The Foundation of Values and Value in the 21ˢᵗ Century

A White Paper Based on a Summit at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford on 23ʳᵈ and 24ᵗʰ January 2023

BLAVATNIK SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

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GLOBAL SOLUTIONS
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Introduction

On the 23rd and 24th January 2023, approximately 130 academics, business leaders, policymakers and students convened in the Blavatnik School of Government for a unique event. It was a discussion about the role of value and value in formulating business practice and public policy in the 21st century.

The Summit was organised by the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford in conjunction with the Enacting Purpose Initiative at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, Fraunhofer IMW, Global Solutions, the New Institute, and the Oxford Internet Institute.

The aim of the Summit was to reassert the centrality of moral values for the conduct of human life and to explore the role of values in policy and business decision-making. The spread of individualism, the majority-rule basis of democracy, and the market economy have all combined to undermine the importance and relevance of moral values, creating a system essentially based on delivering 'what we (as voters and consumers) want'.

The inadequacy of this as a governing principle in making political, business, and social decisions is shown by the current 'polycrisis' discussed in the World Economic Forum at Davos earlier this year. We are facing a climate crisis, environmental degradation, geopolitical tensions, a tidal wave of misinformation and loss of trust, and growing inequality on a national and global scale. The problems are interconnected but most current attempts to address them, piecemeal and unmoored from moral values, have been largely ineffective. We have been tackling the symptoms and not the underlying causes.

The Summit featured presentations from academics and practitioners in a wide variety of areas, covering both conceptual and practical issues. It explored the fundamental foundations of values and value and how they relate to current thinking in the humanities, social sciences, physical and life sciences. In addition, there were focused policy sessions discussing measurement, digital governance, and place-based regeneration.

There were ten keynote presentations by academics from the humanities, the social sciences, and the life and physical sciences which set out the principles of applying values and value to business practices and public policies. These were followed by three interactive discussions and breakout sessions on the application of values and value to three areas of current public policy concern – measurement, digital governance, and regeneration of left behind places.

This White Paper summarizes the discussion of two of the three areas – digital governance, and regional regeneration. It describes the discussion that took place in the relevant breakout sessions and introductory presentations.   It does not attempt to provide a coherent policy prescription in either of the two areas but instead to synthesize the views that were expressed at the meetings, the issues that were felt by the participants to be of particular importance and the novel business practices and public policies suggested by a foundation of values and value.

We have drawn on presentations and discussions throughout the Summit to produce, in this White Paper, practical recommendations for policymakers seeking to address digital governance, and regional inequalities in the UK through value-driven and place-based regeneration.

We believe that the report reflects the remarkably high quality of discussion that took place at the Summit and the significance of using a framework of values and value to address critical business practice and public policy concerns. We would welcome your feedback on this report, and the opportunity to discuss its recommendations further and in more detail.

Finally, we would like to thank the six participating organizations for their support of the Summit.

Part 1
What Do We Mean by Values and Value?

Values are principles and beliefs that can provide implicit guidelines for social behaviour or help us choose between options. They reflect individuals and societies' beliefs about what is 'good' and 'worthy'.

Moral values are normative: they are not rules and they cannot be measured by assigning them a numerical value. They are taught and transmitted by socialisation and storytelling.

Although there are many values (compassion, solidarity, integrity, honesty, justice, fairness, etc.) that most people would seem to hold in common, discussions at the Summit suggested that there is no list of universal values that are held by everyone, all the time. Context matters and understanding that is key to making effective values-driven and place-based decisions.

As a basis of decision-making disparate values can be put together (deliberately or not) in frameworks and to form more comprehensive values. For example:

- As components of an ordinary more comprehensive value, such as 'wellbeing', which can be defined by policymakers through the Global Happiness Index
- As components of a nameless more comprehensive value, such as the SAGE dashboard, which is based on values but is not articulated as a single value
- As components of a stipulated more comprehensive value, such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals
- As disparate values that are talked about together but do not form any more comprehensive value, such as utility as a doorstop and justice

'*We teach our children values by telling stories; and you tell stories in the family and you tell stories in the wider culture. And you get different narratives around the world, and you have problems when they clash*.'

