

Placecast Episode 17 – Transcript

00:00:06 Nicola Headlam

Welcome to PlaceCast, a Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub production based at the University of Birmingham.

00:00:12 Nicola Headlam

Placecast is essential listening for those keen to explore the ins and outs of knowledge mobilisation for influence through central and local government, based on the view that it is only through animating the power of place-based leadership the wicked problems of 2026 can become more manageable.

00:00:27 Nicola Headlam

Whether you are a researcher, citizen scientist, an activist, a professional working within the public sector, a civil servant, politician, analyst or entrepreneur, we think that it's 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.

00:00:47 Nicola Headlam

We're based in City-REDI and rooted in the LPIP programme funded by the ESRC, AHRC and Innovate UK.

00:00:53 Nicola Headlam

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.

00:01:01 Nicola Headlam

Our guests are change makers from across the UK with stories about the ways in which influence can be achieved.

00:01:07 Nicola Headlam

We focus in particular on some of the connective tissue within and between sectors for clues as to how to animate place-based leadership.

00:01:16 Nicola Headlam

as innovating is a team sport best done in the open.

00:01:19 Nicola Headlam

Please contact us with 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.

00:01:34 Nicola Headlam

In this episode of PlaceCast,

00:01:36 Nicola Headlam

Dr. Gerardo Arriaga-Garcia, Research Fellow at City-REDI, is joined by Nina Ruddle, Head of Public Policy Engagement at Wrexham University, and Sophie Cloutterbuck, Director of London Engagement and the London Met Lab at London Metropolitan University, for a conversation on what really enables innovation to take root in different places.

00:01:56 Nicola Headlam

Together, they explore how regional skills, trust, stewardship and intermediary glue work can either unlock or constrain local development, drawing out lessons from two very different contexts, North Wales and London.

00:02:10 Nicola Headlam

The episode asks what policymakers too often miss when they focus only on infrastructure, investment and formal strategy and make the case for a more relational, place-sensitive approach to innovation and growth.

00:02:29 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Hello and welcome to Placecast, a podcast from the Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub based at the University of Birmingham and supported through the LPIP programme financed by the UKRI.

00:02:41 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

I am Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia, a research fellow at City-REDI at the University of Birmingham and I will be your host for this episode.

00:02:50 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

My work focusses on inclusive innovation, place-based development and how knowledge and evidence can be brought closer to the people and decisions that shape communities.

00:02:59 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

On this episode, we're exploring a question that sits at the heart of place-based innovation.

00:03:05 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

What really helps regions grow,

00:03:07 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

adapt and innovate well to local challenges?

00:03:10 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Is it technical expertise, local relationships, trusted institutions, or the often unseen work of bringing people together across systems?

00:03:20 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

To help us think that through, I'm joined by two brilliant guests working in very different regional context, Wales and London, but grappling with many of the same underlying questions.

00:03:32 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

First, I'm delighted to welcome Nina Ruddle,

00:03:35 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Head of Public Policy Engagement at Wrexham University.

00:03:38 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Nina has been at the heart of some of the most important work across North Wales, helping to build partnerships, civic platforms, and shared ways of working that support more joined-up, place-sensitive innovation.

00:03:52 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

I think that what makes her perspective especially valuable is the way she brings together policy, institutional leadership, and community insight while keeping trust, stewardship, and long-term change

00:04:05 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

firmly in view.

00:04:06 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Nina, welcome.

00:04:08 Nina Ruddle

Thank you.

00:04:08 Nina Ruddle

It's lovely to be here.

00:04:10 Nina Ruddle

Thanks.

00:04:10 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And I'm also really pleased to welcome Sophie Clutterbuck, Director of London Engagement and the London Met Lab at London Metropolitan University.

00:04:19 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Sophie's work offers a sharp and deeply grounded view of how innovation happens in a city as complex as London, not as one place, but as many places, communities and local economies layered together.

00:04:32 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

She has done a great deal to show why convening, translation and trust are not just helpful extras, but central to making local systems work better for the people they are meant to serve.

00:04:46 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Sophie, welcome.

00:04:47 Sophie Clutterbuck

Thanks very much.

00:04:48 Sophie Clutterbuck

Really pleased to be here.

00:04:49 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

All right.

00:04:49 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So with that, let's turn to the big question at the heart of this episode.

00:04:54 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So when we talk about innovation in a place,

00:04:57 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

What are we still not seeing clearly enough?

00:04:59 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Let me come to Nina first on the North Wales perspective, and then Sophie will bring you in on whether that looks different in London.

00:05:07 Nina Ruddle

I think it's a really interesting question.

00:05:09 Nina Ruddle

And what we're not seeing enough of in innovation for me is an investment in the relationships and the infrastructure that it takes to build relationships and therefore trust.

00:05:23 Nina Ruddle

And I think the reason I say that is from personal experience of the work I'm doing across the region and in Wales.

