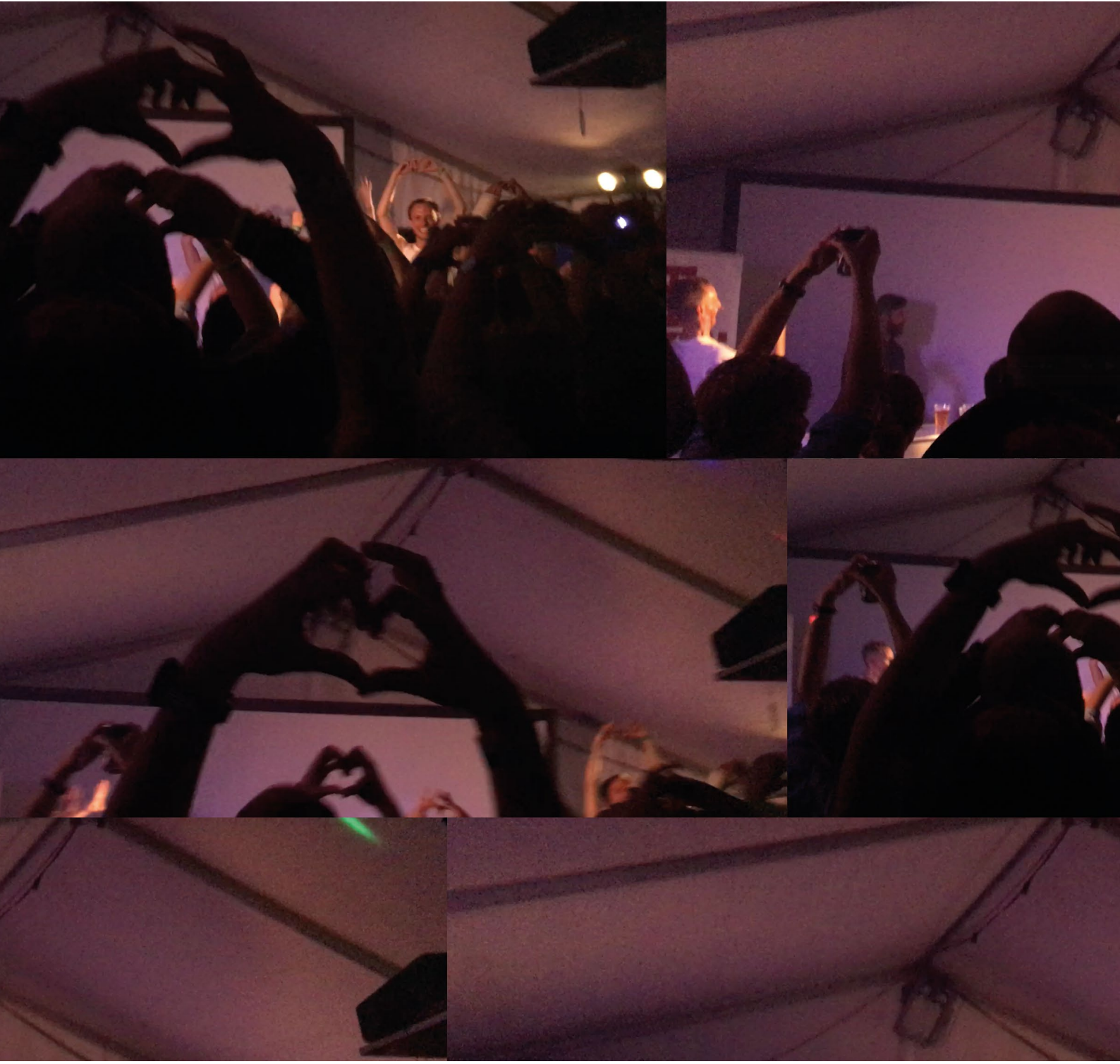

21C POLITICS
Is the Party Over?
Or is it just kicking off?

Indra Adnan

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By Indra Adnan
Front cover photo: taken at the “Folkemødet” annual political festival on Bornholm island, Denmark, where party leaderspolitical do DJ battles at the end of the day

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Compass is a home for those who want to build and be a part of a Good Society; one where equality, sustainability and democracy are not mere aspirations, but a living reality.

We are founded on the belief that no single issue, organisation or political party can make a Good Society a reality by themselves so we have to work together to make it happen. Compass is a place where people come together to create the visions, alliances and actions to be the change we wish to see in the world.

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ABOUT COMPASS AND THIS PROJECT

Compass is the pressure group for a good society, a world that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. We build alliances of ideas, parties and movement to help make systemic political change happen. To change society we believe we have to change the political system. It is clear that despite a growth in members, our political parties are not working as vehicles for the transformation we need to see. They are essentially the same constructs as 100 years ago. Given our analysis in New Times, The Bridge, the Open Tribe and elsewhere, we need to rethink the purpose, culture and structure of the party in the 21st century. This is one of two papers that attempts do just that – the other being The Very Modern Prince. Between the horizontal movements and the more vertical parties we see a rich terrain that could fuel change that we call 45 Degree Politics. We hope to develop this thinking and begin to encourage progressive parties national and locally to experiment with the kind of ideas set out here.

Preface

PREFACE

Between the start and end of writing this paper, the UK has experienced major political upheaval. Following a general election that accelerated the long-term decline of the Labour Party, it looked as if we would be settling in to a period of unassailable Conservative rule. We now have major turbulence with no party safe from the possibilities of rupture.

Within a week of the EU referendum, which resulted in a 52% Vote to Leave, both major parties – in what has essentially been a two-party system since 1945 – found themselves in leadership elections that split their parties to the core. Responding to the splintering, Compass launched a campaign for a Progressive Alliance to bring in proportional representation – the only democratic system that could reflect our growing political pluralism.

In the meantime, the UK Independence Party (UKIP), whose members were so recently the mavericks on the scene, with the money and ambition of Arron Banks pushing them from behind, now threaten to grow exponentially as a people's party – a badge the left always claimed as their own. Responding to the dismay of the Remain vote, a new grouping of centre-left, pro-European politicians and mainstream green and cultural figures announced a new political platform More United.

On the surface – and as it is largely reported by the mainstream media – this looks like a crowding of the political scene. Even more crudely, it is reported as a rise of the right – a return to the pre-fascist turmoil of the 1930s. What too few commentators are willing to explore is to what extent these new eruptions – or fluidity to give it a more friendly name – is the direct result of what we at Compass called New Times: the radically changed social and political environment we are all operating in since the birth of the internet. We are not waiting for a revolution; we have been in the midst of one for over ten years: extreme connectivity has changed everything. And not yet for the better.

What we are witnessing today is not a falling out between factions of the main parties, but the pressure that the new democratic energies have put on outdated structures, cultures and behaviours. Whether it is Momentum challenging the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), the Scottish Yes Movement challenging the Scottish National Party (SNP) or Frome Independents challenging political practice and behaviour at the grassroots, it is activists and citizens finding new ways to gain agency who are making the political weather today. The people are outgrowing their institutions and it is no longer entirely within the gift of the old leaders to point the way. The most successful parties will be those that can shake off their historic entitlement and change to accommodate the much more complex present.

This is not happening in the UK alone: in fact, we are lagging behind Europe and maybe even the Middle and Far East somewhat, in giving rise to the new forms that capture the new energies. This paper explores four ways of looking at the potential for development – four lenses on change – which, together, could add up to a direction of travel in this time of great possibility.

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

During a particularly difficult moment in the general election campaign last year, I opened an urgent email from the Labour Party. There was Ed Balls, declining to make a comment about the news, but urging me to grab a cartooned tea towel while stocks last. I didn't get another email that day. I wondered then who the Labour Party thought its members were.

It is no news to any of us that membership of the major political parties is in long-term decline. Even with the recent surge under Jeremy Corbyn (as I write – summer 2016 – 521,541), the combined membership of the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats (currently 755,541) is at an historic low.

Meantime, membership of 'other' parties has increased markedly in recent years. In June 2015, Green Party (England and Wales) membership was around 61,000, compared with 13,800 in December 2013, while in June 2015 SNP membership was around 110,000, compared with 25,000 in December 2013. UKIP's membership increased by around 10,000 over the same period, from 32,000 in December 2013 to around 42,000 in January 2015 (though it is reported to have dipped again to 30,000 since then).

Yet even if you add them all together, the total number of people who are signed up anywhere to political parties comes to just over 2% of the population. Can political parties as we have known them for most of our lives still be effective tools of democracy, if they command the attention of so very few of us?

Janan Ganesh, political columnist for the *Financial Times*, regularly taunts the left with the charge that British people don't care enough about politics to get involved. They vote Conservative because they like their lives – oblivious to the political or economic settlement – and expect politicians to maintain their equilibrium, no more.

That is not the same, incidentally, as saying the Tories won the economic argument. It is closer to J. K. Galbraith's view as stated in 1992 in *The Culture of Contentment*: 'People who are in a fortunate position always attribute virtue to what makes them so happy.'[1]

Yet looking at political activism in the wider sense – the rise of socio-political movements, online advocacy, petitioning, campaigning – one might say Janan is asleep at his desk. Internet campaigner 38 Degrees (https://home.38degrees.org.uk/) has 2.5 million members, increasing numbers of whom not only click on petitions, but start campaigns of their own. Half a million people are regularly working to save the NHS – there is even an NHS Action Party – many times more than knocked on doors at the general election.

Membership of grass roots activist groups has grown steadily. Civil society organisations, including charities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social enterprises not only grow but significantly increase their attention share with presence on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

According to Fast Company, interacting with social media has overtaken watching porn as the No. 1 activity on the web.[2] Today those with desk jobs are more likely to find a cause that prompts them to take action as they watch cute cat videos on Facebook than by attending the local party meeting in a community hall.

But are we talking about a straight shift of energy from the established parties to the new digitally networked forms of activism, in which the latter take over from the former as the main vehicles of public agency? Clearly not: while the new generation of activists are skilled in creating social spectacles, generating discussions and building advocacy, their numbers and impact is still hard to measure. And the resources for major and sustained change remain in the hands of those in familiar and established institutions of power.

Instead we have a very fragmented field of different forms of action, of new and emergent cultures of behaviour and leadership, in a diverse set of conditions across the UK, Europe and the world – all of which bear upon each other in ways that are not easy to control.

And they are often not working together. Grass roots initiatives attack NGOs for their funding from corporates; local community groups challenge local government for their austerity narrative when they find themselves falling in with the Tory cuts; and fledgling anti-government parties compete aggressively with each other for market share.

How can those citizens who are hungry for change make any sense of it and know where best to invest their passions? And how can they, in turn, reach the politically inert who are oblivious to the inequality and injustice they are unknowingly complicit in?

In 2015 Compass published two papers that set out the complex scene we are now negotiating. Neal Lawson and Uffe Elbæk's 'The Bridge' described the revolutionary impact of the internet in the early years of the 21st century, which suddenly made it much easier for people to share information – peer to peer rather than boss to subordinate – and then to mobilise.[3]

In a subsequent paper called 'New Times', Neal and I explored the multiple shifts that this revolution (it is no less) has given rise to, amounting to a radically altered experience of living in the world.[4] Not simply because of more time being spent in the relational world of Twitter, Facebook and online shopping, but because public space itself is becoming largely virtual and there is an onus on citizens and customers to access their own services, create their own media and name their own social agendas. David Bowie anticipated this in an interview with a sceptical Jeremy Paxman.[5]

All of this takes place within a rapidly shifting world view on at least two critical grounds. *The first is globalisation* – a term that was until recently mostly used by the left when describing the corporate take-over of global markets. Anti-globalisation as a term was often puzzling to people who felt that a benign relationship with the world beyond markets was not only possible but preferable. The economic framing, while crucial in offering a critique of the growing neoliberal project, played its part in limiting a healthy, more rounded discourse on globalisation.

As a result, globalisation today presents itself as a daily challenge to our national and, increasingly, personal identity. We can feel overwhelmed when we cannot make sense of the globe, often only experiencing it as an 'outside' to our more familiar 'inside' – our home. We emphasise borders and ask residents to choose between allegiance to one country over another – even when that person's heritage is mixed. Nigel Farage's image of a country that has a limited capacity and is now 'full up', for example, echoes most viscerally with those who cannot conceive of the world as familiar or friendly – an extension of our own space, populated by people like us.

That ground level, zero-sum view is also what gives rise, to some extent, to our security mindset. Without the aerial view – one that can rise to see the relationship and inter-dependency between nations and land-masses – it is all too easy to conceive of other countries as a constant, extreme threat. With the notable exception of Jeremy Corbyn, too few top level politicians have been able to call out a world view that requires us to be in daily readiness to destroy each other with nuclear weapons.

Digitisation has further complicated globalisation because so much of our virtual life neutralises geography: who knows where our Facebook friend is posting from? This brings with it not only added stress but also increased possibilities, hinging on the difficult task of Britain evolving its *place in the world*.

