Placecast Episode Four – Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia talks to Nina Ruddle about inclusive innovation

Nicola Headlam:

Welcome to Placecast, a Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub production based at the University of Birmingham. Placecast is essential listening for those keen to explore the ins and outs of knowledge mobilisation for influence in central and local government, based on the view that is only through animating the power of place based leadership. The wicked problems of 2025 can become more manageable.

Whether you're a researcher, citizen scientists, an activist, a professional working within the public sector, civil servant, politician, analyst or entrepreneur, we think that it is through our networks that most solutions can be assembled, tested and the learning shared before we go again, and that universities can act as the repositories and observatories of these efforts. We're based in City-REDI and rooted in the LPIP program, funded by the ESRC, AHRC and Innovate UK.

This podcast aims to highlight knowledge and evidence based ways of working, and the strategies needed to make a real impact on the decisions that shape our society. Our guests are changemakers from across the UK with stories about the way in which influence can be achieved. We focus in particular on some of the connective tissue within and between sectors for clues as how to animate place-based leadership, as innovating is a team sport best done in the open. Please contact us for feedback on the episodes, or if you'd like to be a guest or have strong views on the processes of advocacy, lobbying, public campaigning and more. Unpacking how research and evidence connects with neighbourhood, local, city, regional and national missions. In this episode of Placecast, Our LPIP Innovation Lead, Gerardo Arriaga Garcia interviews Nina Ruddle. Their conversation covers all aspects of place-based innovation and is a great listen. Welcome to Placecast.

Nina Ruddle:

Hello Gerardo. How are you?

Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia:

It's really good to see you again. And excited for you're always spot on and you're so busy. So, you know, it's. Yeah, it feels like you have so many projects going on. So I really thank you for it for this. So welcome everybody. We're really pleased to be here today. This is a Placecast interview on Inclusive Innovation.

And my name is Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia. But people normally call me Gerard. And I guess it's because it's easier to pronounce. So I am a research fellow at City-REDI, University of Birmingham, and I have a particular interest in making policy inclusive. Specifically, in one of my current projects, the Local Policy Innovation Partnership, I lead on the Inclusive Innovation agenda.

And in fact, that is actually how I got to know our next speaker, Nina Ruddle. And it all happened as it normally does in academia. You know, you cross paths with like-minded people who you are trying to collaborate and make meaningful changes. Now, let me tell you a little bit about our guest speaker, Nina Ruddle, who is, by the way, also a research fellow at the Local Policy Innovation Partnership.

So she is a leader in public policy engagement and civic innovation. And as the head of public policy engagement that Wrexham University, Nina has dedicated over two decades to public service, focusing on education, social and economic regeneration and policy development across England and Wales. Now Nina spearheads the University Civic Mission Partnership strategy, aiming to eradicate social inequality in North Wales by 2030, and her collaborative efforts have been instrumental in initiatives like the 2025 movement, a coalition of over 600 individuals and organisations committed to addressing health inequalities in the region.

She's been recognised as one of the Wales Future Generation changemakers. So Nina's work exemplifies really the power of inclusive innovation and systems leadership. And so hi Nina, it's really glad to have you here today. It's lovely to be here. I'm looking forward to it. As we were saying before, we actually met, as part of the LPIP project. So perhaps you can tell us a little bit more about how you found out about it and how you start getting engaged with it.

Nina Ruddle:

It's quite a long story, I guess. So, but in Wales we like storytelling. So I'm on the advisory board at the Hope that's hosted by Wrexham University, and I'm also on the advisory board at the rural LPIP as well for Wales. So it's led by Professor Michael Woods in Aberystwyth with many of the partners as well. And I guess how I came across it is that I was part of a workshop in Wales with UKRI and Economic Social Research Council, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. To talk about how actually can we create a new program that would really connect to communities and policy makers and academia so that we can create these sort of local, I think, observatories, but I think, you know, my big thing is it's with observatories, it's are we observing people in poverty? And actually that feels very sort of like ivory tower stuff. So how do we strike a bit of a balance? I was part of a big discussion group and so was aware of this opportunity that was emerging from the funding Council.

Some of the work that I've been working across the region was used as a bit of a case study to again shape that funding. cool. So I was in the process of putting in a bid for an LPIP and then, our university in Wrexham, which is the university I work at, is pretty small and is not research intensive.