00:05:31 Nina Ruddle

Everywhere I go in conferences and events with the LPIP Hub and many other events, at the heart of everything is often the trust element, which is relational, but it's the thing that we, for me,

00:05:47 Nina Ruddle

don't invest enough effort in and don't value it in the way that it should be because if we don't have that and we can see that across the UK at the moment that there's an erosion of trust in institutions to look after and protect citizens in the way that we should be doing that.

00:06:05 Nina Ruddle

So I think for me it's about investment in an infrastructure of relational development that therefore builds trust and delivering what we say we're going to do once we've listened to citizens as well.

00:06:17 Nina Ruddle

So that again comes full circle into that.

00:06:19 Nina Ruddle

How would you trust anyone if they didn't deliver what you asked them to or what they promised to do?

00:06:26 Nina Ruddle

And I think that for me is the fundamental crux of everything to do with place-based local growth and innovation and development.

00:06:34 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Thanks, Nina.

00:06:34 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

That's really, really helpful.

00:06:37 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So what gets missed then when innovation is discussed without trust and relationships in place?

00:06:42 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Sophie, do you want to tell us more about your work and what that means for London?

00:06:47 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Thanks.

00:06:47 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Yeah.

00:06:48 Sophie Cloutterbuck

First of all, I agree with everything Nina said.

00:06:50 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Trust is something I literally hear on the daily.

00:06:53 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Every meeting I'm in, it's mentioned.

00:06:55 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Every bit of research I do, it comes up.

00:06:58 Sophie Cloutterbuck

But I think it's more understanding what the trust is about as well.

00:07:01 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So I know from my point of view in London, a big part of the trust is people don't value other people's expertise.

00:07:08 Sophie Cloutterbuck

They don't listen to the community and what their expertise are.

00:07:12 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Or it might be a university doesn't value the expertise of a local NHS or the local government or the local government doesn't and all around.

00:07:21 Sophie Cloutterbuck

That's what a lot of I find keep on coming up at the moment.

00:07:25 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Going back at the moment, we're quite fractious in the way people work together.

00:07:29 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And that just adds to it, not believing people have something to offer.

00:07:34 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Nina mentioned citizens before, and we don't listen to our citizens.

00:07:38 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We don't hear what they've got to say.

00:07:40 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We think they're a number, they're a tick box.

00:07:42 Sophie Cloutterbuck

They can't be like that.

00:07:44 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We need to trust their experiences, their lived experiences and the difference it can make.

00:07:49 Sophie Cloutterbuck

You know, we have 32 different boroughs within London.

00:07:52 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Each one's its own little town.

00:07:54 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Citizens,

00:07:55 Sophie Cloutterbuck

residents see their borough, but then they have the Greater London Authority.

00:07:57 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's also making decisions.

00:07:59 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Then they have their schools.

00:08:00 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So it's that trust of who makes the decisions, who's making things better, where can you get your voice heard?

00:08:06 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Thanks, Sophie.

00:08:07 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

That's very powerful.

00:08:08 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And you know, I would like to ask a follow-up question on that because I am personally very interested and also for years I've been working on the issue of trust.

00:08:18 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So

00:08:19 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Would either of you go as far as saying that trust is part or should be part of the infrastructure of innovation?

00:08:27 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I'd say 100%.

00:08:29 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Without it, you can't be innovative.

00:08:31 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I'd say personally, that's my thought.

00:08:33 Nina Ruddle

I completely agree and it's actually where Sophie and I connect is that we use the - what is deemed softer skills

00:08:41 Nina Ruddle

to build that trust and relationships in place with people, in partnerships, in the system, with communities, with citizens, with children, young people, you know, anywhere in a place that is about people.

00:08:54 Nina Ruddle

I also think that that difference between what we deem hard and soft skills, the soft skills for some reason is not as valued as that sort of the technical expertise that you need, which, you know, we've both got as well, but actually it's the softer skills that are the things that

00:09:11 Nina Ruddle

build the resilience and build the partnerships and create that sort of space to convene and come together to not only listen, which is again, I agree totally what Sophie says, but listen, but to find different ways of listening and not about the way that we perceive listening as public services and the way we want to receive messages, actually listening in a really different way and using different methods through arts and creativity or the felt experience or engaging in ways

00:09:41 Nina Ruddle

that are more meaningful to people everyday lives, you know, and I think that's where there's a fundamental shift now in policy, in government priorities, you know, and in Wales,

we've got legislation called the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, which is a framework to enable that type of work, which I guess is what I've used as a framework.

00:10:04 Nina Ruddle

And in comparison to London, we are rural,

00:10:08 Nina Ruddle

in North Wales, 750,000, which is probably one of the boroughs in London, So it's more dispersed.

00:10:15 Nina Ruddle

The challenges are different, but the methods we're using are the same.

00:10:18 Nina Ruddle

So there's something really interesting in there to reflect on.

00:10:22 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Right, that's really, really helpful.

