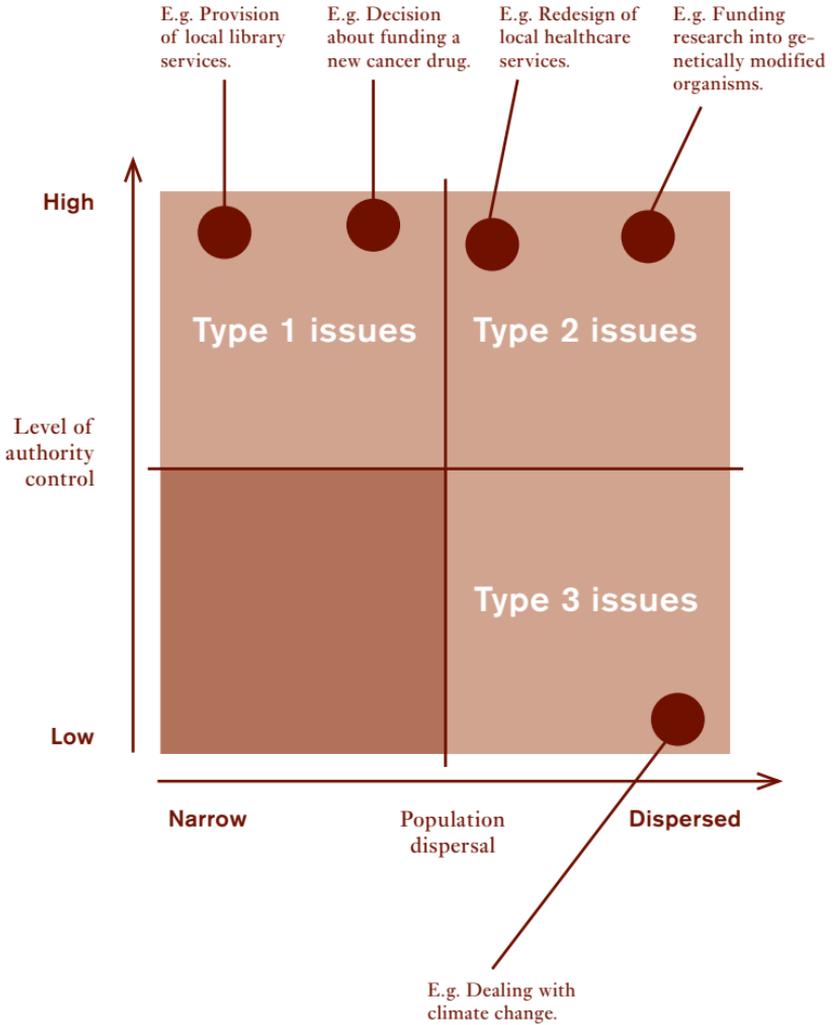
Chapter II

A Typology of Issues

In this chapter we outline a typology of key issues to help policy makers to determine the best form of engagement in different circumstances. We believe this typology makes the case for the development of a new form of citizen engagement, one that is widely distributed across society and places more power in the hands of citizens and communities.

As we have explored in the previous chapter, there are certain types of issue which require governments to engage with citizens in a radically different way. These are issues that necessitate citizen action and consent at multiple levels and so existing methods of engaging citizens can only make a limited contribution to the eventual solutions. These highly complex issues, while small in number, are growing in prominence. Their impacts, if fully realised, are likely to threaten both public trust and faith in government and democratic institutions. These issues call for a renewed approach to engaging the public. However, such an approach will require imagination and political courage. The typology will help policy makers to distinguish these emerging issues so as to focus resources effectively. In addition, we hope that it will help readers to understand their consequences for government–citizen relations.

The typology
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This typology shown in chart A illustrates the characteristics of various issues based on how much control government can exercise over the issue and its size and scope as measured by the size and geographical spread of the affected population. We have mapped the level of government control, low to high (y-axis), over the issue, against the level of dispersal of the population affected by the issue (x-axis). On the x-axis 'Narrow' means that the is-

Chart A:
A Typology of Issues

E.g. Provision of local library services.

E.g. Decision about funding a new cancer drug.

E.g. Redesign of local healthcare services.

E.g. Funding research into genetically modified organisms.

High

Type 1 issues   Type 2 issues

Level of authority control

Type 3 issues

Low

Narrow   Population dispersal   Dispersed

E.g. Dealing with climate change.

sue is contained to a relatively specific and easily defined locality or population. 'Dispersed' means that it has the potential to impact on a diffuse and wide range of people. At the far end of this axis it may well be difficult to predict in advance how individuals and communities will approach an issue, or what 'stakeholder' hat they will be wearing; we explore this in further detail below.

However, all the way across the horizontal axis, whether an issue affects a small group of people or a large dispersed population, there are likely to be well-organised, vocal and powerful stakeholder groups attempting to claim the debate, evidence and arguments. Public engagement in these circumstances, no matter on which part of the axis the issue falls, will be challenging, complex and require a range of skills and experience from those responsible.

Type one issues – These are issues that governments have long experience of dealing with. They involve making decisions about the provision of services, or the impact of a new law or regulation, for example. They tend to impact on an easily identifiable (if not easily reached) section of the population, for example library users in a specific locality. Some of these issues may have a wide impact, but only require the input from a specific group of stakeholders as it is unlikely that the wider public will provide a different perspective, for example a National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) drug approval process for a specific form of cancer or changing regulations for HGV drivers. While these issues are often controversial for the specific groups affected they are often, although by no means always, uncontroversial within wider society. They are also often, but again by no means always, local issues.

Examples of type one issues:
— a planning application to build a shopping centre
— a NICE decision on drug allocation
— a local authority consultation on taxi licensing

Type two issues – These are more complex and wide reaching than those in type one, but government still retains much direct control. Issues like this have gained in prominence over the past ten years as the result of a number of developments, most notably the public rejection of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the BSE crisis. The Science for All Report, released in 2010, details the commitment of government and the science sector to engage the public more effectively in these types of issues.[25] The types of decisions falling into this category range from those taken by research councils into basic research (for example around nanotechnology and geo-engineering), through to those taken by regional or national government on where and how flood defences are built. They can also occur when local authorities take wide-ranging decisions about budgets, for example. Policy makers are increasingly recognising that the public is no longer content to leave decisions about such issues to the experts and politicians.

Over the same period, these issues have become more important as subjects of public engagement, partly because they are vital in a modern economy and partly because methodological developments in citizen engagement have made engagement with them more robust and useful. Finally, policy makers have also become more aware of the value that such engagement processes can bring to decision making and so are more willing, and able, to commission them.

Type two issues differ from those in type one as individual citizens might not readily identify themselves as

stakeholders of some type two issues. For example, basic research into nano-technology seems remote to most people, yet the incorporation of nano-particles in food, for example, affects us all. In other cases, citizens are more aware of the issue and how it impacts on them. However, they could wear a range of different stakeholder hats depending on how they approach the issue and on how it is framed. For example, a single individual could be an employee, a mother concerned about childhood cancer and a budget-strapped electricity consumer. The identity that such an individual takes on will have a profound impact on the way they approach a dialogue about nuclear energy, for example.

In addition, these issues are often high profile and controversial. They build and sustain powerful lobby groups, which dominate the public debate and discourse, in the media at least.

On the vertical axis, the level of government control is often relatively high because regulation or funding decisions play the most significant role in the eventual impact of the issue on the public. However, as the furore about GMOs demonstrates, getting the decision wrong and failing to engage effectively can lead to government and other actors losing control of an issue, making further decisions harder to take and implement.

> **Examples of type two issues:**
> — a local authority needing to understand the priori-
>   ties of local residents before allocating a budget
> — a research council developing its geoengineering
>   research programme
> — a decision around the regulations for the
>   disposal of nuclear waste

Type three issues – These are issues, like climate change and the impact of aging populations, which have emerged as having critical public policy relevance. They will continue to be felt in the policy process for decades to come. They will impact, and require action, at the local, national and global levels. These issues combine high complexity with a limit to the power that government can take directly and the most effective actions are likely to be ones that are integrated and coordinated across all these levels. The evidence about their impact is uncertain and all the policy choices open to governments carry levels of risk that are to some degree unquantified. These policy choices will have significant, yet varied, impacts on different groups of citizens. This will create short-term winners and losers even if society as a whole is better off years down the line. Existing engagement processes have tended to struggle with type three issues.

