

## **England: Discussion with Andreas Pavlou, Network Lead, Involve**

### **Purpose of the meeting:**

- Understand the challenges and success of the programme to date to be able to develop a dream statement that can act as a focus for future dialogue
- Identify any projects/activities beyond those that are already listed on the wiki

### **Dialogue**

- Andreas started in post at end of October 2017
- Co-ordinator Open Government Network
- Leads movement building at Involve plus other things = a lot of work to do
- OG Action Plan process co-ordinated with other networks

### **How does the Open Government Network work in England?**

- OG and SDGs are big agendas – often hard to relate OG and SDGs as full of jargon and include a lots of huge issues/sectors within them
- Key challenges: lack of clarity, lack of central government interest (contrast to Scotland and Wales), difficult to engage in English-only issues at Westminster as well as UK-wide issues.
- Difficult as many English-only NGOs are local, not ‘devolved/national’, or they are UK wide.
- Difficult to include on government/media agenda due to the dominance of Brexit but there are established government leads from Government Digital Service.
  
- Exploration of links with local government
- Open contracting – exploring possibility of local focus for action plan
- Examples of local government interest/support in doing things differently include Huddersfield (with annual conference on open democracy includes cover of SDG 16 but harder to expand to other SDGs)
- Austerity/financial restrictions make local government engagement difficult too
- Option of linking with executive (English ‘metro’) mayors – but early days of thinking
- Also difficult to engage on environment, climate change etc. as they are very established sectors with processes and certain tactics to access to government.
  
- Government leads keen to engage with women’s equality groups (SDG 5) linked to 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women’s suffrage
- Potential OG Action Plan commitment on the collection of data about sex, ethnicity, other diversity indicators, etc. of local government candidates –links being made with Local Government Information Unit and potentially others
  
- OGN Forum – sometimes it feels like only activity on the UK Forum comes from the coordinator, but:

- Core group, part of the Steering Group includes Democratic Society, Institute of Government, Electoral Reform Society, TI UK
- Civil society OG Action Plan leads include MySociety, NCVO, Open Data Institute., CFI, 360Giving,
- Challenge of maintaining longer standing connections and expand into other sectors by identifying the issues they may be interested in, for example introduce OG to gender-equality groups

### **Reflections on the Reimagine Democracy conference (15 March)**

- Conference inevitably had Northern Ireland focus but there were also participants from England, for example Rachel Davies Teka, Transparency International UK attended
- Pleasantly surprised as had expected fewer people, packed room in the morning and 40/50 left for workshop – wasn't just the same people as always
- Ideas useful for NI but not all specifically translatable elsewhere although certain UK-wide themes emerged, including open contracting, transparency and exploration of the link between open government and SDGs
- Making the explicit OG - SDG link is an ongoing challenge because it is not obvious, for example the representation of women and the disadvantaged does relate to the SDGs but feels closer to open government
- Many of the other SDGs – related to environment for example, already have successful or established tactics, processes and access to government, or already aware of open government.

### **Aims and objectives**

- Project is massive and ambitious
- Feeling it is hard to implement as effectively as would be ideal
- Difficult environment to raise awareness – hard as government appears opposed to transparency (Brexit), seems many NGOs are focused on post-Brexit fallout, and government has no UK SDG targets other than via DfID (outside the UK).

### **Mapping and linking to other projects and activities**

- Putting issues through OGN but little capacity to promote
- Questionnaire looks like a useful tool
- Does OG Pioneers project need to be more specific?
- Concept of 'empowered engagement' - what does this mean and how would it be measured?
- This could include numbers involved in workshops and testing how knowledge is leveraged with questionnaire and feedback
- Evaluation could be promoted via the OGN forum
- Contact directly - individuals x 30 and organisations x 5/10