

What kind of region do we want to live in?

Region-building ideas and activity in West Yorkshire.



What Kind Of Region Do We Want To Live In?

Region-building ideas and activity in West Yorkshire.

EDITED BY ED CARLISLE,
IAN MARTIN & ANDREW WILSON

Published 2019 by Same Skies
c/o The Making Space,
The Media Centre,
Northumberland Street,
Huddersfield,
HD1 1RL

wesharethesameskiesblog.wordpress.com

This work is licensed under the Creative
Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0
International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit
creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/

Designed and Typeset by Eve Warren
Printed by Pressision

Acknowledgements

Our thanks go out to the people who gave up their time and energy to help organise, and come along to, the original “What Kind of Region Do We Want to Live In?” event in Manningham, Bradford in 2015, especially Leila Taleb, Yoshiko Stokoe and Alex Schafran. Thank you also to Peg Alexander for acting as an independent chair for the event. Without the writers who responded to our strange, out-of-the-blue requests with so much generosity, passion and inventiveness, there wouldn’t be a book. Eve Warren has taken all of our collective writing and designed a book we can be proud to have on our shelves and to share. Many thanks to Seedbed for their generous funding for this book, and trusting us to follow it up in ways we don’t yet know. Matt McGough designed our first, very effective, stickers, that even made it onto TV. Amy Hirst helped us come up with the markets idea. Thank you to the staff and stallholders of West Yorkshire’s markets for their time and good humour, and the visitors to the markets for getting stuck in and drawing their favourite places and chatting with us about their neighbourhoods and our shared region. Starting something new from the bottom up takes a commitment of time, maintained over a long time. Ian would like to say thank you to Claire, Erin and Freya Martin for their inspiration and support; Ed would like to thank Tania, Emily and Alex for their love and long-suffering support.

V - VI	Welcome
1 - 4	What do we mean by regional democracy? Ed Carlisle, Ian Martin, Andrew Wilson
7 - 8	Getting around our region safely Robyn Vinter
9 - 10	A Green New Deal for West Yorkshire James Oddy
11 - 12	West Yorkshire Water Cooperative Andy Goldring
13 - 14	Cultural democracy - a vision for our region Isaac Rose
15 - 16	And what if one sky cannot contain us all? Peninah Wangari-Jones and Désirée Reynolds
17 - 18	Regional democracy, from the ground up Diane Sims
19 - 20	Living your best life - West Yorkshire as a 'good help' region. Lou Mycroft
21 - 22	The imaginings of West Yorkshire futures Sophia Price
23 - 24	West Yorkshire 2040 Milton Brown
27 - 28	Could local public banks allow our region to do things independently of London? Marie McCahery
29 - 30	What can West Yorkshire learn from Rojava? Tabitha Bast
31 - 32	What could regional democracy mean for asylum seekers in West Yorkshire? Ian Martin
33	What do new migrants think about our region? Pria Bhabra and Rosemary Brookes
34 - 35	Putting all of us first in West Yorkshire Elaine Calder
36 - 38	Could we put 'Ubuntu' at the heart of better mental health for all in West Yorkshire? Peninah Wangari-Jones

Welcome

This book brings together different elements of the idea and practice of Regional Democracy, an evolving concept that has been slowly revealing itself ever since a group of people in West Yorkshire got together in 2015 to organise the ‘What Kind of Region Do We Want To Live In?’ event in Manningham, Bradford.

Following on from that, a collaborative structure which we named ‘We Share The Same Skies’ was formed, and you will find more about regional democracy and about us in this book’s first article.

We see the current moment as being the earliest stages of building a regional democracy, and so the first step is consciousness raising, getting people thinking, and talking, about a region.

To do this, and to show what we mean by consciousness raising, over the last two years we have been visiting all of the many markets of West Yorkshire. We take paper and felt tip pens, and ask people to draw maps of their own neighbourhoods, especially the good stuff, and to talk about their hopes for the future of our region. We explain that we are visiting all the markets in West Yorkshire, and that by the end we will have a gigantic hand draw map of things people care about in our region.

The photographs, hand drawn maps and tweets in the book are from these events.

From the first market onwards, we discovered that children would often be attracted by the colourful maps hung around our stall and adults with them would want to look at others’ ideas and share their own thoughts on their home region and its future. Together families sat down to draw and chat. They drew maps of the city or town itself and also the many other towns and villages around it from where people will travel for a good market.

It was very common for people who came to see us to talk about and draw parks for playing, canal paths for walking the dog, community centres with things going on like sports clubs, libraries, shops, post offices and bus stops with regular services taking them to places like the market itself.

People also talked a lot about schools - from their love for a particular school to frustration at not being able to get a place at the school in their village and so having to travel every day to the neighbouring town. They also often expressed concern about things closing locally (like libraries) or services being reduced (such as street lighting).

Some participants also expressed concern about the UK being ‘Londoncentric’ and that the vote to leave the European Union was in part a reaction against this.

Over time, we have been building up a picture from below of the things that are valued most by people across West Yorkshire. The things that they want to keep, to protect and to develop. The things that exist in some neighbourhoods and that others would like for their own part of our region.

We are building a map of good stuff as the basis for what we in the communities of West Yorkshire want our regional democracy to help preserve and/or to develop.

Alongside these images and descriptions, you will find articles written by people with strong connections to West Yorkshire in response to the question:

“From where we are in West Yorkshire, if your ideal regional democracy was in place by 2040 what would our region be like? What has changed for the better? How has it been done? What work is still to do?”

The articles reflect the views of individuals that have written them. They include a range of views and may not agree with each other. But we are proud to be associated with all of them and believe that they all contribute in one way or another to the future of regional democracy in West Yorkshire. These articles build on those contributed to our ‘We Share The Same Skies’ blog over the last four years and the book also includes a selection of these pieces as well.

We hope this book will give you space to think about where you live and perhaps become inspired to get involved in building regional democracy wherever you are.

Andy, Ed and Ian

Twitter @SameSkiesBlog

Instagram @same.skies

Facebook @thesameskies

wesharethesameskiesblog.wordpress.com

What do we mean by regional democracy?

Words by

ED CARLISLE, IAN MARTIN
& ANDREW WILSON

Regional democracy is a political theory and practice developed in West Yorkshire. It identifies three complimentary and interconnected fields: region building, radical subsidiarity and overcoming the London hegemony.

Building a Region

The first field of regional democracy is cultural: the construction and maintenance of the idea of a region as a space for co-operation between people and places, and the opportunity of fair and equal participation in that co-operation by everyone who currently lives in the region, no matter where they or their relatives were born.

England, and the wider UK, has no meaningful history of federal regional governance so constructing regional democracy here begins with a process of ‘conscientisation’, which is “the process whereby people become aware of the political, socioeconomic and cultural contradictions that interact in a hegemonic way to diminish their lives” [5]. This Paulo Freire idea also includes “taking action against the oppressive elements in one’s life that are illuminated by... understanding” that hegemony [8].

Our first act of conscientisation in West Yorkshire was an Open Space event in Manningham, Bradford in 2015, which asked the question ‘What Kind of Region Do We Want to Live In?’. From the beginning we have been open to working with people from all parties and none and we have actively tried to do something to engage a more diverse range of voices. This means being open to different ways of working including participatory art projects and events based on open models with no fixed agenda and no top table of speeches (such as from MPs or council leaders) so enabling all participants to suggest themes/discussions with equal value. It also means thinking about when, where and how events happen so that it is not just about women and men who already hold positions of power within the region. This includes offering childcare and helping with travel costs.

Following our first event, we began the ‘We Share The Same Skies’ collaborative blog of hopeful ideas and since then, we have developed and delivered more creative conscientisation projects including a viral sticker campaign that invited people to think over provocative questions on the subject of regional democracy, most notably ‘How come places in West Yorkshire are run by people in London?’. We’ve also undertaken a participatory art project in which we visited all the major

markets of West Yorkshire, asking people shopping there to create maps of their communities, and talking about how they relate to their communities and region.

The aim of these activities is to engage people in region-building and not just resistance, cynicism or scepticism. We believe the bottom line is that a centralised UK has failed us and that the idea of regional democracy represents a positive opportunity. If we actively try to make it so. We are specifically committed to focusing our work around the 'margins', helping to generate a movement that not only critiques London as an inappropriate centre of power, but also takes the debate out of the established centres of subsidiary power in our region - the town halls, the voluntary sector, etc. We believe this is the next step in building a more positive politics for the region.

Radical Subsidiarity

The second field of regional democracy is the design and implementation of a governance architecture for where we live in which the regional scale sits between the local and the national. This regional scale has two roles, one inward facing, one outward. The inward facing role is to be the space for co-operation between people and places outlined above, and formally this covers things like transport, education and skills, healthcare, major cultural venues (including sport and parks), the environment, local taxation, planning laws, regional banking, making and managing relationships with other regions nationally, in Europe and worldwide, and so on. The outward facing role, crucially missing in the recent historical context of England and the UK, is to counterbalance London's hegemony.

In regional democracy all authority and responsibility for governance flows from the foundational scale upwards, and by only as much as is granted by one level to the level above. At the lowest level, we believe that the culture of regional democracy is a culture of governance participation at an interpersonal, face-to-face scale, embodied in the formal structures of local and regional government, and also, just as vitally, embodied in participatory and deliberative democracy at a neighbourhood level, in the economic democracy of cooperatively-run businesses, in clubs and societies, arts and sports organisations, governance and delivery of public services, the stewardship and enjoyment of the natural world, and not least local commercial businesses in their relationships with customers and each other. Governance of a regional democracy is the shared responsibility of each of us in our everyday conduct: to mindfully look for opportunities to work together to maximise the benefits of what we have in common, while respecting and valuing our differences.

Governance architectures based on similar principles are commonplace around the world. German federalism, for example, includes a Bundesrat, made up of representatives from the government in each Land (people sent to Berlin to stand up for their region) and the Bundestag, made up of directly elected representatives from across the republic (similar to our MPs). Representatives in the Bundestag reflect the fact that within each Land, and across the republic as a whole, there are a diversity of opinions. Within this well defined and transparent governance architecture, some decisions (default competencies) are made by the Land government autonomously and are implemented within its own space only. These are substantial powers, for example German regions can make their own choices about student tuition fees.

The German system was created by British civil servants after the Second World War in order to prevent the concentration of power. The same civil service went on to write and impose dozens of constitutions on other countries as they gained national independence from the British Empire. In contrast, English exceptionalism meant the same principles were never applied here [3]. The space governed as England has no transparent rule book to define the relationship between different parts of the country.

Why not? And who benefits from that?

Actively Challenging London's Hegemony

The third field of regional democracy is an analysis of who benefits from things as they are, and how we can overcome that. Anyone doing such an analysis will find themselves naming the negative impact of London's hegemony on the UK, especially the impact on people and places outside London and the Home Counties, and in particular the most vulnerable. Regional democracy seeks to actively challenge that hegemony in what Sharon White (second permanent secretary at the UK treasury) described as "the most centralised developed country in the world" [1].

In this specific context, hegemony means the dominance of a way of thinking, doing and being that is most closely associated with a specific region of the UK and which is exactly the same place where overwhelming political, economic, cultural and media power is concentrated – London and the Home Counties [7]. This hegemony is derived from London's position as a colonial capital city and its history of financial capitalism. In "British Imperialism: 1688-2015" historians Peter Cain and Tony Hopkins [2] describe the co-evolution of the City, Whitehall, and Westminster into what they call "gentlemanly capitalism", focused on the generation of wealth through finance. This was separate from the financing of Britain's industry, which was done by regional banks, rather than the City of London. Instead the City focused on exporting finance to Britain's colonies and extracting wealth from them. The ongoing legacy of this imperialism is the way the City, Whitehall, and Westminster treat the rest of the UK. Hemsworth MP and former Leeds City Council leader Jon Trickett described this as the UK government treating "us like the last colonial outpost of British Empire." [10]

Whether it is about spending money (such as prioritising and investing in London's schools or infrastructure over other parts of the UK) or it is about creating a political and legal climate (such as one that benefits types of industries concentrated in London but not one that benefits types of industries concentrated elsewhere), London continues to be economically successful because UK government has decided actively to do something to make it so [6]. Each time these decisions are successful, they strengthen London's case for being prioritised in the future, based on a self serving return-on-investment metric [4].

