

# SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## Introduction

The Scottish Government is keen to bring together views and ideas from a wide range of sectors and to explore the priorities Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) should address.

In the eighth in a series of Think Pieces, Dr Ruth Lightbody, lecturer in politics at Glasgow Caledonian University, sets out her thoughts on Scotland2050 and specifically on community engagement. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion.

## The issues and opportunities

*What are the current issues and opportunities for your area of interest?*

Scotland's people must be at the heart of planning Scotland's future. The communities that shape Scotland's future must be both geographical and communities of interest and identity. We need to create places where people can come together in commonality and live, work and socialise in environments that reflect their needs. People need to determine the sort of planning that works for them. In order to facilitate community planning – planning for the people, by the people - we need to revitalise our democracy. We need to embrace and normalise mini-publics, participatory budgeting and digital innovations such as online forums.

*What are the future issues and opportunities, looking ahead towards 2050?*

We must be wary that community engagement does not reinforce structural and social inequalities. Participation in participatory processes and involvement in community projects should not be compromised by poverty, social position, pressures of time, language barriers, and the accessibility of venue. We need to create a supportive environment which bolsters confidence and tackles the systemic discrimination faced by women, minority ethnic groups, LGBT+ communities, young, old and disabled people. We need to enthuse citizens and undermine the rising scepticism about the 'difference' they can make.

*How are these issues relevant to planning?*

We need to help communities to work closely with those who put plans into action. Developing partnerships and sharing power and decision-making will be unsettling for many. Reciprocity and social cohesion must be nurtured. Effective partnerships are built on trust and a commitment to common goals. These take time to develop.

*Are the issues different in different parts of Scotland?*

There must be no one-size-fits-all approach. We must be sensitive to the particular strengths and needs of different communities. We must also acknowledge that

although technology facilitates participation for some, making it more enjoyable and more accessible, it can also disenfranchise others and exacerbate inequalities and exclusion.

## **Planning solutions**

We need to work toward a more equal society, which involves everyone in planning Scotland's future. We must take steps to facilitate the inclusion of marginalised voices. Offering incentives and/or financial compensation can open community engagement up to a wider demographic and lower the barriers to participation for the most disadvantaged.

Using a variety of recruitment methods for democratic innovations, particularly mini-publics, will result in a wider range of participants. We need to purposively target the participation of those voices that are all too often unheard, while allowing for self-selection that ensures that all those who wish to get involved, can do so. Communities must have the lead in steering decision-makers to deliver what they want or need from community projects. Supportive experts are also needed to provide evidence, to advise on boundaries, to help facilitate conversations, to unpack complicated issues, and to support citizens to practice critical thinking and problem-solving. We need to reflect on past practice and share information on online platforms such as Participedia, and VOiCE.

Community engagement can provide an environment for Scotland's people to plan and transform Scotland's future. Citizens and community groups must be at the heart of the process.

## **Summary**

- Scotland's people must be at the heart of planning Scotland's future
- Community engagement must be central to the democratic process.
- Community engagement must not be compromised by inequalities and injustices; steps must be taken to involve 'hidden voices'.
- We need to showcase the positive impact of democratic and participatory work to convince politicians, decision-makers and the wider public of its value.
- Trust must be strengthened among policy makers, experts, the third sector and citizens.
- Community input into planning should be an ongoing process, which is flexible and responsive to the need of those contributing, and the needs of communities they are planning for.

## **Biography**

Dr Ruth Lightbody is a lecturer in politics at Glasgow Caledonian University. Her research focuses on deliberative democracy, particularly its institutionalisation. Her most recent work focuses on the tensions between equality and community engagement, and the role of experts and evidence in deliberative processes.