The second critical ground for the rapidly shifting world view is the oncoming future – a subject not discussed enough in the media, no doubt because of a predominance of dystopian visions in our media and on our screens. It is not just the popularity of Mad Max style movies in which global institutions fail and the law of the jungle prevails. But when faced by rapid technological advance, too few public figures know how to respond.

Tom Watson in the *Guardian* expressed the fears and denial of the many when he said:

'Never have we seen such a change in the landscape of the labour market. I believe the potential consequences to be so great that we should regard automation as the most urgent issue facing the country. So why isn't the government addressing it?'[6]
Tom Watson

Some are rising to the challenge of reclaiming 'the future' in progressive thinking. Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams' *Inventing the Future* leaps willingly into the void with its cover slogan 'Demand Full Automation, Demand Universal Basic Income and Demand the Future'. It is a seductive book – but it avoids the hard and complex work of creating a path from our complex and embroiled political present to its socio-technical vision.

Williams and Srnicek characterise grassroots and localist tactics as *folk politics*, unlikely to scale up to a national model. But in doing so they miss the important contribution being developed by groups such as Frome Council's Flatpack Democracy (on which more later), focusing on what we might call the *human sustainability factor.*[8]

By this I mean that if we don't understand how individuals and communities can make the transition from consumers or workers to active citizens, then the fully automated future will simply grow and even accelerate the gap between the privileged (the intellectually, economically and digitally privileged) and the rest.

Commenting on this inquiry, economist Robin Murray summed up the challenge like this:

Those engaged in folk politics/economics are inspired by the universal. For environmentalists it is the planet. For fair traders it is the relations of North and South, of capital versus the world of the peasant farmer. What is there in all of them is the frustration of knowing what to do about the universal. How to change it. The tension is between the world of the mind and the world of practice, between the vision and the reality.

Robin Murray

Hence, as the caretaker of political power, we must ask: where does the political party stand, as citizens, voters – people – begin to explore and exercise their individual and collective agency in unprecedented ways, or watch others doing so?

In 2008, the Carnegie Trust wrote about the need for greater power literacy in *Power Moves: Exploring Power and Influence in the UK*.[9] Echoing shifts in geopolitical language and analysis, the authors made a distinction between the 'hard power' that political parties exercise in enacting policy and husbanding resources, and the 'soft power' of creating the cultural context and frames of meaning within which decisions are taken.

While the state (specifically its governing party) has the money, the non-state actors (aka the rest of us) have a growing influence over whether the party can spend that money freely. Those soft powers involve the use of new forms of media, as the Carnegie report put it, to 'withhold, discover, publish or disseminate information'; to 'threaten or harness reputation'; and – most effectively today – 'to create spectacle', which arrests attention and demands a response from the government.

As I said in the conclusion to my book *Soft Power Agenda,*

by knocking power as the preserve of the elites off its pedestal, Joseph Nye (originator of the concept of soft power) opened the door to a democratisation of power. For more of that we need further disaggregation of power, not less. If we are to take advantage of the new power landscape, we need – each one of us – to become more power literate.[10]

Hilary Wainwright, in her unpublished paper 'Beyond social democratic and communist parties', demonstrates what I mean by power literacy. She critiques the notion that traditional parties' concept of 'power over' the instruments of state is the only effective form of political agency.[11] We might recognise power over in an older formulation as 'power by any means' – a concept which justifies the many, often unacceptable, compromises made en route to office.

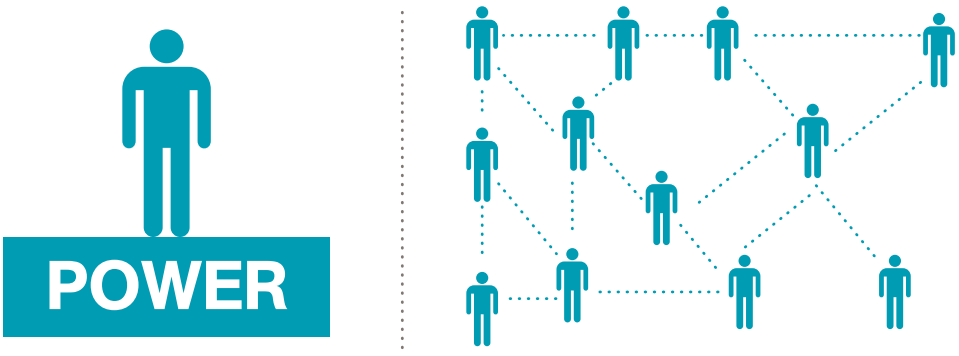
In contrast, when the parties see their job as representing the people to the state, they find themselves dealing in the 'power to' transform government. They try to educate government by sharing information about their constituency members. Their audience is both business and society. Forging relationships, mobilising opinion, creating consensus and the conditions for change – all this can be done by parties even from opposition. It allows a far more open conversation with both party members and the broader public. In a sense, party activity of this kind could be about prefiguring the good society rather than trying to win its occasional elections (Figure 1).

At this moment, established UK parties – even those in Scotland like the SNP – err on the former strategy (power over the state). But we are surrounded throughout Europe by live experiments with the latter (power to influence widely). At the same time, in the UK we might say that the new activism – especially, but not exclusively, in Scotland – is burgeoning.

Is there a way to bring these two worlds of political agency into a healthy relationship? To create what Compass likes to call 'politics at 45 degrees' – a new line of activism between the vertical and the horizontal? Or should we expect the growth of new activism to develop into organisational forms that eclipse old-style political parties altogether?

These are the questions I hope to address in this paper. It is a long moment of transition: the old is in freefall but the new is only incubating – the birth of the new political party, alluded to here, may not be imminent. And yet, with the many deadlines upon us now – Brexit, the migrant crisis, terrorist incursions, climate change – we may have to prepare ourselves for sudden change.

FIGURE 1 POWER OVER VS POWER FOR, CONTROLLING POWER VS TRANSFORMATIVE POWER



POWER OVER vs POWER FOR

UNPACKING THE PRESENT MOMENT

There are four lenses through which we can examine developments towards more plural forms of political agency. Brought together, they can begin to tell us a useful story about the future of the political party:

User experience and action: What does it mean to be a member of a political party? What are people prepared to do as activists, citizens and party members? What kind of spaces can parties meet citizens in, with what purpose? How does an ideal party intervene in the space for political action?
Structure: What kind of party structure allows a productive connection between vertical and horizontal distributions of power? Where should the initiative arise, and decisions be made? Who manages the polity?
Culture: What is the political culture that prefigures the good society? What values must be upheld among activists and party members? What behaviour is 'good'? What is the role of ideology or indeed, philosophy?
Leadership: What skills and capacities are required to both attract and sustain momentum at all levels? How do we examine and assess the pros and cons of charisma?

USER EXPERIENCE

Too often, when politicians and the parties they lead look at the public they represent, they are thinking only about the power relationship on offer: If you vote me in, I will deliver outcomes to you. Very little thought is given, through all the years required to deliver that promise, to the experience of the party member.

Once the vote is in, party members are seen largely as the carriers of the messages and policies decided in Westminster. When an election comes, they are asked to knock on doors – not to canvass opinion, but to recruit the door-stepped to a party manifesto.

Compare this, for example, with how Facebook and 38 Degrees treat their members. For them, the solicitation of opinion and the desire to serve is continuous. They keep members engaged and active – and thus keep their agendas relevant.

The dangers of seeing members as an amorphous mass and the lack of human relationship don't only arise in political parties. When Yanis Varoufakis, ex Minister of Finance for Syriza, describes the 'cartel government' of Europe as anti-democratic, in his Manifesto for Democratising Europe, he is calling for a vigorous response – an uprising against the European governments of today.[13]

But can an uprising ever deliver lasting change? What happens when the moment of confrontation is over? How do the relationships between different kinds of responsibility levels settle themselves?

Here is a story about a friend who was – and remains – a fervent 'Yesser' (the vernacular self-description of those who voted for Scots independence in the 2014 referendum). During the run up to the Independence referendum he joined the SNP. He was tireless in attending rallies, local events and gatherings, in Facebooking and generally making a lot of noise for Scottish Independence. Failure was a kick in the stomach, but not terminal, and he settled in for the long haul towards the eventual victory he feels will come.

But less than a year on he has stepped back from frontline activism because local politics has regressed to business as usual. The May 2016 elections for the Scottish Parliament pitched colleagues against each other and narrowed the focus of politics down to minor differences of personality and locality. Guidelines on what is permissible behaviour in social media came down from on high in the party. In local meetings he felt recruited and managed: the shared vision and inspiration had all but gone.

A Compass inquiry looking at how members experienced their Labour Party revealed a long list of similar complaints. They are, typically, lack of democracy; being too focused on short term survival; extreme partisanship; and overly commanding local leaders. Although the range of concerns was broad, the overarching problem was the lack of engagement by MPs with the party members themselves. The MPs tended to see members as indiscriminate fuel for the PLP engine – rather than the engine itself.

Participants in the inquiry were asked what experiences in their lives they regarded as engaging and compelling. In what way might they inform the way they conduct their politics? The responses – with participants citing experiences like social networking, membership of a football club, family gatherings – indicated a desire for more meaning, conviviality and sense of agency.

Paul Hilder a founding partner in Avaaz, 38 Degrees and Change.org set the bar high when, in a seminar leading up to this paper, he called for all political participation to aim for being transformational – fully engaging and ultimately life-changing.

Momentum – the grassroots movement supporting Jeremy Corbyn – has adopted this goal of transformative activism in the hope of prefiguring the Labour Party of the future, but it is not easily achieved. The media coverage of what Jeremy Gilbert, Professor of Cultural and Political Theory at the University of East London, calls a very British uprising,[14] tends to focus on any negative incident it can to frame Momentum as a rabble. But the challenges

are internal too: honouring traditional Labour language – starting every missive 'Comrades', ending 'In solidarity' – means outsiders still have to conform before participating. Even so, every effort is made to add on elements that humanise the user experience – crèches, art activity, socialising and a great fringe events schedule formed part of the Momentum offering at this year's Labour conference.

UKIP too has tried to remove barriers to participation by making their meetings more convivial, family-friendly – although the tradition of leading the speaking from the front to rally support, with a predominance of men on platforms, is unlikely to change quickly.

Why should an improved experience for the members be such a big ask? Is it the fault of professional politicians, more focused on business and industry as the generators of growth? Or the fault of the electoral system that demands wins on a first-past-the-post basis every four years? Or is it the sheer weight and number of issues an MP is expected to deal with daily, sending them into a trance of box ticking and presenteeism soon after being elected?

Undoubtedly all of those reasons and more. But is it also a failing of the members – and potential members – having no means to articulate their needs and capacities better? If Avaaz, 38 Degrees and other activist organisations can clearly express their desires through the horizontal use of social media, why have political party members remained in thrall to the old vertical structures?

Or maybe the loss of interest in party membership, and the growth of activism in networked civil society, is exactly the kind of separation between forces that a healthy democracy depends on. As they work on single issue campaigns, local community enrichment, and cross-party questions about diversity, power and privilege, networked activists report a lot of energy and commitment. Politicised civil society groups offer belonging and a sense of ongoing purpose in ways the official parties fail to do.

Yet unless something connects the official parties and grassroots politics, harnessing the passions of the latter, Janan Ganesh's verdict that we are an apathetic society (however poorly he understands the phenomenon before him) will continue to be borne out. While our current conditions in the UK cannot compare to the uprisings witnessed in Serbia (2000), Tunisia and Egypt (2011), there are nevertheless lessons to be learned.

We can begin to learn those lessons by studying papers and books that have played their part in informing and sharpening radical protest in these countries. Gene Sharp's 'How to Start a Revolution', Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* and Srdja Popovic's 'Blueprint for Revolution' are, above all, manuals for meaningful citizen engagement.[15]

In all these materials, the guiding principle is soft power: establish your own authenticity, know your own cause, but then turn your attention entirely to your audience. By understanding and being willing to serve their needs and wants, you become attractive to them. When you fight on their behalf you can begin a relationship in which you have influence. Start by championing winnable causes they care about – the price of cottage cheese in Tel Aviv,[16] dealing with the dog shit in the parks of Los Angeles (Harvey Milk).[17] Once your audience sees you are serious about representing them, they will be open to the bigger picture you are offering.

Of course, it is a method that can and is often cynically deployed by political marketing campaigns. However, the principle of paying attention to and serving people's everyday needs is intrinsically valuable, often left out of party-political strategy.

Once the spark has been lit, it is much easier to look at engagement as about the 'removal of barriers to participation' rather than, as it is too often presented, 'the struggle of how to build a movement/network'. Though of course both are crucial approaches towards building the community base that either gives rise to or acts as the longer term support for a political party.