It is important to say that this analysis is about structure and systems rather than a conspiracy of people in London setting out to be deliberately vindictive to people outside London and the Home Counties. It is the inevitable consequence of the Londoncentric UK structure that leads to concentrations of power amongst those who cannot help but share some key experiences and therefore perspectives. In fact, we respect the analysis of those Londoners who also wish to challenge the London hegemony and describe how it fails the vulnerable of London itself. Nevertheless we would continue to critique those London based organisations who claim to organise nationally or offer a national perspective or service but whose hub and franchise structures mean they retreat there when resources are stretched or who continually expect people to travel to meetings or events in London as easily as the many other people based in the Home Counties. Such approaches merely perpetuate the London hegemony.

John Tomaney, Professor of Urban and Regional Planning in the Bartlett School of Planning, called this "a (post)colonial cultural relationship" between London and other regions [9]. Political parties, national charities, national arts organisations and museums, the health service, trade unions and business associations all have the same hub and franchise organisational model: well paid jobs and good careers deciding policy in London, badly paid jobs and volunteers doing what they are told everywhere else. This applies just as much to the institutions of the Left as the Right. The English Labour Party is itself a product of the London hegemony, the victory of the top down, scientific socialism of the Fabians, who were a small group of well connected London journalists, over the freewheeling, cooperatively-minded and regionally rooted Independent Labour Party [11].

Regional democracy challenges the London hegemony not just in order to overcome its negative impact but to give people across the country, rather than just those in London, the agency to campaign for, and make, positive changes where they live and work. Changing a national policy inevitably focuses on campaigners, politicians and civil servants based in London, if only because that is where the decision is made. Those conversations bypass people in other regions because it's more time consuming and expensive for us to be involved in them. A one hour meeting with a civil servant or to attend a protest is a day's commitment at least.

If we overcome the London hegemony, and root political authority where we live and work, it means that people in West Yorkshire (and in equivalent regions in other parts of the country) who have a vision for positive change can much more easily work together to influence decisions about their lives. Regional democracy releases new energy, generates new ideas and makes it easier for many voices to get heard.

Join us?

This is our theory, this is our practice. Will you join us to build regional democracy in West Yorkshire? Will you join with others to build regional democracy where you live?

Ed Carlisle grew up in different corners of the UK, but fell in love with Leeds in the 1990s. He's studied at Leeds and Bradford Universities - and has since 2002 worked and volunteered around Leeds (especially the south), leading and supporting community innovation. Projects include: Holbeck Viaduct, Leeds Repair Café, South Leeds Life, and more. He's also the lead Green Party candidate (local and parliamentary) for south and central Leeds. He's married with two cracking young kids.

Ian Martin lives with his family in East Leeds and moved to Leeds for work 20 years ago. He previously worked across Yorkshire on the development of legal aid and other services for refugees. He is a primary school teacher, junior rugby league coach and campaigner for human rights.

Andrew Wilson lives in Huddersfield and works in the crossover between making in the arts and making new technology. He also organises Hannah Directory, the yearly print publication, website and launch week of events celebrating the great stuff that people are doing in places in England's north, and asking how even more of it can happen.

References

- [1] Winnie Agbonlahor. 2015. UK 'almost most centralised developed country', says Treasury chief. Retrieved March 19, 2019 from <https://www.globalgovernmentforum.com/uk-most-centralised-developed-country-says-treasury-chief/>
- [2] Peter Cain and Tony Hopkins. 2014. British Imperialism: 1688-2000. Routledge, London.
- [3] Linda Colley. 2014. Word Power: written constitutions and the definition of British borders since 1787. Retrieved March 19, 2019 from <http://www.lse.ac.uk/lse-player?id=2343>
- [4] Tom Forth. 2017. The fiscal balance of power. Retrieved March 19, 2019 from <http://tomforth.co.uk/fiscalbalance/>
- [5] Margaret Ledwith. 2005. Community Development: A Critical Approach. Policy Press, Bristol.
- [6] Manchester Capitalism collective. 2012. If They're London's Revenues, They're London's Liabilities. Retrieved March 19, 2019 from <http://manchestercapitalism.blogspot.com/2012/12/if-theyre-londons-revenues-theyre.html>
- [7] Philip McCann. 2016. The UK's Regional Problem. Retrieved March 19, 2019 from <https://www.centreforcities.org/event/city-horizons-professor-philip-mccann/>
- [8] Elena Mustakova-Possardt. 2003. Critical Consciousness: A Study of Morality in Global, Historical Context. Praeger, Westport, Connecticut / London
- [9] John Tomaney. 2018. From the Lindisfarne Gospels to Stephenson's Rocket: The case for a National Museum of Northumbria. Retrieved March 19, 2019 from <https://www.citymetric.com/horizons/lindisfarne-gospels-stephenson-s-rocket-case-national-museum-northumbria-4094>
- [10] Jon Trickett. 2017. Retrieved March 19, 2019 from https://twitter.com/jon_trickett/status/900110699799736326
- [11] Paul Salveson. 2012. Socialism with a Northern Accent: Radical Traditions for Modern Times. Lawrence & Wishart, London.

Map drawing in West Yorkshire

 **WeShareTheSameSkies**
@SameSkiesBlog

Rabina in her shop Darren's Bookshop, in [@HuddsMarkets](#), she's drawing [#Newsome](#), and she loves the village feel of where she lives, where you can get everything you need [@GrowingNewsome](#)



5:51 am - 15 Aug 2018

 **WeShareTheSameSkies**
@SameSkiesBlog

Darcey lives in Crosland Moor & loves having Beaumont Park nearby [#RegionalDemocracy](#)



6:02 am - 15 Aug 2018

 **WeShareTheSameSkies**
@SameSkiesBlog

Abdullah, Fatima & Khalid live in Batley. They came on the train with Grandma & Grandad. He thinks we should have more power over economic development, education, health & housing locally eg affordable homes [#RegionalDemocracy](#)



4:38 am - 15 Aug 2018

 **WeShareTheSameSkies**
@SameSkiesBlog

Michael, Larissa, Laila, Tilly & Ellie love living in Holmfirth. They like getting out in the countryside, playing out & with friends at school & meeting up together for a fry up at the cafe [#RegionalDemocracy](#)



4:45 am - 15 Aug 2018

West Yorkshire 2040

From where we are in West Yorkshire, if your ideal Regional Democracy was in place by 2040 what would our region be like?

What has changed for the better? How has it been done?

What work is still to do?

Getting around our region safely

Words by
ROBYN VINTER

Not for the first time, I arrive home dripping wet, shivering and holding back tears. My partner checks his watch, confused. I'd set off from home more than an hour ago and was supposed to be out for the whole evening. "It didn't come," I say. "Again." It was one of many cold evenings I'd spent abandoned in the dark on a deserted road waiting for a bus that would never arrive.

It must be hard for those who run our region's public transport networks to imagine just how much people desperately rely on them. It's clear those in charge simply don't use the services they run -- it would only take a few bleak, freezing, frightened nights at an isolated bus stop for them to understand that there's a serious problem. The truth is, in large swathes of West Yorkshire, public transport is virtually unusable and borderline dangerous.

The truth is, in large swathes of West Yorkshire, public transport is virtually unusable and borderline dangerous.

I grew up in Leeds, went to university here and live in the city now, but for six years somewhere in the middle I lived in London. Very few people have a car in London -- of course, there's a perception that the roads are too busy and parking is expensive, but there's also an excellent non-profit public transport network run by one company. It's not perfect, but you can be guaranteed to get virtually anywhere from A to B within Greater London at almost any time of the day or night. In fact, frequently, you have multiple transport options. When I lived there, I'd commute on the bus -- about a 12-mile round trip on those "busy" London roads -- and it would cost me £3 a day.

So you can imagine it was quite a shock to move back to the North, where buses are run by a number of different non-local companies, and where a ticket from one bus company can't be used on another within the same city. Not only is the service awful but a commute less than half as many miles as my London one costs £4.20 in Leeds and actually takes longer. It's lucky, actually, that it's just First buses each way -- if I had to get an Arriva too as part of the same journey, it would be £6. It was laughable to find that I can walk the distance quicker.

Part of that is because our roads are a joke. I mean a literal joke -- comedian Michael McIntyre got a good five minutes of material from the ludicrous Leeds city centre loop when he came here a few years ago. And we're making things worse. I have numerous friends who, like me, don't actually want a car, who don't like to drive, but they do so out of necessity. I'd go as far as calling it a Leeds phenomenon. I've never tried cycling. I have a bike and have looked enviously at cyclists progressing past the queues of traffic. But it would take a long time before I'm comfortable riding my bike on the city's roads. I'm not even remotely a confident cyclist.

About once a week I find myself drifting off into a daydream about a subterranean train network. Something like that would be expensive but, as the largest city in Western Europe without a mass transit system after decades of raised and dashed hopes for a tram service, it feels like we're owed something. The frustrating thing is, better transport leads to a better city. We'll invest in businesses but forget that we suffer economically with only one large train station and a hell of a lot of rail blackspots. We fund arts and cultural events but ignore that, when people are forced to rely on buses that may or may not come, they just don't want to bother with gigs, concerts, lectures or other evening events -- it's easier for people in their 20s and 30s to go straight home after work than risk transport drama on a weeknight.

We need to deprivatise public transport and put the ownership and running of it in the hands of people who actually live in our region.

It seems like a big project but fundamentally we know how to fix things. At first glance, nationalisation might seem like the right approach to this problem but, in reality, the only way to put transport users first is to put the ownership and running of West Yorkshire public transport in the hands of people who actually live in our region. Deprivatisation must be a process of regionalisation not nationalisation.

We can pretend it's the size or wealth of London that makes the city's transport work but we all know it's about being able to make decisions at a local level that lead to a quality of service that enables profits to be reinvested back into transport improvements instead of handing them over to wealthy shareholders.

So let's start now. By 2040, we could have a strong, efficient, reliable and profitable transport network -- but the first step is calling for it and not taking "No" for an answer. Of course, I know it's positively utopian to talk like this. For years, the traditional Yorkshire attitude has got the better of us -- we've been putting up and not mithering -- and things have only gotten worse. There's no doubt in my mind that, 20 years ago, had our region mobilised and refused to accept the transport we were given, we could even have transport as good as London's, with a matching (albeit smaller) economically powerful and culturally rich city.

Yes, 20 years ago would have been the best time to put our collective foot down and demand better. But the second best time is now.

Robyn Vinter is founder and editor of investigative news website The Overtake. Starting her career in business journalism, she worked in national news in London for six years for publications like the i newspaper, the Guardian, BuzzFeed, the New Statesman and lots more, before moving back to her home city of Leeds.
www.theovertake.com

A Green New Deal for West Yorkshire

Words by
JAMES ODDY

It's very easy to look at the UK's future, and perhaps that of the majority of the 'western world', and see an increasingly pessimistic outcome. The UK is a place rife with division. It isn't just Brexit (I hate that word, I really do). It's the gap between the affluent, the comfortable, and those struggling to do more than live week to week. It's the gap between those with sufficient education and those without. It's a country divided not just by political lines of left and right anymore, but a country divided by a total belief by one side and the other that they are right about everything, all of the time.

It's a country divided not just by political lines of left and right anymore, but a country divided by a total belief by one side and the other that they are right about everything, all of the time.