Part 2
A System-Based Approach to Digital Governance

WHY ARE WE CONCERNED ABOUT DIGITAL GOVERNANCE?

Toothpaste cannot be put back in the tube. We live in an irrevocably online and networked world. This has many benefits for individuals and societies. The use of data can mean better customer insights and therefore better products, improved supply-chain management, and greater innovation. Digital platforms facilitate learning at all levels, the rapid dissemination of information, and closer personal connections.

The birth of the internet was accompanied by lofty initial goals and the belief that it would herald a utopia of free expression and peer-to-peer engagement, unfettered by government interference.

> 'Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather.' **John Perry Barlow, A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace, 1996**

However, there are now questions about how easily illegal, or simply toxic, content and misinformation can spread online, as well as about how companies collect and use the customer data that is supplied often unwittingly through all kinds of digital transactions and activities.

These questions are often bundled together into an overall concern about the effects of social media in general. However, it is worth examining precisely what is worrying and why.

Toxic content

Illegal content and behaviours can be shared in new ways by digital platforms, amplifying terrorism, extremism, radicalisation, and violence. This content can be targeted specifically at people who are vulnerable to being influenced by it. The content has been shown to spill over into offline or real-life violence and illegal behaviour.

Toxic content also includes that which is harmful but not illegal: the 'lawful but awful'. Examples include the 'manosphere': a collection of different types of digital content and influencers promoting misogyny, pick-up artists, and anti-feminism. Proponents sometimes have millions of followers on social media platforms and are publishing content that is undoubtedly harmful but difficult to prosecute even under hate speech laws.

Digital platforms can also enable online bullying, feed unrealistic expectations about body image, and normalise risky behaviours, with negative impacts on mental health and overall culture.

Many digital platforms encourage toxic content because it increases engagement. Their business models depend on advertising which, in turn, depend on users viewing, searching, scrolling through, and interacting with content.

A 2022 experiment found that use of Facebook declined 23 per cent when toxic content was removed, relative to a control group and to the participants' own prior usage.

Misinformation

Misinformation is hardly new, but digital and social media are allowing inaccurate and misleading content to spread at an ever-increasing rate.

Because of the vast amount of information that is circulating – some accurate and some not – and because there is no requirement for everyday posters to provide or interrogate evidence for the views expressed, it is hard for many people to separate facts from fiction and conspiracy theories. When investigating beliefs, Light *et al.* (2022) found that people who oppose scientific consensus – climate change, vaccination, etc. – objectively know less and believe they know more. This is a meta-cognitive failure to adequately assess their own beliefs and the ways in which they form those beliefs.

Misinformation can kill, as we have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic and various anti-vaccination campaigns resulting in low levels of vaccination and the spread of disease, including the re-emergence in the UK of viruses such as measles, which had previously been eliminated in the country.

Deepfakes

Deepfakes – alarmingly convincing AI-generated fake audio and video – are emerging as one of the most worrying uses of AI for potentially criminal ends, from manufacturing 'revenge porn' to discrediting public figures. In addition, state actors are very deliberately seeking to use these platforms to do things which may not be illegal, but which certainly qualify as state-sponsored propaganda and disinformation.

Fake content is difficult to detect and stop and may lead to a widespread distrust of audio and visual evidence, which itself would be a societal harm.

Monetising privy data

Many digital platforms, such as Facebook, are superficially 'free', but users are paying for it by providing access to their personal information that is then used by advertisers. While there is an argument that this is a fair exchange, it ignores the fact that the personal information that digital organisations can glean from, for example, location data, internet searches, and historical purchases goes far beyond the formal information, such as name and date of birth, that we may feel comfortable giving away.

What is more, this 'privy information' can be sold on to anyone, from ToysRUs to Russia, without users knowing about it and with no control over how it is used. This invisible market is worth $65bn a year.

> 'This isn't a market: it's a form of digital husbandry. And that's the polite way of putting it.'