It's a teaching and learning university. But actually we're growing that research portfolio. So capacity is often one of the challenging things for smaller players in the higher education system. So therefore we got connected into the Hub and hope using the skills I've got in a government policy background as well as local government and across many other sectors, is bringing to the fore particularly that sort of voice of citizens into spaces where they're not normally and actually are not they're tokenistic but there because we should be working alongside citizens to shape the future.

Otherwise we just do. And what we've done in the past, and that clearly is not working at the moment because we've got such complexity and challenges that we face. So yeah, that was a long answer. Hopefully might have given you the pathway into the LPIPs that I've had to.

Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia:

Yeah. Thank you. It's really interesting. your background isn't it because we often talk about breaking the ivory tower of research. But when you look at it, sometimes it feels like it is still there. However, even though Wrexham University is not a research led university, it is growing its sort of research orientation in your you seem to be leading part of that charge. So perhaps you can tell us a bit more about how has your personal experience and background changed your understanding of what inclusive innovation really means in practice?

Nina Ruddle:

Yeah, no, that's a really good question. I think I care passionately about Wales. I'm Welsh, I grew up in Shotton, which has got a steelworks there, so I remember the pickets and the strikes and men being out of work for months and months and months, and the impact on the community in which I lived in, was really significant.

And also that, expectation of children and young people in that context was pretty low. And it was the 80s. So everyone would go work in the steelworks or any of the sort of industries around it, and actually that the world was changing around us. I knew that there was other opportunities that I wanted to explore, and it was the power of the libraries and all the community assets around the community in which I was part of that.

Not many people went to university where I came from, and it was a real eye opener for me to say, well, actually, I want to be part of these debates. I want to be part of I don't think there isn't a sector I want to go into in the steel industry, for example. So I was really about levelling that playing field and wanting to give young people perhaps the chances and opportunities I didn't necessarily have.

I guess, you know, you find that one teacher that sees something in you that lights your brain up in a different way and actually allows you to see that there is different expectations. And I don't think these places that I grew up in or lack in aspiration, I think it's that expectation. And, we're doing a lot of research into how we develop our work to tackle inequalities and social inequalities, particularly because we've spoken to lots of leaders and lots and engage with lots of children and young people and communities.

And we know that if that's the one thing we tackle, then actually we'll unlock some of the other really complex social and economic challenges, like how do we work towards a wellbeing economy, and things like that, and how we measure that. So my background has informed what I do. I've also I've worked at local authorities, across the whole of the region. Ambition North Wales, which is the Economic Growth Board, if you like, and also at Welsh Government lead in policy procurement, funnily enough, which I've got a real passion for because I think procurements a real tool that if we build procurement approaches in the right way differently, then actually we can glean a lot of benefits for the community. So I work on the community benefits policy in Welsh government as well.

So I'm very, very deeply rooted in Wales. And I think the reason that is, I've a geographer background and in Wales we've got something called the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, which was is ten years old and actually the future Generations Commissioner, Derek Walker last week or the week before has just launched the ten year report. Anyone that's done geography knows that it's like sustainable development. So like the principles of everything. And I'm really passionate about that. And having Wales being the first country to legislate for sustainable development, it provides me and the work we do at the university with a really incredible framework of enabling conversations and working together to serve our communities better so that young kids like me, they grew up in Connah's Quay, where I grew up, have opportunities that perhaps they wouldn't necessarily always have. And I think the Act is very much an enabling, framework for us to do that. And when we talk about inclusive innovation, the act when it was set up, there's seven wellbeing goals, which is effectively Wales's version of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. And within the legislation, there's 52 I think, public sector organisations that have to demonstrate how they work together to, towards those, actions, towards our seven wellbeing goals.

But I think the key that makes it really special on this stuff that I'm really interested in is the relationships of trust in the people part of it. So the ways of working, which is in the legislation, is something called the five ways of working, which is, to involve, to integrate, to look long term, to prevent and to collaborate. Now the involve principle is for me where absolutely the inclusive innovation because this legislation is new, it's never been there before.

We're still learning in Wales about how we implement it. And, you know, the ten year report reflects actually that it's not achieving the systems change it set out to do. But there's people like me and lots of other people across the region, across Wales that are working really hard to try and like understand how we include citizens and involve our community and people we serve at all levels.

So we shift in that power balance. But then how we then mobilise to action around prevention long term, when we work within short term funding cycles as well as political cycles. So how do we shift the dial and allow any small innovation that we do to actually drive change within the whole system at those different tiers? And I call it like an ecosystem in North Wales.