As we have all seen from the sad consequences of the Arab Spring, particularly in Egypt, it is never enough simply to think of uprising. The bigger picture of sustainability and a strategy for delivering a vision of the future has to be worked out at all levels of political agency – from grassroots to political party. Otherwise, the chaos that results from the overthrow of an authority can create a vacuum, one too easily filled by reactionary forces.

The independent politicians of Frome, Somerset, whose Flatpack Democracy model is discussed in some detail below, name the starting point as localism. Participation and inclusion are key modes of operation. But when both UKIP and Frome are starting from that point, it is important to make further distinctions about the nature of the localism – the first describing itself as libertarian, the second as socialism – as they scale up very differently.

Movement for Change, founded by David Miliband in 2011 and later picked up by Ed Miliband, originated as exactly that mechanism for citizen engagement, in a British context. Movement for Change was about being with and talking to the public on their own terms. Basing their practice broadly on Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals*, community organisers (remember that Obama meme?) focused on developing relationships with local people – irrespective of how they voted – to show them how to develop their own agency.

For example: if someone was unhappy because drunks peed in their high-rise lift, they were not met with an

argument about why you should then vote Labour. Instead they were given a very practical set of tools and connections – ones that might result in restricting access to the lift, or getting it cleaned regularly.

The desire to educate people for self-empowerment is *not* the same thing as educating them in the history of the politics of your party – though many diehards would claim it is. In truth, these days, self-empowerment is more like Cameron's early Big Society concept than it is the local party or trade union meeting. Richard Wilson, in his blog explaining why he stood to be MP for Stroud in 2015 is not afraid to characterise it as the shift from a *parent–child* model, where citizens expect their politicians to look after them and fix society, to an *adult–adult* relationship, where the tools for local problems are simply shared between the community.

Movement for Change began with a clear brief to build new bridges between the Labour Party and the 21st-century communities around it. But it may have been ahead of its time. It may also now be over-determined by the story of the Miliband brothers in Labour history. The post-Corbyn Momentum project could have been conceived with a similar brief, although youth and grassroots politics may be more its intended audience.

Will Momentum be any more successful than the Movement for Change? Too early to say. In February 2016, I attended the first meeting of Momentum's National Council, which certainly captured some of the energy of the grassroots. However, it is my assessment that only a strong, community-orientated ethos, crucially originating *outside* the party, can invert the traditional party–people relationship. It is not easy to see that ethos operating in Momentum at the moment.

Irrespective of such initiatives, the interregnum between elections is an important time. Now's the time to start the patient work of disaggregating the multiple ways people can and want to engage politically. Can we draw a map of possible new interfaces between the party and the nation (and world) we want to change? This might require expert network analysis to get the surprising insights. Either way it is vital and enlightening to sketch out the networks each of us are working in.

However, if the way we do this gets predetermined by even a sub-set of a party – leaving little space for the people outside to define their own contribution – the gap between party and people will persist. Both could usefully draw on research conducted by Sarah Allan and others at public participation think tank Involve (and presented at one of our 21C party seminars).

Sarah detailed the multiple conditions and motivations that shape participation in activist and party politics. It stretches from economic resources (the bus fare to get to a meeting) to emotional triggers (natural disasters, becoming a parent). Unless parties start from the viewpoint of their potential participants' needs and capacities, noted Sarah, they will not be able to count on their support in the future.

Another vehicle that could give rise to a new relationship between party and people is the Constitutional Convention currently being planned by Labour. Unlike the Scottish Constitutional Convention of 1989,[19] the 2016 Constitutional Convention is likely to occur without a pre-defined outcome. (The Scottish Constitutional Convention asserted the Claim of Right of the Scottish People, and led to a blueprint for Scottish devolution, published eventually in November 1995.)

Momentum UK

"The grassroots organisation, appropriately named "Momentum", which is constituted out of the groups and networks which sprang up to support Corbyn's leadership bid, has been the subject of hysterical attacks... The tone of these attacks has been unsurprising to anyone familiar with the history of antidemocratic discourse in the West. "Mob" and "rabble" are the terms which have been regularly bandied about to describe this entirely benign network of individuals whose only political action so far has been to run local voter registration drives. Of course, the use of such terms reveals more than their users intend. Although critics on the right of the party claim to be afraid that Momentum represents a return of the secretive far-left factions who did cause major problems for the Labour leadership in the early 80s, it is clear enough that they are even more afraid that Momentum might turn out to be exactly what it claims: a genuine grassroots organisation committed to radical democracy." Jeremy Gilbert[14]

Pirate Party

Is a global network of parties sharing common goals: many technological

- Freedom of expression, communication, education; respect the privacy of citizens and civil rights in general.
- Defend the free flow of ideas, knowledge and culture.
- Support politically the reform of copyright and patent laws.
- Have a commitment to work collaboratively, and participate with maximum transparency
- Do not accept or espouse discrimination of race, origin, beliefs and gender
- Do not support actions that involve violence.
- Use free software, free hardware DIY and open protocol
- Politically defend an open, participative and collaborative construction of any public policy.

The Icelandic Pirate Party has 43% of the vote and is tipped to form a government in the October 2016 election.

The German PP is experimenting with Liquid Democracy whereby members can create and vote on original policy

The UK PP cannot thrive under the first past the post system

The 2016 Constitutional Convention would address the complex nature of British society, across the islands. If it was cross party and time-limited, such a project has the potential to reveal and curate the vast range of citizens' actions that might contribute to a healthy democracy. Cameron's Big Society project was content just to gesture at the self-evident worth of civil society groups – the point being not to harness them in any way to 'the state'.

However, a 2016 Constitutional Convention might find distinct uses for civil society groups, by designing new and more responsive structures of government. Could that imply, for example, a Citizens Assembly, or multiple citizens assemblies up and down the country? That would be for the people to decide.

The prospect of a simple and direct e-democracy, in which members are invited to vote digitally on as many issues as a sitting and representative parliament, frightens some people. E-democracy – trialled by the Finnish government in 2015 – is challenging, because the degree of attention or personal autonomy we are able to exercise in our pressured lives varies so much.

Some of our worries over time and capacity are addressed by the concept of liquid democracy, which offers an ongoing choice to cast a vote or delegate that vote to another authority. (The Pirate Party in Germany has been practising this since 2010.)

In an interview with Andrew Marr on 10 July 2016, Arron Banks the financial backer of Leave.EU now wanting to put his next £10 million into building a new party, called for exactly such as shift.[21] Seeing online participation, including multiple referenda as the manifestation of an evolved democracy, Banks, a libertarian, believes people 'know what they want'.

But when seeking more public participation in politics should we be going straight to a technological fix? Particularly when there is so much everyday citizens' engagement that goes unacknowledged by politicians and society?

Consider this broad range of types of engagement, and the varying amounts of time, attention and capacity each requires:

- Sign a petition, share on Facebook, tweet.
- Go on a march (e.g. CND).
- Volunteer as an 'ambassador' for your country (e.g. Olympics or Commonwealth Games).
- Attend regular meetings of a community project (e.g. Frome's Flatpack Democracy).
- Be committed to regular activism (e.g. Sisters Uncut).
- Run a local community project (e.g. Alexandra Park Football Club).
- Volunteer with the church, mosque or ashram (e.g. Brent daily homework club).
- Volunteer regularly for a charity or NGO (e.g. have a

part-time job at the Oxfam shop).
- Volunteer for a citizens' jury.

Would a 2016 Constitutional Convention be able to witness, monitor or even process these diverse kinds of social actions, in a way that enriches our democracy over the long term, in the form of a citizens' assembly? Could that assembly work towards becoming a Third House, or replacing the House of Lords? Or should it exist well outside established power structures?

And would these bodies become a medium through which parties could engage more effectively with the people? It is crucial to explore this tension between the virtues of institutionalisation, and the call for fluidity in a more meaningful democracy.

Of course there is a danger that a 2016 constitutional convention would institutionalise and then slow down what is currently a constantly changing reality for citizen activism or people's politics. On the campaign trail with Bernie Sanders in the US, Paul Hilder described the excitement engendered by real time change in the ten years since Obama's victory:

In 2008 the articles about Obama's victory focused on how they would go into a state and open an office and train people, whose job was then to train others' [a Sanders activist says]. 'In every single state, Bernie's people were already there and ready before a single staffer showed up. They are willing to more or less follow the directives of staff, but they also have a tremendous amount of autonomy. And the way they got there was by using social networking… A lot of the people who got attracted to the campaign had experience with movements like Occupy or #FightFor15. All these movements have been fuelled by digital tactics. And now that people know what the routine is, they're like, oh, I'm going to start a page for my neighbourhood, city or constituency. The Sanders team didn't build it – the Sanders team can't dismantle it.[22]

Paul Hilder

The difficulty – as even the SNP is currently experiencing – is how to generate that level of commitment and excitement without an urgent deadline like a referendum or general election.

STRUCTURE

We have established that the relationship between traditional political party structures and the people is vertical in nature. But even that pathway has become narrower over the past decade.

It is now at the point where meaningful engagement between the government and the people has been lost altogether, taking place almost entirely via the media, whose agendas shape the conversation between the two. Politicians have their eyes on business and industry, and present their backs to the people, leading them in service to the market.

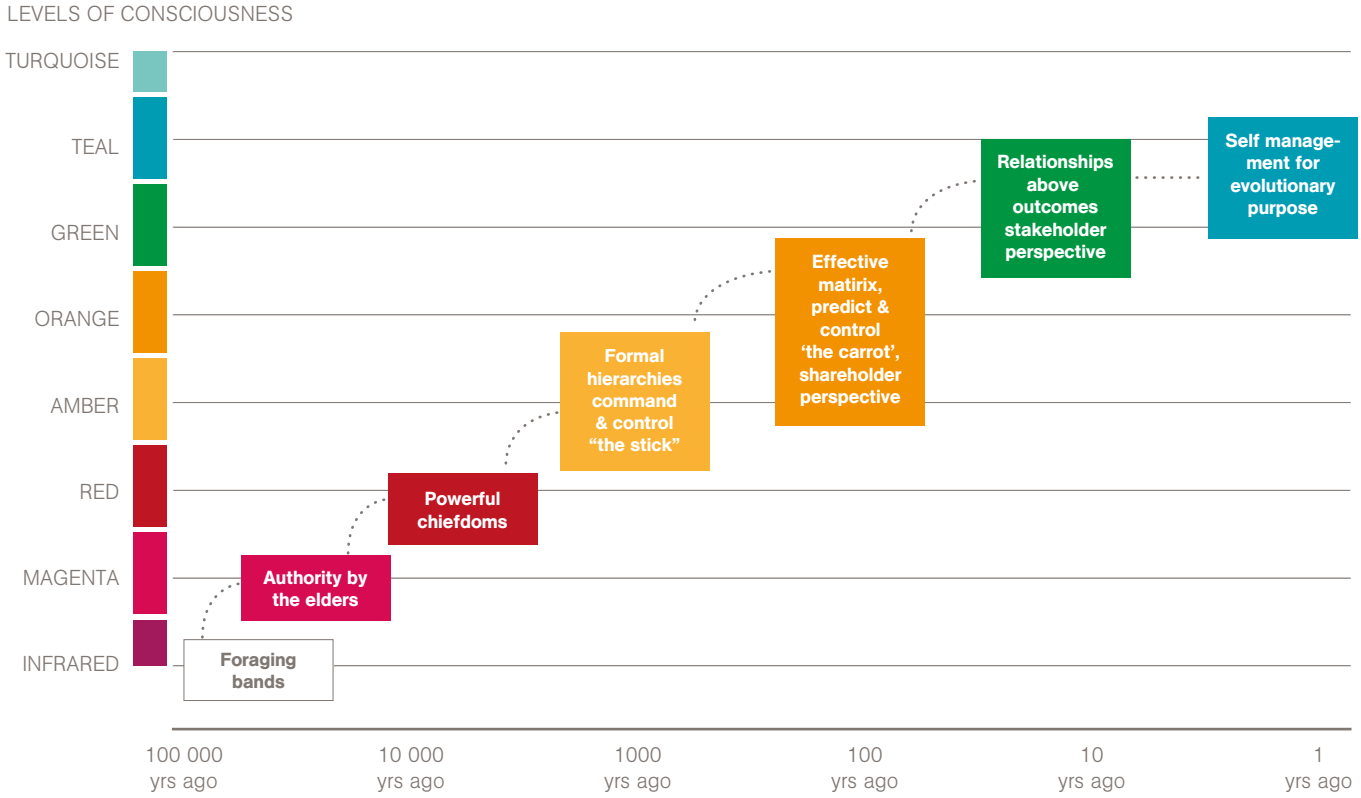
Richard Katz and Peter Mair took this observation further in the Cartel Party Thesis (2009), which used data to evidence how parties 'use the resources of the state to maintain their position within the political system'.[23] They argue that parties in Western Europe have 'adapted themselves to declining levels of participation and involvement in party activities by not only turning to resources provided by the state but by doing so in a collusive manner'.[24] Common resources are harnessed for the preservation not just of an economic elite, but a political one.