Again, individual users may imagine that this sort of information is so innocuous that they have nothing to fear. But once it is sold to advertisers who perhaps are focused entirely on profit maximisation, it has potential to be harmful. For example, someone whose internet searches reveal questions about alcohol abuse and treatment may be targeted with advertising by drinks manufacturers, who knowingly make a significant proportion of their sales from heavy drinkers.

The need for regulation

While not all digital platforms use the same business model, and not all collectors of data sell it on, John Perry Barlow's vision of a 'home of Mind' has become something of a lawless free-for-all. To eliminate the harms that can be caused by unscrupulous users of the digital sphere, and to address the power imbalance caused by the invisible trade in personal data, some form of regulation is necessary.

There has been plenty of time for the digital industry to create its own self-regulating behaviours, but it has not done so, largely because it benefits so much from the power imbalance and spread of toxicity. We are operating in an environment where the lack of regulation has resulted in known harms, and that is something that must change.

> '[The need for regulation] is not a sign of failure; it is in many ways a sign of how these digital platforms have matured and how individuals have used them for their own purposes.'

HOW CAN WE REGULATE?

The idea of regulation raised some serious and complicated questions, particularly in light of the values-based discussions at the Summit.

While it is clear that self-regulation has not worked, what is the role of government? Can there be national regulation for a phenomenon that is decentralized and global? What are the implications for free speech? How far should regulation go – is there a danger of over-regulation?

Are the values on which regulation would be based clear enough to the companies concerned? We assume that we know what the values are – but if all companies shared them, they would have done something before now. Discussions need to take place to define and explore values *before* rushing to regulate.

Regulation entails prioritising some values (safety, security) over others (freedom of expression). Is it right that government should decide this? Do we trust the governments of, for example, Russia and China to collaborate with others to create a worldwide system of regulation? And to follow it themselves?

There was broad agreement (with some reservations) on the need to explore basing regulation on three principles.

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Build in the 'duty of care'

There are some regulations that apply offline that can be applied in the online world, including a general duty of care. We know (see the previous section) that digital platforms and other digital products and activity have the potential to cause harm. The designers and owners of those products should have an obligation to foresee possible risks and mitigate them. The law already recognises the existence of a duty of care from manufacturer to consumer, and from employer to employee. It should also be built into governance frameworks in the digital space, specifying, for example, that data can only be used in the best interests of the data subject.

Regulate systems, not just content

Because toxic content is one of the harms that we might perceive regulation to mitigate against, it is tempting to focus on policing that alone. This is something that has been done successfully before – the television watershed, for example, aims to protect children from harmful material by imposing strict rules on what can and cannot be broadcast before 9pm.

However, on social media, this only addresses outcomes and only after the fact. People post the content; then the regulator or company tells them to take it down. But that does not necessarily reduce the harm as people will already have seen the content.

Instead, bearing in mind that platform business models are based on monetising attention – systems and algorithms are designed to keep us scrolling -- regulation needs to be targeted at those systems rather than just the content. This would address platform design and how technologies are being designed and deployed online.

This approach would be based on assessing the risks of the system and its design features. It would look at how users might misuse features, for example, and think of measures to stop the misuse. It might look at the algorithms that encourage people to see and engage with risky content.

Crucially, this assessment happens long before someone posts something or engages online. It could also address concerns about how adults can search for and contact other users, including children.

Companies would be responsible for their own actions in designing and creating products and systems, and not for the actions of users.

Give users control of their data, individually and collectively

The GDPR regulations and the tick-box granting of consent to use cookies on websites may give the illusion of control, but, in reality, few if any users read through the terms and conditions and understand what they are consenting to. Typically, the consent form appears as a pop-up, that the user clicks on quickly and unthinkingly to get to the information they are looking for.

But a more troubling aspect of the way in which data is collected is that so much of it is entirely invisible. An iPhone, for example, collects 450 data points – far more than anyone in the Summit estimated. Not only do users not realise how much data is being collected, but they have no idea what it is being used for. Some of it, indeed, is used to target advertising,

but much is sold and used to train algorithms, for purposes that the user does not know about and may or may not agree with. Because this is data that is largely inferred from general use of a smart phone and/or the internet it is harder to give agency on and to legislate for. Users have no means of appeal, no choice in how their data is used, and they receive nothing in return for providing it.