Decisions about how, and even if, to deal with climate change, for example, will constrain policy choices in other areas; the world faces bald choices about how much to invest in renewable energy compared with dealing with malaria, for example. Crudely put, there is not enough money or political capital to deal with all of the issues facing the world, and dealing with some will almost certainly make action against others more difficult. The choice about whether or not to deal with an issue, as well as how to deal with it, is based more on values and priorities than on expert advice or 'hard' evidence. All policy choices for dealing with these types of issue will change the trajectory of societies forever. Traditional decision-making structures are ill-suited to build the consensus needed to chart a course to a shared destination.

Governments will be able to deal with aspects of these issues, but cannot solve the problems alone. They have the power to implement a range of policies to deal

with climate change for example. These will range from investing in a different energy mix to reduce CO2 emissions, and creating frameworks of incentives to move industry towards using low carbon fuels. However, many of these policies, such as a large scale move to wind farms, require consent at the local level as they will impact on the local environment. Governmental priorities around climate change come directly into conflict with local priorities about environment. Governments are unable to open up multiple battles at the local level and expect to be able to remain in power for long. In addition, government action alone will not be enough. Individuals and communities will have to take informed action to reduce their own emissions, yet government action is notoriously bad at provoking the sorts of behaviour change required.

In short, the issues themselves are distributed across time, space and populations. The solutions must be similarly distributed.

Examples of type three issues:
— meeting the challenges associated with an
  ageing society
— designing workable policies to tackle
  climate change
— designing policies to deal with the banking crisis

We have chosen to leave the lower left quadrant of chart B blank as there are few issues at this level which are of interest to the public. Issues that impact on a small number of people, often within the household and over which government has limited control, lie outside the scope of this paper. Where these issues do exist they are most likely to lie outside the realm of government responsibility, for example relate to how people spend their leisure time. If such an issue has wider impacts it tends rapidly to
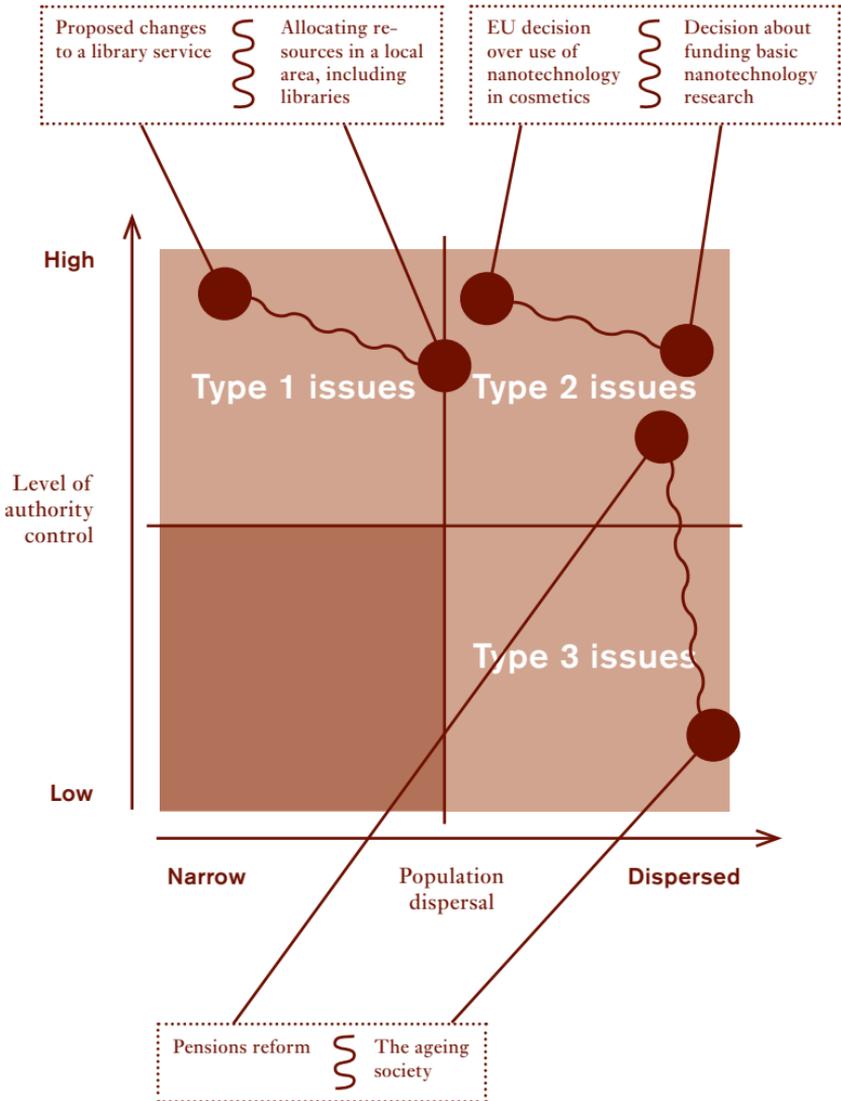
become a type one issue as government reacts.

This typology is not an exact tool; like all models it is a simplification. It is, however, a useful guide to understanding which types of engagement might be useful in different situations. It also clearly demonstrates what it is that makes type three issues extraordinary. This typology should therefore be used as a flexible tool. The axes given represent our best attempt at formulating a method of mapping these issues.

This typology should also help policy makers to be clearer in the way they talk about issues of concern. This is because the way that questions are framed will have a significant bearing on the issue's typology. This is demonstrated in chart B. The way an issue is framed will determine the type of engagement process that appears most relevant (see chapter four).

Chart B is intended to help policy makers and dialogue practitioners to think about how issues should be managed and framed. One way to tackle type three issues would be to split them up into multiple type two problems. Although this might be a feasible way to deal with individual aspects of the issue, it fails to recognise its interlinked nature, and that changes to one aspect of the problem could have huge implications for another aspect; all must be considered in the round. It will not, alone, be sufficient to solve the problem and does not address either the need for wide public awareness, or the requirement for individual behaviour change, for example.

Chart B:
An illustration of how the way we frame our question
can affect its classification

Proposed changes to a library service / Allocating resources in a local area, including libraries

EU decision over use of nanotechnology in cosmetics / Decision about funding basic nanotechnology research

High

Type 1 issues   Type 2 issues

Level of authority control

Type 3 issues

Low

Narrow   Population dispersal   Dispersed

Pensions reform / The ageing society

The nature of type three issues

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Certain types of issues are best met through traditional means. With type one issues the government has primary and direct control over the resolution of the problem. The scale and extent of the issue are confined within a local area or outside the scope of wider public interest.

Our typology defines type two issues as those which are larger scale and have implications and impacts over longer periods of time than type one issues. However, the onus of control still lies with governments. These are very often issues of a technical or scientific nature. A concerted effort has been made to deal more proactively with these types of issues in recent years,[26] with the development in upstream forms of engagement around subjects as diverse as nanotechnology[27] and GM foods.[28]

By mapping the issues in this way it is possible to identify where existing public engagement methodologies are inadequate. It is the type three issues which require attention. Type three issues are difficult for the state to manage using legislation and government investment alone, and yet the dangers of not acting are potentially devastating. Two critical examples facing the nations of the world today are climate change and the ageing population. These problems are:

International – These issues cross borders; nations are unable to implement effective decisions alone. They are fluid in nature. They affect, and are affected by, international movements of thought, consumption and action.

Interconnected – Actions in one sphere, say energy policy, can have profound implications and effects in others such as politics, manufacturing policy and health. These effects are likely to make themselves felt in different ways

at the local, national and global levels; they will often be unforeseen and unpredicted, and need to be considered as a system.

Intergenerational – The impact of these issues will be felt for decades and by generations in different ways. Paying for action now, for example, will cost older people more, but reduce the more negative effects on their children and grandchildren later. There are no right answers in deciding how to balance these intergenerational effects.

Distributed – The impacts of, and responsibilities for, these issues are distributed across multiple layers of society, across different stakeholders and actors, and across time and space. They require both top-down action, and bottom-up consent and action.

Life changing – These issues require governments and citizens to change their behaviour, habits, visions of the future and even values.