So what has this got to do with West Yorkshire? Well, we are a divided region. Leeds, unequal in its own way as it is, is a commercial powerhouse. But look around it, and places like Dewsbury, Batley and Halifax struggle to retain their past glories. Likewise, bigger urban conurbations, Huddersfield and Wakefield, have similarly uncertain futures. Bradford seems to be the ominous city - a glorious, beautiful city, no matter what anybody says - but one that shows what can happen when the high street collapses and people rarely visit.

But within that uncertain future, one wracked with uncertainty and division, is the slim possibility for cohesive revival.

Imagine if West Yorkshire sought to be the centre of a type of green socialism, a melding of the European style embrace of greener modes of mass and solo transport (such as tram, subway and bicycle) with an FDR style 'New Deal' stimulus.

Of course, this idea supposes that our region will gain greater say over how money is raised and spent, but still, hear me out. It's only polite.

But imagine if the vast amounts of younger and older people struggling for work in the region were employed to create more sustainable modes of transport - designing, building and shaping the infrastructure. This would provide them with an income, allowing wealth to circulate in the region to a greater degree, but that would not be the only benefit. It would allow quicker, more reliable public transport links within West Yorkshire and between regions, thus allowing people to move around much more successfully in search of the work they desire.

The icing on the cake would undoubtedly be the preservation, to a certain extent, of the beautiful countryside that we enjoy in West Yorkshire.

**It's the idea of putting the idea of power and control
back into local people, empowering them and creating a
sense of collectivism to create something great.**

My final reason for this new deal idea is ripped right from when FDR suggested it to the American people. It's the idea of putting the idea of power and control back into local people, empowering them and creating a sense of collectivism to create something great.

This would only be a small piece of a larger puzzle, but it would be a great start.

*James Oddy is a writer and
teacher from Leeds. He can be
found via Twitter at @OddyIJ*

West Yorkshire Water Cooperative (2030)

Words by
ANDY GOLDRING

Hello and welcome to the Esholt Centre for Water and Ecology. I'm Andy and I'm going to be your guide today, and before we explore the visitor centre, lab and agricultural demonstrations, I'm going to tell you a bit about the background to our launch nine years ago.

West Yorkshire Water Cooperative is one of five operational divisions of the Humber River Basin Water Authority, and our remit is to supply water at a fair price to all citizens and businesses in the region.

As you know, a lot changed in the early 2020s! Our story begins with the bold and rapid phase of deprivatisation [1] which removed the English water companies from private hands - mostly international hedge funds and insurance companies. What was unique about that period, was that de-privatisation mostly became a process of regionalisation not nationalisation, and the water companies were handed over to regional multi-stakeholder cooperatives, not civil servants in Whitehall.

West Yorkshire Water Cooperative is one of five operational divisions of the Humber River Basin Water Authority, and our remit is to supply water at a fair price to all citizens and businesses in the region of West Yorkshire and to distribute financial surpluses towards ecological restoration of our watersheds, research and youth education. Our two main water catchments are the Aire & Calder - rising near Todmorden - and Wharfe & Ouse - which rises in Bekefmonds in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Both rivers then drain into the Humber. Catchments are the areas of land where water all drains into the same river or rivers, and they make sense to manage as a whole landscape. It's not an exact match to the county boundary, but much easier to say than the Aire Calder Wharfe Ouse Water Cooperative!

As a multi-stakeholder cooperative we have six key groupings that contribute in different ways to its success.

- Firstly you, all citizens of West Yorkshire are stakeholders and represented by a Citizen Council. Council members do a three year term and get training in how to hold us to account, and they do!
- Secondly each Local Authority is a stakeholder and co-owners with the workers. They use their collective power to raise Government backed Municipal Bonds for long term investment in the infrastructure.
- Thirdly, Schools and Colleges have a special group that educates and involves young people, engaging them in citizen science and understanding the water and ecology of the area. We'll see some of the data sensors and experiments that are being deployed by school kids later today.

- Fourthly wildlife groups, universities, farmers and land managers work via the two Catchment Partnerships to enhance soil, hydrology and biodiversity through regenerative agriculture practices and landscape design using an approach called permaculture.
- Businesses have a panel that works to identify problems and opportunities, minimise water needs, reduce pollution and ensure all new business and housing infrastructure uses water wisely.
- Finally, workers are fully represented, within a fairly flat organisational structure. We do have managers, but as part of the national network of water cooperatives we are developing processes and technologies that enable small teams to get on with the job.

All citizens of West Yorkshire are stakeholders and represented by a Citizen Council.

Each stakeholder group adds value in different ways, but no-one makes a profit. We get good wages, but we've also been able to direct over sixty million pounds in the first nine years towards ecological restoration and soil enhancement, and that's in the midst of significant challenges re-orientating the old Yorkshire Water company into a multi-stakeholder cooperative. We'll probably double that in the next three years [2].

As you remember there were calls to make water free or much cheaper, but it was argued that if it was free, more would be wasted. The key thing is that we've brought in much more support for low-income families, and this is very closely monitored by the Citizen Council. By maintaining charges roughly where they were for most people, we have real power to design and implement long term projects that enhance our natural environment, and engage citizens, especially young people in meaningful ways.

As you will see shortly, the regenerative agriculture approaches, when combined with natural flood management methods, are giving excellent results, so we expect a significant improvement in water quality, reduced costs, enhanced biodiversity and better returns for farmers and tourism within the next decade. Plus we're much better prepared for climate change than before.

The schools programme gets kids out into nature, helps with the science and is nurturing a generation of kids that really appreciate just how special and important our environment is. We'll speak to a few of them in the lab later.

Ok, I think I'll stop there for questions, and then let's go and see the centre. Thanks.

*Andy Goldring is Coordinator/CEO of the
Permaculture Association and a member
of Leeds Permaculture Network.
www.leedsparmaculturenetwork.org*

References

[1] en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kelda_Group - Kelda Group, originally known as Yorkshire Water PLC, was one of the regional water companies privatised in 1989. It changed to its current name in 1999. In 2000 Kelda purchased the United States water supply business Aquarion and subsequently announced the conditional sale of this asset in February 2006. It was taken private in a £3.04 billion deal in February 2008 by Saltaire Water, a consortium of investment companies including Citigroup and HSBC. Until the 1980s, universal provision of drinking water and sewerage services in England and Wales was considered a public health service. The water industry was privatised in 1989, according to the Conservative government's program.

[2] In the decade up to 2019, the nine main English water companies have made £18.8bn of post-tax profits in aggregate, according to a study by Greenwich University. Of this, £18.1bn has been paid out as dividends. Consequently, almost all capital expenditure has been financed by adding to the companies' debt piles. Collectively these now stand at a towering £42bn.

Cultural democracy - a vision for our region

Words by
ISAAC ROSE

Cultural democracy should sit at the heart of the vision for our region. By this we mean that access to the arts should be available to all - regardless of background. Every child should have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument, or perform on stage or paint. Every adult and every community should be touched by the joys of performance, music or festival. But achieving this will be no easy task. At a time when the austerity agenda has ruthlessly stripped arts education from state schools, and defunded and destroyed key cultural institutions such as libraries or community centres, the fight to defend and extend the arts will not be easy. It is our duty to rise to the challenge, and the opportunity of devolution provides an ideal starting point for this.

Firstly however - why is this necessary? For progressives, access to the arts should sit at the heart of our politics. At root, our politics celebrate humanity - the recognition of the innate wonder of human beings and their capacity to create, to inspire and to love. One of the grossest injustices of our social system - capitalism - is that it snuffs out human potential. The struggle to survive crowds out the space needed for people to explore their creative capacities; the demands of capital on people's time and energy preclude any possibility of them spending that time and energy on anything other than survival.

Access to the arts should sit at the heart of our politics. At root, our politics celebrate humanity - the recognition of the innate wonder of human beings and their capacity to create, to inspire and to love.

To create a world where people can explore their creative capacities, where access to the arts is available to all, it will be necessary to bring about far-reaching social changes. In the medium to long term, changes such as a drastically reduced working week, cheap or free housing, and universal basic services will all unlock people's productive capacities. This may sit outside the scope of thinking for the limited forms of devolution already underway in the North but we could at least apply the same thinking and analytical framework to policy solutions that improve access to the arts now - namely how can the space allocated in people's time and lived environment to the arts be protected and extended?

The starting point of course must be our schools. Arts education has to be enshrined as a cornerstone of schooling - with every child having access to the opportunity to learn an instrument or paint or engage with the arts. In the absence of national government prioritising this, we should insist that regional provision is made. Building on this, urgent questions hang over the current spend and strategy of the Arts Council.

The Movement for Cultural Democracy has made a series of very good policy suggestions on how the Arts Council could be restructured and devolved to make it better fit for purpose, and less focussed on the capital (1). Part of the role of our region should be pushing for these kinds of structural reforms.

Local authorities should act to protect and extend grassroots spaces for art - using innovative methods such as community land trusts to preserve cultural centres, DIY spaces and community hubs.

Yet cultural democracy must extend beyond schools and beyond the Arts Council. In his three-part chronicling of the cultural ferment of downtown New York in the 1970s and 1980s, Tim Lawrence explores beautifully how the availability of physical space and cheap rents created the conditions that produced one of the most artistically innovative periods of the 20th century (2). Under a culturally democratic West Yorkshire, these same conditions must be created. Local authorities should act to protect and extend grassroots spaces for art - using innovative methods such as community land trusts to preserve cultural centres, DIY spaces and community hubs. Unused retail spaces could be repurposed for artistic ends - something that Bradford has led the way on (3). In city and town plans, care must be taken not to allow financialised development to sweep away precious local ecologies of creativity, such as in the Mabgate developments in Leeds (4). Broader than this however, cultural democracy will be enabled through cheap and high quality housing for all. Rent controls in the private rented sector, and an expansion of public housing will be necessary to allow people to claw back time and energy from the insecurity of existence, in order to more fully devote time to learning, creating and experimenting.

In a brilliant essay written a few years ago, Manchester DJ and cultural writer Dave Haslam critiqued the direction of his city's cultural policy (5). Writing in the wake of the opening of HOME (a new multi-arts space), he wrote passionately in defence of the fact that cultural innovation doesn't happen in shiny new spaces, but at the margins: "in the dodgy venues, the rehearsal rooms, the uncontrolled spaces, artist's studios, the basements and the streets." Exactly. Protecting those margins and extending them to touch people's everyday lives is at the core of the move for cultural democracy, and West Yorkshire should sit at the heart of it.

Isaac Rose is an arts programmer and housing activist originally from the Calder Valley but currently living in Manchester. He can be found via Twitter on @wouldntdaremate

References

- [1] www.colouringinculture.org/refunding
- [2] www.timlawrence.info
- [3] www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/14767503-former-department-store-becomes-wild-woods-for-series-of-evening-arts-events/
- [4] www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/nov/07/regeneration-leeds-arts-quarter-mabgate-under-threat-victoria-centre
- [5] www.davehaslam.com/#/manchester-arts-culture-what-happens-next-june-2015

And what if one sky cannot contain us all?

Words by
**DÉSIRÉE REYNOLDS &
PENINAH WANGARI-JONES**

To imagine a racially just West Yorkshire is to imagine a racially just world, to imagine a racially just world is to imagine race equity globally. So to think about equity it's hard to not think of inequity, to not think of all the ways that coloniality and a whitewashed history affect us every day. To consider whether 'We Share the Same Skies' is to think about the ways in which racial injustice plays out here. The world is changing. Language is changing. We're seeing now, after being just under the surface of a white collective consciousness, that 'race' is now part of the conversation. But with participation comes risk and all are affected and that's reflected in our schools. The uproar in November 2018 about the bullying in a Huddersfield school of Syrian children merely highlighted what a lot of people of colour (POC) living here have been experiencing for years, despite moments of solidarity and inclusivity such as the open arms offered to Chileans back in the 70's.