A key proposal from the Summit is that governance structures should be put in place to involve and empower users by giving them control of their data.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Toxic and misleading content on social media has dominated the public conversation to the extent that regulation tends to be seen only in terms of policing content and penalising wrong doers.

Discussions at the Summit focused on more complex recommendations for creating new ecosystems and institutions with clear governance structures that make clear who is responsible for what, ensure transparency throughout the system, and distribute power more equally. Participants were also keen not to disincentivise digital companies from using their power to do social good.

These will not be quick fixes. However, a key recommendation that should be adopted as soon as possible is to **ensure that long-standing rules in the analogue sphere are applied and enforced in the digital sphere**. This includes the duty of care, and also covers content and certain types of communication between users (for example, grooming) that can be facilitated by digital platforms. What is illegal offline should also be illegal online.

Even this apparently simple principle will be difficult to enforce, requiring collaboration between governments to avoid piecemeal approaches. It was suggested that other regulatory mechanisms might also be brought into play, such as anti-monopoly laws to break the power of scale enjoyed by the largest technology companies, which factor fines into their planning.

The following recommendations are based on a proposal by The New Institute to empower digital citizens and address concerns over data collection and use.

1. **Give citizens control of their data through establishing the principles of rights of association, rights of representation, and skills and knowledge.**

   This will involve the creation of bodies of representatives who can engage citizens, explain what can be done with data and how that has value, record citizens' preferences, and ensure that individuals provide accurate, authenticated data. They would be fulfilling a similar role to that of pensions advisers and trades union representatives in educating citizens and presenting their choices impartially Essentially, if someone wants to access this data, the individual should be entitled to know it and to be able to agree on the terms on which it is used.

2. **Establish data registries**

   These will store data securely and encode it with the citizens' preferences. If there is a request for data, they will inform the representative and/or individuals involved and

share the data with the requestor according to the individuals' approval and preferences. These processes would be recorded.

These data registries would build on existing technology and business models such as the domain name system or credit card processing system.

3. **Establish oversight mechanisms**

Representatives and data registries will be subject to security and stability audits as well as commercial audits. Meanwhile, the existing audit requirements of the companies and organisations who will request and use data will be broadened to include this new regime.

Benefits from this approach would accrue throughout the system, increasing transparency, empowering consumers, and creating a more competitive market for digital services, especially for new market entrants.

CONCLUSION

It is almost a defining characteristic of most commercial digital platforms that they have actively divorced themselves from human values.

Rhetoric about community, connections, and positive impact obscure the fact that their business models are about monetising attention and interest, fuelled by advertising, and based on algorithms.

Ostensibly embracing freedom of expression and customer choice, the current functioning of the digital sphere seems engineered to present to us 'what we want', with no assessment of its actual value to the individual consumer or to society in general. Complex concepts such as privacy and personal information are explained and engaged with via automated processes, while platforms equivocate about their responsibilities over content.

Suggestions that individuals should take responsibility for educating themselves and their children about how to avoid harm or absorb fake news and propaganda presuppose privilege.

We need to insert the human into these digital processes. Our recommendations include doing this literally by creating human and consumer-facing representatives and 'information fiduciaries' whom we entrust with holding and protecting personal information. But more broadly, by actively building new ecosystems around the provision of data and by regulating platforms at the design and system level, we can ensure that human values are embedded at the heart of the digital economy.

Part 3
Values-Driven and Place-Led:
A New Approach to Regeneration in the UK's 'Left-Behind' Regions

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

As the Government has acknowledged in its own Levelling Up policy papers, the UK has marked regional disparities on multiple measures. Over the past few decades, the country has effectively been split into two: London (and the South-East) and the rest. In particular, it now has the most unequal life chances and lowest intergenerational life chances of any other country in the OECD. The bleak truth is that unless a child grows up in London or the South-East, with parents who have been to university (preferably one of a small number of elite universities), the likelihood that they will do well for themselves in terms of education, career, living standards, and life expectancy is very low.