So I'm sort of in lots of these, partnerships as well. So I can see where we can actually harbour voices of citizens. And I say that it sounds like really strategic, doesn't it? But I mean, it's things like public narratives, like drawing a conversation. It's, looking at the data and insight with citizens alongside you to analyse how we prioritise.

It's, you know, lots of lots of different projects. but I guess I'm going down a long path already, which, perhaps you'll pull me back out of a little bit here.

Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia:

Not at all. That was that was precisely the type of things we want to discuss today. And, you know, as you were talking a lot of ideas, we're sort of flashing through my mind. One of them is you doing a great job, engaging with the communities. And, you know, you were talking about being too strategic about it, but, you know, one of the you know, associations with which City-REDI, UoB works. You probably know them is, Citizens UK. And they and they have these ideas of power and they look at organising seats and see through power.

So they do a power analysis to identify who best to collaborate. So again, know when it comes to collaborating or working through the cracks of power, you do need to be strategic about it. But it's very interesting that after ten years, I think being the first nation who will actually sets up this legally, and Wales, you know, they not being able to sort of institutionally achieve these goals.

I think it's a massive learning curve nevertheless. but I think that challenge of how to mobilise short term sort of goals around long term goals or, you know, short term funding with long term cycles, I think it communicates very clearly with that ideal place-based community place-based innovation. So you work with children, as you mentioned, which I think really are key to sort of reframing innovation through inclusion especially we aim to achieve the SDG Sustainable Development Goals.

But in your opinion, how do you think we can sort of ensure that it is not just innovating for communities, but innovating with them? Particularly those who are often excluded from these conversations?

Nina Ruddle:

I've got a really good example to share, and it's one I, I share often, but I'm so passionate about it because I know it makes a difference.

But it's that also like the LPIPs and what they're trying to do, it's knowing that in your heart it's the right thing to do. But it's also having the data, the evidence, the insight underpinning and all of that. And I think for me, the way I see my role across the whole of the region as a translator, between working with citizens to test and drive innovation alongside citizens, and then and this is where it is quite unique, that often you have people that are very senior in the role.

So at the top of that ecosystem, if you like, and then you've got lots of layers and lots of different piecemeal partnerships that are created by all these different things. But then you've also got citizens. And often there's a big disconnect between what's delivered in what we call services or clients or patients or whatever we want to. But, you know, we're all part of the same community all wanting to make it better for the people in which we serve.

The way that I've worked is I'm in that very strategic space influencing and working with, you know, very senior leaders. But then also, I'm at the coalface or working with citizens and communities and children and people to understand and work with them and develop that data insight and research that will then therefore be fed up and change the system.

So that's where you can see a shift in language. You can it's a hard thing to describe, and it's a very difficult thing to measure because how do you measure that? There's a shift in language, the language that people are using. Like people talk about systems leadership. Now across North Wales now ten years ago they weren't. And I know it's because over the last 8 to 10 years we've been working with partners, communities, doing open masterclasses around systems leadership.

So all that stuff is part of the underpinning so that how we work. But I think using a really good example of listening directly to children, young people, so that the future generations act, we have things and it's similar when you're looking at LPIPs and the work that they're trying to do in local policy innovation partnerships is the legislation requires hugely ambitious legislation.

But it arguably it's a sort of managerial infrastructure to deliver. It's got a public service board, which sounds like the most dullest possible, but it's not it's great. You know, it's a great place where partners come together. One of the requirements of the act is that we have to develop wellbeing assessments as a public service board, which includes Public Health Wales.

It includes the health board. It includes local authority. It includes fire and police and rescue and third sector and it has invited partners as well. So as a collective, we have to do almost like a check in of what's the wellbeing like of that population on that footprint? It's often their footprint of I think there's 18 public service boards across Wales.

And one of the pieces of insight we gleaned from Wrexham was that children and young people through the Senedd yr Ifanc, which is the youth parliament in Wrexham, they said we want life skills outside of the classroom, yet the curriculum doesn't teach us how to connect in life, learn and evolve. And, you know, the curriculum is very linear, whereas actually the way we learn is really different and young people are asking for something different outside of the classroom.

So I got some funding and we piloted something called Children's University, just in Wrexham and Flint, to the 171 students and in nine settings, Welsh, English in a pupil referral unit. And it was about recruiting community assets. All those groups and organisations that wrap around a school or support young people, they become a learning destination. The young people have passports to learn in, and every time they do an hour, they get a contribution to 30 hours.