**Race has always been connected to capitalism and Neoliberalism.
The legacies of colonialism that we see today are reinforced
by structures like education, media, finance, corporations
and government.**

The issue of resolving race and social injustice becomes harder because it is woven into every fabric of ordinary life, from schools to hospitals, work, transport, health and housing. Race has always been connected to capitalism and Neoliberalism. The legacies of colonialism that we see today are reinforced by structures like education, media, finance, corporations and government. Imperialist expansion necessitated the invention of 'race' to justify the treatment of the 'other'. And West Yorkshire benefited from industrialisation which was bolstered by the enslavement of Afrikans and imperialism, evident in the mills, town halls and canals which are visual reminders of this. Our region, like everywhere else benefited from the Afrikan Holocaust. This is not always spoken of when conversations about 'migrants' coming to take from the host communities are held.

Northern and working class has always been synonymous with whiteness despite the long history of POC living and working here. Black and Brown communities have little or no participation in government or decision making processes in any form beyond limited tokenism. This lack of representation is even evident in relation to issues that directly affect our communities. Too often Black and Brown people are made to feel vulnerable or feel unsafe, and subjected to the real threat of internalised powerlessness. Feelings of not belonging are pervasive, and too many people from racial minorities are constantly told that is the case. Other ills include low education attainment levels, health inequalities and job prospects as well as unfair justice and migration systems. We make it just, fair and 'Same Skies' by decolonising, which means unpacking the hype of

colonialism and empire. Unweaving what has become normative, framed by British amnesia and a reluctance to accept the lived experiences of people of colour. This is a big task and might take a long time but making steps is better than nothing: to decolonise is in fact our only way forward. If we take the education system for example, West Yorkshire schools would teach history that connects empire to current global issues. It would allow for voices to be heard other than the white, Euro-centric and western perspectives observed now. Decolonisation would allow for reparatory justice, acknowledging past harms and addressing the inequities that have come from that, regionally and globally, including forced migrations and climate induced displacement.

Migration reforms where migrants are treated with compassion and humanity, that celebrate diversity, increase employment, improve health conditions and promote better relations between communities in general.

This would help rebalance the inequality that exists between the UK and the Global South. Decolonisation would have an impact on connections globally and respect for lands, nature, cultures in whatever part of the world they exist as well as combating the extraction and destruction that continues today. It would move away from the good migrant/bad migrant narrative of only looking at humans from the monetary perspective of what they are bringing in. On a regional level it will restore sovereignty of imagination for Black and Brown communities who are often not considered, it will increase participation and, in so doing, benefit the region even more. It would lead to migration reforms where migrants are treated with compassion and humanity, that celebrate diversity, increase employment, improve health conditions and promote better relations between communities in general.

Decolonisation would mean to not be judged, discriminated against or made to justify ourselves as people of colour. That borders are gone and that history is a continuous thread that we are all adding to. And the skies we think of would be many.

Peninah Wangari-Jones is a West Yorkshire based anti racist activist, community organiser and campaigner. Peninah is known for her public engagements on a range of topics including: colonialism, migration, race, racism, racialisation and intersections like gender, class, mental health, activism. She currently heads The Racial Justice Network, a network of individuals, communities & organisations working together to address legacies of colonialism and end racial injustice.
@peninah69

Désirée Reynolds is a writer, editor, activist and creative workshop facilitator. She has written film scripts, short stories and flash fiction. Her stories are in various anthologies. "Seduce" her first novel was published by Peepal Tree Press in 2013, to much acclaim. Her activism is underpinned by race and gender, learning differences, mental health and (dis)abilities, having lived experiences of all them.
@desreereynolds

Regional democracy, from the ground up

Words by
DIANE SIMS

A little after 6am on the morning of Thursday 17th November 2016, I stood quietly on the corner of the street where I live, and heard the timbers of Newsome Mill finally give way in the intense heat of the fire. We lost the most prominent building in our area that night, and in the wake of the fire came shock, grief, unease, a sense of powerlessness and volatile anger.

In the ten years that I had spent campaigning for a future for our mill, I never thought that I would see my family and our friends and neighbours evacuated from our homes in the middle of the night after a reckless act of arson. And I never thought that it was impossible for the people who live here to have influence over what happens to our community. I still don't.

I always knew that our mill mattered to the people who live in Newsome. I knew it and understood it instinctively, in the way that only someone who lives here can. In the days and weeks following the fire, when people talked to me about it they would often use the word "bereavement" to describe their feelings about losing our towering four-storey mill. "I know that sounds silly..." people would say. But I didn't think so.

Founded in 1827, Newsome Mills manufactured fine worsted woollen textiles and was most familiarly associated with the successful firm of Taylor & Littlewood. Newsome village grew around the mill, which was the major employer in the area and was still in operation into the 1980s. Many families in Newsome today still have strong connections with the mill, and it is part of the identity of our area.

**I never thought that I would see my family and our friends
and neighbours evacuated from our homes in the middle of
the night after a reckless act of arson.**

Newsome Mill is also what connects us to West Yorkshire's shared industrial heritage, and what made us part of a thriving textile manufacturing region. It is the kind of connection that people feel we are losing today, along with our voice in the decisions that affect us and the places we call home.

When the Kirklees Democracy Commission talked to citizens about how to strengthen local democracy, one of the things people said very clearly is that local identity matters - and that it should matter in decision-making. The Commission's report, "Growing a stronger local democracy, from the ground up", recognises that the shared heritage of our places is important. The Commission's work also revealed that citizens of Kirklees are worried that our local towns and

villages have lost their identity and have lost their connection with the council. They fear that regional devolution may further weaken our sense of local identity, instead of strengthening it, and make decision-making even more remote, rather than bringing it closer to our everyday lives.

If this is the exact opposite of how we're meant to feel about regional devolution, then that may be because we have started in entirely the wrong place. Devolution feels to be about deals being done (or not done) far away, without our involvement. We do not know what devolution is for, who is part of it, or what it will mean for any of us.

Ordinary citizens across our region choose to take on seemingly impossible challenges every day.

How can we expect a top-down devolution, based around economic identities and disconnected from our local councillors and communities, to feel relevant to someone standing on a street corner in the middle of the night, watching their heritage and aspirations go up in smoke? How can we expect it to feel relevant in any neighbourhood?

Ordinary citizens across our region choose to take on seemingly impossible challenges every day. In their own time. Not because they know how to do it. But because they know and understand that it matters to the people who live here. I'd like to think that someday devolution can help us to meet these challenges and support us in being what we want our communities to be.

I'd like to see citizens who have taken personal responsibility for regionally significant buildings in their neighbourhood being recognised as heritage guardians. We should have statutory rights to be kept informed and to have a voice in any decisions relating to the places we have a stake in (not just planning decisions, and not just some of those decisions). A regional network could be incredibly valuable in helping active citizens to share experiences and ideas, and could reconnect our community to our region.

Democracy happens where we are. For regional devolution to be meaningful, relevant and democratic, it must be rooted in our communities. It must give us a sense of being part of something, and of being able to influence the decisions that affect us. It must be a regional democracy that we grow together, from the ground up.

Diane Sims is a heritage campaigner, food grower and co-ordinator of Notwestminster, an annual event in Huddersfield for anyone who has something positive to say about local democracy and who is up for the challenge of making it better.

Find her projects at:
www.savenewsomemills.org.uk
www.growingnewsome.org.uk
www.notwestminster.org.uk

Living your best life - West Yorkshire

Words by
LOU MYCROFT

I'm a South Yorkshire native (don't judge me) working across our glorious county. What you can't see is that I'm an outsider in other ways: adopted as a baby I grew up a Northerner with roots in the south, giving me a perspective sharpened by my own experiences and those of my South London birth family.

By 2040 I want West Yorkshire, and any other region that wants to join us, to be a 'Good Help' region. Isn't 'good help' traditionally what we're all about? Neighbouring (but not over-neighbouring), communities pulling together like 'Calendar Girls' and 'Brassed Off'? Extraordinary brother (and sister) hood, exemplified by Jonathan and Alistair Brownlee? Everybody down the Woolpack? Yet we endure centrally licensed public services which create dependency by eroding dignity: not social but increasingly parochial 'welfare'.

It strikes me that we are entangled in structures and systems that impoverish us all.

I'm a recovering public servant myself and I'm not in the business of discounting the dedication of former colleagues and fellow travellers. However my experiences across health, education and housing incline me to the view that empowerment is an increasing rarity in public service. West Yorkshire Grit notwithstanding, it strikes me that we are entangled in structures and systems that impoverish us all.

In times of ideological austerity, it is easy to think this impoverishment is all about money and this is truest of all at the sharp end of poverty. Shivering on a delayed and ancient early morning train, bumping along potholed carriageways and waiting for a hospital bed are challenges common to everyone except those so economically fortunate they can pay for private services (of course they use the same roads, railway lines and, occasionally, doctors). More hidden and equally pervasive is the creeping erosion of personal agency across all public services: the effects of welfare state infantilisation. Decades of treating adults like children has caused many of us to stop making powerful decisions for ourselves.

My proposal is that we make West Yorkshire a Good Help region, based on principles identified in research by social impact labs Nesta and Osca (2018):

"'Good Help' supports people to feel hopeful, identify their own purpose and take action. 'Bad Help' does the opposite, undermining people's confidence, sense of purpose and ultimately creating inaction."

Take a look at any local community Facebook group and the effects of Bad Help jump out at you: valiant efforts by local volunteers undermined (sometimes aggressively) by those who wouldn't dream they could also take action. There is no blame of individuals implied here. I'm guided by the belief that individuals are fundamentally good. And don't politically pigeonhole me - my vision lies with neither the right nor the left: in fact it's not about a political spectrum at all. The trajectory of this cultural drift towards dependency has continued under austerity and prosperity. What's needed is a collective rethink of the structures and systems that determine our lives: how can the mission of social welfare be one of enabling people to feel hopeful, identify their own purpose and take action?

My vision lies with neither the right nor the left: in fact it's not about a political spectrum at all. The trajectory of this cultural drift towards dependency has continued under austerity and prosperity.

I want to be very clear that I'm not talking about an 'Us and Them' situation: if language shapes the way we think, we are already thinking about people who most use welfare services as 'other', even if we do this with a good heart. Paternalism benefits no-one more than the giver of largesse; however well-meant, if it erodes the receiver's purpose, it's a step further down the road to personal stasis. And in my experience, and after at least a decade of being told that we too were a drain on the country, public servants are as disempowered and demoralised as the people served.

No complex problem has an easy answer. Thinking differently on such a huge scale takes patient, incremental partnership work. Culture change is bitterly resisted by everyone who benefits from the status quo. I'm not afraid to punch well above my weight, but taking on the whole of the UK seems like too big an ask. But West Yorkshire? Yeah, we can do that. We've got the spirit, the grit, the egalitarian stance. We believe in getting up and getting on. There could be no better place than West Yorkshire and all of God's Own Country to kick-start the Good Help Revolution. And if you're with me, I think I know how we can begin...

*Lou Mycroft works across Yorkshire
and beyond and can be found on
Twitter at @loumycroft*

References

Nesta (2018) Good and Bad Help:
How purpose and confidence transform lives.
Online www.nesta.org.uk/project/good-help

The imaginings of West Yorkshire futures

Words by
DR SOPHIA PRICE

When George Osbourne announced his plan for a Northern Powerhouse, it was met by some scepticism. While the promise of economic reinvigoration and infrastructural development provided some optimism for a better future for the North, the framing of this in terms of a regional collectivism revealed how problematic this was. It created an identity through the ‘othering’ of those parts of the UK that were not geographically located in the South and were therefore economically, socially and politically peripheralised by this. This relied on a distinct conceptualisation of a shared, collective Northern identity that linked the cities, towns and rural communities of the North of England. For many of us who live and work in these places, such a framing of Northern collectivism seems indistinct and reliant on a characterisation that is not fully rooted in our realities. Rather it appears as an externally imposed idea that is based on an economic rationale rather than an actual social or political collectivity.