One of the ways cartel government creates consent for this structure is to take over the language of public goods by private services. Witness the ways in which public services have reduced the role of their workers from precious interlocutors to providers of services to 'customers' – previously people – within a market narrative of efficiency and profit. Citizens too have become customers of Westminster.

Just as care workers have switched from providing 'meals on wheels' delivered personally to the elderly, to sending 'meals by post' (eliminating any time wasting chat), so we, the citizens are expected to turn up and tick the correct boxes just once every five years. No engagement required.

It has to be said that many individual MPs are caught uncomfortably in the middle between the Westminster cartel culture and their constituencies. Most experience a sharp contrast between the ever better articulated frustration of their constituents – through emails, petitions,

FIGURE 2 OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN ORGANISATIONAL PARADIGMS FROM FREDERICK LALOUX'S BOOK, REINVENTING ORGANISATIONS



tweets, on top of regular surgery appointments – and a lack of capacity to represent their needs and views in Parliament. It does not help that many of the bodies that might have acted as intermediaries – job centres, citizens advice bureaus, legal aid centres – have been shut down.

Those politicians who can stand outside the 'cartel' culture – the Greens, UKIP, Corbyn Labour – could learn from the breakthrough work in European public services, such as that of nursing organisation Buurtzorg (the Dutch for 'neighbourhood care'; www.buurtzorgusa.org/). Their lesson is this: allowing people to self-manage their lives, rather than submitting to models and rules handed down from above, is far more successful in delivering services to patients – or citizens.

Buurtzorg has been investigated by Frederik Laloux in his popular book Reinventing Organisations.[25] Laloux describes how clients suffer and regularly die for want of attention when nationwide care services are run by electronic timetables. Even the coldest hearted bureaucrat understands this is neither efficient nor effective. Buurtzorg sees that patients' needs can best be met when nurses self-organise their care work, neighbourhood by neighbourhood.

These horizontal, peer-to-peer networks meet regularly to share understanding and information about their clients. Their structures allowed relationship and trust to come back into the nursing system. A higher tier of management in Buurtzorg accepts the findings of these self-organised groups, using the information they bring to plan the future for the organisation as a whole. What started as a local initiative has become a nationwide network of 8,000 nurses serving up to 80,000 people in small groups of ten. This is a revolution in community nursing, which could be echoed throughout public services.

Fundamental to Laloux's model is a developmental narrative. A sense that from whatever standpoint we take – individual, social, political, business – we are always developing our ability to manage ourselves and our environment in a better and increasingly complex way, due to our collective intelligence.

Laloux identifies six historic stages of developmental change (described in figure 2). They move from a simple command-and-control style of change, to the more egalitarian style of change used by many civil society and activist groups. Through his work in organisations as a McKinsey consultant, Laloux saw the limitations of emphasing super-efficiency, controlled by remote schedules. In response, Laloux introduces what he calls the 'teal' model. Structurally, this is more like a natural ecosystem, complex and self-managing.

In the teal model, leadership is distributed, so that no strong hierarchy – the kind that disempowers each preceding level of responsibility – arises. However, it is not a leaderless model. Using their 'all of us are smarter than any one of us' ethos, Buurtzorg style CEOs (or equivalent) are obliged to move beyond their own rigid goals. Instead, they must serve the more complex vision of the people they work with.

Because the model implies trust in people, whenever decisions are made the participants reach for the highest possible realisation of the group's potential, rather than a lowest common denominator approach. Strangely and poignantly, this model sounds like the representative democracy we are already supposed to have: local networks of people tackling their needs along with their MP, whose job it is to feed those findings up to a fully interested government.

How have the parties drifted so far from being respondents to their constituents' needs – becoming the hard-to-reach honourable gentlemen or ladies with their own agendas, expecting support from the people? Let's put all the issues of self-interest aside. Could the core problem be that these MPs cannot manage the size and scope of the problems they are tasked with solving every day – the constant demands of a globalised world?

If we were to draw a diagram of the possible relationship between Westminster and the people it purports to serve, the 1990s and 2000s model would look like a pyramid. Global business and industry would be at the top, the MPs below them, civil society below that and the people stretched along the bottom.

Not all, but far too many MPs have been looking up to the peak of the pyramid, their attention drifting only intermittently downwards. That behaviour was possible to maintain as long as those in authority could control the information flowing downwards; power is most easily protected through selective access to knowledge. But that has changed. The old model is bust and in flux. Today, as described above, free access to information, the ability to generate new discourses and narratives is in the hands of the people. What is generated is not simply 'demands' from constituents – as in the old model – but much of the rich content government needs to answer our socioeconomic problems.

The context for MPs to act in ignorance of the people – and the resources they bring – has gone. The people have become non-state actors, increasingly reshaping the public space.

How long has it been since we looked to Westminster for cutting edge thinking or problem solving? Whether it is work on a Citizens Income (http://citizensincome.org/), local currencies (http://realeconomylab.org/), relational welfare (http://guerillawire.org/author/relational-welfare/), community organising (www.corganisers.org.uk/) or green

energy (http://bze.org.au/), we are pleasantly surprised when MPs appear to get up to speed with social innovation. We are not there yet, but the shape of an upside-down pyramid is coming into view.

Of course, it would be inaccurate to say the new politics arises entirely outside of traditional forms of political culture. In fact, as things stand, grassroots or folk politics movements must be mirrored by, or find a link to, a political agent, whether a civil society activist group or a political party, to make a direct impact on government. But will it always be that way? Wouldn't a genuinely new political culture transform the relationship between the grassroots and government at both ends, with the modus operandi becoming consistent between the micro and the macro?

It is hard to imagine but this is the aim of experimental political parties – like Denmark's Alternativet Party, introduced below. Their laboratory approach to politics, not just their crowdsourcing policy but also being prepared to act as a virus within Parliament, changing culture by upsetting tradition, suggests that a very different kind of party is possible. If that becomes the case in the future, then the actions of the party members and the parliamentarians will not look that dissimilar – they will echo and illustrate the same values, behaviours and forms of agency. The gulf will shrink, become less opaque, until it is barely noticeable: just as in the virtual world of the internet, politics will become flatter.

Is anyone already doing that in the UK? In the years leading up to the Scottish Independence referendum a very diverse and eclectic movement for Yes grew up around the SNP. It was this movement that brought in first time voters, young and old. It was the Yes movement that initiated and sustained a vibrant inquiry into what kind of a country the Scottish people wanted. The 'Yessers' helped Alex Salmond and his deputy, Nicola Sturgeon, to realise their 'positive thinking' strategy.

'I believe in client-centered care, with nursing that is independent and collaborative,' said Jos de Blok, Director and CEO, Buurtzorg Nederland, 'The community-based nurse should have a central role – after all they know best how they can support specific circumstances for the client.'

Yes Scotland remained distinct from the Scottish government throughout the referendum. At a certain peak of community involvement, Chief Executive Blair Jenkins had to describe the Yes campaign as 'out of control' of its official main organisation.[26] But throughout, Nicola Sturgeon sat on the Yes Scotland board – itself a diverse, multi-party and non-party body – and helped drive and brand it.

Before the referendum only 25,642 were SNP members. However, after the No vote another 75,000 of Yessers joined the SNP, radically shifting the political picture in Scotland.[27] In the 2010 election, the Labour Party won 42% of the vote. However, in the 2015 UK general election post the Indy ref, Labour's vote fell to 24.3% and the SNP won all but three of Scotland's MP seats.

That might seem like the end of the story. But the continued autonomy of the Independence movement – as well as the freshly defined Unionist counterpart – has continuing consequences. Scottish Parliament elections are held under a proportional system (specifically the Additional Member System, in which there are constituency and regional 'list' members of the Scottish Parliament, creating a 'first' and 'second' vote). Rather than confirm the Westminster result by establishing an unassailable SNP majority in the Holyrood elections of 2016, the Scottish people chose to use their two votes differently to reflect the more diverse, internal polity. Hence, the SNP lost its overall majority in the Scottish Parliament, with six Scottish Greens making up a 'Yes majority', the Conservative Party more than doubled their seats and Labour slipped to third.

Even so, the Yes movement has changed Scottish politics forever. The symbiotic – although not fully reciprocal – relationship between movement and party allows the culture of the Yes grassroots, as a spontaneous emergence, to stand its ground, no doubt infecting the cultures of the other parties too. Over time, that emergence will continue to re-shape the party, not just from the Yessers of 2015, but from outside those campaigning boundaries too.

If the SNP becomes resistant or over-controlling, it could kill this democratising movement originating with Yes. Yet even the attempt to do so would probably generate resistance, which would either subsume the Party itself, or generate new alternative parties.

The tension is a familiar – and healthy – one in the 'new politics', as the case of Podemos shows.

While there is no formal link between Podemos and the ongoing anti-corruption and anti-austerity Indignados or 15-M Movement, Pablo Iglesias and others lay claim to their achievements. This is a source of much discomfort

for the original movement leaders, who wish to remain independent and free to back other parties.[29]

It is a recurring conundrum. If the original uprising is the voice of the people against a ruling elite, how can the party – once they have MPs taking part in the political culture – remain connected and in service to the movement, rather than become in thrall to the conventional political dynamics?

Today, Podemos' Citizens Assembly is made up of its 350,000 members, who have an equal vote on everything from leadership to policy and strategy. It is served by an outer ring of small circles; these meet locally or sectorally to discuss issues in preparation for the vote. Then there is an inner circle of leaders who 'serve' the membership and stand for office. The circular structure emphasises Podemos' democratic intent of giving voice to all, irrespective of status: it feels natural, human and inviting.

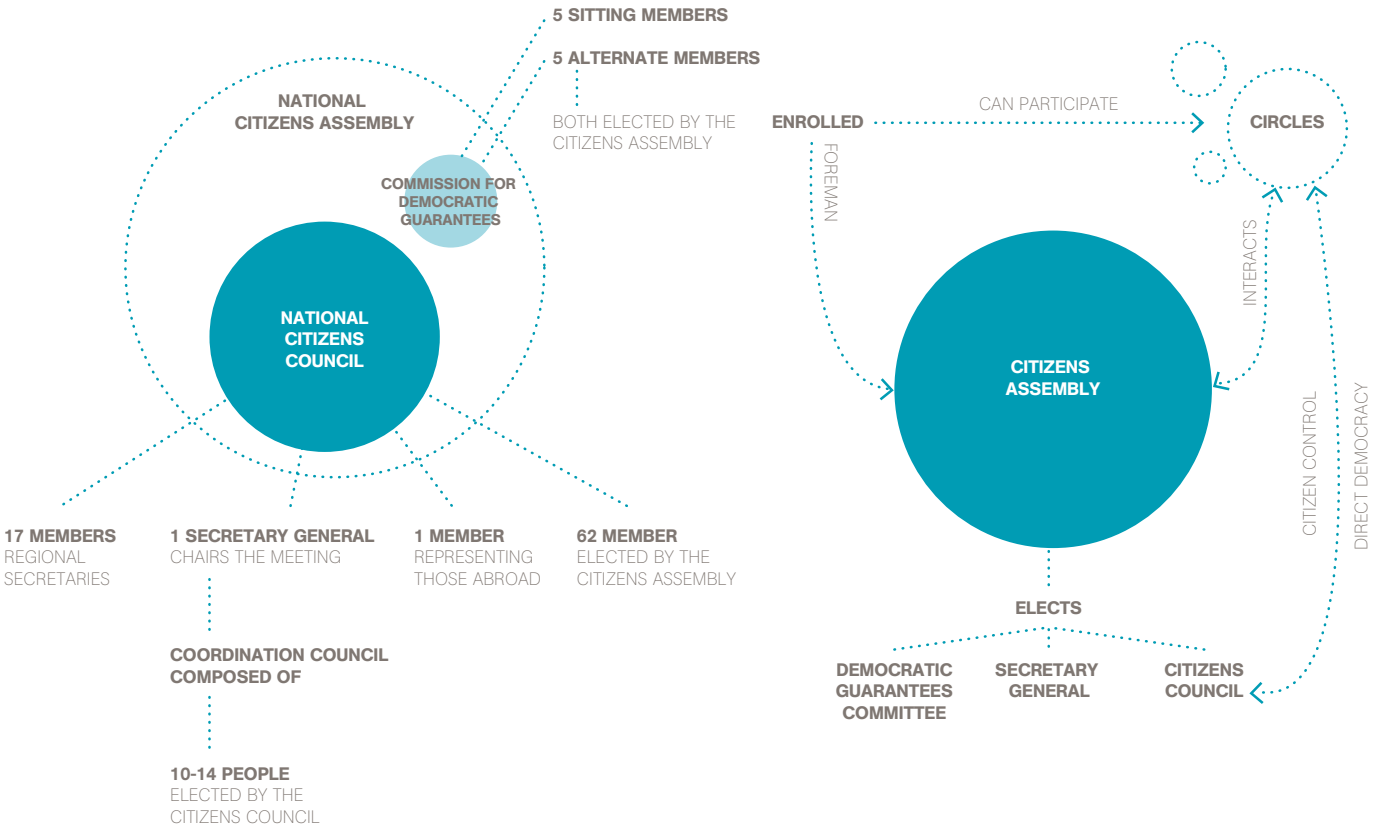
At the elections in December 2015 Podemos leapt into contention, winning 20.7% of the vote – an extraordinary result that left the country without a clear majority for any party. In a bid to hold the balance of power and possibly enter into a governing coalition, the Podemos leadership chose to become strategic and joined forces with the United Left to become Unidos Podemos. But in the re-run in June 2016 they lost 1.6 million votes and there was a growing divide between the party and the movement. Was Iglesias acting inconsistently with the 'new politics' ethos by joining other parties that do not share its culture? Elections, more than any other time in the political process, challenge and expose the mechanics and internal relationships within the party. However while the fairy tale of rising from nowhere to take the country may be over, these are still early, bright and hopeful days. The conditions in Spain are ever riper for radical change and it is likely Podemos will play a major role in the future.