And you graduate because you achieve something and you can track your skills on a skills builder platform. So it's about really in Wales we've got a policy called community Focus Schools, and it's about sort of knocking on the door once of a school as a collective or civic society to go, how can we help? How can we develop content as a university that supports learning both in the curriculum, but actually just everybody's more able and talented.

But how do we find their talents? And we find them in different points and parts of our lives as we evolve. So that was, for me, one of the most powerful sort of ways of listening and doing something about it and then feeding it back. Then we were really successful. We rolled it out across the whole of North Wales.

I secured some more funding and we went to 51 schools and 1169 students. And there is some we've done a research impact report on that. And we're now, with the eight recommendations within that we're focusing and targeting the approach on deep rooted deprivation, because we know we can shift the dial on how we support those young people to have opportunities that would never have access to otherwise.

The inequalities just widening. and we know that the stats say in Wales, 29% of children, you know, living in poverty and it's getting worse. So actually, we've got to really shift the dial and all work together collaboratively. That enables that to stop. And so that we can put mechanisms in place to support that. So on top of the North Wales Children's University, just another great example.

We did something called Ted Talks. Everybody knows Ted Talks. And it was about trying to engage those older young people that wouldn't want to necessarily go and do their Minecraft. after school. It was trying to empower through leadership skills, young people that was a bit older because anyone that says Children's University, I think, you know, year eight and nine, it's sort of drops off.

So we did a program called, Ted Talks, which was around wellbeing, and we went in and coached young people with how to do a Ted talk in a public narrative. how to identify your collective challenge. We then hosted and they're not called Ted talks anymore. They're called Bob Talks because Bob was a character that young people identified as part of the stigma and bullying.

Bob is now symbolic of our listening to young people taking their voices and taking them to the leaders to say, this is what our young people want and need. This is how we need to shift the dial. So I guess it's that constant sense making of bringing all of these different aspects and elements together, from data and insight through to voices through to storytelling, through to as touchpoints, to then bring the head, the heart and the hands into that ecosystem which sometimes just understands numbers and doesn't have the human side of stuff. And part of that, like arts and, you know, creativity as well as a big part. So yeah, this is a lot of projects that we're doing in that space.

Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia:

Those are two fantastic examples. And I think they actually come to illustrate the importance of going beyond your normal sort of boundaries of topics and which is sometimes a problem with researchers and the work.

Sometimes they work in silos. And I think arts have actually gained momentum, thankfully, to sort of revolutionise or at least change how we do things. So by changing the status quo, it's interesting because you sort of went ahead because one of the questions I had was precisely on a concrete example of how things have worked, which you very clearly exemplified.

And I wonder if you could tell us a little bit more about practical steps, because you've sort of what does through the, the what worked and you describe the projects and the outcomes. But in your own words, what would you say actually has worked to move these historically marginalised groups from the sightlines to the centre of these, policy development processes? And where do institutions still struggle to achieve that?

Nina Ruddle:

I think this is certainly something in language. So I see that we set up these infrastructures. They're almost, they seem a little bit impenetrable or not connected to communities that they serve. And that's and there's lots of reasons why, because we have to be accountable as public bodies, because it's often public money.

There has to be transparency. Absolutely. But I guess this is an area where we can innovate, you know, and we've got a new Vice-Chancellor. Wrexham is doing a fantastic job. It's like where we fail and fail quickly. we can move on to learn more. But I think there's something about language that we speak different languages. There's something about infrastructure that feels really locked down.

So the PSB is a really great example where I find the spaces are, you know, connected. They're strategic. They're often very, very key leaders. But I think some of the work I'm trying to do is opening up that public service boards to have more memberships that are at every level. So if

you're we I always say that if you're about change, your leader regards where you are in that system.

And then there is some think about, as our Vice-Chancellor says, it's that learning quickly in the how we fail and accept failure is a good thing to learn from it. And then also how we understand the human side of systems. And it's not because that's the fluffy stuff, it's because that's the hard stuff, like how we shift the dial on, you know, using different methods to prioritise what we do and where we put public money, which is finite massively at the moment.

And how, you know, my job of work is to to really push boundaries with citizens to make things happen, which is what we've done in parts, and then to present that to the system so that it doesn't try and like lock down and go, oh, this is only and we don't understand it actually to allow the system. And I say the system, it's the people within that as well as the sort of governance within it.