The ‘othering’ of those parts of the UK that were not geographically located in the South and were therefore economically, socially and politically peripheralised.

We know of the difficulties of attempting to construct an identity based solely on economic rationalities – surely the issues thrown up by the Brexit referendum reveal just that. While the pursuit of the promises of future prosperity through geographic integration might make sense for the planners, this can have deep seated social and political repercussions. If those that are subject to these impacts feel distanced from the decision making processes that manage such change, the long-term legitimacy of the Grand Plan is called into question, and can ultimately be its downfall.

A further problematic element of the promise of the Northern Powerhouse, is its reliance on the ability of the North to attract globally mobile finance to the region. Such finance is imagined as the key to unlock a better future for the North, that will deliver a radically different and more prosperous reality if only it could be harnessed. The trouble with this imaginary is that it denies the fundamental character of such finance: its mobility. This arms finance with the ability to dictate the terms of its engagement, the conditions of work for its labour force and the actions of political institutions reliant on attracting and keeping it. In short it further constrains the democratic ability of resident populations to make decisions about their lives.

It is these twin forces, i.e. the need for the democratic and social engagement of people in shaping their own lives and the constraining elements that globally mobile finance can place on those choices, that pose the greatest challenges to the future of West Yorkshire. In addressing these

challenges there is a need to collectivise political action and will around the geographical areas that make sense to people and which they can relate to. Restructuring political institutions around a Yorkshire or West Yorkshire macro-region, underpinned by sub-regional, locally based organisations that reflect and respond to the needs and concerns of people living in those areas, makes sense. This would provide the legitimacy, responsiveness and democratic control of our daily lives that is necessary for sustainable and healthy communities to flourish. Finding ways to embed those communities in sustainable forms of economic organisations, that deliver fair outcomes and security for those that participate in them, is also key.

We should not be modest about our political, social and economic histories but use these as the basis for imagining a future for West Yorkshire.

Drawing on the radicalism and claims for social equality and justice that are at the heart of West Yorkshire's history would root the re-conceptualisation of our collectivity in the heritage of the region and would provide a vision of the future that has people at its heart. We should not be modest about our political, social and economic histories but use these as the basis for imagining a future for West Yorkshire. That imaginary should not be framed from the outside, particularly not by Central Government, nor should it be reliant on an endless desire to attract globally mobile finance. Instead it should be created by the people of West Yorkshire, drawing on our political, social, economic and imaginative forces, in order to deliver a sustainable future for all.

Dr Sophia Price is Head of Politics and International Relations at Leeds Beckett University. She has previously worked for the Open University and University of Manchester. Her research focuses on feminist political economy, UK and EU development cooperation policies, particularly with West Africa, and the politics of Brexit.

West Yorkshire 2040

Words by
MILTON BROWN

“History is not everything, but it is a starting point. History is a clock that people use to tell their political and cultural time of day. It is a compass they use to find themselves on the map of human geography. It tells them where they are but, more importantly, what they must be.”

John Henrik Clarke (1996)

This quote appeals to me, as a fifty-seven-year-old African Caribbean British born male. A British native son, born to economic migrant parents, who came here, invited by the British government to work as British citizens in 1958. I went through my formative education in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire and served in the British Armed forces for six years in the 1980s. The navigation of race and discrimination has been central to my everyday experience from the 1960s to the present.

In spite of the challenges of race and discrimination, from the 1960s to the mid-90s, communities and families stuck together. Good morning, good evening, excuse me, please and thank you were still used when addressing your elders and each other on a daily basis. Young people had high expectations of finding employment or steadily progressing onto further education. Local people shopped at their local shops. Local communities stuck together and supported each other. A butcher's shop, post office, paper shop, laundrette and greengrocers were the basic tenants of a coherent community. It felt like you were part of something bigger than yourself.

The navigation of race and discrimination has been central to my everyday experience from the 1960s to the present.

The historian John Tosh states “The past should be studied as it actually was”. (Tosh 2010). As I reflect on the Tosh, 2010 and Clarke, 1996 quotes respectively, asking myself where we are as a nation, and in particular West Yorkshire, I can wholeheartedly say we have progressed. The celebration of cultures is much more visible; diverse communities are continually evolving. Compassion, solidarity, welcoming and racial justice have all improved from the 1960s to the present. However, the idea of localism, knowing and supporting your neighbour, appears to have evaporated into shopping centres outside of your community, retail parks, online buying and selling. Social media seems to have increased the ability of our present generation to communicate, but equally eroded the sense of localism, civic duty, manners, respect, positive human interaction and collectively valuing their local community.

I believe that history shapes our identity: knowing who we are as individuals, and the collective human spirit, is the key to forming stronger families and safer communities and providing better futures.

The future in our minds must start with the next generation. Clarke, 1996, states, “Each generation must assume the responsibility of securing their manhood, their womanhood, the definition of their being on earth.”

A compulsory West Yorkshire Citizenship Service for 17 to 19-year-olds.

My vision for 2040 is to ensure the next generation is filled with humanity, compassion, trust, and that civic responsibility is central to public policy, significantly contributing to democracy, and our local and regional economy. I would suggest a compulsory West Yorkshire Citizenship Service could be introduced for 17 to 19-year-olds, compromising of young people working in their local community. A central narrative of the service will be about human rights, children’s rights and equality legislation. A skills audit for every young person to establish their learning styles and where their skills will be of benefit to themselves and their local community. Schools are the central point of every community. I would suggest every secondary school has a community college linked to online national vocational courses for adult education. I would like to see Universities in the region share their resources more within their local towns and cities. Every university faculty should adopt a community enterprise or a local area and work co-productively to improve the life chances of the local people and their families.

I believe my vision for 2040 brings back localism, improving the interactions between those who have and have-not. Moreover, it is preparing a generation to understand that living is connected to giving. Finally, it is my wish that in 2040 we have a cultural, social and political narrative, that celebrates the joy of serving, helping and supporting your neighbour, bringing good old fashion values of civic duty and responsibility back to the present.

Milton Brown is CEO of KLTV in Huddersfield. He is an experienced consultant in organisational development and holds a MA in ‘Consultation and the Organisation: Psychoanalytic approaches’ and a PG Dip in Black Leadership in White Institutions from the the Tavistock Institute. In October 2011 Milton was honoured with the Fellowship from the United Nations for the International Year of People of African Descent.

Map drawing in West Yorkshire



WeShareTheSameSkies @SameSkiesBlog · 2 Aug 2018
Ellise & Brandon love living in Burmantofts, especially having so many community facilities like Haslewood Hub nearby [#RegionalDemocracy](#)



1 3 4



WeShareTheSameSkies
@SameSkiesBlog

Kate & Doreen love their local churches in Holme & Keighley [#RegionalDemocracy](#)



6:46 am - 4 Nov 2017



WeShareTheSameSkies
@SameSkiesBlog

Open space was really important to Dave growing up in Keighley [#RegionalDemocracy](#)

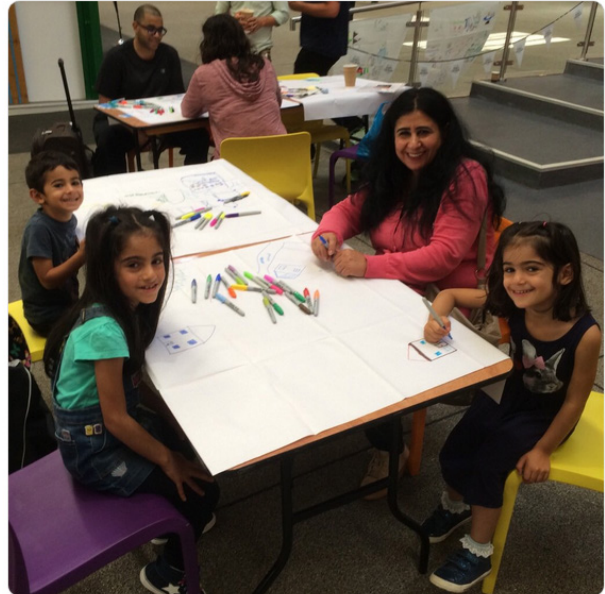


4:12 am - 23 Aug 2017



WeShareTheSameSkies
@SameSkiesBlog

Layla, Maarooof & family love living near Shaftesbury corner, especially being close to their school & friends. Mum runs a catering business & it was hard to get established but now it's going well. [#RegionalDemocracy](#)



4:12 am - 2 Aug 2018



WeShareTheSameSkies
@SameSkiesBlog

Dalia loves living in Chapel Allerton & in particular she loves the family atmosphere of the suburb although she wishes that there were more affordable houses that were well built [#RegionalDemocracy](#)



3:57 am - 2 Aug 2018

Essays from the Same Skies blog

Since 2015, We Share The Same Skies have been developing a multi-authored blog of hopeful ideas from around West Yorkshire. These are ideas from our region, for our region and they are inspired by dreams of the early days of a new regional democracy. The following are some of the essays contributed to this collaborative blog over the last four years.

Read more: www.wesharethesameskiesblog.wordpress.com

Could local public banks allow our region to do things independently of London?

Words by
MARIE MCCAHERY

When I've attended devolution conferences, I've found them interesting but at the same time I've been astonished that local public banking is never on the table as an option for achieving financial independence.

Upon extensive study of monetary and banking reform I have become convinced, with many other people, that local public banking is the most achievable way for localities to gain some measure of financial independence, to fund the initiatives they decide they need. I think that devolution to cities and regions provides a fantastic opportunity for this option to be investigated further as local public banking can allow them to do so many things independent of funding from London or Brussels. It really needs to be on the table.

But public banking is never talked about in the UK, despite it being 25% of banking worldwide and 40% in successful economies such as Germany. The UK banking sector is dominated by four huge private banks and it's about time we had a more diverse banking sector like many other countries. Germany, for example, has local, regional and national public banks, all motivated for the public benefit, not profit maximisation. These are major lenders into local SMEs, infrastructure and the green sector.

Local public banking is the most achievable way for localities to gain some measure of financial independence.

The local public banks, the Sparkasse, lend over 70% of their loans to the local SMEs (small and medium enterprises, less than 250 employees), unlike the massive, national private banks in the UK, that only lend 8% to the productive sector and only a quarter of that, 2% to SMEs. The Sparkasse are also major investors in local green initiatives and co-operatives. We have many problems in the UK and public banks could be part of the solution to alleviate them. Devolution to the regions offers a great opportunity to investigate the idea of local public banks using the Sparkasse outreach programme, the SBFIC, who have already been doing fantastic work in Ireland.

Local public banks are owned by the local authorities, though not operated by politicians but by public employees proud to work for the public benefit. They can only ever earn salaries as there is no bonus/fees/commission culture in public banks. They offer what Professor Marianna Mazzucato calls 'patient, committed' money. Their remit to work for the public benefit means that public banks do not lend into financial speculation which meant that the Sparkasse did not suffer losses in the crash of 2008, and were happy to continue lending to businesses and to even lend more to nurse their businesses through the recession. Institutions worried that they would lose their deposits in the event of a bank failure caused by the incessant financial speculation of private banks might choose to deposit in public banks, where their money is safer, where banking charges are cheaper, and where loans and profits are channelled for the public benefit.

Local public banks are willing to look at business plans from the local authority and lend to it for public housing, green initiatives and other projects whose income will pay to service the loan. Their interest charges are also cheaper for such loans as they have minimal overheads. Local co-operatives are also much more likely to receive funding from a local public bank that does not want local enterprises to close.