Within our general question – what is the best relationship between movement and political party? – lies this challenge: *How can the political party broaden its base and appeal, if it can only recognize those spontaneous movements that already reflect its established values and current practices?*

To help us recognise how different our current challenges are, it might be useful to recall briefly New Labour's modus operandi. For New Labour, our question of how effectively political parties might respond to emergent networked movements was hardly even thinkable. Their arena of battle was 'capturing the middle ground', a 'Third Way' between left and right. But their methods were all the conventional practices of the traditional political party. Capture a top-down mainstream media with your narratives, and through that display a 'modernising' competence. And all the while, assume a voting populace whose desires could be reflected back to them through

'For us, the spirit that allowed the indignados movement to be born and grow can be summed up in its own words: "Some of us see ourselves as more progressive, others as more conservative", leaving no doubt that 15M would be a pragmatic rather than an ideological movement. This is the key to its success. The Left had been calling for rebellion for years, with few results. So whether we like it or not, the indignados achieved what the Left couldn't precisely because it was not foundationally ideological.' Simona Levi, co-founder of X-net

FIGURE 3 NEW ORGANISATIONAL MODEL OF PODEMOS

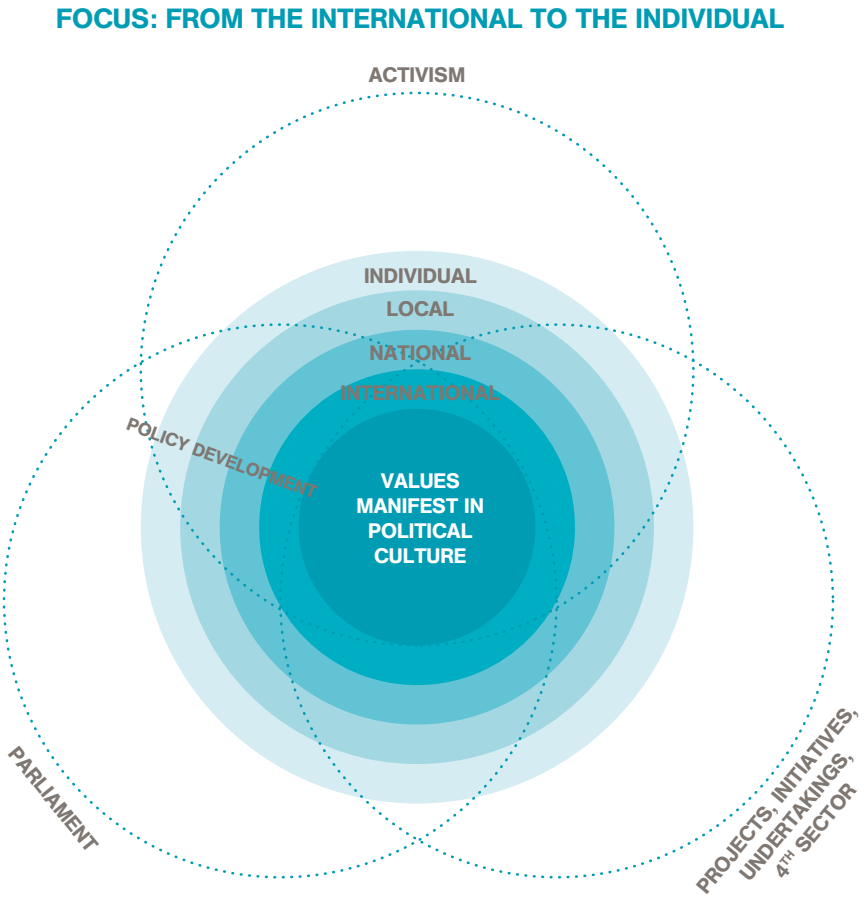


the careful reading of focus-group results. These new 'new times' of the 2010s are much more demanding – and ambitious.

As I begun describing above, Denmark's Alternativet responds to the same challenge in a different way. Rather than direct the members or the movement, Alternativet expects them to stay connected to the grass roots and civil society and feed their data upwards. It is not organised but connected to the party through its explicit values and culture. People are attracted by the headline of an 'alternative', guided by values rather than an ideology, which overly determines its scope or audience. This is not an anti-ideology stance, but neither is it defined by ideology – it is open.

Is this simply *intersectionalism* – exploiting the overlap between single issues, in order to broaden the base of the movement? Or does Alternativet pursue one step further: a culture of openness, that looks at the polity as politically and socially diverse, but having a broad common interest in more and better democracy and saving the planet?

FIGURE 4 THE STRUCTURE OF ALTERNATIVET



Of course, such a broad appeal is generally made easier by conditions or an event that can unite people urgently – like the Scottish referendum deadline, which enabled a joyful and energetic two-year long inquiry into 'what kind of country we want'. Or the extreme poverty and corruption in Spain, which made it easy for the Indignados to name the enemy as an elite (la casta). This gave rise to the formation of local community talking circles – with no signing up required.

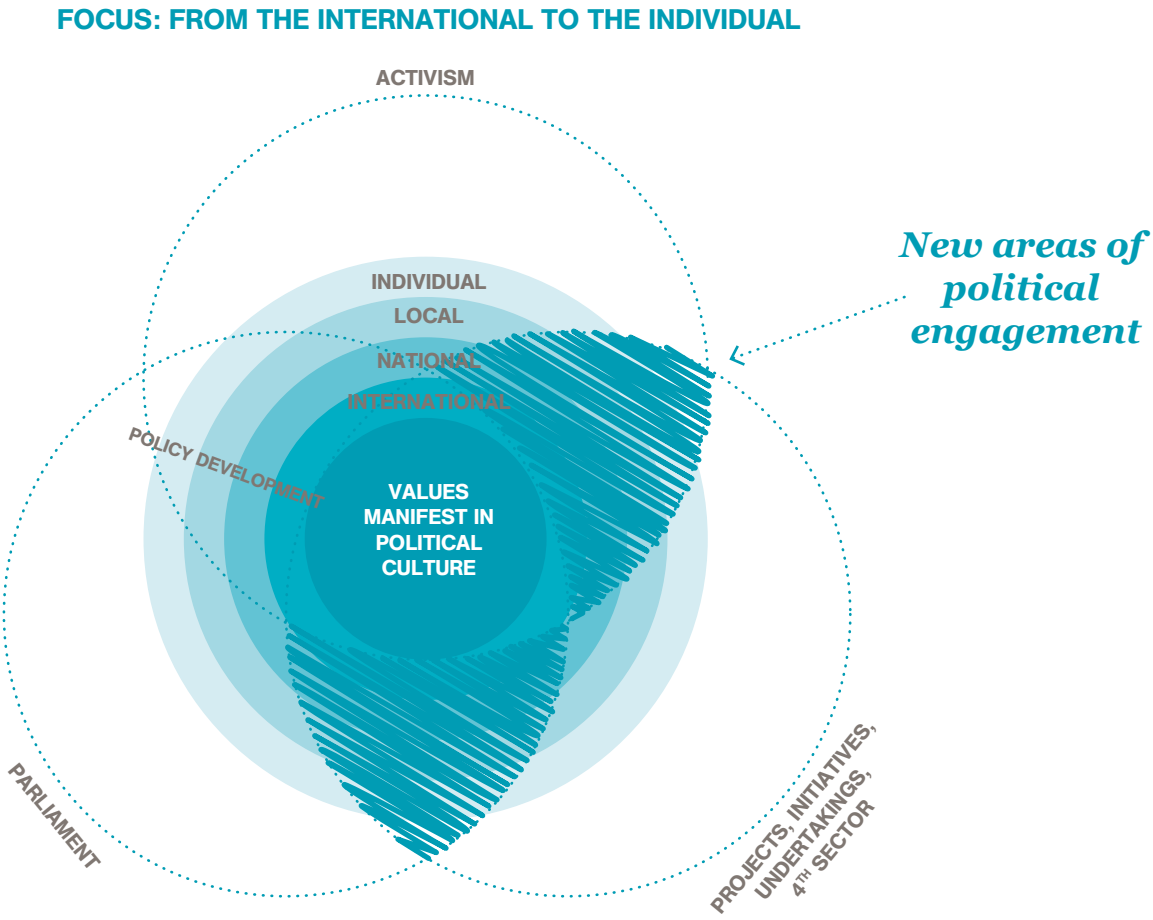
But Alternativet did not start with such a crisis. Creating possibilities for intersectional activism is worked into the structure of Alternativet. In my conversation with Brian Frandsen at their campaign headquarters in Copenhagen, a member of the party but also an activist who believes in the independence of their movement, he drew a diagram (see Figure 4), which suggests how it works.

He posits three overlapping arenas of activity for Alternativet – the Parliament, the activist movement and the local community. Between them they give rise to a shared space, a 'fourth sector', which brings together the best of the private sector (finance and orientation towards users), the public sector (investing for the common good) and the third sector (engaging the public). The fulcrum where they all overlap is where the ideology of Alternativet sits and develops as it grows.

However, that is only one starting point. Figure 5 shows that there are unlimited ways into the movement, starting from parliamentary events or entrepreneurial connections. The scribbled-in shapes in Figure 5 are examples of how the overlapping arenas can create new publics. In Brian's words, wherever you are in the diagram, you *create value* within that space – there is no pre-defined idea of what counts as a valuable contribution.

Of course, Alternativet had the luxury of starting from scratch. A blank sheet allows it to change the rules of inclusion in a political party. Not only is it a people's party, but it also offers membership and ambassadorship on an international level. As we speak, Alternative platforms, with or without parties, are being explored in Norway, Sweden and the USA. Why should geography limit an idea?

FIGURE 5 WAYS INTO ALTERNATIVET



POLITICAL CULTURE

As social movements thrive and political parties shrink, how important is culture as an attractor? By culture we mean the values, attitudes, behaviour, practices and design of an organisation, community or movement. How it feels to be in it.

Given that movements and activist organisations are in the ascent, it might be worth starting there. Paul Hilder was a key figure in the launch of Avaaz (now with 45 million members), Vice President of Campaigns at change.org (80 million users) and is now Executive Director of Here Now and co-founder of Crowdpac. In the seminars leading up to this paper, Paul cited three key elements of a successful people's organisation:

- There should be a commitment to serve the members by encouraging and embracing their participatory experience.
- Being a member of the organisation – whether party or movement – should be transformational: it should change your life.
- The issues the organisation takes on should be intersectional – crossing boundaries, creating new vistas, opening up possibility.

The power that such organisations generate is more soft than hard – they generate influence and create the conditions for change, while prefiguring the good society.

Can a political party afford to invest so much time and energy in building what Hilary Wainwright describes as 'transformative capacity', rather than the pursuit of dominance? It is possible that pursuing the latter can create spaces for the former. For example, while the Greater London Council was a contested political body, it was also a cultural hub, a civic laboratory that explored new ways of interacting with the public, whoever was in power in Westminster. That is more difficult to achieve in

the role of Her Majesty's Opposition, playing your part in a Commons culture that is brutally competitive.

The persistence of unequal status, rigid hierarchies and puerile behaviour from all parties on the floor of the Commons is now giving rise to a more direct critique of styles of power. The new economic organisers network (NEON) created a Power and Privilege Toolbox that puts all forms of historic and cultural dominance under the spotlight.

NEON not only articulates an ideal of what a truly 'equal opportunity' to speak, act and be heard might look like, but also offers concrete practice and training for how to get there. This includes how to run meetings, what kind of venues are conducive to democratic practice, and how to check yourself for selective deafness.