It's like how we can understand that, unpack that and accept that so that it changes the way we do things and the way we work and where we put our money. But pooled resourcing, for me, and pooled priorities, getting that shared narrative is absolutely pivotal. And I think it's took me, I would say, most of my career to get to the point now where we've got some really incredible regional work in where we set up a North Wales Insight partnership, which is about exactly that, innovating with citizens and community.

We've got this co-produce community narratives where six towns across the whole of the region, we work with artists to go into these spaces to understand what that place means to those communities, which often the data tells you one story, but actually using the power of arts, creativity and engaging in a different way can tell you a very different narrative of how citizens see that space.

So I think it's that data stuff. It's like, what is data? How do you understand data and and therefore research and how we use that to understand impact, be it good and bad, so that we share the learning and we don't repeat or continue doing the stuff that doesn't work. I'm a to to do the stuff that does, but it's that whole like holding together as a convener and a host of bringing players together in that system both at every level to get that, that narrative.

And that's that's the point where at the moment in North Wales, with the Future Generations Commissioner, the week before last week, I think it was we, brought together North Wales Civic Engagement Partnership, which is 40, 50 leaders across the whole of the region, from third sector, Police Crimes Commissioner, Children's Commissioner, Food Standards Commissioner. But then lots of players and partners from Ambition North Wales Skills Partnership, regional partnership would like every partnership that is trying to work with communities.

We've brought them together and said - What is it, are the things that matter to the communities in which we're trying to support and that will help us shape a shared narratives so that actually we can pull forces across the system to put them where it needs to go, rather than where all of these piecemeal partnerships need to be because it's unnecessarily complex, and it doesn't need to be like that.

We are here to make sense of those partnerships and simplify them to a point.

Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia:

I think your work, as you describe it, you know, pushing boundaries, it's it's really powerful and meaningful. And I think the words of the Vice Chancellor, I think you were probably paraphrasing him, but, you know, learning and failing quickly to move on. I think that's really powerful because we often learn the most from what actually didn't work.

So I was wondering if there was something you could share, like an initiative aimed at inclusion that you thought actually fell short, and what you took away from that experience?

Nina Ruddle:

That's a big question. I always say that if you don't win you learn. So I always see everything you know as painful things can be. I think probably the biggest frustration I've got is that just I often feel sometimes like a few steps ahead because I'm in so many.

I'm with communities and I'm with children, young people doing some, some sessions with some young people. Then I'll be in a meeting with the chief executive, and I've got the lens of both, and I hold that. And I guess the frustration is that I feel sometimes like you're banging your head against a brick wall because you have to take people with you on that, and you have to say things like 15 times in order for that to be accepted.

And, you know, creating fear in the system of change can bring real challenges. So I guess the pace of change I get frustrated with and there's there's some things that in parts of certain parts of projects that have not worked as well as I could have, should have. But actually what I do is we learn and go, well, how do we fix it and how do we fix it quickly?

And I think because we are I'm really lucky with a really small university with a lot of rooted partnerships across the region. But because of that, we can be far more agile. So I don't think I've probably directly answered that question about what's gone wrong. But I think stamina is the hardest part, I think. But it's just keep going and having that stamina, like the energy from the people that are on that same journey, because sometimes it can feel quite, lonely, which I guess for lots of leaders it feels quite lonely.

And what we do is try and bring spaces together that are safe for leaders to just support each other and share, because it is just it's really tough stuff that we're all dealing with, and we're all trying to work to the very best of our capacity. But yeah, I don't know whether things, I don't know if I answered that question. Probably doesn't.

Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia:

I don't think there is a like a direct answer to such a difficult question, but I think it's that learning, isn't it? Of the process. And I think you've been answering that question throughout your conversation today. And one of the key things that we could do after days, for instance, is looking at the Future Generations Act and the report and then extracting from that some of the lessons learned and sort of curating, perhaps a blog and then some set of steps of what were the reflections and what can we what can we say about that?

Because it's it's a whole country, isn't it? And, you know, what are the lessons that can we learn? Because I think that will be important for the LPIPs as well. But but maybe that's something we could talk at another point, you know, writing a blog about it, maybe reporting something. But,

you know, it does seem that Future Generation Act has sort of, in a way, helped to shift the narrative and to some extent, these, you know, power structures.