In South Yorkshire, for example – England's poorest region – the psychological legacy of the economic shock caused by the collapse of the coal and steel industry is despair, leading to learned dependence, self-blame, blaming scapegoats, and fragmentation. All of these inhibit individual motivation, intergenerational mobility, and the possibility of communities coming together to agree strategies for improvement.

This situation was not inevitable. The Summit identified some key beliefs and attitudes that contributed to the decline of such 'left behind' places in the UK, and that continue to limit attempts to reduce inequalities and improve prosperity in the most disadvantaged areas.

Centralisation

The UK is one of the most centralised states in the industrialised world, even allowing for the roles played by the three devolved administrations. In terms of governance, the UK is dominated by highly centralised and top-down policymaking and accountability systems; local government has very limited power and decision-making autonomy.

It thinks in terms of national policies and design programmes with the assumption that one size fits all: the belief is that a well-designed programme will work anywhere. But because the places in which programmes are implemented are so different, and the outcomes dramatically so, it becomes impossible to tell what a well-designed policy actually looks like.

The assumption in the 1980s was that paying attention to London as the 'motor' of the UK economy would act as a catalyst and lift all regions. Instead, there was a decoupling: while a prosperous London was outperforming almost all OECD indicators, the rest of the country outside the capital was going backwards on those same indicators. But the prosperity of London to some extent masked the regional divergence, even as the entire country stalled. Centralisation is a characteristic of the UK Treasury's philosophy, which maintains control of economic decisions on the basis that it is where expertise is concentrated.

Place-blind policies and 'the miracle of the market'

In addition, for the past century the Treasury has operated a 'place-blind' public policy strategy. This is based on the principle that it should not favour any region over any other or make any interventions that are place-based. Such interventions would be over-riding and distorting the market.

Not only has that ostensibly neutral approach not survived contact with real life, but a belief in the ability of the market to fix itself and restore equilibrium bears no relation to the economics of place. One analogy discussed during the Summit compared a local economy to a sailing dinghy in a gusty wind. The dinghy may be said to be in equilibrium in two states: one, when it is the right way up, so that the crew can sail wherever they want; and the other, when it is capsized, so that unless the crew has already been taught how to right it, they cling to the upturned dinghy and drift with the current. A place that has received an economic shock is like a capsized dinghy. But investors do not invest in capsized dinghies: only in upright ones. Leaving the fate of the dinghy in the hands of the market will merely amplify divergence: the upright dinghy prospers while the capsized dinghy drifts further and further away.

In terms of GDP per capita, half the UK population live in areas no better than the poorer parts of the former East Germany, poorer than the Czech Republic and equal to Slovakia, and poorer than the US states of Mississippi and West Virginia

According to the OECD multi-dimensional quality of life measures, the UK outside London and the South is in the bottom 50%, equivalent to Tennessee and Alabama.

Quality and accessibility of healthcare for half the country is similar to that of eastern Europe.

'No one knows what to do. Why don't they know what to do? Because we've never had these discussions in the UK for 40 years. We've assumed that top-down and a-spatial will give us all the answers…'

'This kind of fragmented deal-making process where localities have to bid for pots of money from central government is frankly absurd.'

A NEW DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

If some of the principal barriers to change are unhelpful beliefs and narratives – both on the part of the people living in disadvantaged areas and of the policymakers, Treasury officials and other stakeholders aiming to reverse the decline – then a first stage in creating successful strategies involves rethinking some of these beliefs.

Rethink our definition of prosperity

There is an established critique of the idea that economic growth and the maximisation of GDP are the primary goals of government. Equally, there is increasing discomfort with the well-worn notion that profit maximisation is the one and only purpose of business. Instead, we are gradually moving towards a consensus that we need a new vision of the economy, in service of life for people and planet, and capturing a stream of benefits into the future rather than just measuring income.

But old models die hard, and there is continuing resistance to moving away from measures of economic value. That is always the starting point, and ideas to address challenges, including environmental challenges, are instinctively evaluated according to the 'cost to GDP'. That measure ensures that many potential new ideas do not get off the starting block: we end up with lock-in, maladaptation, and missed opportunities because we are focusing on the wrong things.

