

Envisioning Community: Incorporating community into regional strategy

Krata is a creative think tank that runs community engagement projects focused on social, environmental and economic sustainability. Our Research Programme draws on our experiences together with others to explore the social and cultural understandings that underpin and influence community engagement.

In our response to Communities evidence paper during the consultation phase, we encourage the NWDA to put community needs at the centre of its vision for the region. Similar to the Manchester City Council vision that “we put people at the centre of everything we do”, the NWDA should put communities at the centre of every strategic decision. Since communities vary greatly across the region, the challenge lies in how to encapsulate such diversity.

“Sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.” (CLG website, 2008)

The Sustainable Communities Act 2007 demonstrates a growing trend in central government to incorporate local community needs at the heart of policy development. Similarly, the NWDA Regional Strategy Evidence Paper on Communities puts the CLG definition of ‘sustainable communities’ at the centre of a discussion around key issues facing communities such as crime and employability. The challenge for developing the Regional Strategy is to respond to an appropriate mix of these clearly defined statistical measures with the more specific circumstance that prohibits different communities from achieving sustainability

The Paper identifies key principles and issues to be considered when working with the Community aspect namely definitions of terms, the need for joined up thinking, courage in defining policies, engendering trust, emphasising child needs and reflecting a changing population. Further questions include: Who can represent communities? How to measure different aspects of community? How do the decisions people take about their lifestyles affect the regional economy? Who decides when a community is sustainable? How will NWDA policies be able to affect the development of sustainable communities? How to balance economic, environmental and social considerations and which take priority?

The challenge for the NWDA Regional Strategy therefore is to work out a structured process for incorporating the ‘Community’ aspect into the regional strategy.

Krata would like to assist NWDA in considering the Community aspect, drawing on our work in community engagement and our network of related organisations across the North West. We argue that community interests can be represented in the NWDA by individuals and organisations in the third sector who are working towards achieving sustainable communities. Through our engagement on various themes, in different areas, we have developed an excellent understanding of key issues that block communities from embracing opportunity and changing their situation for the better. As we sit between public sector institutions and private individuals or businesses, we observe and mediate the challenges facing people in communities as they seek change.



We are keen to pass our learning on to the NWDA, to contribute to the Community strand of the RIU and its representation in the regional strategy. In particular, we could help as follows:

- Identify issues to be considered when developing the Community aspect of the regional strategy such as trust, prioritisation and diversity
- Develop key principles for how Community aspect should be incorporated into the regional strategy including definitions, measures and representation of community interests
- Shape a structured process for evaluating policy impacts on North West communities
- Develop a training programme for key staff within NWDA and partnership organisations to explore how to bring consideration of sustainable communities into daily practice
- Run events bringing key theorists and practitioners working towards sustainable communities together with NWDA staff
- Develop creative workshops to assist and advance the forecasting process
- Draw on our extensive network of individuals and organisations working on community engagement in places across the North West to help provide context to developing policies

Please contact Jessica Symons on jessica@krata.co.uk or 0161 718 0304 to discuss further.

About Krata

Krata is a creative think tank working on, and learning from, community engagement projects focused on social, environmental and economic sustainability. We work in collaboration with individuals and organisations, such as Creative Concern, Tyndall Centre Manchester, Food Futures, Development Education Programme and UnLtd. Our projects range from setting up a successful social enterprise, to working in schools, to supporting the opening of a community café, to the formation of the 100 Months Club.

We consider the social and cultural underpinnings of community engagement and share these insights with others. For example, through our work in the 'deprived area' of Merseybank in Chorlton, we have learned that while people may be financially challenged, many are very enterprising in their activities, particularly in how they draw benefits and through the black economy. Understanding this nuance:- the independent and enterprising nature of many people in 'deprived areas' - could significantly affect the success of public sector engagement in similar places across the North West.

Krata associates and collaborators

Krata is connected into community facing organisations and individuals in areas across the North West. Our network ranges from AfSL and the Transition Town movement in Cumbria, Chester and Liverpool, to BITC and Manchester Community Information Network (MCIN), to many of the North West museums and art galleries, to EMERGE Recycling and Frankland Timber, to Liverpool, Salford, Manchester and Lancaster universities, to PCT Trusts, to multimedia and communication consultancies, to Striding Out and UnLtd working with emerging entrepreneurs, to notable community organisations such as CARISMA, working to reduce gun crime in Moss Side. The breadth of our network and the depth of our relationships with key individuals allows us to draw on valuable insights and perspectives from across the community spectrum.

Krata contact

Jessica Symons, Krata, Tel: 0161 718 0304
Mob: 0798 4747796 Email: jessica@krata.co.uk

If you would like to find out more, check out our website, www.krata.co.uk.