00:10:24 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And actually, I think that's a very nice equal to my next question, because both of you

00:10:29 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

are pushing beyond the usual distinction between hard and soft skills.

00:10:34 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So what are those real skills that make innovation possible in a place?

00:10:40 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And perhaps we can start with you, Sophie.

00:10:42 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Could you say that and a little bit more about how do you translate between community, policy and institution.

00:10:50 Sophie Cloutterbuck

The first one, before I get onto that, I'd just like to say that I think the first bit of skill you need is patience.

00:10:54 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And you also have to be flexible, adaptable, and you can't be going into a situation thinking, this is how I want it to end.

00:11:03 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I think that's really important because too many people do go in thinking what the outcome is.

00:11:08 Sophie Cloutterbuck

as Nina, well I'm sure, is nodding with me, you can't go into it that way.

00:11:12 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So I think that's a real skill, is being able to go into a room, hear what people are saying and think of how that can address a challenge, solve a problem, have an outcome from it, which is a skill in itself.

00:11:25 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I also think the skill in translating is about-- Nina sort of mentioned this a moment.

00:11:31 Sophie Cloutterbuck

She said, we have the soft skills, but we also have the hard skills.

00:11:34 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So we have the skills to understand what's coming out of academia.

00:11:38 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We are doing academia, but we also have the skills to be talking to the local grassroots organisation on a one-on-one in the middle of a park somewhere, or for me, in the local estate or wherever it might be.

00:11:52 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Equally, we can go in and talk to local government or national government.

00:11:56 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We're having the same conversation with all these people, but we're doing it in different ways and translating it across.

00:12:02 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's not about dumbing down.

00:12:04 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's not about using plain English.

00:12:06 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's not about those things.

00:12:08 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Because as I go back to before, people have expertise in all the areas that there are.

00:12:13 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's just framing it.

00:12:14 Sophie Cloutterbuck

For example, I work with councils a lot, local councils, and I work in HEI.

00:12:19 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I've just done it myself.

00:12:20 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I work in a university.

00:12:22 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Both of them have a million acronyms.

00:12:25 Sophie Cloutterbuck

A million acronyms to the fact that when I started working in local councils, one organisation provides a list on the back of notepads of all the acronyms in councils so you can understand.

00:12:35 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Start talking to people in real words, explaining how that acronym is exactly the same as yours.

00:12:41 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's about

00:12:42 Sophie Cloutterbuck

translating without dumbing down, without expecting, treating people that they haven't got the expertise.

00:12:47 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And there's a lot more, but I'm going to let Nina answer some more of them before I add on.

00:12:52 Nina Ruddle

Well, I think just to build on that, Sophie, actually, and I think you would agree with this, is that it takes a lot of time.

00:12:57 Nina Ruddle

So there is a patience element, but there is.

00:13:01 Nina Ruddle

a time element as well to investing in building trust because it's almost like for the work I've been doing in North Wales, again, a community of 750,000, rural, coastal, dispersed, lots of challenges and a language as well.

00:13:18 Nina Ruddle

So we're a devolved nation, own legislation, devolved education, health, et cetera.

00:13:24 Nina Ruddle

So we've got like different levels and I think that the one thing that I've done

00:13:31 Nina Ruddle

recognised that it takes time to build platforms or partnerships that actually are truly understanding of not only professionals and the middle bit, not the strategic leaders, the chief execs, the ones, the local authority officers and natural resources Wales officers or the

00:13:51 Nina Ruddle

people that are actually at the coalface, so to speak, day in, day out, and how then we also engage the citizens level with the middle bit and with the strategic level.

00:14:03 Nina Ruddle

So you have to be understanding of all the different levels within a place, which can be really complex, particularly in a place like London and in Wales, because of the differences in the way that we work.

00:14:15 Nina Ruddle

That time to invest in bringing together partnerships in an informal way is

00:14:21 Nina Ruddle

really hard work, but when invested in can be incredibly powerful.

00:14:27 Nina Ruddle

And we've got a great example in North Wales called the North Wales Insight Partnership, very organic, where I spoke to the public service boards, which is the mechanism that we have in Wales to deliver the wellbeing of Future Generations Act collaborative service boards.

00:14:42 Nina Ruddle

And I was like, why don't we just work together?

00:14:43 Nina Ruddle

Because we're one region and there's three of them in North Wales.

00:14:48 Nina Ruddle

And we work together to pull resources, share data and evidence, engage citizens in a truly meaningful way to create systems change.

00:14:56 Nina Ruddle

Now, that's took nearly six or seven years to get to this position, but we're in a position now where we've got a website and it's started to really galvanise because we just got on in an informal way

00:15:09 Nina Ruddle

Understanding where we are professionally, understanding that we just want to get stuff done, but understanding the constraints of policy, governance, and resources.

00:15:17 Nina Ruddle

And we've still, despite all of those challenges, managed to get things done.

00:15:21 Nina Ruddle

And that's what's built trust with citizens and communities and with and across the system and partnerships as well.