And so it looks as if, you know, the whole of Wrexham and probably, you know, the whole country are more prone to thinking or openly discussing community driven action, policy and innovation. But can you think of any example where, where this has sort of led to the first step is, if you want of a systemic change?

Nina Ruddle

Yeah. I think one of the, big examples I could probably share is around climate change. and it often feels like, oh, well, we'll leave that, that over there for somebody else with some other policy. And actually it's everybody's business, isn't it? We all need to be actively contributing and mitigating the impact of climate change. And one of the pieces of work we did through, again, the North Wales Insight Partnership, is I set it up with lots and it was a part it was a true collaboration of all the public service boards across North Wales.

There's three of them, which is six local authorities. So it's population about 700,000. One of the things that we did quite quickly, and we commissioned it as part of our civic mission work, very, very small piece of work was looking at how we worked with citizens to analyse climate change and data around climate change, and we worked at Natural Resources Wales, and we worked with a brilliant academic called Dr Anne Collis and we worked to develop data packs, and we recruited 12 citizens across the whole of the region, which was like a microcosm of society.

So it was a home school or an 18 year old and 80 year old climate change denier, a refugee asylum seeker. So we tried to, you know, really. And that sounds tokenistic in itself. But we tried to get a broad group that would be a representative of society. And then we brought them together with these data packs, and we enabled and it was just, we were just coming out of Covid to some sort of in lockdown.

And that information, we looked at things like flooding. There was certain data packs, three themes, three workshops. And what we also did, which I think is really, really important when we go to talking about how we work with citizens in public services, or we often ask citizens to contribute lots and lots and lots, we get paid, you know, and those citizens are the experts in some of the stuff that we're asking them.

But we don't value that because sometimes you don't even go back. But so what we did is we paid those citizens for their time as well. So it was, it was valuing their expertise. There was a report that was produced at the end of that. But the biggest impact, I would say, is that all of the partnership ecosystem that is enabled that I'm sort of part of. That piece of work, I think influenced where we're at now, which is we're in discussions as a region to work on a climate change risk assessment for the whole region that allows us to look at working together once on a climate change risk assessment, that allows us then. So instead of lots of organisations doing it individually, we do it once for the region, but then we take it back into organisations and partnerships and then make it our own.

But it's not one version of the truth, but the climate change challenge that we've got across the region is going to be similar. So we're going to be doing it once for the region. So I think that it's really powerful that it's changed things, but it's sometimes it's just a little seed of some think that, you know, has been the catalyst and it's really difficult to track that back, which I think for

me, when you look at the LPIP Hubs perhaps that's the value of bringing academic data, insight, research evidence into the forefront of that.

And working with citizens is a real powerful combination, because it's the power in the partnership that makes the difference, and it's the value of everyone's knowledge base in that space is as of equal value. The citizens, academics, practitioners, policymakers. And then emerging from that, we talked about deliberative democracy and how we worked with citizens in a different way.

And we're still evolving and unpacking that and I know Welsh government have recently just done a piece about deliberative democracy in Wales. So, yeah, that's the sort of an example I can give that, has achieved change. But yeah, it's difficult because sometimes it's just a feeling as well as an impact. And that's why. And then you have to have, you know, the funding is, you have to have the funding in place to actually have the research is really powerful because that is the thing that often changes the system.

So it's just trying to hold all of those things together at the same time, which is what the LPIPs are doing for me is, is where the magic will happen.

Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia:

That is actually fascinating. And you know, that project you just highlighted, the one on sort of data on climate change and the recruitment of these 12 citizens. And it's interesting because it looks like you were able to mobilise assets to mobilise resources and sort of push forward the discussion on on risk assessment, which in itself being a small project, as you described it, I think it's really meaningful.

But I think going back to your point of measuring, you know, especially the issue of participation and co-creation and inclusive innovation, it seems to be a bit of a of a grey area, especially for policymakers, because most of them, or a lot of them at least, are sort of interested in on numbers. And they want to see graphs and and percentages and measure.

So, you know, the question really is how can we measure the success of, of, of including the community, you know, beyond the traditional outcomes, you know, how do you assess what worked and what didn't, who participated and and whose knowledge counted?

Nina Ruddle:

I think it's a really difficult balance, isn't it, because I think it's like I've been trying to it's it's the difference between like engagement and research.

Now, research, generates new knowledge that allows the system to change. But an engagement is where you just you connect and you understand communities. And sometimes it's a lot quicker and easier to do engagement or which is a lot of the practitioners and policymakers, that's the stuff they'll do. Whereas with the research stuff, it's understanding the importance of ethics and having that underpinning stuff and then the finances.