It must be remembered that credit unions do not have a banking license, they are intermediaries between savers and borrowers. The difference with a banking license is that banks can create money from nothing when they issue loans. When someone borrows from a bank, they sign a promise to pay which becomes an asset to the bank. The bank then must create a matching liability which it does by crediting the borrowers account. This money, however, does not come from savers or from the bank's reserves, but is created by tapping the keyboard. This capacity of banks to create money was explained by the Bank of England on their website (www.bankofengland.co.uk/quarterly-bulletin/2014/q1/money-creation-in-the-modern-economy).

So local public banks bring newly-created money into the local economy, supporting local businesses and jobs. It is not inflationary, as the money is matched by new production, unlike the money created by the present private banks that are primarily aimed at the housing and financial sector, creating inflation in these sectors and making asset-holders richer whilst leaving everyone else with debts, thereby increasing inequality. For more information on how banks create money, also look at the Positive Money website (www.positivemoney.org).

Only 3% of money is created by the government as cash, the rest is created digitally by the private banks and it is time this immense power was used for the benefit of the public. How much longer can we put up with the private banks litany of wrong doings?

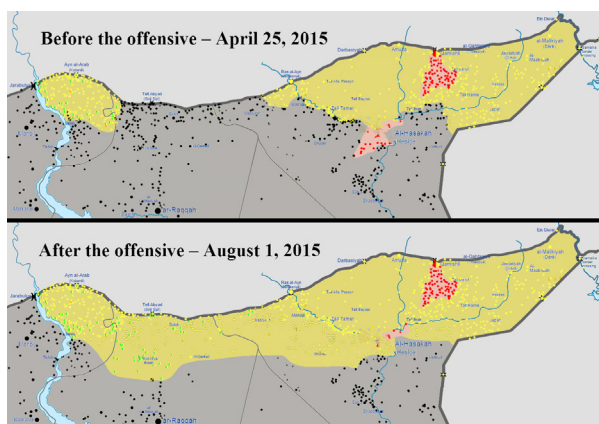
*Marie McCahery can
be found on Twitter
@MarieMcCahery*

What can West Yorkshire learn from Rojava?

Words by
TABITHA BAST

Rojava is the light in the darkness that is Syria, an autonomous region of four separate but interrelated cantons since 2013, also known as Syrian Kurdistan. Rojava has established a society based on the principles of direct democracy, sustainability and gender equality. The YPG are the military wing, a very young army that has only been in existence in this form since 2012. Yet I, and probably most other West Yorkshire folk, hadn't heard of Rojava or even the Kurdish people, until Kobane came under siege from the terrorist group ISIS (known as Daesh or ISIL also) as this was a key area that if ISIS had won, would have given them a great strategic advantage.

And now I know that there are 300,000 Kurdish refugees in the UK, and Leeds, Huddersfield and Bradford are home to many of the Kurdish diaspora, some a few minutes from my door. We also know that ISIS didn't win, they didn't take Kobane. The YPG, unbelievably, whilst starved of military and humanitarian assistance by Turkey's ongoing campaign against the Kurds, triumphed. This military, made up of 40% women, and under a political system closest to what we know as anarchist/libertarian socialism, or grass roots organising, not only resisted the onslaught of ISIS but last year seized land. Rojava typifies the spirit of demanding the impossible, making dreams reality.



Rojava and West Yorkshire are, literally, miles apart and have different cultures, landscapes, ways of being. This is not a call to identikit and imitate the Rojava Project, but rather to engage with the consciousness of Rojava in ways that have meaning for us here.

One of the most interesting elements of the Rojava Revolution is that it has emerged from a Stalinist-Leninist hierarchical organisation into a movement committed to Democratic Confederalism.

This means, at its core, power to the people, to neighbourhood assemblies rather than high ranking officials. In Rojava, decisions happen at street level, at the grassroots. In some ways, West Yorkshire might seem the opposite of that, with the bureaucracies of councils and proposed devolved powers centralised in Mayors, or decision making concentrated down in Westminster, London, by a load of Eton boys who have no understanding of the North. But actually West Yorkshire is rich in a history of grassroots organising from the radical militancy of food riots or anti blackshirt organising, right up to the present day, for example during the floods of December 2015 when all over West Yorkshire neighbours helped neighbours and volunteers piled in to provide food, accommodation and hard labour for strangers across the region. Grassroots organising without money or hierarchy happens all the time across West Yorkshire, and it's up to us to make it happen more.

We lost a much loved Yorkshireman out in Rojava in 2015, Kosta Scurfield who came from Barnsley and was a former Royal Marine. His parents, Vasiliki and Chris, campaign for Peace and speak out about the Kurdish struggle, including resistance to ISIS. We even have Joe, a Halifax lad who fought with the YPG, through the International Brigades group 'Lions of Rojava'. Those with a sense of history will know this resonates with the Spanish Civil War and many dreamers, thinkers and makers from our region heading out to join the anarchist resistance to fascism there. Whilst there are few who would not understand the necessity in this situation to take up arms against ISIS as self defence and against genocide, the military element of Rojava is just one small part, and perhaps the least transferable element of the Rojava Project to a West Yorkshire situation.

The police force are taught feminist theory as part of their training.

Instead perhaps we can look at some of the economic systems in Rojava. Much of the financial situation is managed by cooperatives, these are non-hierarchical collectives that manage the day to day systems such as agriculture. As Abdurrahman Hemo, advisor for economic development, states in explanation 'Our economic project is the same as our political project. We call it social economy, and all parts of society participate. It's cooperative. We have started to build cooperatives in all different sectors: we have trade cooperatives, company cooperatives, construction cooperatives. The organisational model for our economy is the cooperative. Our aim is to be self-sufficient. If there is just bread, then we will all have a share. This is the main principle of cooperatives.'

Again, this is not so far removed from the cooperative community that exists across West Yorkshire. In Leeds alone, there are workers co-ops such as Leeds Bread Co-Op, or the cooperatively owned market place Fairmondo, or Oblong who operate a flat management structure to run Woodhouse Community Centre. There are also housing cooperatives such as Firelight, Cornerstone, Tangram, Xanadu and Lilac.

The essential ways that power and oppression are understood and challenged in Rojava as integral to Women's Rights are absolutely central to the ideology in Rojava and women make up 40% of the People's Protection Units (YPJ). The YPJ are in charge of investigating rape and domestic violence, and the police force are taught feminist theory as part of their training. Equally, despite massacres, torture and brutalisation of the Kurdish people as an ethnic group, they have not turned away in fear and grown isolated as a people but instead ensured Rojava is committed to ensuring other ethnicities are welcome. Indeed, for Christians it was one of the few places that was safe in Syria under ISIS, and the Yazidi people, of whom the YPG/YPJ rescued 50,000 from an ISIS massacre off Mount Sinjar, have their own fighting forces within Rojava as a separate but united front with the mostly Kurdish units. This welcoming, in the face of adversity, rather than a closing off from fear, is something that West Yorkshire can do too. The deadly creep of racism and the rhetoric of the Far Right is a horrible truth for West Yorkshire, yet just as true is West Yorkshire common sense and hospitality, and a history of multiculturalism and integration. If 3,000 Syrian children are finally given refuge in the UK I trust West Yorkshire will be at the forefront of that welcome.

Finally, with that acute critical instinct so often celebrated in Yorkshire, we must understand that the project in Rojava is by no means perfect or to be idealised and idolised. Rojava is made up of people, imperfect as us, and traumatised by endless war and crisis. We must assume internal conflicts and human errors. Rojava is not a finished project, not a utopia, but rather another example for us of some ways we can exist without a capitalist, patriarchal system, that there are many ways of being, and we hold the power to make our West Yorkshire the region we desire.

*Tabitha Bast can be found
on Twitter @tabitha_bast*

What could regional democracy mean for asylum seekers in West Yorkshire?

Words by
IAN MARTIN

What would happen if West Yorkshire could decide for itself how to welcome those fleeing war and persecution? If you want to help somebody who is starving, can you? Are you 'allowed'? The answer is of course 'yes'. Sort of.

If for example you are wanting to help an asylum seeker who couldn't skilfully and successfully navigate our complex asylum system even though things were so frightening in their homeland they risked their life to reach the UK, you could offer them food, drink, clothes, somewhere to sleep and keep warm. If you were part of Yorkshire St Pauli, you could make friends by playing and watching football together. But none of the taxes you pay to local or national government could be used to help them. Many people fleeing war and persecution are specifically denied 'recourse to public funds'.

At the moment therefore even if you are more than happy for some of the money you give to the state to be used to keep asylum seekers alive, to help them retain some basic human dignity, it won't happen. So in a sense, you've been prevented from helping someone who is starving. Is this what you want? Does this sound like the way that you and your neighbours want to welcome people to West Yorkshire?

This is why so many asylum seekers in West Yorkshire are destitute, without access to food, drink, toiletries, clothing and somewhere warm, safe and dry to sleep. The decisions made by our representatives mean that people who want to work to support themselves, who have no control over the minimum wage nor employment rights, are deliberately forced into unacceptable poverty.

Could we in West Yorkshire choose ourselves how we welcome, accommodate, support and integrate refugees?

This is why brilliant charities like Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (PAFRAS) in Leeds are having to work so hard to help desperate people with the basics, even though they cannot use any taxpayer funds to do it. PAFRAS alone help as many as 1000 destitute individuals each year. But surely you can change this. You could lobby your councillor and your MP, you could join a campaigning organisation like Leeds No Borders to put pressure on the Home Office.

In this country, ordinary citizens can influence policy that matters to them. Theoretically. But who is making these decisions? Where are they? Who is influencing them? Why are they making these decisions? There is a feeling of political powerlessness in many EU states and the ability to make a positive impact on government policy towards those fleeing war and persecution feels just as remote as anything else. But what if it was different? Even whilst retaining UK border controls, could we in West Yorkshire choose ourselves how we welcome, accommodate, support and integrate refugees? Even if the UK government maintained a policy of forced destitution for those asylum seekers lost in the asylum labyrinth, could a new regional democracy welcome those asylum seekers entitled to support without stigma and prejudice? Without pre-paid cards at below the poverty line levels that actually make life more expensive by telling fellow human beings what they can buy and where they can shop? Even if we did not have the power to allow asylum seekers to work, to support themselves legitimately, to contribute to the tax base, could we ensure asylum seekers had cash support that enabled them to buy the things they need from the nearest, cheapest shop?

Maybe a new regional democracy would enable those struggling in our many different communities, whether born here or elsewhere, to find common cause in reclaiming power for their part of the world and demanding decisions are made closer to them and their experiences?

Historically Home Office contracts to manage asylum accommodation and integration projects have been allocated at a regional level but the policies were decided and implemented nationally. Did they reflect the welcome that we in West Yorkshire wanted to extend? Could a new regional democracy take responsibility for using local knowledge better? For ensuring that people locally are properly informed about and engaged positively with the new arrivals in their neighbourhood? That they are properly supported to meet each other, have fun together, build understanding and share their common humanity?

Maybe a new regional democracy would enable those struggling in our many different communities, whether born here or elsewhere, to find common cause in reclaiming power for their part of the world and demanding decisions are made closer to them and their experiences?

For these reasons I would like regional democracy in this part of the world to assume the right to fund and make policy on asylum support, integration and community cohesion. I want us to get ambitious about being more welcoming to asylum seekers.

Ian Martin lives with his family in East Leeds and moved to Leeds for work 20 years ago. He previously worked across Yorkshire on the development of legal aid and other services for refugees. He is a primary school teacher, junior rugby league coach and campaigner for human rights.

What do new migrants think about our region?

Words by

PRIA BHABRA & ROSEMARY BROOKES

Leeds is an amazing and diverse city that has so much to offer for all the citizens that live here, new and old. But if you are new to the city, how much do you actually know, and how do you learn to navigate your way through to services and society?