These issues have the potential to cost society dearly. For example, the changing demographic structure of many western nations means that state pensions are growing increasingly expensive. Changes to government policy in this area will have profound implications for the lifestyles of individual pensioners. However, inaction will mean that cuts are inevitable to other public services. In other words, whether the government takes action or not, the nature of the state–citizen relationship is likely to alter in relation to care, the provision of health, the structure of the economy and in many other areas of life. In order to face up to this crisis it is likely that governments will need to engage meaningfully with citizens about the changing nature of this relationship as they try to balance the needs of differ-

ent generations, and the demands of citizens and diverse stakeholder groups.

Dealing with the pensions crisis is likely to require more care outside the state. However, governments struggle to harness the power of grassroots communities and individual citizens outside a contractual, service delivery relationship. Instead, they tend to deal with this type of issue by trying to change the behaviour of some or all sections of society, such as the Act on CO2 campaign[29] and the Change4Life campaign,[30] which was aimed at parents and children at risk of obesity.

However, top down edicts and complex messaging[31] are often not the best way to achieve these types of behaviour change.[32] While communicating the problem combined with the expert-generated solution is attractive, there are more effective ways of dealing with some of the most intractable of these types of issues. In the area of policy to tackle chronic and lifestyle-related conditions such as diabetes and lung cancer, for example, affording more power to individuals has the potential to have a bigger impact on behaviour than any social marketing campaign could.[33]

This is true also for issues where compromises between different areas of life are required. For example, in considering how to reduce energy use, engaging the public in what the compromises are between different forms of energy reduction is likely to prove much more effective in changing behaviour than centrally dictated and communicated solutions; different people prioritise different things. The relationship between the state and citizen has changed and is no longer one of deference and compliance; for these complex policy areas government needs to recognise this and change the way it relates to the public.

In the same way that town halls have been opened up to deal with type one issues, space needs to be cre-

ated for debate around type three issues. These complex issues require governments to mediate between the many different views on the problem and contradictory interests.

In the following chapter we present some of the best in engagement processes from around the world, highlighting some of the more innovative methods around engaging the public in complex decision making. Not all of these case studies deal with type three issues. However, each example can contribute to an understanding of what an appropriate approach to engagement might look like. In chapter four we present our typology of approaches, and suggest that we need to move towards a distributed form of dialogue.

25 Science for All Expert Group. 2010. *Science for all*. London: Department for Business Innovation and Skills.

26 See, for example Stilgoe, J. and Sykes, K. 2009. A little more conversation. In Stilgoe, J. ed. *The road ahead: public dialogue on science and technology*. Didcot: Sciencewise.

27 See for example, Jones, R. 2009. Public engagement and nanotechnology: the UK experience. In Stilgoe, J. ed. *The road ahead: public dialogue on science and technology*. Didcot: Sciencewise.

28 For example the 2003 GM nation debate, archive article. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2003/sep/24/higher-education.uk2

29 http://actonco2.direct.gov.uk/

30 http://www.nhs.uk/change4life

31 For example, research has identified the complexity faced by citizens due to the lack of an overarching narrative from government on cutting carbon emissions: Ipsos Mori. 2009. *The big energy shift: a report from Citizens' Forum*. London: Ipsos:20.

32 The same research identified that government should provide information and advice to citizens on how to participate to achieve goals for cutting carbon emissions: Ipsos Mori. 2009. *The big energy shift: a report from Citizens' Forum*. London: Ipsos:20.

33 See, for example the Expert Patients Programme. 2010. *Self care reduces costs and improves health: the evidence*. London: Expert Patients Programme.

Chapter III

Case Studies

In this chapter we present some case studies of recent public dialogue processes. These examples all have features that might appear in a distributed dialogue.

About the case studies
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In order to test the typology contained within the last chapter we spoke to project managers from a variety of recent and innovative dialogue processes from around the world. The examples reflect the leading developments in public dialogue over the last several years. All have incorporated innovation in application of method and objectives. They have been ambitious in addressing their particular issues through processes which have engaged with a large number of participants.

There is much to learn from previous attempts to engage on complex issues. In spite of the differences between the examples presented here, we believe that there are lessons to be learnt from each of them in helping us to develop a new form of dialogue to address the most complex and interconnected of issues. Some of these case studies have taken pioneering steps in experimentation with new technologies and in the blending of local, state and international engagement. They all reflect a desire to involve citizens in understanding and navigating the tradeoffs and compromises associated with challenging issues. Taken together it might be argued that there is consensus of opinion over what this new form of dialogue could look like.

Deliberations about democracy
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Case study one: Power 2010

A large-scale online and offline event. This resulted in participants making recommendations for reform to the UK political system.

Why was it needed? Low public engagement and lack of trust in politicians and the political system is not a new phenomenon. However, it has become an increasing public concern in light of numerous shocks to public confidence, largely the expenses crisis. The Power 2010 campaign emerged as a response to this, although it is also part of a wider continuing agenda for democratic empowerment.

What happened? On 9 and 10 January 2010, for the first time ever, a microcosm of the UK congregated in one space to discuss what political reforms they would most like to see implemented in the next parliament. This timely event consisted of 130 randomly selected participants drawn from a statistically representative YouGov sample. These citizens of varying political interest and persuasion spent the weekend in small groups discussing 58 proposals and asking questions to panels of experts during plenary sessions. These proposals originated from the 4000 plus individual reform proposals which were submitted by the public to Power 2010 online in November 2009. These were then narrowed to the 58 broad proposals by a team at Southampton University to be discussed at the event; each proposal listed the number of people who subscribed to the notion. The 58 proposals were distilled into six topic categories in order to help to structure the deliberation: elections and voting, parliament, political par-

ties, Europe, devolution and local government, and rights and freedoms (each discussed separately).

This was a deliberative polling event where participants were given briefing materials in advance in order to ensure informed deliberation. Participants completed pre- and post-event questionnaires to track changes in their attitudes. Success was measured by changes in opinions as well as how informed participants became. The results[34] show changes in ranking of almost all proposals, increased awareness[35] and a generally positive evaluation.[36]

There were some difficulties for the organisers to contend with. For example, there was a high drop-off rate because the event took place during significant disruption of public transport and roads; of the 200 randomly selected participants only around 130 arrived at the event. This was a concern because the deliberative polling method is characterised by its methodological robustness and sampling frame. Another challenge was the large amount of information the participants had to cover.

The process was significant because it had the potential to make an impact on policy through the campaign which followed the event.

It blended large-scale, online, bottom-up engagement (through the Power 2010 website) to inform the direction and briefing materials with the small group discussions. It also showed how citizens can looks at multiple issues and develop balanced views. The process is still ongoing as this pamphlet is being drafted so it is too early to judge its success. However, it demonstrates the direction that some are trying to take citizen engagement.

Case study two: Ontario Citizens' Assembly
A randomly selected citizens' assembly. Participants took part in a process of learning, consultation and deliberation. This resulted in them recommending

a new form of electoral system, which then went to a public referendum.

Why was it needed? The impetus for this originates from the Select Committee on Electoral Reform. The Select Committee was made up of members of the provincial parliament from across the political spectrum. They were commissioned by the Ontario government because the electoral system in Ontario was increasingly being seen as unfair and lacking representation.

What happened? On 27 March 2006 the Ontario government announced the creation of a Citizens' Assembly of Electoral Reform.[37] Its mandate was to assess whether the province should retain its current single member plurality system or adopt an alternative.

Through a civic lottery, 100,000 letters were sent to citizens across the province. From the 7000 responses to participate, 103 were randomly selected, with one from each electoral district; 50% were women and a broad range of occupations, ethnicities and ages were represented. The 104 members of the Assembly (including the Chair George Thomson) participated in three phases. These were developed, supported and delivered by an independent secretariat, to enable the Assembly to fulfil its mandate:

> *Learning phase (Sept–Nov 2006)* – Under the impartial guidance of Dr Rose of Queen's University, the Assembly learnt about Ontario's current electoral system and the alternatives in place in various countries.

> *Consultation phase (Nov–Feb 2007)* – Central to this phase was outreach and input from the wider public. This involved written suggestions, interac-

tion with the public through their website and public meetings.

Deliberation phase (Feb–Apr 2007) – In this stage of the process the Assembly reflected on what was learnt from the previous phases. It then decided on two alternative models to design: Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system and Single Transferable Vote. This was then narrowed to MMP through an overwhelming consensus. However, when put to referendum in October 2007 it failed to get enough support at the ballot box.

It might be suggested that more could have been done to build the public profile of the Assembly, and more investment might have been made in the relationship with the media. Greater involvement of high profile figures in the legislature could have been beneficial in creating stronger ties between the public and political sphere. Despite extensive campaigns, many were not informed about the referendum or the proposed MMP system.