Others take a slightly less doctrinaire approach. Local and community organisations such as Transition Towns pay great attention to sustainable relationships. Once someone is through the door they ask: what will make them want to stay?[30] What is the unique skill or energy of the newcomer that will help to grow our movement? It is a culture of friendship and co-operation that is rarely replicated in local party politics. There, the rationale for coming together is more to serve the established agenda of the parliamentary party.

Unless, of course, you are one of the Independents for Frome (IfF) – a group of residents who came together to challenge the old parties' dominance on Frome County Council, in Somerset. Starting without a stated ideology but with a commitment to basing all their decisions on local needs, the IfF first stood for election in 2011.

On their first try, 10 of the 17 who stood together were successful, giving them instant control of the council. More importantly, gaining a council majority gave them the freedom to create new 'Ways of Working' with the local population, which has since been described in their book *Flatpack Democracy*.[31]

These Ways of Working covered how the group would conduct business and the ethos of a council they might lead. They were later adjusted to focus on five core values and a list covering how the group would adhere to them. These were the core values:

1. **Independence:** We will each make up our own mind about each decision without reference to a shared dogma or ideology.
2. **Integrity:** Decisions will be made in an open and understandable manner. Information will be made available even when we make mistakes and everyone will have the opportunity to influence decisions.
3. **Positivity:** We will look for solutions, involving others in the discussions, not just describe problems.
4. **Creativity:** Use new, or borrowed, ideas from within the group and the wider community to refresh what we do and how we do it.
5. **Respect:** Understand that everyone has an equal voice and is worth listening to.

The group would adhere to these values by challenging themselves and each other to:

- avoid identifying ourselves so personally with a particular position that this in itself excludes constructive debate
- being prepared to be swayed by the arguments of others and admitting mistakes
- be willing and able to participate in rational debate leading to a conclusion
- understand the value of constructive debate
- accept that you win some, you lose some; it is usually nothing personal and there's really no point in taking defeats to heart
- maintain confidentially where requested and agree when it will be expected
- share leadership and responsibility and take time to communicate the intention of, and the approach to, the work we undertake
- have confidence in, and adhere to, the mechanisms and processes of decision-making that we establish, accepting that the decisions of the majority are paramount
- sustain an intention to involve each other and others rather than working in isolation
- trust and have confidence and optimism in other people's expertise, knowledge and intentions; talk to each other not about each other.

Out of these principles came a system of 'working parties' – groups open to anyone living in the community – who take on specific issues, from planning bicycle routes to defining ethical policy. This then evolved into 'panels' – not unlike the circles of Podemos, with tightly defined meetings bringing in community expertise to make recommendations for policy and strategy. Unless there is a really good reason not to, and budget permitting, the council adopts them. Because 'failure to implement them would rapidly undermine the whole idea'.

I spoke to Peter Macfadyen, leader of Frome Council, Mayor of Frome 2014/15 (see 'The mayor's chains'[32]) and author of *Flatpack Democracy*, about the larger impact of what happened at Frome on UK politics.[33]

As expected, Peter expressed frustration about the limits of economic power at the local level, and it is still too early to see how far the council is able to reach the public, and invite their participation. Yet there is a lot of satisfaction in seeing, given the time, space and commitment to the community everyone brings, how easy it is to agree and get things done. 'When there are disagreements,

they don't last long,' says Peter. 'We just explain our perspectives to each other and more often than not, we get an understanding. It's like, yes, I get it now. It's a human, reasonable experience.'

Interestingly, some of the aims and ambitions of IfF were anticipated by the Localism Act of 2011.[34] Peter's view is that, even if it was a Conservative initiative, it did more to evoke grassroots politics than New Labour's ideas for a more communitarian – 'rights and responsibilities' – polity.[35] Similarly, the Big Society initiative was influential, however badly executed.

Having said that, the localism that Frome nurtures is clearly distinct from what UKIP has been honing. Founded by Alan Sked as the Anti-Federalist League in 1991 to oppose the Maastricht Treaty, UKIP was born in 1993 but had few significant breakthroughs until the local elections of 2013 led by Nigel Farage. Promoting itself as a Eurosceptic party for the white working class, UKIP won 147 seats, polling 23% of the vote across the board to be labelled by the media as the 'most popular insurgency' in the UK since the Social Democratic Party in the 1980s. But while Farage made much of his localist approach, many saw the contradictions in his city banker past and fondness for partying with elite networks. Labour candidate for South Thanet, Will Scobie, wrote about the constituency's fear of becoming an isolated, 'rotten borough' under Farage.[36]

Even so, the Leave vote in the 2016 EU referendum – 52% on a 72.2 % turnout – owed much to localist rhetoric: an overarching call for local community decisions to be taken as close to home as possible at all times. However, when the key movers – Nigel Farage, Douglas Carswell, Arron Banks – are libertarians, it is more likely that this will take the shape of online voting and multiple referenda than the more slow and patient development of new political cultures as experienced in Transition Networks or Frome.

Do members of the Flatpack Democracy group think of scaling their process up into a national political party? They are certainly not ambitious in the way that political activists might be (Podemos, for example, had in mind the end of the two party state from their first meeting).[37] Even so, the IfF has an ethos, a philosophy and the well articulated Ways of Working (captured in the book). Their method is replicable, and is causing similar independent (more accurately 'anti-party politics') groups to rise across the country. 'It's a network of active, bolshie, local councils whose influence is spreading,' said Peter. 'Who knows what kind of demand that might generate among the public from their political leaders in the future?'
In July 2016 IfF's authentic, values based approach to governance attracted Brian Frandsen, Co-Chair, and Helle Engelbrechtsen, co-founder of the Alternativet party from Denmark, to come to Frome and explore their commonalities and differences: I was there. It was fascinating to see what a good match the open government style of Alternativet was with the autonomous localist approach of Frome – like the two parts of a space ship docking. What Brian and Helle could offer the Independents from Frome was the bigger developmental picture (Figure 5) and praxis arising from that. This consists partly of having an overview of how each sector – politics, activist and community – overlaps and then working at the seams between them, using their core values to change the relationships.

In a series of workshops, we explored the antagonism at the interface between the levels of power. There were a number of activists there who were about to become politicians, worried about the shift of mindset they would have to occupy. Through role playing each sector, a new empathy arose between them and many concrete suggestions were made for how each could help the other to do a better job. Rather than focus on power imbalance, we looked at the dynamics which could give rise to more inter-dependence. Mock televised debates and panels helped all participants to try out different political behaviours, such as not knowing the answers to questions or admitting mistakes. The liberation of being guided by common values rather than policy or ideology was palpable.

Given the growing strength of independent politician groups, localist politics and autonomous civil society initiatives – many of which share this co-creating, relationship orientated, values based culture – is there a future for a party based on the Alternativet values led approach to politics?

On a boat on the River Seine one week after the Paris atrocity in November 2015, I had a chance to interview three key European party figures on the question of culture and its role in the success of a political party.

Birgitta Jonsdottir of the Iceland Pirate Party (which has no leaders but a circle of power) founded The Movement in the wake of the Icelandic financial crisis. This gave rise to the Icelandic Pirate Party, inspired by the Swedish Party of the same name with whom they co-operate via Pirate Parties International.

In Iceland the Pirate Party is now on 43% in the polls and could be in government come the next general election. Birgitta co-founded and is Chair of the Modern Media Institute (Iceland) and is also a prolific poet, writer, editor and artist. Birgitta said:

People are afraid or, at best, they are anxious. Rather than attack and defend, we should be inspiring people to feel they are part of something amazing – create a future vision together. We all know the Dystopia on offer (from Hollywood, the right wing of politics and increasingly the mainstream media) but who has offered the Utopia? Even if we have to change our lifestyles to save the planet, creating a culture of doing it together means it will not be awful. Using writers, film makers, artists alongside the politicians, teachers, activists will help us shift the norms and thresholds – much more effectively than any economic model can.

Birgitta Jonsdottir

"As Alice Walker said, activism is my rent for staying on the planet. More people should be involved in creating the positive vision Birgitta describes, making it easier for people to make the urgent choices. We've only terrified people so far". Caroline Lucas MP

Echoing Janan Ganesh's view, Birgitta reflected on the UK statistics that suggest only 10% of people care enough to do anything about the disabled people dying because of the government cuts to services. 'They only stand up when they are afraid for themselves. We have to appeal to them in new ways – to create strong attraction.'

Uffe Elbæk, founder and leader of Alternativet, regularly matches Birgitta's call for politics to have more 'verve and vivacity'. Like those handbooks for revolution cited earlier, he suggests that we should not be afraid to try and reach people by whatever means we can. Comedy, self-interest, emotion – all are legitimate as means to engagement. Why should politics be so different from any other social gathering?

'I've always been an outsider and that awkward feeling saves me, helps me to be a rebel, but it's no good doing it on your own,' said Uffe. As founder of an international training programme for millennial entrepreneurs called Kaos Pilots, Uffe cites the need to be 'playful, real world, risk taking, street-wise, balanced, compassionate' – in order to be sustainable in all your projects. 'Knowing your values is key because the context changes from day to day. It's not just staying sure, but staying flexible.'

The third politician on the boat was Caroline Lucas of the Green Party for England and Wales – the only Green MP in Westminster despite winning 3.8% of the vote (1.2 million people). Before the election, in response to the BBC excluding the Green Party from the core debate platform (while including UKIP) there was a surge of support, which later translated into a rise in membership and 11% of the vote in the polls. What happened to that surge: did culture play any part?

While neither UKIP nor the Greens could improve their representation in Parliament because of the voting system, UKIP has nevertheless been able to use that vote to shape the political agenda: dramatically so as the voice of the Leave vote, but also, before that, in its stance on immigration. Given that so many of the voting public accepts, in principle, the importance of protecting the environment, why has the Green Party not been able to develop a comparable public voice with an active movement behind it?

Funding plays a part: UKIP received £3.5 million vs the Green Party's £712,000 running up to the general election.[38] UKIP's backers are not just wealthy but focused on message: one Paul Sykes donated £1.5 million of his own money to run what was described as a racist advertising campaign in the run up to the European elections. Add to that the charismatic personality of Nigel Farage and the skillful crafting of a populist narrative and you can see how UKIP's influence spread. Even so, without local organisation, often as basic as social meetings in pubs, this would not have translated into the level of votes UKIP and later Leave enjoyed.

Does the Green Party lack the fluidity and soft power approach of other small parties – the SNP for example – that might allow it to grow faster? Given the high level of youth membership, why does the party still have an esoteric rather than modern image? It makes clear in its manifesto that it is committed to parliamentary representation and that to have a say in the party you have to be a member prepared to vote at conference. However, there is less evidence of the sort of transformative organising that Momentum and others are now adopting from the European parties.

As an activist herself since school and part of the Greenham Common anti-nuclear movement,[39] Caroline agreed that politics has lost its participative culture and should try to regain it – particularly with a view to finding a positive message:

People find it hard to grasp the motivation of politicians, on the benches in their grey suits. They can't see what lies behind that. It's also time for more women's voices to be heard, not just for the sake of equality but for a better connected conversation. Not many people realise that working in the European Parliament, which has a much better gender balance than Westminster, is actually a much more co-operative, consensual space than anything we experience here. With all the caveats of avoiding stereotyping, a more feminine political culture is overdue.

Caroline Lucas

While some may see the feminisation of politics as secondary, others – not just feminists – see it as primary: the *means* to evolve both politics and society. The goals are not simply about numbers of women but about what women bring – a different style and rationale for politics. Top lines might include moving on from the confrontational, ya-boo style of debate in Parliament to a more discursive mode, more diversity at every level, and a more consensual approach overall. But on a deeper level, changes in theory and policy are offered: a more relational mode of operation – such as Participle pioneered – for public services,[40] a caring economy such as has been developed by Riane Eisler in the US,[41] a soft power approach to international relations.[42]

From such a developmental point of view, the Green Party may be simply ahead of its time: seeing a world in which armies are no longer necessary, where steady state economies replace relentless growth and the planet becomes sustainable through advanced technologies and transformed lifestyles. Yet, within the current neoliberal culture, which champions almost the opposite on every front, the hard work of bringing people along, from their starting point, has to be faced.

All the above suggests that the difficult tasks that activism and localism take on – overcoming division, forging relationships, surfacing common human values, breaking down the barriers to entry for citizens – is what makes contemporary politics sustainable and gives it a future. And even though it is yet not clear to us how this local politics scales up to the national level, that makes it far from irrelevant to our concerns here.

While political parties may not take the same forms, they should consider adapting to the values and culture being painstakingly honed on the front line – whether in activism groups or in local community politics – if they are to become attractive to the people again.

LEADERSHIP

In the run up to the last general election, the polls regularly suggested that Labour would win, but never once suggested that Ed Miliband would be the prime minster. The clash of these two findings might have prompted the Labour Party to ditch their leader, but Ed himself never allowed his unpopularity to affect his decision-making. Instead, he regularly announced that, despite the public's opinion of him, he was ready for the challenge. Was he right to do so?

