



PROGRESS REPORT TO THE HESLETINE INSTITUTE

Moving from individual acts of civic voluntarism to Governance of the Commons

1. Background

This project aims to apply lessons from the successful 'co-city protocol' adopted by the city of Bologna, Italy. It is an international academic and knowledge exchange collaboration designed to maximise impact. It will do so by testing out possibilities for the creation of innovative co-produced governance processes in the Dingle neighbourhood of Liverpool to address persistent urban problems that current governance approaches have failed to resolve – political austerity, scarce resources, democratic deficit, social exclusion and reliance on acts of civic volunteerism – whilst harnessing existing and potential capabilities, creativity and assets to experiment with more systematic collaborative forms of governance.

The aim is to take 'governance of the commons' research and practice in new directions, applying it for the first time within the UK to urban commons these include: underused land, abandoned buildings; green space; public infrastructure; neighbourhood services but also knowledge, technology and education. This is the first stage of a proven 3-stage method for prototyping new governance processes that allows for shared management and access of said commons.

Our working hypothesis is that the existing governance approaches to regenerating and sustaining 'commons' within the Dingle could serve the community more effectively and democratically. Our notion is that a better connected and more collaborative governance approach may be needed to sustain the social and economic wellbeing in the community. The objective of this mapping stage is to gather evidence to support or reject this hypothesis and document any legislative/policy/cultural constraints that currently inhibit any alternative approach.

This mapping stage will be delivered through a series of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, a one day workshop and citizens' exhibition (a participatory dissemination method).

2. Progress to date

2.1 'Mapping' the community

This first stage has so far yielded interviews from 15 different key figures and organisations in the Dingle neighbourhood of Liverpool. We are in the process of conducting further interviews and meeting with representatives of local schools and faith organisations. Sampling and access was facilitated through the 'contact books' and insights of two key gatekeepers in the community. Interviewees covered topics ranging from the rich history of Dingle in the late nineties and early noughties to coping with austerity measures and rising social problems in the neighbourhood.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. The guiding interview question at this stage was: **what can you tell us about your organisation in the Dingle and who do you connect with?** Interviews were audio recorded and professionally transcribed. The research team adhered to ESRC's six key principles to ethical research, which stresses the transparent and non-coercive nature of the research process

In addition to traditional interview methods, the research team used a map drawing exercise. Creative methods are appropriate when dealing with complex historical and geographical topics and can aid participants' memory and sense making, thus yielding richer data. The map drawing had two stages: i) a geographical map, where participants were given a google map print-out of their neighbourhood and were asked to draw what they *feel* the Dingle is, ii) a conceptual map, where participants drew a diagram of how their community connects with others.

Analysis of the interview material has provided some key community insights.

Better communication

There seems to be a general lack of communication, both in terms of inter-organisational and organisation-to-public communication. Participants pointed out the need to connect the individual dots of already great work into a better organised whole and felt disconnected and uninformed in regards to other organisations' activities and services. For example, two organisation offered the same IT course. While one charged £5 for it, the other organisation secured funding and offered same course for free. Better communication might mean that moneys can be invested more wisely.

Inter-generational prospects

We also observed that each of the organisation cater for a specific demographic group. While this means that services can be targeted to the needs of its users, it also misses the potential for inter-generational learning. One of the key problems of the area is the youth who have been described as trouble-makers who are bored, disrespectful and lazy. We see potential for connecting the youth with the elderly, in respect to vocational and education training, social care and a heightened sense of kindness, inclusion and connectedness in the community.

Resistance

Interestingly but not unsurprisingly we came across a degree of resistance towards our project, as we were seen as outsiders. One political key figure in the area reported an explicit mistrust in the idea of shared decision making and more participatory governance

structures. This meant that a lot of funding decisions were motivated by favours and nepotism while smaller organisations “need to be weeded out”. This level of resistance is to be expected and highlights the importance of grounding our research in the community and allying with key people in the area.

2.5 Identifying future collaborators

The mapping process has also enabled us to identify potential future collaborators for the next stage of the project by classifying organisations and individuals within the community into groups we have labelled as: ‘the powerful’; ‘the connectors’; and, ‘the outsiders’. Put simply:

‘The powerful’ are individuals who have historically held positions of influence in the locality and were largely resistant or sceptical of any notion of widening civic collaboration within the community.

‘The connectors’ are active community organisations in the Dingle who have an intrinsic motivation to improve life in the Dingle. Their key feature is that they are known to other organisations in the area and actively communicate and connect with them

The key feature of an *‘outsider’* is that other organisations or individuals do not connect with them or have never heard of them. This is the largest groups and includes most businesses and citizens

For our purpose we will be targeting the connectors and the outsiders for future collaboration. Experience from similar projects have shown that ‘the powerful’ will naturally come into the picture in stages 2 and 3 of the project.

2.6 International academic collaboration

To date we have conducted two video conferences with Prof. Christian Iaione, University of Rome and Prof. Sheila Foster, Georgetown University, USA. These have proved useful in providing us with helpful guidance based on the empirical work these academics have conducted into neighbourhood ‘Governance of the commons’ projects in Italy and the USA.

Following on from the last video conference we were invited to participate in the ‘We make the City Festival’ in Amsterdam 20-24 June 2018. This is also an opportunity to deepen our conversation with Christian and Sheila.

2.7 On-going activity

We are currently planning and mobilising for our first workshop in July where we will be working collaboratively, and hopefully creatively, with local residents to share information

from the mapping exercise, discuss it and incrementally develop and agree a set of achievable common objectives, priorities and a route-map for the Governance of the Commons in Dingle.

We are also planning on displaying the research material we have gathered as posters to be displayed as a citizens' exhibition as part of the workshop.

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