So I think the way that we've done that, like how you measure it is, starting with, with conversations and starting with a collective purpose. And therefore everybody's voice is equal and around the table. And one of the things in the principles of some of the work we do around

systems leadership, it's an open system. So in theory, if you've got an interest and you care about it, then come along.

So on the 22nd of May we've got a big, child poverty conference. it's if you if you're interested, come along. We've got Minister there and it's about how we work differently collaboratively to tackle child poverty, which is have the same respect where we do, you know, work, across the system in a more, strategic way.

I mean, mobilise towards a wellbeing economy that doesn't grow GDP without the compromise of wellbeing. And and so it's that really careful balance. But I think for me, it's no voice is hard to reach. We just need to find the right way to reach them or open access that others can reach us so that so I think it's about just being far more open and not so scared.

I think there's a bit of a yeah, I think particularly from an academic perspective, because everything can and in the research context has to have the ethics which is right if it is research, but if it's engagement then it's it's there for different reasons. So I think it's about the clarity of what you do and and why.

Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia:

All right. No, that makes sense. if you could, later or, you know, I'll send you an email reminder, send me details about that child poverty conference. Is it online?

Nina Ruddle:

It's in-person. It's in person and Llandudno, in North Wales. So, yeah, if you could make it be great.

Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia:

Yeah. Okay. I'll have a look at. But. Yeah. asking for the details. right. So I think we are fast approaching sort of the end of this fascinating conversation. I think, most of the questions I actually had, you've actually answered in advance. I wanted to talk to you about the role of Wrexham University and its civic mission, which you completely explain the issue of power imbalances, which you have also touched upon.

So I guess my last question is. If you could make one strategic move to permanently improve how inclusive innovation happens in a specific place, you know, like Wales, what would you choose and why? and keep in mind that you can have no restrictions in terms of funding, or you can actually present your idea to the cabinet. You know, you can influence and advocate and basically do whatever it is that you want to do.

What what would be that strategic move?

Nina Ruddle:

I think one of the biggest things I've learned on the Civic Mission work with Wrexham University is that it's grown exponentially and organically. and it can be a bit messy, but that's okay. It's sort of it's okay to accept that it's messy because that's the nature of being human, isn't it?

And I think I would say to have a really clear narrative, be it, you know, that's out there, that people understand. So the if there's a clarity of purpose to what you're trying to do, and that's the clarity around the problem, we're trying to tackle not not jump to solutions. If we have that, then it means that anyone that cares about that can join you in that movement for change.

And I think for me, that's what I'd really want. we're trying to work in that way where we have that regional narrative, where we have that running call to go. This is what we're all of caring about, which then allows communities to connect into that, because there's an understanding and a common rallying call for others to join on that journey, because unless we start doing things like that, we can't continue doing what we're doing in the way that we're doing it, because it's clearly not working in parts.

And I think that, for me, is where telling that story and allowing people to connect into you is, really, really important.

Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia:

That is really powerful. And you know that. What's interesting is that, well, as you were saying, all of this often embracing messiness, having clarity of narrative, having clear purpose and, you know, clarity of the problem, all of that when you're saying, you know, actually, I don't know if you know it, but it's really what you are doing.

So, you know, to a large extent you are walking the talk, which I think is one of the biggest challenges. And it's very fascinating for me personally, interesting to see people like you who are trying to sort of, you know, bridge the gap between research and practice and more importantly, doing meaningful stuff not for people, but with the communities.

And so it's, you know, again, it's fascinating to see everything you you've been doing. well, we're coming to an end. You know, I don't know if, if there's anything else you want to say to, to wrap it up and conclude this podcast?

Nina Ruddle:

I would just say that you're right, that it's the implementation gap. So I think in Wales and a lot in the UK, there are, particularly in Wales, in the context, there's some great policies.

I think the biggest challenge is the implementation of those policies and that, and that's because we need to involve citizens and it's the way of working. So we just need to be minded of everything starts with trust and relationships, and that goes with the communities. Young people, children, but also leaders as well. So I think it's about levelling the playing field a bit and, bridging the implementation gap in many ways.

Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia:

Thanks, Nina, and thanks for your time. Thanks all the listeners as well for tuning in. This was another episode of Placecast interview questions on inclusive innovation.