



The future is local...

Scottish Parliament, 26th April 2013

A day of debate, discussion
and celebration of
achievement
by Scotland's
communities.



scottish
community
alliance

local people leading



Programme

Supported by:



Keynote Address by Alastair McIntosh

Scottish Community Alliance
Scottish Parliament
26th April 2013

Intro slide on screen – **Picture 1**
(see all slides at back)

Good Morning

You, who have come to this parliament today, are the backbone of the great work of our times. Work that reaches to the heart of what it means to be a human being. Work that makes community happen, by digging from where we stand.

We are here to explore *the future as local*. The local, as what the Isle of Lewis poet, Iain Crichton Smith, described as, *real people in a real place*.

Real reality, and not just what can be the virtual reality of Facebook friends. Communities of place, and not just communities of interest.

In the past our forebears understood the “how” of community, but maybe weren’t so conscious of the “why”.

Today we’re starting to see the “why”, but need to recover what’s been lost from the “how”.

We live in the One World village where everyone is interdependent. Yet some global forces out there would homogenise us all into a single market surface. Others have portrayed local communities as something to be vilified as a menace to right thinking.

Here is what I mean. Some years ago I was invited to share a platform in Glasgow with Charles Leadbeater, an advisor to the then prime minister. He had written a book about the “knowledge economy” called *Living on Thin Air*, and I quote him:

Strong communities can be pockets of intolerance and prejudice. Settled, stable communities are the enemies of innovation, talent, creativity, diversity and experimentation. They are often hostile to outsiders, dissenters, young upstarts and immigrants. Community can too quickly become a rallying cry for nostalgia; that kind of community is the enemy of knowledge creation, which is the wellspring of economic growth.

Power in the Local

Let me tell you that the only way I know of “living on thin air” is by plugging in directly to the local. I’d like to share a personal example.

My wife, Vèrène Nicolas, and I both work from home in the parish of Govan in Glasgow. This year we installed solar electricity panels on our roof – and use the free energy partly to power an air-sourced heat pump.

Throughout this chilly April, our household carbon footprint has crashed, and partly helped by the solar feed-in tariffs, our total bills for gas and electricity have plummeted - to less than fifty pence a day.

Yes, fifty pence, not pounds. The monitoring spreadsheets can be inspected on my website.

Neither is this beyond the reach of ordinary incomes. The combination of panels and pump that I’ve described cost seven thousand pounds installed.

About the same as a decent second hand car.

You see, these things are partly questions of priorities – both personal, and national. We’re told we can’t afford the technologies that could lift many of the poor out of fuel poverty. But we can and must afford replacement of our grim deterrent on the Clyde.

I put it to you: Which is the greatest threat to most of those who live along the banks of Glasgow’s river?

The winter’s cold, including cold indifference? Or a new Cold War; justifying Trident (as we were told the other day) – just in case the North Koreans get uppity?

Community and Conflict

Now, in making his remarks Charles Leadbeater did have a point, up to a point. Nobody ever said its easy to make community.

In the 1990s I was a trustee of the Isle of Eigg land buy-out. It was hard, and one of the first resident-elected directors told me that it felt like walking about with her jugular constantly exposed.

We need to appreciate that conflict is normal in healthy human relationships. Our task must be to learn to recognise it, and process it, for communities are the crucibles in which people learn to become more fully human.

As Colin Macleod, who founded the GalGael Trust in Govan used to say: “Shit happens. What matters is how you shovel it.”

You see, we can either turn our backs, and leave the *S-H-one-T* to fester and stink. Or we can turn it into compost out of which new life can grow, releasing long-blocked nutrients.

It’s about taking local *responsibility*, and I mean by that word, *the ability to respond*. To respond to what gives life, and not just any old life, but promised life abundant.

The Cycle of Belonging

At one point in the Eigg buyout campaign Lesley Riddoch, who is with us here today, went up to the island and recorded a programme for the BBC that she later told me was, “the hardest piece of radio I’ve ever made.”

Folks wouldn’t open up. The laird was seated in the audience, but the turning point was when he said that the community wasn’t capable of becoming responsible for itself. At this, Maggie Fyffe shouted from the back: “We have never had the chance to show that we can be responsible.”

So how can futures that are local drive responsibility? Here is a model that I call the Cycle of Belonging **(Picture 2)**.

You start with your birthright in (or adoption towards) a *sense of place*.

That sense of place conveys a *sense of identity*.

The sense of identity carries a *sense of values*.

The sense of values generates a *sense of responsibility*.

And that sense of responsibility feeds back into strengthening community of place.

Community Responsibility – Case Study from Eigg

(3) In the case of Eigg in the early 1990s, the place itself was on the market to the highest bidder.

(4) Previously it had been a marker of identity for the laird, who told me that it was, “a collector’s item.”

(5) The community got organised around their own values.

⑥ They launched a worldwide fundraising campaign called, *Let's Crack It*.

⑦ This helped to energise the wider Scottish land reform debate; indeed, it gingered up perceptions of the need for Devolution.

⑧ Finally, in 1997, Eigg was freed from landed power, and the community, free to rise to the responsibility of democratically accountable local self-determination.

Sixteen years later, Eigg has achieved a steadily growing population base, vibrant cultural creativity, diverse small businesses, a vastly improved housing stock, and a world-famous electricity grid run by residents and powered by solar, hydro - and thin air.