Despite these issues the Citizens' Assembly of Electoral Reform was a pioneering example of innovation in public engagement. The Assembly demonstrated the capacity of citizens from a wide range of backgrounds to learn about electoral systems, make an informed decision about a very complex issue and reach a consensus. It showed how citizens can be empowered through devolved decision making by allowing them to propose the issue in the referendum. The citizens involved were not simply participants but members of an active political body responsible for the consultation process and the final decision taken. This was an experiment in democracy which went beyond giving citizens a voice. It gave them real decision-making powers. In large part this was

achieved because the experiment was commissioned by the government, thus showing it had potential legitimacy for effecting results beyond the Assembly. The Citizens' Assembly represented a very brave step by elected politicians. The results demonstrate that placing trust in citizens can be worthwhile when dealing with issues that politicians find difficult to solve on their own.

Deliberations about development and the economy
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Case study three: Listening to the City
A large scale deliberative process and online forum. This aimed to facilitate public consensus over the redevelopment of lower Manhattan.

Why was it needed? The aftermath of September 11 2001 left New Yorkers with two pressing issues about the future of the site: How were the victims to be remembered? How was the area to be rebuilt? To address these questions, a deliberative event was organised by numerous academic institutions and public participation specialists. The event[38] was sponsored by the Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York.[39]

What happened? In July 2002, approximately 5000 people from New York City and the surrounding region took part in a series of public meetings.[40] The aim was to reach a consensus for the redevelopment of lower Manhattan and an appropriate memorial for 9/11. Six concepts for development were proposed by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) at the event, all of which advocated some type of memorial and commercial developments. The concepts were rejected

by the participating citizens and a consensus was later formed on the importance of adding a major "ambitious" landmark to the Manhattan skyline. There was also strong support for the development of the World Trade Center site and a memorial to be a closely integrated project. Following the event there was an online dialogue, which involved 818 participants discussing similar issues.

Listening to the City used the methodology of 21st Century Town Meetings.[41] It successfully combined discussions within small groups (of 10–12 people) with large-scale collective decision making via the use of networked laptops. Ideas were generated from the small groups, which were then fed into the laptops. These were then transmitted to teams who worked to code them and develop priorities and questions, which were placed on the main screen. Participants were then able to vote on priorities. The methodology allowed this huge group of diverse participants to work effectively as a whole. The technology helped to forge a close connection between the larger group and the small group discussions, enabling the questions and keypad voting to have an intimate bearing on the deliberations. The sum of the parts resulted in a truly dynamic event.

Several issues arose. For instance, a large percentage of the online group suggested creating a skyscraper as a memorial as well as re-establishing the site's financial significance, in contrast with the main event participants who wanted a blend of commercial and affordable housing. The difference in demographic make-up and tensions between the online and offline dialogue highlight issues surrounding the impact of different methods. It is not clear how to weight the responses gained through the different channels.

Listening to the City was organised by the Civic Al-

liance and had close cooperation and sponsored support from the LMDC. The majority felt the Civic Alliance could be a strong advocate and that the LMDC and Port Authority would listen. Furthermore, only roughly 20% of participants[42] were concerned that the outcomes of the event would not be heard or connected to policy.

This demonstrates that deliberative events, which have the investment and attention of decision makers, can be successful in making the voice of the public effective. During Listening to the City gathering a responsive dialogue was formed between participants and policy makers. The event also highlights the potential that new communications technology has for linking small and large group discussion, adding to the dynamism of the event and helping to ensure that the process is flexible.

Case study four: Voices and Choices, Ohio

This was a series of devolved town meetings, online forums, interviews and leadership workshops in which participants discussed broad themes relating to the economic priorities of Ohio.

Why was it needed? Voices and Choices[43] was a response to a changing economic situation. It was created by Fund for Our Economic Future to deal with what its representatives saw as a shift from individual communities to regions as the unit able to deal with competition in the global economy. The project was instigated with the aim to make the 16 county-regions of Northeast Ohio economically resilient.

What happened? From August 2005 to June 2006 citizens of Northeast Ohio identified the main strengths and challenges facing their socio-economic development.

From July 2006 to November 2006 discussions took place on how to overcome the challenges facing Ohio and prioritise investment. The challenges for prioritisation included introducing equitable and accountable schooling, reducing urban sprawl, attracting business and promoting racial equality. The findings and solutions have influenced the region's economic agenda through the Advance Northeast Ohio initiatives.

Voices and Choices employed various methods (21st Century Citizen Town Meetings, online surveys, interviews, leadership workshops) and engaged with over 21,000 citizens. By using a variety of methods and undertaking a phased approach, a wide range of actors were able to participate. For instance the leadership workshops placed over 1000 representatives of government, business and non-profit organisations at the centre of drafting a list of challenges. Through the town hall meetings, further leadership workshops, online "choicebooks" and extensive community conversations, these general challenges were prioritised along with the provision of solutions. This approach seeks to bring together actors who play a variety of different roles in Ohio's development and wellbeing; it enabled communication and learning between these actors. Furthermore it managed to achieve this without marginalising the voices of citizens.

An issue during the various phases was integrating the wide assortment of data collected. Another obstacle was ensuring that the opinions of the various actors had equal weight.

However, what is special and innovative about Voices and Choices is its decentralisation. The community conversations (and materials provided) enabled discussions to take place in private and public locales. It involved approximately 13,500 participants discussing the broad themes and providing their own solutions. The leadership work-

shops provided a space for communication between organisation leaders and helped to bring about cooperation, for example between city managers and village mayors.[44]

Case study five: Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre

This is an ongoing programme, rather than a one-off event. Since 1989, the local government of Porto Alegre has implemented what it calls the "participatory budget" (PB). At the heart of this policy is the handing over of decisions on the distribution of municipal funds for basic capital improvements – paved streets, drainage and sewer investments, for example – to neighbourhood-based forums.[45]

Why was it needed? The history of deciding and implementing public budgets in Brazil is characterised by serious deformations related to power concentration, resource waste, political affairs and corruption. Initially, key issues related to access to basic amenities and improving the services on offer to the poorest sections of the city. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Porto Alegre's municipality spent the majority of its investment resources in middle class neighbourhoods – to the detriment of the poor majority;[46] in 1989 a third of the city lacked access to basic amenities (water, sanitation, health care facilities and schools).[47]

What happened? When The Workers' Party (PT) came to power in 1989, it began to implement a creative experiment of actively engaging a broad spectrum of citizens to formulate the city's budgets. Known as participatory budgeting, this is a process in which citizens participate in the allocation of municipal or public budgets by working

together to define needs and implement projects in their communities.

Currently over 40,000 people a year participate in budget assemblies. Coupled with this is the inclusion of a myriad of local associations and popular organisations – so well over 100,000 persons are linked in some way to the city's budget.[48]

The process works by splitting the city into 16 regions and the topics for discussion into five different themes. There are two rounds of plenary in each region, and on each theme. These are held every year. Citizens meet in March just before the first round of formal assemblies to put forward their ideas and select regional delegates.

The first round of meetings between citizens and the executive are held in April. After this (March–June) informal preparatory meetings are held with community associations.

The second round takes place in July and includes two elected councillors from each of the 16 regions, two delegates for each of the main themes and members from the civil servants' trade union. These delegates make up the Council of Participatory Budgeting (COP). The COP then debates criteria for resource allocation and elaborates constituents' demands. They meet for a two-hourly meeting once a week until the budget is finalised.[49] Once the budget has been formally agreed by the mayor and other officials, what has been agreed begins to be implemented.

The PB initiative has had much success. For example sewer and water connections increased from 75% of total households in 1988 to 98% in 1997.[50] There has been a fourfold increase in the number of schools, the health and education budget has increased from 13% in 1985 to almost 40% in 1996, and the number of public housing units increased from 1700 in 1986 to 27,000 in 1989.

The PB initiative has had a redistributive effect, ensuring that lower income and densely populated regions receive greater levels of resources in relative and absolute terms. Crucially, because citizens have participated there are more people-orientated budget allocations, which are implemented in a timely manner.

Porto Alegre's PB is often heralded internationally as a best practice model of urban governance. At the UN Habitat Conference in Istanbul 1996 it was recognised as one of the 42 best forms of urban governance in the world.[51] The process is particularly commendable as it is open to all persons affected, not just elites. The participants involved have effective decision-making power instead of being merely consulted. Since its beginning in South America PB has spread across the world, and is in operation in various guises in Europe and Africa.