Working with some of the new migrant communities through the migrant access project (MAP) is fantastic as we learn so much about their culture, how things were back home and how different things are here. Different individuals say there are both good and bad things both here and back at home, but feeling safe is why many are here. There is a lot to learn as new migrants start to integrate, for example the specific way we define 'safeguarding' is something new, something not discussed within communities because it's not a definition that really existed back home, but they are learning in their own way to understand the bigger picture.

Do we all understand Leeds, and West Yorkshire, in the same way? How does it look through different eyes? Yes, there are some pictures and views of Leeds that are put out at a corporate level, but for each individual who lives in Leeds and is part of its existence these ideas and images may not be exactly the same. MAP was developed by Leeds City Council, Touchstone and Feel Good Factor, aiming to reduce pressures on services where migration has impacted the most, whilst helping new arrivals to put down roots in Leeds. It works with different migrant communities, often training volunteers up to become members of Migrant Community Networks through leadership training.

In April 2016, MAP was invited to attend a workshop for Leeds 2023 European Capital of Culture bid. We had the opportunity to hear people's thoughts and visions of Leeds, but also a chance to share our own views. Two volunteers came along with us, Michaela came to the event representing the Roma community, and Bei came representing the Chinese community. For Michaela, Leeds was about different communities and cultures. It was good to see that people of Leeds are starting to learn about different communities and work with them, and she wants this to grow. Also, Leeds is a friendly city with opportunities. It's about looking at some of the things that are negative such as deprivation, but also seeing the good. For Bei, she similarly saw the options that Leeds could offer, whilst highlighting some of the city's contrasts in terms of prosperity, history, architecture and culture.

Every time MAP meets someone from a new migrant community, both staff and new migrants learn more about what Leeds is now, and what it should ideally be. These ideas may vary from person to person, but overall MAP, and the majority of people we meet, want Leeds to be a safe place to live and raise children, just like everyone else.

Putting all of us first in West Yorkshire

Words by
ELAINE CALDER

Several years ago my husband and I made a long planned move to Scotland. We both have family connections to Scotland and we wanted to be a part of the growing Radical Independence movement there. We lived in quite a remote area, so when a family member became ill back here in West Yorkshire in 2015 we decided we needed to return here to support them.

While we were in Scotland we were very impressed by the level of debate and engagement at grass roots level concerning the Independence Referendum. A lot of thought and consideration was being given by people there to decide on their own future. They were thinking about what they wanted and how they could go about getting it. One of the organisations that was set up at the time was the Common Weal movement. Common Weal (CW) is a 'think and do tank campaigning for social and economic equality in Scotland'. It is a non-party movement concerned with bottom up social change. CW helps to provide creative thinking to provoke debate without prescribing limits. Even after the narrow victory of the No vote in the Scottish Independence Referendum, Common Weal has given the people of Scotland a storehouse of ideas to feed Scottish politics for the future. They have produced a 'Book of Ideas' to offer ways of doing things differently to create a better Scotland.

**We could promote a referendum on changes to the system
and an assembly directly elected by PR as Red Lines for any
mayoral candidate.**

Since we returned to West Yorkshire there has been a lot of talk about the region receiving some powers devolved from Westminster. We do not know what these powers will be but I feel at least the discussion around regional democracy gives us a chance to get together to discuss what we want rather than just accepting what is imposed on us by central government.

Having seen the positive impact of discussions during the referendum campaign in Scotland, I took part in the event in Bradford on 7th November, 2015, 'What Kind of Region Do We Want To Live In?' It was good to meet people from a wide range of backgrounds from different parts of West Yorkshire. Many things were discussed at the event but we did all feel that people in our region have different priorities to the priorities of the current London model. We all felt that we are fed up of 'Me First' politics and that the current talk of devolution all seems to be about what someone above wants us to have, on their terms, rather than the people who live here, who have different priorities, making the decisions. The discussions we had seemed to me to mirror the CW principle of 'All of us First'.

Regional Democracy must include us. The Book of Ideas puts this as 'Nothing about us, without us, is for us'. People living in the region should be at the heart of any discussion about the future of our region. During the 2015 General Election campaign, CW promoted the Red Lines campaign which asked people to consider their own values, their Red Lines, and to vote only for a candidate who stuck to their Red Line issues under the slogan 'Small can be powerful, your vote can count'. I feel that this approach could be adopted here in West Yorkshire. We could have local meetings to discuss what our Red Lines are and campaign on them. For example, in the case of electing a mayor, we could promote a referendum on changes to the system and an assembly directly elected by PR as Red Lines for any mayoral candidate. I feel that such a Red Lines campaign could help to engage more people in regional democracy, encouraging them to believe that they could actually have a say in the kind of society they want to live in. At the moment, the whole devolution subject seems to be far removed from people's actual lives.

The Book of Ideas highlights the true aspirations of people, home, security, work, community, recreation, public service and respect. These were all topics that came up in the discussions at the Bradford meeting. We all felt that we had had enough of me-first politics, where greed, profit and elitism has taken us away from our own core values of humanity and equality and that a collective well being was at the heart of the society we want to live in.

The Book of Ideas provides creative ideas encompassing almost everything needed to envision and create a better Scotland, from tax and investment to energy and housing or from infrastructure to economic and social equality. Scotland is more than a step ahead of us, so some of the content of the Book of Ideas is not relevant here in West Yorkshire just yet. What it does provide though is a starting block for discussion. What came out of the Bradford meeting was the notion that we here in West Yorkshire, like the people in Scotland want a society which puts All of Us First.

Elaine Calder can be found on Twitter @elainecalder

*You can download a copy of The Book of Ideas free or
for a donation of your choice or £8 for the book version
www.allofusfirst.bigcartel.com/product/a-book-of-ideas.*

Could we put ‘Ubuntu’ at the heart of better mental health for all in West Yorkshire?

Words by

PENINAH WANGARI-JONES

Before David ‘Rocky’ Bennett’s death in an East Anglian psychiatric unit 18 years ago, he sent a letter to the nurse director, pointing out there were no black staff members. He wrote: ‘There are over half a dozen black boys in this clinic. I don’t know if you have realised that there are no Africans on your staff at the moment’. Bennett died while being held down by four staff members at a psychiatric unit after a violent altercation with another patient and a nurse. Looking at the circumstances around his untimely death, it’s clear his blackness was threatening to staff members. He had been using mental health services for at least a decade, yet his needs as a black Rastafarian were not being met.

Minority communities who have been in the UK for several generations are also known to feel alienated from the health system.

Bennett’s death was a catalyst for what became ‘delivering race equality’ in health, however the cuts since 2010 mean little is currently being done. He is just one example of the mental health system failing people of colour – Sarah Reed, who died in a prison cell in 2016 after having been sexually assaulted, is a more recent case, but the list is far, far longer.

61% of refugees are likely to experience a mental health crisis or breakdown. Most will have experienced trauma before their arrival in UK, forced to deal with a complicated, bureaucratic immigration system. Refugees face the challenges of restarting a new life in a new country, often without family members, dealing with culture shock and language issues. Understanding the culturally specific, underlying reasons for their mental ill health could lead to far better treatment.

Minority communities who have been in the UK for several generations are also known to feel alienated from the health system. This means that often they do not feel comfortable in environments that are supposed to improve their mental health well being. Support is not always timely: reports show that black people are 40 times more likely than white Britons to come into contact with mental health services through the criminal justice system, rather than the general practice referral system.

There is also evidence that ethnic minority communities are less likely to seek help at an early stage of illness, due to a combination of lack of knowledge and stigma around mental health. But this is not helped by inappropriate or racist models of diagnosis which often lead to poor experiences of mental health services, for example being medicated, restrained and going off radar upon release.

It currently costs the NHS billions every year to deliver work on mental health. The NHS also has a specific plan for 'equality and diversity', following a catalogue of failures. But the continuing cutbacks mean this plan is no longer being regarded as a priority, especially when we shed light on the hostile environment policy that deprives people with unsettled status of treatment. When it comes to mental health, providers still have little understanding of the nuances in the different cultures of minority ethnic groups. This means treatment that is offered by practitioners is ineffective and at a cost to the taxpayers.

Ubuntu holds that humans feel human through affirmation from other humans and that is achieved through belonging, participating and sharing with others.

The methods used to diagnose mental health illnesses are western-centric, often rooted in a tradition of Freudianism. This means they do not work universally. Globalisation means we no longer have monocultures in our towns, but mental health systems don't reflect this.

Could devolution be an opportunity to do things differently? If we had responsibility in West Yorkshire for mental health, could we decolonise our system to fit with the communities that live here?

The Race Equality Foundation found that black people are three times more likely to be diagnosed and admitted to hospital for schizophrenia. This, in turn, has been attributed to institutional racism or to a racialized definition of traits associated with schizophrenia. Gesticulating or talking loudly is often seen as threatening in western cultures but might be seen as normal, acceptable behaviour in non-western cultures. People have lost lives because of such misconceptions.

For example, witchdoctors and prophets have been known to claim having powers to heal, transmit messages from gods or the dead to family or congregation. In some communities such people are held in high regard, but in others they are seen as delusional and therefore in need of medical intervention.

Decolonising mental health would allow practitioners to have a better understanding of different communities. This can be achieved through cultural diversity awareness, as well as having a more diverse staff team as people learn about others informally. This would make the services more accessible because a lot of service users are put off by going into places where no one looks like them. It would also place less expectation on the NHS to be the only solution for mental health problems. Communities can look after their own and each other allowing them to practice, for example, the African concept of 'ubuntu'.

Ubuntu holds that humans feel human through affirmation from other humans and that is achieved through belonging, participating and sharing with others. The concept of lack of belonging and being 'othered' is one that most minorities say they struggle with. It has been argued for example that individualism in western societies can adversely affect someone who has migrated. Reinstating their qualities of Ubuntu instead of prescribing medication can improve someone's mental health. An individual's ability to have a choice of treatments that suit their cultural need would empower someone to feel like an agent and not a problem or victim.

Looking into the underlying reasons for poor mental health within certain communities and working with the communities to address it would be far better and more cost effective than sectioning someone under the Mental Health Act for a period or several times. Medication should not be the only solution. Instead, working with individuals and families will allow for better understanding of conditions to allow people to make their own choices on what works best.

Mental health has been and still is underfunded. Continuing cuts mean the situation is likely to get worse for those experiencing mental ill health. One positive thing brought about by cuts is it has fostered relationships and synergy between the statutory and the third sector. This has perhaps facilitated the gradual growth of social prescribing within the health service and would therefore mean health services are now looking at other alternatives.

It could be said that this ties with the spirit of devolution where the government announced it will empower local communities by handing decisions down to local people. A devolved health system is already part of the powers held in Greater Manchester and despite the size of the budget, there have already been calls to use this as an opportunity to challenge failings in national policy. If we get the chance through regional democracy to do things differently in West Yorkshire, stopping the situation deteriorating any further would mean refusing to replicate what has been the case so far: alienating those who are on the margins of our society. Having an understanding about communities who face multiple oppressions, and about equity, would harness and create opportunities for involving everyone in West Yorkshire. The ability to involve all members in our communities in looking after their own will not only inform and empower them to demand what is best, it will also fill in the gaping hole being left open by cuts in services.

Intersectionality has in recent years highlighted how multiple barriers can make certain individuals or communities more vulnerable than others. W.E.B Dubois spoke about double consciousness and the effect of internal conflict on an individual living as a minority in an alienating environment. To improve mental health treatment for ethnic minorities would require understanding racial disparities in treatment. This is an example of 'equity'.

Assuming everyone has similar health status and health care needs is a false starting point. People experiencing disadvantages means that equality in service is not enough. Equity in this case means patients not getting the same thing, but treating people differently having taken into account their different circumstances. Equity would mean that all sectors would work together to ensure individuals are not slipping through the net. If we have the opportunity to do things differently in West Yorkshire, that should be our starting point.