The island has become a lighthouse built on rock. It still has problems, yet it beams out rays of human hope, quite literally, across the distant seas.

Folk, Work & Place – Case Study from Comrie

What is the local? The local is the locus of the *parish* in the widest sense, and parish, derived from the word “parochial”, originally meant *para-oikos* in the Greek. Literally, that which is “alongside” - as with parallel lines - the *oikos* or the “household.”

Other “eco” words share this same *oikos* root – ecumenical, ecology, economy – and Patrick Geddes, the Ballater-born pioneer of community planning, suggested that we need to examine this extended sense of household – what gives a sense of home.

⑨ He urged us to understand the interactions of *folk*, *work*, and *place*; and their combinations, like work-place and place-folk.

This is not a luxury. It is an imperative of wellbeing. Consider the Comrie Development Trust. In 2008, networked in with other local organisations, it produced a plan that said:

We need to look at how we become more self-sufficient; how we move about; how we entertain ourselves and look after each other. In other words, how we build a resilient community.

Twice last year their river burst its banks and there was terrible flooding. When it happened in November a community councillor told the press:

Our Black Monday ... will go down as ... one of the bleakest seasons in the history of our community.... We have hundreds of residents deeply traumatised, fearful of the future and robbed of their homes.

But resilience – the ability to bounce back – had already been thought about.

Whole families took in other whole families.

Resilience moved from talking shops to an applied survival skill; to greater depths of understanding folk, and work, and place.

Rekindling Urban Community – Case Study from Govan

But what about hard-pressed parts of urban Scotland? Communities where the skills base may be highly socially stratified, leaving gaps that make it difficult to sustain social enterprises. We need to find anew the mix of gifts that we can share across divides with one another.

(10) Vèrène and I have lived in Govan for the past nine years, drawn there by the GalGael Trust of which I am a founding director.

(11) Here is where we go to buy our morning newspapers.

(12) We live in a nice terraced house in a quiet street with good neighbours, but poverty is written all around.

(13) That is why the late Colin Macleod and his wife, Gehan Macleod, found themselves compelled to start a venture where folk’s lives could “journey on”.

(14) Helped by local agencies, the GalGael managed to buy premises.

(15) Building boats, but really, rebuilding harrowed people.

(16) We seek to draw out beauty from local wood and stone, and from one another. A Clyde-built sense of dignity in work as nothing less than “worship”. And “worship”, from the Old English words, *worth-ship* – the ship of life that’s worthy of respect.

(17) Seen by one another. Heard by one another. Loved by one another. Across the generations and divides.

(18) As one lassie said: “GalGael gave us back our river.”

(19) Restoring sense of folk – work – and place.

(20) We often talk of George Macleod of Govan and the Iona Community. His secretary’s desk is on our premises, and he left a message: “Only a demanding common task builds community.”

That’s the kind of thing that GalGael gives to us, and makes the future local.

Policy Conclusions

It is an honour to have Derek Mackay with us today, Scotland’s Minister for Local Government and Planning.

We ask him to carry back to his ministerial colleagues the need to put the local at top dead centre of the nation's future.

We therefore look towards the Community Empowerment Bill, and hope that urban Scots as well as rural ones are helped to gain control of unused assets.

We look towards developments from the Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services in Scotland, and hope that it can foster subsidiarity – the spreading of responsibilities downwards – while being careful not to abdicate the functions that remain more proper to the wheels of government.

We look towards the findings of the Land Reform Review Group under the former Moderator, Dr Alison Elliot, and hope that ministers of government will have the political vision, and spiritual bravery, to bring back the land into the people's hand.

There is a Persian proverb, that when we reach the gates of Heaven, God will only ask one question.

“What did you do with the land that I gave you?”

That is our question at this conference in this parliament today.

“What can we do, to make the future local?”

Thank you.

Below: slides & programme



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Patrick Cadogan of Ballater (1854-1932)

PLACE	Place: work, work, place	WORK	Work: place, place, work	FOLK	Folk: work, work, folk
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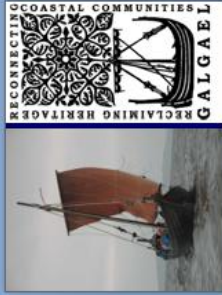
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The future is local

Programme

Main Chamber

- 9.30 **Welcome**
Deputy Presiding Officer, Elaine Smith MSP
- 9.35 **'The future is local'**
Keynote: Alastair McIntosh, writer, academic and community activist
- 9.50 **'Localism and community empowerment'**
John Wilson MSP, Deputy Convener, Local Government and Regeneration Committee
- 10.00 **Response from Scottish Government**
Derek Mackay MSP, Minister for Local Government and Planning
- 10.25 **Community voices**
Introduced by Lyn Ewing, Convener, SCA:
Alis Ballance, Moffat CAN
Angus MacMillan, Stòras Uibhist
Anna Stuart, Cassiltoun Housing Association
- 11.00 **Emporium of dangerous ideas**
Committee Rooms (see opposite page)
- 12.15 Lunch
- 1.00 **Question time panel**
Lesley Riddoch, journalist and broadcaster
Jackie Killeen, Director, Big Lottery Fund Scotland
John Wilson MSP, Deputy Convener, Local Government and Regeneration Committee
- 2.00 **Closing remarks**
Lyn Ewing, Convener,
Scottish Community Alliance