Deliberations about future visions
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Case study six: European Citizens' Consultation
An EU-wide deliberative engagement process.
It allowed members of the public to make recommendations for the future of the EU.

Why was it needed? On 13 October 2005 the European Commission launched its "Plan D" ("D" stands for democracy, dialogue, debate). The Commission aimed to create a framework which can build an EU-wide consensus on its future policies. Plan D's impetus is largely the product of French and Dutch voter rejection of the European Constitution in June 2005. This prompted the heads of state and government to call for a "period of reflection" in order to enable member states to initiate national debates on

the future of Europe. Plan D sought to enable this "reflection" by encouraging such national debates.

What happened? The European Citizens' Consultation 2007[52] (EEC) was the first ever EU-wide opportunity for the public to discuss political, social and environmental issues. Through a random sampling process (which was representative of demographic diversity), citizens were chosen to deliberate and make recommendations for the future direction of the EU. The main themes for discussion were: energy and environment, family and social welfare, and the EU's global role and immigration. The event attempted to close the gap between the EU and its citizens by placing them in an advisory capacity to policy makers.

This was a unique form of consultation as the 27 member-state debates were coordinated across national borders and the results of voting were shared during the course of the National Citizens' Consultation. At the UK event participants were divided into groups of eight, each with a table facilitator to debate key issues. Priorities and suggestions were then fed into a networked laptop. This was edited and then transferred to a main screen in plenary; the participants then voted on their favourite suggestions using keypads.

The use of communications technology enabled everyone's voice to be heard. The instantaneous nature of the information gathering allowed the tables to see the unity of their actions during the plenary sessions. The deliberations also enabled participants to take a proactive role as they set the agenda of the debates and formulated the recommendations to policy makers.

The events were staggered across several weeks, so the results didn't appear as simultaneous as organisers might have hoped. Because it was a pilot, and because of the broad topic for discussion, there was limited direct

impact on policy at the European or national level.

Nevertheless, the European Citizens' Consultation can be seen as a pioneering model for cross-European dialogue processes. This was the first event of its kind in which a dialogue was forged between policy makers and citizens of Europe.

Case study seven: My Estonia

A brainstorming, open space event, which brought together 11,000 citizens to come up with ideas on the future of Estonia.

Why was it needed? Developing civil society has been a major concern for the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO) and the My Estonia project[53] was initiated as an opportunity for strengthening this and experimenting in bottom-up approaches in public engagement. The confidence to implement My Estonia rode on the success of the previous Let's Do It! project, which attracted 50,000 volunteers to clean up waste across Estonia.

What happened? On 1 May 2009, over 11,000 people across Estonia participated in a brainstorming session to discuss the problems facing Estonia and possible solutions. It was an open space[54] event; participants posted their potential discussion topics, debated various issues facing Estonia in small groups (the majority facilitated) and then wrote down their potential solutions. The aim was to find out what Estonians (and nationals living abroad) thought about the country and their community, and what their visions were for the future.

By 17 August, there were 2524 summarised ideas, collected from over 400 localities across Estonia. These

ideas were stored in an "idea bank" and then analysed. After creating themes and keywords, the ideas were analysed by considering what had been discussed, how urgent the problem was and who was to provide the solution. It was found that participants saw themselves as being able to provide solutions to problems. Their main priorities were matters at community and city level, followed by national issues, those affecting mankind in general, and lastly those affecting the home and immediate environment.

One of the highlights of the event was the range of views expressed within the groups. The method enabled multiple issues and solutions to be discussed. Participants could leave their group and join another to discuss issues they felt were more relevant, so participants remained dedicated and interested. Various civic organisations also gained from the event as participants acquired information on avenues of civic action.

There was some difficulty in striking a balance between structuring the debate and allowing free and evolving conversations. The organisers felt in hindsight that they had tried to control the event too much and that they should have allowed it to evolve more freely. Also the rather amorphous design and lack of clarity about the goals and who would hear and act on the suggestions caused some confusion among participants, in contrast with the previous large-scale initiative Let's Do It! 2008 clean-up Estonia day, when goals and implementation were concrete.

Nevertheless there was a still a strong desire to devolve the agenda to the participants themselves. My Estonia was successful in harnessing the self-organising abilities of citizens and their capacity to set the agenda for discussion themselves. It used existing public spaces and provided the capacity for the event to take place; the rest was civic energy.

Strengths and weaknesses of the case studies
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In all of the events and processes described above there was a commitment to giving a voice to members of public in areas of decision making where the opinions and expertise of citizens would previously have been unheard.

To grant citizens a voice, all case studies have experimented with innovative methods of engagement. Many have made the most of new technologies to reach a growing audience and have often mixed approaches to engagement in one process.

Where most of the examples have fallen short, however, is in guaranteeing a direct channel into the decision-making process. In many cases they have also been unsuccessful in generating much public interest beyond that of the public participants involved. The media has been approached in some of these cases to help build profile and impact, but there is still a distinct lack of "bite"; media companies have yet to find such public engagement exercises attention-grabbing. Something can be learnt from the deliberative polling methodology, which in being able to demonstrate a transformation in opinion through information and deliberation gives the media a hook on which to create an interest piece. However, such methods, as with many deliberative workshop approaches, rarely engage beyond the stratified sample of participants. It is vital to grant all interested voices a platform to be involved in decision making about the most complex and interconnected of issues. After all, the decisions made will ultimately require the consent and action of everyone.

How can an approach to engagement with an impact equivalent to that of the more research-orientated processes, with the empowering remit of more devolved, bottom-up approaches such as My Estonia and Voices and Choices, be developed? There must be a move away from

the one-off engagement processes, which deal with the most complex of issues, and move towards a distributed dialogue approach, building on the inspirational practices of previous attempts at large scale engagement, in particular those presented here.

34 Center for Deliberative Democracy. 2010. *Power 2010 Deliberative Poll Results Reform Ranking.* http://cdd. stanford.edu/polls/uk/2010/power2010-reform-rankings.pdf

35 Center for Deliberative Democracy. 2010. *Power 2010 Deliberative Poll Knowledge.* http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/uk/2010/power2010-knowledge-change.pdf

36 Center for Deliberative Democracy. 2010. *Power 2010 Deliberative Poll: Evaluation Questions.* http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/uk/2010/power2010-eval.pdf

37 For more information about the design of this process see The Ontario Citizens' Assembly Secretariat. 2007. *Democracy at Work: The Ontario Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform.* http://www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca

38 For more information about this event see http://www.listeningtothecity.org

39 For more information about the civic alliance to rebuild downtown New York see http://www.civic-alliance.org

40 See the report of the process: Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York. 2002. *Listening to the City: Report of the Proceedings.* http://www.listeningtothecity.org/background/final_report_9_20.pdf

41 For more information about this method and others visit http://www.peopleandparticipation.net.

42 Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York. 2002. *Listening to the City Final Report:* 21. http://www.listeningtothecity.org

43 For more information about this process see America Speaks. 2006. *Voices and Choices Report on the Public's Priorities for Northeast Ohio's Future.* http://www.americaspeaks.org

44 See the Voices and Choices Case study available on the America Speaks website: http://tinyurl.com/3aypsb2

45 UNESCO. n.d. *The Experience of the Participative Budget in Porto Alegre Brazil.* http://www.unesco.org/most/southa13.htm

46 Boulding, Carew and Wampler, Brian. 2010. Voices, votes, and resources: evaluating the effect of participatory democracy on well-being. *World Development* 38(1):125–35.

47 http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPOWERMENT/Resources/14657_Partic-Budg-Brazil-web.pdf

48 Leubolt, Bernhard, Novy, Andreas and Becker, Joachim. 2008. Changing patterns of participation in Porto Alegre. *International Social Science Journal* 59 (193–4):435–88.

49 World Bank. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPOWERMENT/Resources/14657_Partic-Budg-Brazil-web.pdf

50 Dominguez, Jorge. 2001. *Mexico, Central and South America: social movements.* London: Routledge.

51 UN HABITAT (2006) *Best practices database in improving the living environment* http://www.bestpractices.org

52 For the findings and recommendations of the UK event see European Citizens' Consultation. 2007. *Citizens' Perspectives on the Future of Europe.* http://ecc.european-citizens-consultations.eu

53 Praxis. 2009. *Analysis of the Idea Bank of the Citizens' Initiative "Let's Do It! My Estonia".* http://www.minueesti.ee/index.php?lng=en&leht=87&mID=1058

54 For more information about Open Space and other methods see http://www.peopleandparticipation.net

Chapter IV

Towards a Distributed Dialogue

This chapter presents the model of engagement methods and makes the case for progress towards more distributed dialogue.