00:15:27 Nina Ruddle

So I think that's an example I can use of the time it takes and the energy and the resilience, I think, which I think Sophie will probably agree with me on that.

00:15:36 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I was going to say, if you don't mind, I 100% agree on the time.

00:15:39 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's something that we always talk about.

00:15:42 Sophie Cloutterbuck

You cannot get these relationships in a one-off project.

00:15:46 Sophie Cloutterbuck

All my proper networks, proper relationships have been six years plus now.

00:15:49 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I think what's interesting, Nina was saying about her project coming up organically, which I think is really great.

00:15:54 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And recently I've had the chance to look at, I suppose, two different ways, a project that's not funded for relationship, which is where I'm in two different anchor institution networks.

00:16:04 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So I'm in an anchor institution network

00:16:06 Sophie Cloutterbuck

in place in my local borough, but I'm also in the Greater London Authority's local institution network.

00:16:13 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Both of them don't provide funding to the organisations that are part of it, but the organisations that are part have decided that they're in place, they need to make a difference in place, they want to come together.

00:16:24 Sophie Cloutterbuck

They do spend time together, but I wouldn't say it is as tight, and we've worked together a long time and it's coming together and it's going well.

00:16:33 Sophie Cloutterbuck

One of the other things I'm working on is the health determinants research collaboration.

00:16:36 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Now I'm on one in Tower Hamlets, but there are three others in London.

00:16:40 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I'm actually doing some of my LPIP fellowship looking at the different HDRCs.

00:16:45 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And that's where 5 million pounds has been given to each one of these to build framework and capacity.

00:16:51 Sophie Cloutterbuck

But the biggest part of it and the biggest part we keep on coming up with is the trust issue.

00:16:57 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And we're spending hours trying to build trust.

00:16:59 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We're having meetings and having that time that is funded to give people that opportunity to have that time has actually made a world of difference.

00:17:07 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And we've actually come on a lot of steps having that time where we can say, let's all get in the room for three hours this afternoon and talk some of this stuff through.

00:17:17 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I've never had that opportunity before in other projects to actually talk through the issues of trust between us and having that space and funding space has actually really helped.

00:17:26 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And now not only are we working with them on those projects, we're moving on to other places within the council because we've really been able to develop that trust.

00:17:34 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And I think having that funding, having that time that people are like, well, this is part of my job doing this.

00:17:40 Sophie Cloutterbuck

This isn't an add-on has really made it a lot easier, but harder in a way because we've dug deeper.

00:17:46 Sophie Cloutterbuck

But I think in the long run, it means that the relationship will stand for a long, long time.

00:17:51 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And it's not only helped with the relationships with that, it's within the universities as well.

00:17:56 Sophie Cloutterbuck

One of the other big differences between London

00:17:59 Sophie Cloutterbuck

and Wales is, Nina, how many, I'm not sure how many universities there are where she is, but.

00:18:04 Nina Ruddle

In Wales there's nine.

00:18:06 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Nine in Wales.

00:18:07 Sophie Cloutterbuck

In London there are 45 London universities, 65 universities if you include ones from out of London, and if you include international and private there's 104 universities in London.

00:18:20 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So we have to trust each other as well.

00:18:23 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And it's also about learning how we work across unis to solve problems rather than to not trust each other and think we're a competition with each other.

00:18:32 Sophie Cloutterbuck

But still back to time.

00:18:34 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Time, I think, is the real answer to building a lot of these relationships as well.

00:18:47 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

I would like to actually ask a follow-up question because you've already mentioned a couple of pieces of advice on trust building relationships.

00:18:57 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And I wonder if you could expand on that because the Placecast audience are a lot of them are policy makers, practitioners and researchers.

00:19:05 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

What would you say are the key ingredients to building trust?

00:19:11 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

You mentioned time and patience.

00:19:13 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

What else is needed

00:19:16 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

for relationships to work over the long run?

00:19:19 Nina Ruddle

For me, I think there's a curiosity of an organisational humility and curiosity that is from the leadership.

00:19:27 Nina Ruddle

I think that's really, really important because I think for me, universities

00:19:31 Nina Ruddle

in some settings can be quite ivory tower and the front door of university is very difficult to find.

00:19:36 Nina Ruddle

When you've got 104, like in London, where do you go if you want some help, if you've got a research question that you want to unpack and explore?

00:19:43 Nina Ruddle

So I think, you know, there's something about that aspect.

00:19:46 Nina Ruddle

I think there's also something around learning ecosystems.

00:19:50 Nina Ruddle

So when you learn together in leadership or whatever you do or delivery,

00:19:57 Nina Ruddle

It inevitably feeds the system and feeds the networks.

00:20:02 Nina Ruddle

And so maintaining networks through a learning ecosystem, which again is what we've tried to do across the region, is develop the skills of systems leadership and the understanding as a foundation that creates networks that then drives the change both in the middle bit with the leadership at the executive level and influences policy.