We need not only to rethink our definition of prosperity but to develop new, more powerful narratives around that definition.

Values, the environment, and wellbeing need to be central to our ideas of prosperity, with the understanding that true wellbeing is derived from the pursuit and attainment of our value-driven goals.

'We participate in collectives. There is a deep sense of social belonging that each of us has … There is the wellbeing we get from agency. People say success is a journey, it's not a destination. Why? Because the journey builds character, it builds our capabilities and it builds our ability to set new goals, because we evolve as human beings and evolve in connection with our environment. We shape our environment, respond to it, and in the process create new collective challenges.'

Rethink policymaking based on values – not preferences

The dominant approach to policymaking worldwide is to base decisions on preferences: what people 'care about' or what they 'want'. Even capability approaches, such as in health and education, which are necessary for people to achieve things, may look as if they are value-based, but are in fact based on preferences: they are favoured and prioritised only if they provide for the delivery of preferred methods or outcomes.

The problem with a preference-based approach, of course, is that what people care about might not be valuable. They might also have been manipulated into caring about it. So, policies based on what people care about may result in approaches that do not necessarily make lives better, or indeed can make them worse.

Solving the wide range of social problems now confronting policymakers therefore requires them to shift to a value-based approach, taking as a starting point not 'what we want', but what is valuable: what has worth and is an objective 'good' that improves human lives. Then preferences can be considered as a means of identifying which values we care most about.

> *'What we should be doing is making policies based on what we care about, but only so far as what we care about is valuable… So, our preference to have over 1000 TV stations is not something that policy should promote, but our preference to live in a world without climate degradation is a preference that is valuable and therefore is an eligible concern about which we might make a policy.'*

The interplay between values and preferences – and indeed between different values – is complex, and it is likely that trade-offs will have to be made.

[figure]
Values > What we care about > How do the values that matter relate? > Compare options (actions, policies, values) with respect to the values that matter > In hard choices, commit or drift; in easy choices choose what's best with respect to the values that matter.

Rethink how and where programmes are designed

One size does not necessarily fit all, and an intervention that has worked in one place may not work in another. Centralised programme-design by experts within the Treasury or Government departments has demonstrably failed.

Solutions must be designed at a local level, with participation by multiple stakeholders, including local government, businesses, charities, education providers, and local people. Co-design is key: the focus-group approach, in which experts listen to local concerns and then go away and create programmes, may have a level of local input, but it is still operating on the paternalistic basis of, 'we will decide what is best for you'. More seriously, it is denying local communities of agency – which, as we have discussed, is key to wellbeing and to enabling communities to come together and lift themselves up.

The foundations of this approach to design are tolerance for the values of others and dialogue between equals. That means deliberately empowering and amplifying the voices of

those who are less powerful – maybe because they are poorer, less well-educated, or from a minority group.

> *'The strong have to shut up and listen to the weak, silencing their own over-loud voices … they have to stop celebrating their own magnificent gestures amongst themselves. We need less bragging billionaires, and more of the rich celebrating the heroes amongst the weak'*

As with all complex problem-solving, participants in the dialogue and design process should approach it as an experiment, not expecting an instant and perfect solution. It should build on existing narratives and pictures that allow people to keep their identities and cultures and evolve them together.

The expectation should not be that this process will create many individual, hyper-local projects, but that experiments can be learnt from, developed, and adapted to suit different places. The local experiments develop the principles and 'code' for a modular national strategy.

> *'If we still think of this as an analogue process of taking something in, rolling it out, then we end up with problems. I'm thinking much more in terms of a sort of design code for policy: these are the things we need for developing flourishing in this country; here's the investment; go and develop something. It's not a cookie cutter approach, it's not an industrial approach, but it is still a national approach.'*

Rethink timescales

40 years or more of decline will not be reversed instantly. Regional regeneration will require a long-term vision with sustained support and investment, continuing over the lifespan of several parliaments. Following the traditional approach of focusing on regular, short term new policy ideas and infrastructure projects involving relatively small amounts of money will not make much difference.