Highly structured and controlled processes run from the top down are very safe for government to run, but limited in what they can achieve. For the most crucial and complex type three issues, citizens and communities should be afforded greater control over what is discussed and have more impact on the eventual policy results. In the previous chapter we cited examples of dialogue events from around the world which brought people together to talk about complex issues. In doing this we attempted to illustrate that dialogue with the public on multifaceted and challenging issues is both possible and desirable.

In compiling the case studies and in interviewing the project managers we have identified what we think are the key characteristics of these engagement processes. We use this analysis to identify the key features of citizen engagement that will be needed to deal with the type three issues described above. We have called this new approach distributed dialogue.

Chart C illustrates the types of public engagement that have traditionally been used to address type one and type two issues. There is much to celebrate. Approaches to engaging the public in these issues have developed significantly in the last ten years, demonstrating that practice can and should continue to improve. No doubt in the next ten years there will be new waves of thought and practice influencing the way people engage on these issues. However, it is necessary to ensure that those attempting to improve engagement differentiate between the two types of issue where a considerable body of experience is being built, and the third type of more complex issues. Type three issues are so critical to solve, so large

**Chart C:
A typology of methods**
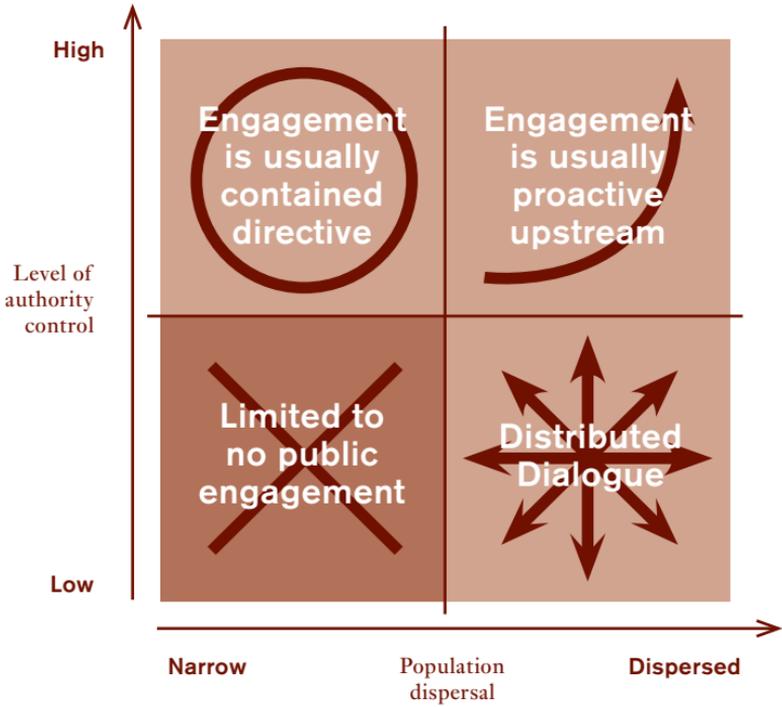
in scale and so difficult to manage that they deserve a radical new approach.

To deal effectively with complex issues such as climate change and the ageing society, governments must increase the impact of, and trust in, their engagement processes. This means creatively designing processes which enable both bottom-up and top-down influence and control. If the initiative comes only from the top, through the use of predetermined questions for example, then the resulting power imbalance impacts on people's confidence and expectations.[55] However, trusting to bottom-up action alone cannot work either because these are collective action problems requiring large-scale investment and new frameworks for changing incentives of individuals, communities and businesses. To start to solve these problems will require a central strategic approach combined with devolution of power and autonomy of action.

Approaches to engagement for each issue type
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Mapping a typology of issues is not an attempt to suggest that approaches should supersede each other, that one is better than another. Rather it demonstrates where different approaches are likely to be more or less effective.

Traditional approaches to public involvement such as consultation and surveys are most effective when used to tackle type one issues, where the objective is to make a quick, effective decision. If a problem appears straightforward and it is clear who needs to be involved, then the simplest of engagement methods will normally work. This does not mean that more inventive methods cannot sometimes be used to approach these issues. For example, box I on co-production demonstrates that the adoption of different methodologies for type one issues can lead to the

Box I

*Co-production: an innovative method
for first generation issues*

The identification of certain types of public engagement process with the different types of issues highlighted in this report is not intended to be restrictive; there are a range of ways that you can deal imaginatively with type one and type two issues.

Reactive directive consultation processes, although most suitable for many type one issues, should not have priority over other approaches. Quite often an indirect consequence of engagement will be improved relationships or increased social capital of participants, and sometimes the "softer", yet still extremely valid, objectives will be one of the main purposes for engaging. As ever, the choice of engagement method should be linked not only to the type of question you are asking but also to the context, people and overall purpose.

Sometimes a more innovative and collaborative technique will be useful for type one issues. Co-production is an example of one such method as it is ideal for building relationships, morale and capacity while also resulting in a tangible development of a service. The term co-production refers to a way of working whereby decision makers and citizens, or service providers and users, work together to create a decision or a service which works for them all. The approach is value-driven and built on the principle that those who are affected by a service are best placed to help design it.

Co-production rejects the traditional understanding of service users as dependents of public services, and instead redefines the service–user (or government–citizen) relationship as one of co-dependency and collaboration. Just as users need support from public services, so service providers need the insights and expertise of their users in order to make the right decisions and build effective services.

achievement of very different objectives alongside the simple act of taking a decision.

Type two issues have been imaginatively tackled in recent years by using upstream, proactive and deliberative methods. Typically this sort of approach involves a representative group of participants meeting together to deliberate on an emerging issue. The discussions are usually flexible in nature and concern broad topics. This is a relatively new area and will continue to evolve.

Our approach to type three issues, distributed dialogue, draws on the learning from upstream and deliberative engagement, but goes further as it attempts to deal with the challenges of scaling up the dialogue and giving citizens more power to influence the direction and destination of the process.

We argue that type three issues have not yet been adequately addressed through public engagement. In the same way that people are responding more imaginatively to type one and type two issues, a similar approach to type three issues is needed that meets their unique challenges. Too often public dialogue has not been an empowering experience for participants. There is a culture of consultation which emphasises extractive research and the intent has been to achieve methodologically rigorous results rather than provide a space for participants to contribute to the policy process in a meaningful way. [56] This is not a viable approach for type three issues for the reasons highlighted above.

Issues like climate change are large scale, complex and interconnected. It is essential therefore to engage large numbers of citizens to ensure that meaningful action is taken. These issues require more than the type of public dialogue which involves, and therefore only benefits, the few members of the public and policy makers who are directly involved.

Box II

Hypothetical example of distributed dialogue:
Public engagement on childhood obesity

Childhood obesity is considered a serious health concern in the UK and experts are predicting increased cases of cancer, heart disease and high blood pressure.

The government decides to begin a large scale conversation to work with the public to identify policies that will impact on the problem, and to better understand the difficulties faced by parents and children in maintaining a healthy diet and lifestyle.

The government, together with third sector organisations, embarks on a year-long dialogue process, which involves:

– **Deliberative engagement exercises** in regions of the UK and linked to local libraries; parents are encouraged to engage with the best science on the debates and to formulate workable policy recommendations
– **Devolving activities** to the local primary schools and Sure Start centres through engagement packs
– **setting up an online forum** for "parent watchdogs" who are encouraged to report on irresponsible practices of confectionery companies and the fast food industry
– **working with Netmums** to distribute information and to poll mothers on the various policy options

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We present here the set of characteristics that distributed dialogue is likely to need in most situations. Not all of these qualities will be suitable for all issues or situations, but they do attempt to address the deficit that exists in public engagement on type three issues.

Distributed dialogue
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Distributed dialogue is a way of engaging a significant

number of people in a long-term, meaningful debate about complex and interlinked issues. In order for this to work there need to be multiple entry points for citizens. The dialogue itself should be a continuous, evolving and collaborative conversation between authority and citizen.