00:20:23 Nina Ruddle

But at the heart of it, it's about elevating the voices of citizens

00:20:28 Nina Ruddle

into the system so that the people within those systems make those decisions based on the insight, the data and the evidence so that actually we can truly do what we should be doing to make a difference to the communities we serve and those big massive challenges that are out there like inequalities, climate change.

00:20:46 Nina Ruddle

Yeah, they're the areas I think that would, I'm sure Sophie would have a lot more to contribute.

00:20:54 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Thanks Nina.

00:20:54 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Sophie?

00:20:55 Sophie Clutterbuck

I would agree.

00:20:56 Sophie Clutterbuck

I think the networks, you can't do this work without networks.

00:20:59 Sophie Clutterbuck

And I always talk about how when I first started this role, I'd go into a conference or a meeting and I wouldn't know a person.

00:21:06 Sophie Clutterbuck

I'd always look around people chatting thinking, how do they all know each other?

00:21:09 Sophie Clutterbuck

Now, Nina and I, we don't get time to talk to all the people we know in a room anymore because we know so many people.

00:21:16 Sophie Cloutterbuck

But it really helps when you're looking at challenges.

00:21:19 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We're not siloed whether we're unis or not, whether we're in competition with others to actually make real change.

00:21:25 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We have to work together and we have to understand how our networks can help us.

00:21:29 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So in London, Nina's point about how does a uni, how does someone know what uni to go to when there's 104 of them?

00:21:36 Sophie Cloutterbuck

In London, we have a network called London Higher and I'm the chair of their civic network.

00:21:42 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So I have a group of, I think there's 65 people on my network who are all doing a similar job to Nina and I in universities across London.

00:21:52 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We've done a map to show all the work we're doing.

00:21:55 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So there's a single place that someone can come

00:21:58 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And they can go, I want to do work in environment.

00:22:02 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I can go on.

00:22:02 Sophie Cloutterbuck

All those unis are doing civic work in environment.

00:22:05 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I can go and grab one of them.

00:22:06 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And we have our contact details, single point of contact.

00:22:10 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And I think that's a big thing.

00:22:12 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's not that Nina and I want to be the only person that's known.

00:22:14 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We don't.

00:22:15 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We want other people to know all of our contacts.

00:22:17 Sophie Cloutterbuck

But our contacts don't need 4,000 people to choose from when they're trying to get something done.

00:22:23 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So I think it is about making it easy as well for people to get, and that was, easy access away from the ivory doors.

00:22:32 Sophie Cloutterbuck

People understanding that our roles are, we are anchors in the community.

00:22:37 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We do have a role to make a difference to the community.

00:22:40 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We're not just there, you know, doing things that other people don't understand.

00:22:44 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I think the skills, back to the skills question that we need as well, is translating that not only externally but internally within our world as well.

00:22:54 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Our vice chancellors need to understand why as a university we're doing this work.

00:22:58 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Not every uni in London does this work, not every university in the country does this work.

00:23:03 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Some come in and out of it and you'll see a lot of it is led by the senior leaders and how they're doing it.

00:23:09 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So a skill is when new senior leaders are coming in, how do you convince them that they need to keep this work going?

00:23:16 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So I think that's another skill as well, keeping this work at the forefront when people don't necessarily see it as everyday work and how you get people to understand that as well.

00:23:27 Nina Ruddle

Building on Sophie's point, I think

00:23:28 Nina Ruddle

that relationship point is that you don't have a relationship with an organisation, you have a relationship with a person, it's person to person, and people will go to that London Higher because it's Sophie, or it's Nina, because they know us.

00:23:41 Nina Ruddle

And they know.

00:23:42 Nina Ruddle

So there is something really powerful in sort of looking at those people that are those sort of conveners of a system change makers that have skin in the game, and care about it, but you're convening but not controlling the system.

00:23:57 Nina Ruddle

And I think that's

00:23:59 Nina Ruddle

a real big difference that we have been lucky enough, I guess, to evolve our roles to be like that with the support of leadership.

00:24:09 Nina Ruddle

And I think the second point, just building on Sophie's point there, which was unpacked a bit is how do we truly value what civic means?

00:24:18 Nina Ruddle

And the whole nature of civic is place-based and people-based.

00:24:21 Nina Ruddle

So it inherently will be very different in different places.

00:24:25 Nina Ruddle

But as Sophie and I are demonstrating, there's some clearly some commonalities and synergies in the way that we're working and enabling our work that is having similar impacts.

00:24:37 Nina Ruddle

Now, I guess they're in a relatively complex

00:24:41 Nina Ruddle

place-based environments with significant challenges.

00:24:45 Nina Ruddle

So there is a real interesting about how we translate and how we value the delivery of what we're delivering and its value in its

00:24:58 Nina Ruddle

purest sense, not by metrics, which we can do, you know, I can, as like Sophie, and like we all can, I can give you a list of numbers of people we've engaged with, but whether that engagement has had any impact on that person, or, you know, I'd rather have one impact on one person choosing to go to university or create a path in their lives that we've helped them navigate and connect to as education as a tool to drive the future that they want, that supports our place

00:25:28 Nina Ruddle

and our people, the place we love and the people that live in it, And so I think there's something about how do we really truly value civic and what does that really mean?