If you are thinking about that on a personal level – do I like Ed? does he inspire me? – you may be thinking he was. If you are thinking about it impersonally – was he the right leader for the time? – you may be thinking he wasn't. Both are legitimate responses, the first arising from attachment, the other from some sense – rightly or wrongly – that you can predict what the wider public is going to choose. Ed's failure to become broadly popular outside his own party, leading to one of the worst results in Labour's history, means that every contender will now be put to the 'but is he electable?' test. But in whose gift is it to decide? When all the political parties are failing to deliver a modern, participatory democracy, who can predict what will appeal to those who have not actively made their preferences known before?

As I was writing this paper (in summer 2016) the leadership of the Labour Party was once again in contention because Labour MPs had brought a vote of no confidence in Jeremy Corbyn, saying he was 'unelectable'. In the post-EU referendum vote which had seen Theresa May quickly elected to leadership of the Conservative Party following David Cameron's resignation, there was every chance that a snap general election would be called and the polls were not looking good for the Labour leader.

However, the party members, many of whom had joined to elect Corbyn as leader only ten months earlier, took a different view. Watching the wave of popularity of Bernie Sanders in the US, Pablo Iglesias in Spain, and other leaders who had built their success on uprisings of popular feeling, they believed that Corbyn was the only leader who could appeal to young people and previously disaffected voters. Momentum – the political movement founded by Corbyn – sees itself as the new politics we have all been waiting for.

This tension between old and new *within a party* is painful: can it lead to renewal when global forces for change are so polarised? The prospect of the Labour Party splitting is every bit as likely under these conditions as the Labour Party suddenly, Pokemon style, evolving to become bigger than its warring parts.

The tension that always exists between looking for a leader who can lead and one who can serve arises from a vertical structure. The first kind of leader implies a pyramid – the second kind requires that pyramid to be inverted. How does all this work within more networked structures of political organisation?

In his book *Anti Hero,* Richard Wilson argues that 'the modern challenges we face have fundamentally changed what we need from our leaders, requiring a shift from Heroic to Antiheroic leadership'.[43] On examination, this does not simply imply the servant leader, but something more complex: the capacity to display all the familiar traits of strong leadership at one moment, and the ability to step aside the next. Why is this important?

In the world of two or three party politics that we see discredited all over Europe, the polity was divided largely between the left, the right and the middle. Ideology and class did a big job of speaking for the people and authority was largely placed in the leader of the government and opposition to represent the nation. Personality mattered because the people were invisible.

Today the people are much more visible. They don't fall into simple class divides any more but report themselves as more fragmented, diverse and pluralistic. Within the Labour Party are two or three quite different, often competing, groups – the same for the Conservatives. The first-past-the-post system denies this diverse reality and is increasingly discredited; there are now huge anomalies in number of seats relative to votes actually cast.

Young people report being uninterested in sole membership of a party – but otherwise sign up to multiple interest groups. When the Women's Equality Party allowed dual membership it became the fourth party – larger than UKIP at the time – with 45,000 members within three months of its launch. All these facts suggest that political activity is strong out there, but that there is decreasing possibility for single party dominance or control of the political landscape. For this reason, Compass developed from being a Labour campaigning group to becoming an Open Tribe,[44] welcoming all progressive politics through its doors. Monthly meetings exploring the possibility of a Progressive Alliance between Labour, Greens, Lib Dems, Plaid Cymru and the SNP led, post-Brexit to the launch of a campaign to bring the parties together in an electoral pact for proportional representation and maybe more.[45]

This aspect of letting go of overall control is closer to what Richard Wilson describes as 'post-egoic leadership': less about the self and one's own party and more about the whole: winning for the people at any cost. This has much in common with complexity theory ideas about leadership – working at arms' length, encouraging plural and diverse contributions to help solve difficult problems. Roy Madron

identifies why Jeremy Corbyn's strategy – if not always his style of leadership – is appropriate for a more complex age:

> ***I want to change the way we do our politics. I want to be far more participatory, bringing in people who have ideas, people who may of may not have gone to a university, but have good ideas... letting people's ideas flow, with imagination.***[46]
> *Roy Madron, School of Oriental African Studies*

The more charismatic leadership style of Podemos' Pablo Iglesias and his appeal to the electorate beyond the left and right divide must take some of the credit for the party's impressive growth over a short time. Even so, the anti-government conditions in which he has been successful have also given rise to the centre-right Ciudadanos (led by Albert Rivera), and the success of activist Ada Calau in Barcelona – at a time when the call for an Independent Catalonia is also at fever pitch. Will this combined challenge to the two-party state be able to find any agreement among the challengers, and change the political destiny of Spain? The capacity of these three charismatic leaders to rise, but then give way to each other, will be sorely tested.

From the perspective of leadership culture, the progress of Alternativet in Denmark will be instructive. As mentioned above, before party leader Uffe Elbæk went into politics – becoming Minister of Culture for the Liberal Party before jumping ship to found Alternativet – he ran a leadership academy called Kaos Pilots for 20 years. With branches all over the world, Elbæk taught the next generation of leaders how to be able to surf the increasingly complex landscape of global innovation. Today his party is marked by its emphasis on creativity in politics. Everything Alternativet does is designed to act like a virus within the Danish Parliament, infecting the old ways with the new. And new styles of leadership are one of these creative viruses.

Take the way that Alternativet's MPs seat themselves on the floor of the Danish Parliament. The custom is for party leaders to sit at the front of an arrow formation, their MPs fanning out behind them. Instead, the Alternativet MPs sit as an island in the middle of the floor. No one can see who the leader is, or who ranks higher. A larger example of the party's new leadership style is their decision to forego a foreign policy in favour of a global policy. After all, it is not enough to think about Denmark in the world – they think about Denmark for the world.

Just recently Alternative hosted a European gathering of thinkers for a 'political innovation jam' in Copenhagen.[47] One of the three tasks they set for the visitors was to create a leadership programme for those who want to be involved in the politics of tomorrow. Working in the Alternative environment gave participants all the licence they needed to reach for something ambitious and suited to the transitional moment we are in. Figure 6 shows the shifts they saw occurring.

FIGURE 6 XXX

THE POLITICAL IS (ever more) PERSONAL

YESTERDAY	TOMORROW
MECHANICAL	NOURISHING
EDUCATING OTHERS	LEADING OURSELVES
WINNING	INSPIRING
PROGRAMS	PRACTICES
MITIGATING VIOLENCE	CREATING FRIENDSHIPS
NEOLIBERALISM	NEOHUMANISM
REPRESENTATION	RECOGNITION

Referring again to Laloux's conception of a 'teal' world view – one that is attuned to the diversity of the whole, yet leads by allowing groups to self-manage – the group described the capacities of future leaders for:

- listening to multiple realities
- enabling society
- uniting narratives
- embracing transformation
- creating alliances.

The jam eventually formulated a purpose for these future leaders: to 'grow diverse communities of responsible people who can connect the dots of change and inspire transformation with a spirit of generosity'.

Implied in all these inputs is a new idea of leadership that does not point to an elite of capable people, but a capacity for leadership that exists within everyone. In her excellent book How Organizations Develop Activists, Hahrie Han describes the transformational effect of welcoming newcomers into a movement with an invitation to contribute whatever gifts they have. If they bring something new, they are effectively creating and leading that space, giving the movement a chance to deepen as it grows.[48]

WHAT MIGHT A 21ST-CENTURY PARTY LOOK LIKE?

This paper has looked at the possibilities of change for political parties through these four major lenses:

- user experience and action
- structure
- culture
- leadership.

Yet as we look through these lenses, the prospect of Westminster giving rise to a 21st-century party that is distinct from the 20th-century version seems a long way off. How difficult is it to envisage something open, fluid and distributed even being effective? Maybe because we are overly attached to an image of the mother of parliaments – with a dueling chamber at the heart of government – it is like trying to lift a table while we are standing on it.

Even so, there is so much change happening, so many initiatives being reported, so much learning and listening going on that it would be fair to say we are moving towards something. On the way there, can we at least make an attempt to imagine it?

If we are learning from Laloux, and the developmental framework he offers, we'll have some tools for mapping a new direction of travel. Let's try to look at the party as an organisation that is constantly developing new tools to deal with the growing complexity of society in a networked and global age.

If we do that, we can see a line from the past to the future – where each stage of organisation isn't superseded or eradicated by the next, but adds in richness and capacity to the whole, making it ever more capable for complex conditions.

Over the past hundred years, according to this model, we have moved from a command-and-control style, through a shareholder–carrot approach, into a stakeholder mode which prioritises relationships. We are now approaching what Laloux calls 'teal': a self-managing organisation with evolutionary purpose.

It is not the first time such a developmental approach has been suggested. I remember sitting in the House of Commons five years ago listening to a presentation by Chris Rose, author of *What Makes People Tick*, an event organised by Jon Cruddas and David Miliband.[49] I suggested then that the Labour Party already had these three strands working alongside each other in the guises of New Labour, Blue Labour and Old Labour. For a minute, the warring factions in the room were disabled – but only a minute, as none of those present were quite ready to co-operate yet. And co-operation is the key. Sadly, even with the arrival of newish politics under the stewardship of Jeremy Corbyn, the battleground within Labour has only intensified.

FIGURE 7 INTEGRAL MAP OF POLITICAL PARTY DEVELOPMENT?

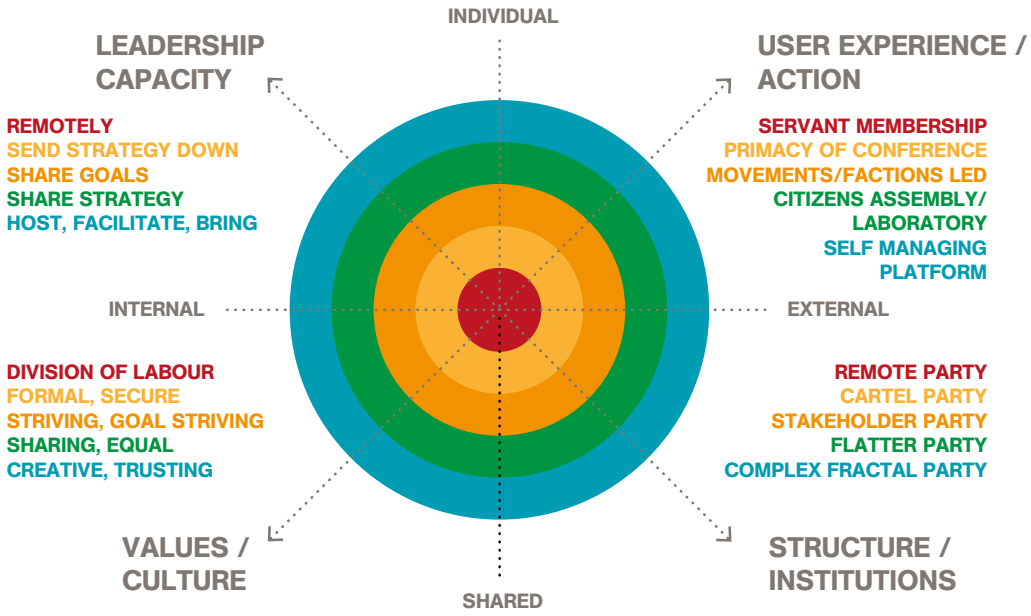


FIGURE 8 POLITICAL PARTY AS PETRI DISH, CULTIVATING THE GOOD SOCIETY

What Laloux is demonstrating with Buurtzorg and other 'teal organisations' is that society is plural and developmental. If you try to manage it in a top-down way, as if everyone you deal with is essentially the same, measurable entity, organisations of all kinds become very dysfunctional.

Allowing groups to be local and self-managing, prioritising relationships and responding to real needs makes this diversity much easier to serve, and to get the best from. It is the opposite of saying one idea or management style fits all. To manage complexity, you have to be complex.

Interestingly, the Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP21) held in Paris in November 2016 used teal methods to come to agreement – depending on bottom-up pledges rising and building, rather than top-down goal setting.[50] Looking at the fluid and capacious styles of the new parties, there is some evidence that they are going in that direction too.

Another aspect of the developmental model Laloux uses is the distinction between an individual and a collective perspective. For an organisation – including a party or a movement – to develop, it has to be able to address the needs of individuals as well as groups. It is exactly this ability to pay better attention to the user experience that makes activist organisations more attractive than parties.

Within that distinction also lies others, the difference between what an activist, member, citizen or anonymous member of the public is, what they do and what they are capable of. This means never thinking of people as vehicles of a manifesto decided in Westminster, but rather as diverse individuals. Some of them may want more responsibility (including training, socials and so on) than others – but all of them are regarded as being able to create value in different ways.