Type three issues require behaviour change and action at multiple levels of society. Dialogue which is dispersed across multiple local areas will ensure that larger numbers of people can engage meaningfully in the debate and will tap in to the expertise and experience of a wider range of people. Distributed dialogue will also need an ongoing conversation between government and citizen which is carried out with different levels of government. Governments will need to be able to initiate top-down engagement with the public, while citizens and third sector organisations will need to be given the power to shape, contribute to and initiate debate.

Implementing methodologies like distributed dialogue, which attempt to bring citizen engagement to scale, suffer from a range of challenges, from methodological issues of ensuring that information is presented fairly at the multiplicity of citizen meetings, to developing ways to prevent capture by one or other side of the debate, to developing effective mechanisms for feeding results of events into the policy process and back to participants. However, the case studies we presented in the previous chapter demonstrate that many of these problems are surmountable with planning, resources and real clarity about purpose.

If it is to succeed in overcoming these challenges, distributed dialogue will need to be:
- devolved
- well promoted
- collaborative
- open rather than closed
- of mixed methodology
- influential

- internationalised
- continuous

We explore these characteristics in greater detail below. For a hypothetical example of what a distributed dialogue might look like see box II.

Devolved – Distributed dialogue will require an engagement method which can be launched from the centre, but influenced by a variety of actors for various local contexts. Such engagement will make use of networks of community activists to reach citizens at the local level. This will help government to tap into local sources of knowledge and well-springs of action. Engagement "kits" might be distributed from a central organisation and adapted by local groups to suit their needs. DIY engagement kits are widely used by practitioners working in participation, [57] but often used in isolation. [58] Groups can often remain unconnected to each other or the decision-making process. Distributed dialogue will require a clear channel for the results of the distributed conversations to feed back into decision-making processes and to participants in the process themselves. It will also require a way for local groups to communicate together, continue the debate horizontally and vertically, and plan and implement action together beyond the local level.

Third sector umbrella bodies will often be ideally placed to cascade information, training and advice to their local partners, who can then undertake dialogue in their local areas.

An example of an attempt to decentralise and devolve a dialogue is Voices and Choices, Ohio (case study four in chapter three). The community conversations and materials developed by this project allowed discussions to take place in a variety of locales, both private and public.

Well promoted – Essential to the success of distributed dialogue is the promotion of the activities to potential participants and a wider audience through the mass media. Because type three issues have the potential to impact on all citizens, for distributed dialogue to be effective, government will need to renew its effort to harness the energy of record numbers of citizens, including those who rarely engage. Very often public servants talk about avoiding "the usual suspects". Perhaps instead they should ask why there are so few of them and why they fail to attract certain groups to take part. Involve has entered into partnership with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Institute for Volunteering Research to explore questions related to how to engage larger numbers of people. Our Pathways through Participation project[59] is now beginning to identify the factors that promote and block engagement of citizens. More work like this will be needed if policy makers are to engage the numbers of citizens needed to start to deal with issues such as climate change.

The expectation would then be that these engaged participants will take the debate and conversation deeper into the community, allowing formal participants to act as bridges to the wider population. In order for this to happen the events and processes need to capture the imagination of the media and wider networks not taking direct part in the debate. Dialogue processes have previously been under-promoted. There is always limited media interest in these events, and national debates are not seen as newsworthy. The deliberative polling methodology may have something to teach policy makers as it has, in part, been designed to be used in collaboration with media outlets.[60]

Collaborative – In the past there has been a tendency to look at citizens as simply sources of data and information.

A more useful view is to shift the focus towards building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships between citizens and the state. The kind of citizen input needed when considering type three issues will come more easily after relationships and trust have been built.

Distributed Dialogue should equip citizens with the tools to engage in the debates. These tools range from signposting to the ways a person can get involved, to better information about the subjects that matter, so that people are better equipped to make informed decisions. Success will require building the capacity and confidence of citizens to engage in the debates.

Open rather than closed – Distributed dialogue requires a move away from approaches that have predetermined destinations. For example, instead of the impetus coming from the top-down or the bottom-up, approaches to dialogue should seek to apply the best of both. They should harness the capability of government to organise top-down approaches while tapping into the capacity of the grassroots to mobilise large numbers of local people in a common interest. In addition, rather than viewing dialogue as a one-off exercise to answer a specific question, government is better off looking at it as a constant interaction with citizens; at times the initiative will come from the centre, sometimes from citizens.

The My Estonia project (case study seven in chapter three) illustrates how a large scale process can be both collaborative and open rather than closed. This project harnessed the Open Space[61] methodology, facilitating collaboration between likeminded citizens as well as opening up public spaces for debate, but allowing citizens to drive the discussion and set the agenda.

Of mixed methodology – Distributed dialogue is not a new methodology; rather it is a framework within which citizens and government can work together to solve common problems. It will merge online and offline approaches and use a variety of methods at different times and in different situations. By its very nature it will have to cover the whole of the engagement spectrum, from information provision through to collaboration and empowerment.[62] This will ensure that a broad range of people are able to engage. One case where this was tried was Power 2010 (see case study one in chapter three). This dialogue process harnessed an online portal to reach thousands of people who wanted to offer their suggestions for improvements to UK democracy. This was combined with a deliberative event and followed by an online poll engaging thousands of people to whittle the suggestions down to five pledges.

Participative technologies are still under-exploited and ineffectively used in the policy process. Dialogue on type three issues will need to use a variety of communication technologies from traditional leaflets and posters, through to email, social media and text messaging. An example of where the internet was used effectively was in the World Wide Views project (see the introduction chapter), which gathered together the responses from the parallel events and allowed for real-time comparison and observation.

Many engagement professionals see new technology as an inevitable and indispensable tool, which will be used to assist the progression towards a new type of dialogue. Engagement practitioners are using new technologies to reach growing numbers of people such as e-petitions and imbedded video or audio. As technology develops policy makers will be forced to change the way in which they conduct their dialogue.

As we highlight in chapter one, citizens are also beginning to demand more data from government, to "mash" existing datasets as well as generate their own. This will change the relationship between those running the dialogue and those participating as the line between expert and citizen begins to blur. The explosion of channels through which people can now engage between themselves and with government is further changing the citizen–state relationship. It is forcing the government into more two-way conversations, as well as affording citizens themselves ways to continue debates and organise outside frameworks designed and controlled by authority. Our attempt to describe distributed dialogue recognises this shift and draws the first sketch of its implications for citizen–government engagement.

The project managers we spoke to noted that the nature of the internet is having implications for consultations at all levels from the global to the local. As technology already cuts across borders, it is difficult to continue to keep the conversations within borders, particularly around the type three issues, which have the potential to affect us all.

Using the internet to its full potential presents a number of challenges, but given the inevitability of its involvement in cross-border, or large national, engagements these challenges will have to be met head on. There is clearly a difficulty in combining dialogue with the wealth of activity and mobilised communities already expressing their opinions online, and engaging offline.

Influential – The outcomes of distributed dialogue should be linked to the policy-making cycle; it should be clear how the dialogue will feed into the decision-making process, both to engagement practitioners and to the participants in the process. The process itself should also be open to change; participants should be able to impact on

the course or design of the dialogue itself.

The project managers we spoke to in research for this pamphlet spoke of the dissatisfaction with current forms of democracy as a driver of improvements in public dialogue, and the feeling that voting alone was not sufficient, particularly in an age of global problems. Decision makers will need to bring citizens with them, but as we highlight above, this will require much more active engagement than just clever communication. Although interviewees noted that policy makers do not always recognise this need.

Internationalised – We have already noted that type three issues have no respect for national borders. As a result, no country can deal with them alone. This will mean that any dialogue may need to take place on multiple country or international platforms. An example of where this has already happened is the World Wide Views process. This process brought together 4400 citizens from 38 countries to deliberate on climate change issues ahead of the Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change (see the introduction).

When asked about the move towards global participation, the project managers that we spoke to suggested that it was a natural progression, they argued that the general public normally is left in the dark about how decisions are taken on the international stage. They felt that global dialogue processes could be used to tackle issues of a global level as well as helping to bridge the gap between global decision makers and the public. However, the challenges are daunting enough at a national level; significant investment will be needed before any global dialogue with the characteristics outlined here can take place. This is not to say that attempts are worthless, rather to understand their current limitations and ensure that policy makers are clear from the start about what can be achieved. This is what should dictate the objectives

and expected outcomes from any dialogue at the international level.