00:25:37 Nina Ruddle

I know there's lots of sort of publications about that and it goes back to.

00:25:42 Nina Ruddle

Sophie and I connected through the NCCPE, through the brilliant Paul Manners, but there was also, we had a discussion at an event in November at the LPIP hub because trust and that convening role and the value of it was really reflected in the feedback of all the LPIP Hubs, the four across the UK.

00:26:00 Nina Ruddle

The strong message I got was,

00:26:04 Nina Ruddle

We need to have convening roles and therefore they build the trust.

00:26:07 Nina Ruddle

So the LPIPs have done a great job, but the trust is just really starting to take hold and take root and wow, there's so many opportunities and then the funding ends.

00:26:17 Nina Ruddle

So there is something about looking longer as well as their value of the roles and relationships of being civic, of being convenient and not controlling.

00:26:26 Nina Ruddle

I think there is a lot of synergy in the way we're working, but in completely different geographies, I think.

00:26:32 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

That's really powerful.

00:26:33 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Thanks, Nina.

00:26:34 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

I think you've already touched upon some of the things I wanted to ask.

00:26:38 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

London and North Wales, they look very different.

00:26:42 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

London, messy, chaotic, high-density competition, North Wales, dispersed communities, long-term relationship building.

00:26:50 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So what do those difference mean in practice for innovation?

00:26:56 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Perhaps we can start with you, Sophie.

00:26:58 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

You can paint the London picture first.

00:27:01 Sophie Cloutterbuck

You'd think it'd be easier with so much options in London, but actually, it's messy.

00:27:07 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's really messy.

00:27:09 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And people go to different places and people use, as Nina mentioned earlier, she said it's the relationship.

00:27:15 Sophie Cloutterbuck

As much as you're with organisations, it's the people at the relationships.

00:27:19 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So sometimes relationships are there already and people are going to people who don't have the expertise and you'll be knocking on the door going, hang on, we probably have better expertise.

00:27:28 Sophie Cloutterbuck

How do we

00:27:30 Sophie Cloutterbuck

come that across in London.

00:27:31 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Literally, I was talking to the Greater London Authority yesterday about some skills work they were doing.

00:27:36 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And they were doing it with a Russell Group University, just one Russell Group University.

00:27:42 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And my question was, you have lots of post-1992 universities in London that used to be polytechnics, that used to do vocational learning.

00:27:53 Sophie Cloutterbuck

That is their skill.

00:27:54 Sophie Cloutterbuck

You want to look at vocational skills.

00:27:56 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Why didn't you bring the post-1992

00:27:59 Sophie Cloutterbuck

into the conversation who would understand more from that point of view.

00:28:03 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And his answer was, I'll be honest, I knew someone at that Russell group, so I just phoned him up.

00:28:08 Sophie Cloutterbuck

He said, now I've met you and I'm now on the list, going to be invited to the meetings, etc.

00:28:13 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It just hadn't occurred to him because he knew someone, he went to it.

00:28:17 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So that makes a mess again, because there's so many people who've got friends at universities in London who are working in London as well.

00:28:24 Sophie Cloutterbuck

But on the other hand, we have

00:28:27 Sophie Cloutterbuck

the businesses that can buy into innovation.

00:28:30 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We have the money coming into London.

00:28:33 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We do have more opportunities to work together as universities as well.

00:28:38 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So for example, the project I was talking about that London, I'm doing with myself at London Met, Tower Hamlets, I'm also doing with Queen Mary and UEL.

00:28:47 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I don't know if we would have been on that programme without Queen Mary.

00:28:51 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So that made it easier because I had a good relationship with Queen Mary.

00:28:55 Sophie Cloutterbuck

They invited us in to bid with them.

00:28:56 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So

00:28:57 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I think there's a lot of pros and a lot of cons, and I'm sure Nina's now going to say some ones that aren't the opposite, because I think as much as there is that, I think actually the more Nina and I have talked, there's actually a more commonality through the work we do, even though it seems so different, the areas.

00:29:16 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And as much as the challenges we're trying to deal with, you know, trying to work with will be different.

00:29:23 Sophie Cloutterbuck

as much as our neighborhoods and our citizens will be different.

00:29:28 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Even at my uni, I have 148 different languages spoken.

00:29:32 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I'm sure that it's going to be different.

00:29:35 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I think the commonality of how we build our relationships, how we listen to our partners, our stakeholders, our communities is actually the same.

00:29:45 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So I think that's the interesting part.

00:29:47 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I don't know what you think, Nina.

00:29:50 Nina Ruddle

I would completely agree.