The four-quadrant diagram above Figure 6 shows how the four categories of change in this paper – user experience, culture, structure, leadership – are actually integrated aspects of the whole reality of a political party (or indeed, of any reality we see before us). Change that is made (or emerges) in any one or more of these quadrants, as we can measure it by the coloured stages of development, will have consequences for the other quadrants.

Even merely being able to notice the disjunction between different quadrants, and then thinking about how to respond – whether just identifying the gaps, or seeing a way to close them – is helpful, as the Alternative workshop did in Frome.

Most political thinking in think tanks, media or meetings takes place from only one of these perspectives at the expense of the others. But learning how they might interrelate can help us map our existing party's or organisation's overall identity and feel, and perhaps point towards as yet unseen innovations and progressions.

Developing the organisation you find yourself in requires attention and engagement – it cannot be delivered at arm's length. But if you are paying attention to one of the perspectives – e.g. trying to improve training or structure – it is likely that some of the benefits of that development will be reflected in the culture and user experience too.

For example: will the *structure* for a new party arise because what was once a party member has now

become (through their *user experience*) a serial activist, finding themselves in a changing *culture*, which values service, reciprocity and play? On the other hand, will a new party *not* arise until we have enough of the right *leadership* who can manage the chaos of multiple inputs?

Just for the sake of experiment, what would a 'teal' party look like? Are Podemos, Pirate Party, Alternativet or others almost there? Or is there still a way to go, given the future that is looming? For example, in the world of full automation, when more people have more time on their hands and active citizenship becomes our way of earning a basic income… would activism become mainstream? If it became so, what might that do for how society self-manages?

Another important question, not shown in the figures above, but explored at the beginning of this paper, is: what is the party's world view? Are its leaders comfortable with globalisation and the task of maintaining and developing agency in the world? Do they share responsibility for the future of the planet? Or are they in retreat, looking inwards, focused on the need to deliver for their voting public, framing the globe as a threat on the doorstep? For more about this, see Simon Anholt's Good Country Project on the dual mandate of government in the 21C.[51] Much of the strength and encouragement activists receive comes from their global networks – distinctly soft power networks, built on shared experience and relationship, not hard, corporate, transactional networks. If the party cannot reflect the capacity of their members, how can it serve them?

In our various 21st-century-party discussions in Compass, the metaphor in our talk was often less about solid structures, more about viruses and petri dishes, a zone in which new political projects arose independently of a party, but were still part of a strong, connected network working towards common ends.

Do we have to project ourselves forward into the world of artificial intelligence to even imagine every citizen self-managing, checked by an internet of things, fluid and active between home and the public space? The political party as a hub in this swirling reality, reflecting our activities and offering paths to resourcing them? (Figure 9)

FIGURE 9 POLITICAL PARTY AS A HUB, AT THE CENTRE OF A NETWORK OF ACTIVISM

Or is it really much simpler? Switch the dominant paradigm from father to mother, give the party and its government the job of caring and sharing resources, and leave everything else to the kids at play (Figure 10)?

It seems the possibilities are still too many. But so as not to duck out altogether, Figure 11 shows a diagram of where the logic of Compass' 'politics at 45 degrees' has led so far, a party that:

- serves the people
- through the machinery of civil society
- shaped by a citizens' assembly
- arising from the grass roots.

Essentially, this is an inverted pyramid: power conceived of as central, capable of intervening with Goldman Sachs and the Security Council, but connected to the grassroots, informed by civil society, constrained by a citizens' assembly. Multiple levels of a machine that operates at different speeds and reach?

FIGURE 10 POLITICAL PARTY AS FAMILY - RELATIONAL AND

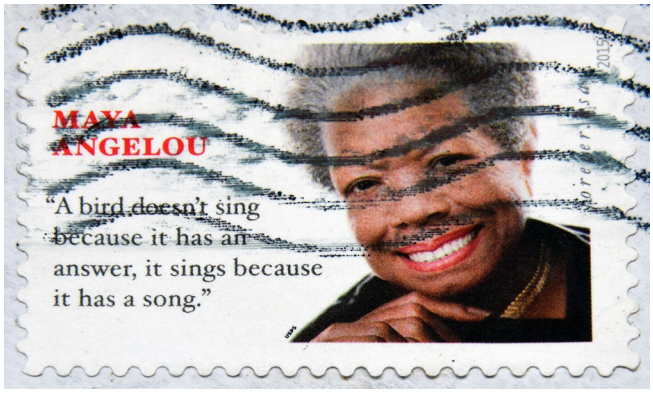
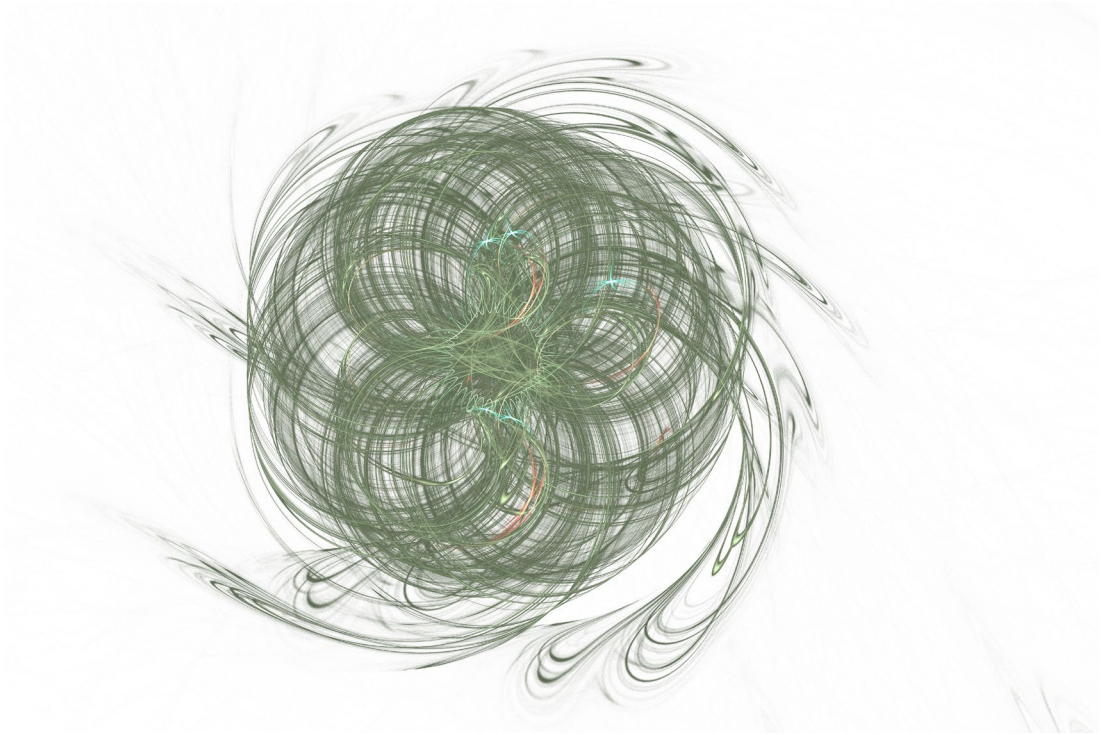


FIGURE 11 POLITICAL PARTY AT '45 DEGREES' - RESPONSIVE

FIGURE 12 **POLITICAL PARTY AS REFLEXIVE ENTITY, WITH A FLATTER STRUCTURE, EVOLVING WITH SOCIETY**



Would 45 degrees politics be the end of history? Or are we already reaching out to something beyond that? What would a flat party look like – one in which not just the values but the ensuing culture, philosophy and modus operandi of the grassroots organisation and the parliamentary party are almost indistinguishable – micro and macro expressions of political action?

What would happen if emergent local politics – localism at its best – was also seen as a starting point, with a positive feedback loop going up towards government, infecting each layer of administration as it goes? If there is an 'open' party – or better, government – at the top, could these positive feedback loops become circular, working to keep parties, policy and local actors in better tune with each other? It is very hard to imagine within the current political culture, but quite conceivable as a 'teal' or 'turquoise' organisation where power structures are held lightly and 'cross-contamination' of good practice is possible (Figure 12).

WHAT NOW?

As I write (in summer 2016), the UK is in an extremely fluid political situation. The recent EU referendum, a 'clean' vote which is not complicated by the first-past-the-post system, has changed not only the way politicians see the needs and aspirations of the people, but the way Britain is seen in the world. Suddenly, in common with eruptions around the globe over the past ten years, the mother of parliaments has been shaken up by new forces. A party with only one seat under the current system, became, momentarily at least, the voice of the majority.

Exciting or depressing? How we respond now may set the scene for the next 20 years.

On the surface everything imploded – both the Conservative and Labour parties were seen as having failed the people they represent and moved instantly to new leadership elections. The Conservatives dealt with it quickly, electing Theresa May as prime minister, appointing Boris Johnson as Foreign Secretary – one might say they returned to the business of ruling as usual, content that the unruly aspect of the right was contained outside the party, in the form of UKIP.

The Labour Party, however, cannot avoid the historic clash of forces within the party. Having elected Jeremy Corbyn to leader with one of the biggest mandates in the history of the party, their democratic accountability is on the line. How can the party of the people continue to do its job of facing down the neoliberal elite if it cannot itself be democratic and, beyond that, capture the forces of populism?

Compass' launch of a Progressive Alliance does the very important job of rising above the failings of individual parties and offering a format within which voters on the political left can come together to challenge the likelihood of a Conservative–UKIP meld of energies. But the success of this initiative depends highly on the Labour Party's capacity for the more open politics, meaningful collaboration and post-egoic leadership described above. As Neal Lawson has written – it is not an incremental improvement, but a massive leap of imagination and consequent action that is required.[52]

On both sides, major political actors are trying to defy the system in which we are stuck, but others have swung into action regardless. As described above, Arron Banks was first to describe a new political party, harnessing the Leave.EU vote he bankrolled, with the potential to re-shape the political landscape as we know it. Using online voting, libertarian localism and effective story-telling he has the capacity to build a major party over the next ten years.

In direct response, though from a much weaker position, prominent centrist figures launched a political platform called More United, which tries to capture the Remain vote. Political platforms can be very effective for intervening in the political discourse, providing a focus for unmet needs and a marshalling point for marginalised voices.

If the Progressive Alliance succeeds in bringing in the new system of proportional representation, new parties could arise and/or old ones could be transformed. Whether any of them will offer a different user experience, structure, leadership style or overall party culture than what we have today remains to be seen: so far power to seize the reins of government seems to be the only thing on offer.

Taking our eye off Westminster for the moment, what slower, longer term actions are available to help evolve the conditions for change to happen?

For constituency MPs, the best opportunities must lie in becoming immersed in local networks, irrespective of party membership. Finding time to get involved with people, whether they vote for you or not, is crucial in developing the post-egoic leadership that Richard Wilson and the crew in Copenhagen describe. In particular, knowing what kind of localism is brewing up around you is important – that is increasingly the front line of politics.

Are events rallying, emotive – characterised by black and white thinking? Or are they engaged, developmental, relational, inclusive like those in Frome? In the post-EU referendum moment, we should hope less for large parties with agendas becoming more politically active in impoverished towns: what will it profit the disempowered to turn up to meetings, simply to endorse politicians? What would benefit the excluded now, would be the new, organising, transformative, local politics, that give them connection, meaning and purpose – as well as a chance, if they decide, to do participatory budgeting, crowd funding and sourcing of policy and the chance to develop their networks.

Encouraging the development of open groups (like Podemos' circles) on the fringes of the parties is vital. They should be run without guidelines from the centre, avoiding the language and culture already dominant in the party. Movement for Change was an early example of Labour's capacity to reinvent itself; Momentum perhaps less so.

Here is another way of shifting our thinking out of its current malaise – establish reading groups focused on books about the future. Jeremy Rifkin's The Zero Marginal Cost Society; Paul Mason's PostCapitalism, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams' Inventing the Future – these volumes are all guaranteed to re-wire the reader and tune them into the currents of change happening outside the party-political bubble.[53]

It is a good sign that Mason, Srnicek and Williams are speaking at John MacDonnell's public economic

seminars, but we must recognise that these big thinkers only provide us with a richer picture of the changing context – we still have to do all the detailed work and development, outlined in this paper, to make this politically effective. A useful alternative input may be to switch to the revolutionary bibles of Sharp, Alinsky and Popovic, previously cited. All of them are non-violent, deeply practical humans at play.

If and when new parties arise – as they will, should proportional representation ever be introduced, and maybe before – it will be the capacity for openness, relationship and vision for the future that will guarantee the survival of those that currently hold sway in Westminster.

And if any of us reading this are that new party, the challenge is barely different. Buzz words like distributed leadership, self-management, peer-to-peer networks and servant leadership are mere platitudes until we develop the capacity, individually and collectively, to introduce them – and then sustain them.

We will not implement the change, we can only be the change: it is a journey of personal and collective transformation that cannot be underestimated. But in so doing, we prefigure the good society.

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