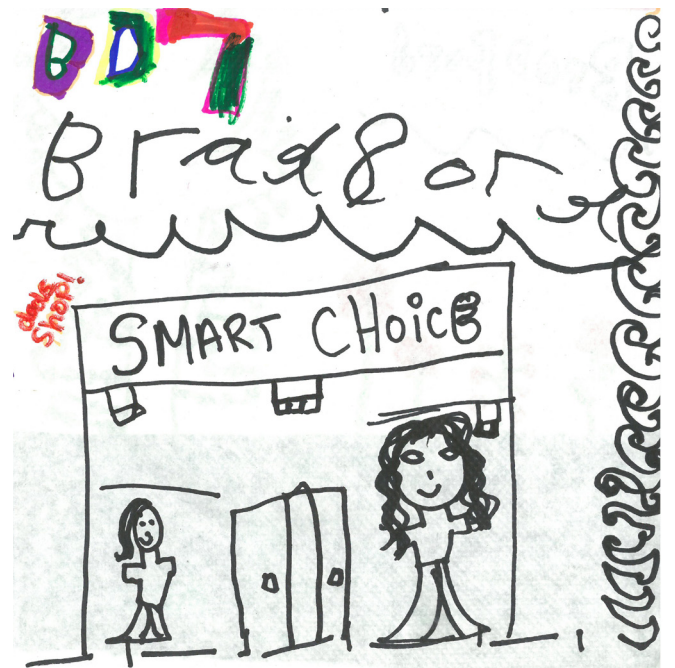
Peninah Wangari-Jones is a West Yorkshire based anti racist activist, community organiser and campaigner. Peninah is known for her public engagements on a range of topics including: colonialism, migration, race, racism and racialisation and intersections like gender, class, mental health, activism. She currently heads The Racial Justice Network, a network of individuals, communities and organisations working together to address legacies of colonialism and end racial injustice. @peninah69

A version of this article first appeared on Open Democracy.

Bradford

Maps drawn by the Bradford community





Castleford

Maps drawn by the Castleford community



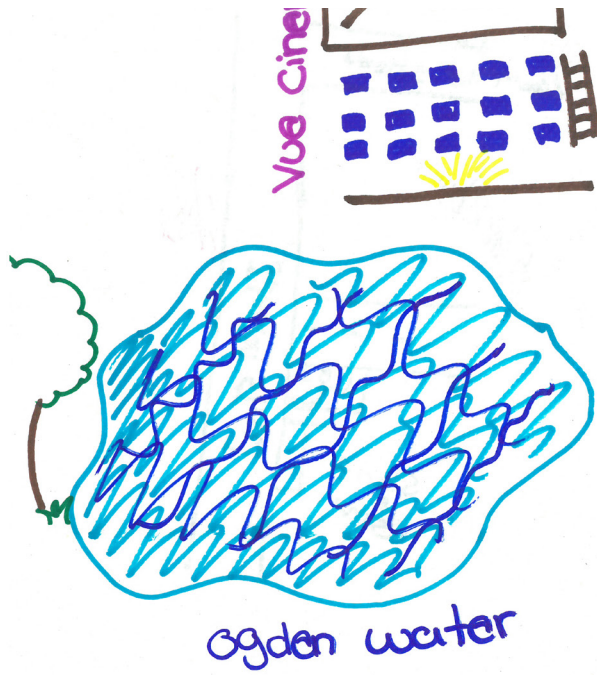
Maps drawn by the Keighley community



Halifax

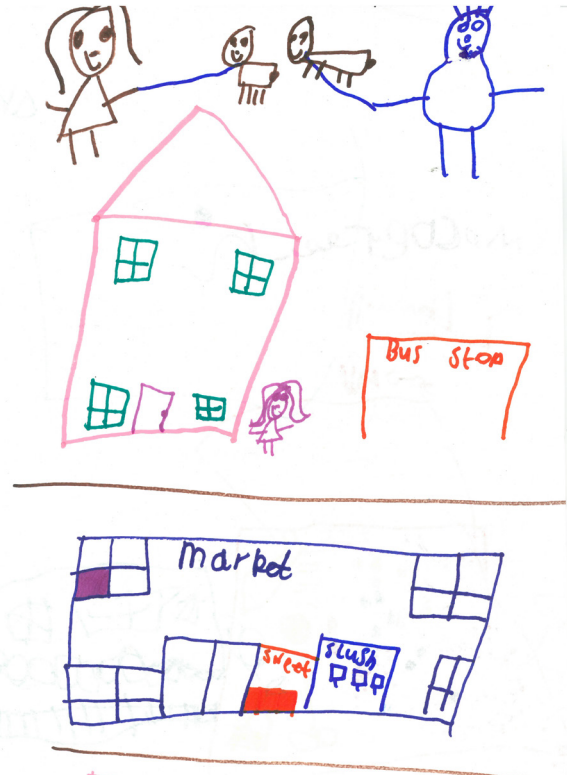
Maps drawn by the Halifax community





Huddersfield

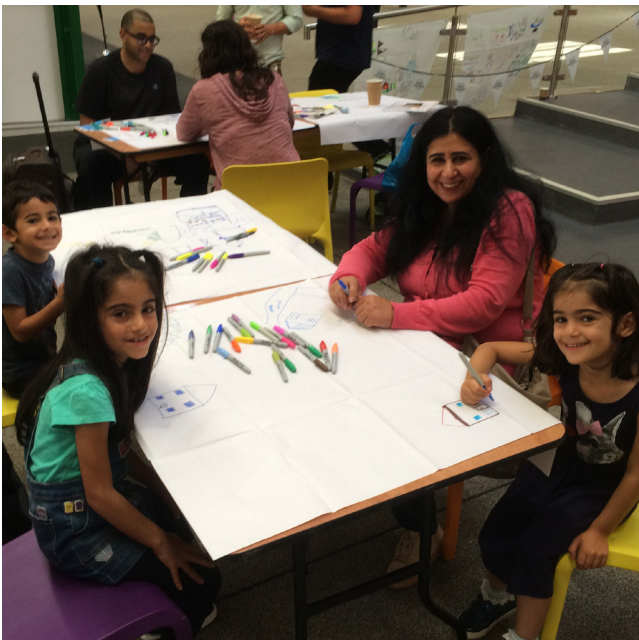
Maps drawn by the Huddersfield community

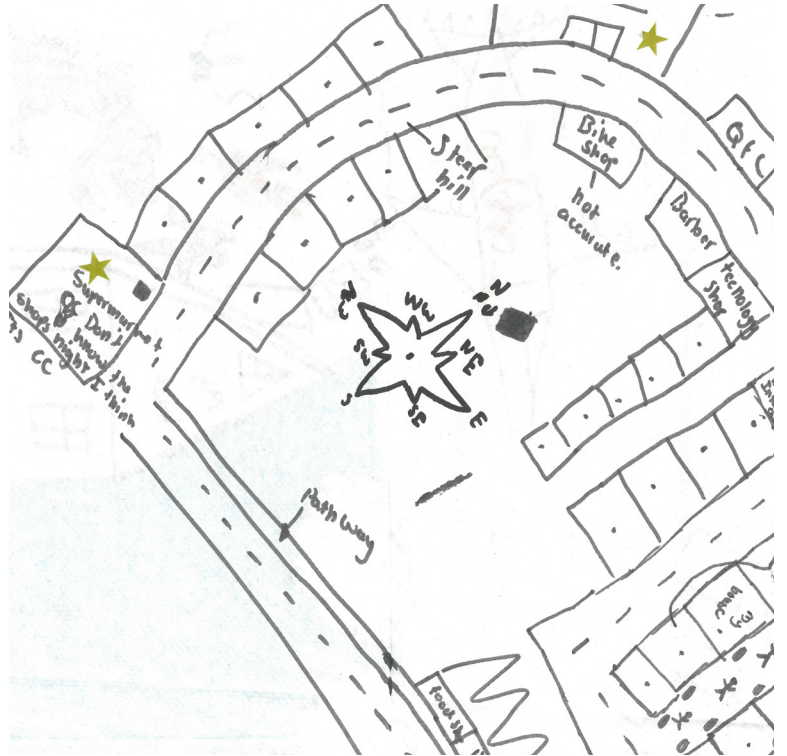
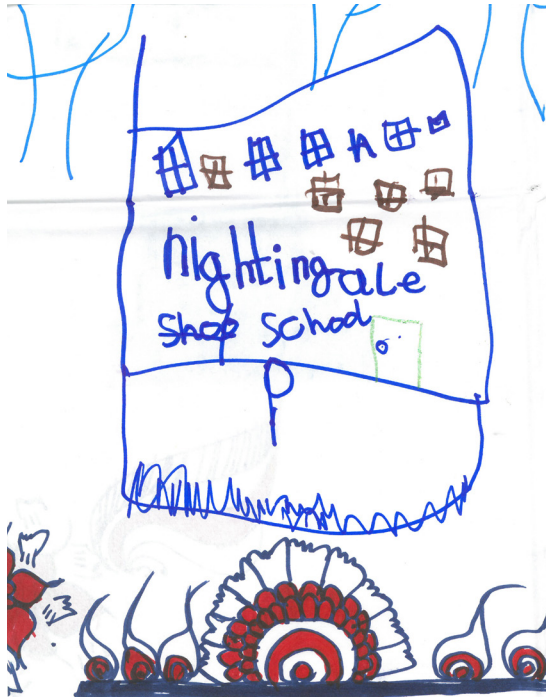




Leeds

Maps drawn by the Leeds community





Map drawing in West Yorkshire

 **WeShareTheSameSkies**
@SameSkiesBlog

Elliot, Leah, Bella, Faye & Blue live in Gomersal & Birstall & love playing at Oakwell Hall & going shopping [#RegionalDemocracy](#)



4:00 am - 15 Aug 2018

 **WeShareTheSameSkies**
@SameSkiesBlog

Asha Kauser is proud of living in West Yorkshire, especially for the diversity of the people & the beautiful countryside nearby [#RegionalDemocracy](#)



5:52 am - 2 Aug 2018

 **WeShareTheSameSkies**
@SameSkiesBlog

Thanks to Becca for this great map of Sutton in Craven - having a local hospital & good bus routes into Keighley is important to her



5:41 am - 23 Aug 2017

 **WeShareTheSameSkies**
@SameSkiesBlog

Sophie & Romeo live in Deighton. They love having a swimming pool nearby [#RegionalDemocracy](#)



5:29 am - 15 Aug 2018

 **WeShareTheSameSkies**
@SameSkiesBlog

PCSO Sam has kicked us off at [@LeedsMarkets](#) today with her map of the city centre. [#RegionalDemocracy](#)



3:24 am - 2 Aug 2018

This book brings together different elements of the idea and practice of regional democracy, an evolving concept that has been slowly revealing itself ever since a group of people in West Yorkshire got together in 2015 to organise the ‘What Kind of Region Do We Want To Live In?’ event in Manningham, Bradford.

We see the current moment as being the earliest stages of regional democracy, and so the first step is consciousness raising, getting people thinking, and talking, about a region.

To do this, and to show what we mean by consciousness raising, over the last two years we have visited many of the markets of West Yorkshire. We take paper and felt tip pens, and ask people to draw maps of their own neighbourhoods, especially the good stuff, and to talk about their hopes for the future of our region.

The photographs, hand drawn maps and tweets in the book are from these events.

To demonstrate the potential of regional democracy to release new energy, generate ideas and make it easier for many voices to get heard, Same Skies invited people with strong connections to West Yorkshire to share their response to the question:

“From where we are in West Yorkshire, if your ideal regional democracy was in place by 2040 what would our region be like? What has changed for the better? How has it been done? What work is still to do?”

These new essays, along with a selection from our blog, challenge all of us in West Yorkshire to come together and make them happen, and to ask ourselves: what is stopping us?

The book contains one longer piece, “What Do We Mean By Regional Democracy?”, co-written by the main organisers of Same Skies, and describing a framework for regional democracy as we currently see it.

£10