00:29:52 Nina Ruddle

And I think the more that we speak, the more that I realise that the methods that we use and the way that we approach things, the way that we built the partnership and translated and navigated the partnership landscape, which is complex in North Wales for a different reason, not because of the numbers, but because we work across all sectors.

00:30:12 Nina Ruddle

So, and I know you probably do as well, but even with 104 universities, we've got two in North Wales.

00:30:19 Nina Ruddle

So we can work with them, but we can then mobilise action across the regional footprint that allows us to really push boundaries and innovate in the framework of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, which I use as a sort of North Star, if you like, for some of our...

00:30:37 Nina Ruddle

our work.

00:30:38 Nina Ruddle

And within that, it's how do we use the principles of sustainable development?

00:30:42 Nina Ruddle

And if you underpin everything you do with that, then actually you can't go far wrong with tackling poverty, inequality, climate change, all the big challenges that we've got.

00:30:51 Nina Ruddle

So I think in Wales, we are obviously devolved.

00:30:54 Nina Ruddle

We've got, I think, the Future Generations Act, Social Care and Wellbeing Act, they're progressive policies that are quite challenging to implement because they are

00:31:05 Nina Ruddle

really progressive in the way that they've been set out and in stature.

00:31:10 Nina Ruddle

And so the work I've done is trying to work with those policies and make them really

00:31:15 Nina Ruddle

alive for the people in the system delivering projects and doing things differently for citizens.

00:31:21 Nina Ruddle

So we listen and we involve them and then we do what we say we're going to do.

00:31:26 Nina Ruddle

So I think you don't necessarily need a framework to do that, but there's very clear, you know, collaborate as a first off, involve citizens, integrate where we can, which makes sense, look long term, which is one of the biggest challenges and wherever we can, trying to prevent problems from getting worse because

00:31:45 Nina Ruddle

That's one thing we don't want to do is that for me, the geography of Wales is 3 million in the whole nation.

00:31:53 Nina Ruddle

So we should be small enough to mobilise and innovate, which I think we are.

00:31:56 Nina Ruddle

And there's some great stuff going on in Wales.

00:31:58 Nina Ruddle

And at the moment I'm working in partnership with Caia Park, which is based in Wrexham, and it's the biggest housing estate in Europe.

00:32:06 Nina Ruddle

So it's a real challenge, it's a brilliant area.

00:32:09 Nina Ruddle

It's on the doorstep of the university and we are really creating place networks and partnerships with Caia Park so that

00:32:15 Nina Ruddle

actually, we can work together for the long term for the benefits of the people of Wrexham.

00:32:20 Nina Ruddle

And then that interfaces with the city board, which is part of the UK-wide Pride in Place programme.

00:32:26 Nina Ruddle

So what we're doing is constantly weaving together all of these different programmes that come from UK government, from our Welsh government.

00:32:35 Nina Ruddle

and making sure that the impact is what it should be for the communities that we serve.

00:32:40 Nina Ruddle

And it's not always right.

00:32:41 Nina Ruddle

In our region, it's smaller scale to London in a way, but then it's geographically, it's really diverse and really different.

00:32:51 Nina Ruddle

So it does make it interesting.

00:32:53 Nina Ruddle

But at the foundation of it all is

00:32:56 Nina Ruddle

people, and that's it.

00:32:57 Nina Ruddle

And people that care about place.

00:32:59 Nina Ruddle

And I always call it the coalition of the willing, I will work with and lean in and lean into and with the people that care about place in the same way I do.

00:33:09 Nina Ruddle

So you have that sort of common purpose and a commitment to change, which often public service has.

00:33:15 Nina Ruddle

But I think there's now a big shift in how we are working differently with third sector and businesses as well, to really leverage everything we can to just

00:33:25 Nina Ruddle

make our places the best they can be for the people that live there and that's at the foundation I think of everything we do and we're using the lever of a university and education as the core research to underpin that and I do feel in that way universities are really unique and privileged because we hold a set of skills

00:33:48 Nina Ruddle

that if used in the right way can make such huge differences.

00:33:52 Nina Ruddle

And I feel really privileged to be in that position to do this work.

00:33:55 Nina Ruddle

So I don't know whether Sophie agrees with that.

00:33:58 Nina Ruddle

Although it is challenging with all this previous challenges set out, it is a real privilege to do the work with citizens, communities and policy in the way that we do.

00:34:18 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

You could argue that one lesson is that no place is too small or too big or too complex for stewardship.

00:34:25 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

It's just that stewardship takes a different form depending on where you are.

00:34:30 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And it feels like a really strong theme in both of your reflections is that, you know, brokering trust development and covening are crucial.

00:34:41 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

They're not side activities.

00:34:44 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

and they seem to be actually the work.

00:34:46 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

But then the question is, if that's the case, why do you think that these intermediary roles, while they're so important, they are still so often undervalued?

00:34:59 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And maybe I can start with you, Nina, first on convening as an output that you can fund.

00:35:06 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And then I move up to you, Sophie, about how that looks like in the London platforms.