Longer, sustained funding-streams into the system allow for the co-design of process and implementation of programmes, but also allow for monitoring, checks and balances, accountability, and evaluation to be able to identify the approaches that work, those that need further development, and those that can be safely abandoned.

As examples to follow, the regeneration of the former East Germany following German reunification was achieved through a cross-party alliance which committed to massive, focused public spending over a period of 30 years. The programme to regenerate Germany's coal-mining regions is based on a target of ending coal-based power generation by 2038. Committing to a long-term vision may come at the expense of quick wins but is vital to creating and sustaining trust.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Rethinking the UK's traditional approaches to regeneration unravels what appears to be a straightforward, manageable, and easily measurable process to leave something that is uncertain, nuanced, and messy. But this allows us to rebuild as an adaptive system that supports a multidimensional vision of flourishing communities – from the ground up. The process is inevitably based on experimentation, on exploring a variety of options, and of negotiating between a range of different values and preferences. It will not be a quick or easy fix and there is no predefined outcome.

Our recommendations therefore are for practical actions that create the environment in which such a system may be built, based on principles of collaboration, partnership, equality, and fairness. They can be seen as the first steps on a long and ambitious journey of values-led and place-led regeneration.

Commit to sustained public investment and support on a place-led basis

This will take courageous moral leadership, as it involves challenge to the Treasury's place-blind orthodoxy and may be opposed by powerful voices in more prosperous areas. It will also need cross-party support and commitment to ensure the continuance of investment possibly decades into the future.

Rather than top-down support to favoured projects, funding should be provided in the spirit of partnership and cooperation between equals – fraternalism rather than paternalism. It would be investment to support the local development of programmes and strategies as well as contributing to funding implementation.

> *'We know there is no knight in shining armour coming to rescue anywhere. But if we have been consistently over-investing in a particular region in a country for decades, why not say that this should change? Expecting to find everything you would need for your local or regional development locally is optimistic at best, or self-deceiving.'*

Ensure internet access and true digital connectivity

While published statistics indicate almost 100% internet access nationally, the experience of people working in deprived areas suggests otherwise. Many families and people are technically online because someone in the household has a smartphone, but this is not the same as the high-quality reliable broadband needed to start and run businesses or participate in online education.

Use further education colleges as spaces in which to run collaborative experiments and conversations

The deep participation required to experiment and co-create ideas requires high levels of trust between diverse stakeholders, including local government, business, intellectuals, civil society (including charities), and citizens. The place where such meetings are held is important: people must meet on a level, with no reinforcement of hierarchy.

We recommend further education colleges as places that have strong links to and understanding of the communities in which they are based. They are typically established in those communities, with good relationships with local businesses and other local employers, and knowledge of the skills base and potential of the communities.

There is no small irony in the fact that further education colleges have recently been brought together under the direct control of the Treasury. But this may facilitate some of the practical aspects of funding these sorts of experiments as well as provide the 'vertical' connections described below.

Support multi-level connections between institutions and stakeholders

Flourishing places have dense networks of interaction between different institutions. These interactions can be vertical (towards higher or more central levels of government, for example) or horizontal, connecting a variety of different types of organisations (businesses, universities, charities, public sector organisations and community organisations) and creating new systems.

These top-down, bottom-up and horizontal, peer-to-peer connections facilitate diverse centres of control and coordination. This is complicated but allows for different voices to be heard and priorities met, as well as supporting learning and innovation.

New institutions may be needed on a regional or national basis to strengthen networks and encourage the feedback loops that will enable successful ideas to be developed and adapted nationally. Again, these may not look the same in each place or do the same job.

CONCLUSION

Addressing the UK's regional inequalities by adopting a values-based and place-led approach will require significant moral leadership.

The long-term nature of our recommendations entails sustained commitment and resistance to the urge to focus on quick wins and low-hanging fruit. They also entail long-term collaboration with diverse partners against a background of changing power dynamics and uncertain outcomes. The notion of 'flourishing' is multi-dimensional and increasing material wealth must be rooted in care for the planet and for human well-being.