

BACKGROUND PAPER

Building Sustainable Regional Communities in Today's World

A St George's House Consultation in partnership with Future iQ Partners

Context

In the current world of elevated uncertainty and volatility, it is becoming even more critical for regions, communities and industries to understand and adapt to future events. Many are facing unprecedented levels of change. For regional and local leaders, this intensifies the urgency of answering the question: 'What does this mean for us? How do we adapt and continue to build our local communities and economies?; How do we find power in this situation?' This consultation will draw together practitioners and leading thinkers from Europe, North America and Australia, and will explore how to build 'future intelligence' which will be critical in unlocking local people's power and inspiration to create and sustain their own future.

As countries and economies adjust to this current period of economic volatility, increasingly the effects are being borne at a regional level. As Government funding shrinks, more and more responsibility is being passed down to the local and regional level in a period of sustained global devolution. It is unlikely that small communities will have the capacity or resources to effect the adjustments that are required. This scenario is likely to be further compounded with emerging macro trends such as, declining supplies of fossil fuels, climate change, technological advancement and dependence, and escalating global populations. However, embedded in these changes are new opportunities. Renewable energy and local food systems offer potential new economic pathways for regional and rural areas. Technology could fundamentally alter how educational and social services are delivered, removing the barriers to access even in relatively remote locations.

In most cases, coming together in regional communities offers the ideal course of action. This provides a chance to combine efforts and resources to plan for the future and begin to take the actions that will create prosperity and build vibrant communities. Many of the important issues facing regions such as: new industry development; workforce creation; landscape protection; provision of social services; and, systemic cultural change, will all require regional scale thinking and action.

The challenge for regional leaders is how to build true regional communities. Local systems will need to create agile and responsive economies and workforce. Leadership will have to find creative ways to engage the citizenry in defining innovative social and



economic solutions and forging new partnerships and networks. The question remains, as to how this can be best achieved.

The consultation, 'Building Sustainable Regional Communities in Today's World' brings together experts in the field - practitioners, researchers and key policy makers. The consultation will provide an opportunity for a thoughtful and positive debate and discussion on the subject at hand. To encourage open discussion, this Consultation will take place under the St George's House Protocol, which ensures that all views expressed are non-attributable.

Future iQ Partners

Future iQ Partners is an organisation that specialises in helping regions and organizations create their future in a new way. As an organization, it believes the challenge for organizations, regions and communities is to develop their Future Intelligence – that is; have the capacity to understand unfolding trends, develop the systems for agility and then find the new opportunities. Future success will hinge on the ability to be agile and adaptive in order to respond purposefully in a rapidly changing world. Partnering with regions, Future iQ Partners help structure processes that allow long term systemic and sustainable change – ultimately positioning organizations and communities for their future success. Having worked around the world for nearly a decade, Future iQ Partners has amassed a wealth of practical experience in building engaged and future-focused regional communities.

Purpose of the Consultation

The Consultation, a partnership between St George's House and Future iQ Partners, will examine the challenge of building sustainable regional communities in today's world. In particular, it will focus on the situation in developed countries, such as across North America, Europe and Australasia. The consultation will examine a range of major global trends and their probable future impact on regional communities, and in particular begin to identify areas of potential opportunity. It will also deepen the conversation around the definition of a regional community; what elements go in to the mix? What beyond language and culture defines a region. The consultation will be a mix of insightful and thought-provoking presentations by leading experts, and in-depth discussion sessions which will examine critical issues and case studies of regional initiatives.

There are a number of salient questions we wish to explore:

- How do we build agile and adaptive workforces capable of responding to emerging economic trends and opportunities?



- How do we build innovation, and find creative ways to add value to traditional industries, especially those based on natural resources, when these sectors are often steeped in tradition and resistant to change?
- What is the role of culture and language in building regional communities; and how do we close the common gap between people's preferred regional future and their expected outcome?
- How might emerging technologies change the quality of life, and particularly the delivery of education and social services within regions? Is this a new opportunity to close the 'tyranny of distance' and develop new economies?
- How might important new trends in civic engagement help in regional advancement, and how can we best stimulate the formation of critical new partnerships and social networks?

Conclusion

A St George's House Consultation is underpinned by a vigorous exchange of views, open discussion, intellectual rigour, new thinking and, crucially, a willingness to listen. This is a place where significant subjects are tackled seriously. 'Building Sustainable Regional Communities in Today's World' is one such subject. The findings from the Consultation will be presented in a 'White Paper', which will collect the discussion and conclusions, and present the work as a contribution to the broader field of regional and community development. In this way, it aims to contribute to the body of work helping build 'future intelligence' with regional leaders and decision makers across the world.