Continuous – One-off engagement processes, or processes that are confined to one facet of a problem, will not fix type three issues. Any engagement with citizens will need to be ongoing, with government committing to an evolving conversation with citizens. This in turn will require the development of a set of interlinked relationships, which are based on a shared interest. Many of these complex issues are long term in nature. As a result, changes in technology, evidence, politics and the input of citizens themselves will alter the nature of the way humans respond to the issues. Creating a citizenry with the capacity and skills to engage in a long-term dialogue with government on more equal terms will be critical. However, such dialogue will not work unless government and politicians are able to reduce their attempts to control every aspect of the decision-making process. It is only by devolving power to newly active citizens that methodologies like distributed dialogue can have any hope of success.

The role of government
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This list of characteristics for distributed dialogue is demanding. It will require government, both civil servants and politicians, to act very differently. They will have to give up a degree of power and control if such a dialogue process is to work. Government will no longer be able to lead in the traditional sense of deciding what to do, defending the decision if it is unpopular and implementing it.
     However, government will not need to abdicate all leadership responsibilities, far from it. Rather, govern-

ment's leadership role will change. Political leaders will still need to decide which issues to engage the public in, how and when. Strong leadership will be required to hold the framework together, to build and sustain emerging consensus in the face of strong stakeholder groups from either side pushing narrow perspectives and even trying to destroy the process.

In the end, the citizens taking part in the distributed dialogue will be unable to take the difficult decisions; politicians will still need to lead, fortified and guided by the results of the dialogue, but unable to abdicate responsibility for taking the final decisions.

Distributed dialogue will combine the best of grassroots approaches with the organisational ability of government-directed initiatives. It will harness the power of new technologies to improve the reach and quality of the dialogue. It will be multi-platform and highly engaging, but most of all elicit change. This will be change to policy, hearts and minds, and in the behaviour of the citizens who are involved.

55 Bryant, L., Wilcox, D. 2006. Many-to-many: lessons from Web 2.0 for participation and e-democracy. In Wilson, R., ed. *Post party politics*. London: Involve.

56 Ibid.

57 See for example the Community Power Pack which was created to help local groups to organise and facilitate discussions on the topic of empowerment. The pack contained suggestions for the format of the meeting, advice for facilitators and organisers as well as detailed information about key empowerment issues. The feedback was intended to be used by Communities and Local Government (CLG) to inform and shape empowerment activities, including the Empowerment White Paper. CLG. 2008. *Community Power Pack* London: CLG http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/powerpack

58 Luskin, Robert C., Fishkin, James S. and Jowell, Roger. 2002. Considered opinions: deliberative polling in Britain. *British Journal of Political Science* 32:455–87.

59 http://pathwaysthroughparticipation. org.uk/

60 Luskin, Robert C., Fishkin, James S. and Jowell, Roger. 2002. Considered opinions: deliberative polling in Britain. *British Journal of Political Science* 32:455–87.

61 http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/ display/Methods/Open+Space

62 For the spectrum of engagement see the International Association for Public Participation website http://www.iap2. org/associations/4748/files/IAP2%20 Spectrum_vertical.pdf

Conclusion

On 1 May 2009 over 11,000 people from across Estonia gathered at 400 venues across Estonia. Almost 1% of Estonia's population took part in the My Estonia conversation to discuss solutions to the problems and challenges they faced as citizens. The events were run by local voluntary groups using a common framework, and attracted people from all walks of life. The Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations and partner organisations coordinated the media information and gathered together the final ideas, but the organising and running of individual events was the work of a decentralised network of organisations, activists and facilitators. In the end over 2500 practical ideas were recorded, on issues ranging from education to maritime trade. They were gathered together and presented to all participants after the events. Encouragingly, given the government's budget deficit, most of the ideas were ones that citizens and the third sector could undertake themselves without accessing additional state resources or support.

This process was preceded by a national citizen-led initiative to clear up waste across Estonia. A low cost online mapping system allowed citizens to report fly tipping and sign up to self-organising, local clean-up teams. The organisers were able to tap into the self-organising abilities of citizens and 50,000 volunteers took part. This is almost 4% of the population helping to co-create a public service. One observer suggested that "it probably would have taken the Estonian government three years and 22.5 million Euros to accomplish the same task the people of the country performed in just five hours for half a million Euros".

The My Estonia experience shows that getting significant numbers of citizens to self-organise and develop better policies and services is anything but wishful thinking. By running the dialogue in a distributed fashion,

tapping into networks of non-profit organisations, businesses and community groups, My Estonia achieved more for a lower cost than a centralised process would have done. The infectious nature of the engagement meant that thousands of community leaders left feeling a shared sense of ownership and responsibility for their areas and with the motivation to take action.

Ten years ago the idea of engaging 1% of the UK's population in a deliberation would have seemed impossible. Today it is merely challenging. Involving 500,000 people seems like a tall order but Consumer Focus estimates that two and a half million got involved in the various engagement activities that surrounded the Post Office closure programme in 2007–2009. At a time when people are struggling to come to terms with how to make difficult choices around the budget deficit, climate change and the ageing society, there is desperate need for the knowledge, skills and actions of citizens. Distributed Dialogue provides the solution.

Afterword

A functioning democracy which meets the needs of its citizens could be compared to a language; both never reach a point where they are perfected and completed. Both are constantly updated, and adapted to deal with new needs forced by changing circumstances. The process of updating and adapting languages and democracies often draws on concepts, ideas and words from around the globe. In the case of language it is an automatic process, driven by human curiosity, playfulness and inventiveness.

In the case of democracy, this is also true; human nature itself is one of the drivers of change. Driven to solve the challenges facing them, whether as a result of internal tensions or external threats, communities have always developed new ways of taking better decisions. However, there is a greater imperative driving the constant evolution of the best democracies: the need to ensure that those with power don't capture its structures and processes to the detriment of either the majority or minority. Even without any external challenges, democracies change and adapt continually because of this internal dynamic.

In this pamphlet we have described how governments around the world are facing a range of complex issues of a different type and complexity from those faced before. James Lovelock, the scientist behind the Gaia Theory, has recently suggested that humans are "too stupid" to face up to these challenges. He claims that democracy itself cannot cope: "Even the best democracies agree that when a major war approaches, democracy

must be put on hold… I have a feeling that climate change may be an issue as severe as war. It may be necessary to put democracy on hold for a while."

This pamphlet presents a first attempt to think through how new forms of public engagement could be developed to strengthen and improve representative democracies because we believe that Lovelock is wrong. It highlights examples from Canada, Estonia and Brazil that demonstrate that the public can be involved in complex, technical and controversial policy discussions. These show that the public can provide nuanced, thoughtful and practical solutions to problems that elected representatives are unable to solve alone. It is not just the experts with privileged knowledge, career politicians, policy wonks, geeks and nerds who have the expertise, experience and insight to solve mutual challenges. Indeed, as we have tried to demonstrate, the solutions to problems such as climate change and the aging society are necessarily distributed within communities largely out of reach of government using traditional policy tools.

Technocratic, bureaucratic solutions imposed from above will not work for the biggest challenges facing society. Representative democracy cannot deliver the solutions needed alone. They can only be delivered through a new relationship between the citizen and the state. Our case studies describe examples of where governments and other bodies are attempting to develop new relationships. They demonstrate what is possible, but highlight also how much further there is to go.

We are under no illusions about how hard this will be. It will require a different mindset and different skills from those in government. Institutions will need to change, potentially radically. They will need to be much more open about how they work and the information they make available to citizens. They will be able to control and plan far

less; and will be required to facilitate, support and coordinate far more.

Difficult though this may be, Lovelock's intervention represents a prescient warning of what might be necessary if citizens cannot reset democracies in this way. Dealing with climate change will not be like fighting a war; the end will not come in a few years. Rather it will present an ongoing set of challenges for decades to come.

Relying on a green dictator emerging to plan the way out of climate change is not an option. If citizens value freedom, liberty and above all equality then they must find new ways for governments and citizens to work together to define problems, identify solutions and work together to implement them.

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Director, Involve

63 http://www.tonic.com/article/country-clean-up-estonian-style

64 Burrows, Andy and Griffiths, Colin. 2010. *How Was It For You? Consumer Engagement in the Post Office Closure Programme.* London: Consumer Focus. http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/assets/1/files/2009/06/How-was-it-for-you.pdf

65 Hickman, L. 2010. James Lovelock: Humans are too stupid to prevent climate change. *Guardian*, 29 March.