00:35:12 Nina Ruddle

I think it's a really interesting question.

00:35:15 Nina Ruddle

And I think it's because the role of convening and not controlling is that it goes back to some of those principles of integration.

00:35:24 Nina Ruddle

So sometimes you have to give power away in order to collaborate and organisations, if they're measured on a certain way of how they deliver or the impact they're having, that's what your priority will be.

00:35:36 Nina Ruddle

So it's sometimes the measurements we're creating in a system from governments, et cetera,

00:35:42 Nina Ruddle

can really curtail that collaborative effort because you have to sometimes not deliver against something or give power away or give resource away in order to pool it to have a greater impact that you may not feel now, but you might feel in 25 years' time or 50 years' time.

00:35:59 Nina Ruddle

So how do we, and it goes back to value again, doesn't it?

00:36:03 Nina Ruddle

How do we measure it?

00:36:04 Nina Ruddle

Do we measure it?

00:36:07 Nina Ruddle

And how do people value as in leaders, politicians, you know, policymakers value the work of translating voices and citizens into spaces to make decisions that actually have an impact.

00:36:21 Nina Ruddle

And I think there's something in how we measure that process and not seeing the skills as just soft or fluffy.

00:36:29 Nina Ruddle

The work that we do, I think, is almost the hard stuff.

00:36:33 Nina Ruddle

And it's that sort of dichotomy between hard and soft, one being good, one being bad.

00:36:37 Nina Ruddle

But actually, it's a combination of those two things.

00:36:40 Nina Ruddle

So.

00:36:41 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Sophie, you did mention before the issue of funding.

00:36:44 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So what makes a good intermediary when it comes to practice?

00:36:49 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And particularly, what should, in your opinion, remain when the funding ends, assuming these intermediary roles are really that important, which I think they are?

00:36:59 Sophie Cloutterbuck

No, I do think they are.

00:37:01 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And I think sometimes it's a difficult one because sometimes people want to fund you to do the role as well, which I'll give you an example in a minute.

00:37:10 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Nina just said it's not only about the time and the convening, but it's about we're not going in leading, but we are going in translating for people as well.

00:37:19 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And I think that's a skill we're looking at as well is the translation of policy of people, what we're hearing from the community, et cetera.

00:37:27 Sophie Cloutterbuck

But

00:37:28 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I think it's weird.

00:37:29 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Like some people really do see the role.

00:37:32 Sophie Cloutterbuck

My boss at work, their word is you need to be in the room.

00:37:36 Sophie Cloutterbuck

You being in the room is a job in itself.

00:37:39 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And they see my role, being in the room is how you start making the change.

00:37:44 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So that's really interesting.

00:37:45 Sophie Cloutterbuck

But I was working with a local council that I built up a very good relationship with.

00:37:49 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I thought I was just having a normal meeting with them one day and they went to me, oh,

00:37:56 Sophie Cloutterbuck

relationship with our local voluntary sector is entirely broken down.

00:38:00 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We're meant to be writing a new voluntary sector strategy with them.

00:38:04 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We were about to give them money, but we want to give all the money to you so you can set it up and you can do it instead.

00:38:11 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And we have.

00:38:12 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I've got colleagues involved and we have done the whole VCSF strategy for this local borough, us working with the local VCSFE, making sure they're totally as facilitators.

00:38:24 Sophie Cloutterbuck

They came to me because they trusted me.

00:38:26 Sophie Cloutterbuck

They came to me because they saw that role as a convener.

00:38:29 Sophie Cloutterbuck

They understood I was neutral.

00:38:31 Sophie Cloutterbuck

They could see what difference it would make.

00:38:34 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And actually something they've been trying to do for three years, we've completed now and it's moved on.

00:38:38 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And so that was local council saw that it's getting.

00:38:42 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Getting the feedback out there that this makes a difference, that's why I'm hoping projects like the HDRC, projects like that, people start to understand that that role is actually the really needed role.

00:38:53 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Because I think as well as people like us within higher education, a couple of the projects we've had the same role within the local council.

00:39:01 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And yesterday I was in a different meeting with the person who's got the same role within London NHS as me and Nina.

00:39:08 Sophie Cloutterbuck

it's important to have our roles.

00:39:09 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And so that's three different areas I'm talking about that all have our roles.

00:39:13 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And then if you look at private business, how many corporate social responsibility departments are there?

00:39:18 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Those people actually, when you take it down, are doing something similar to our roles as well.

00:39:24 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So I think it's not making everyone understand these roles are important.

00:39:29 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I think it's making higher education understand these roles are important.

00:39:32 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

That's actually quite powerful.

00:39:34 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Nina, you want to add something to that?

00:39:37 Nina Ruddle

The other thing that I think Sophie and I probably do well in our respective areas is connect people as well.

00:39:44 Nina Ruddle

So you'll have a knowledge of the partnerships, of the landscapes, of the people, of the place, and you will be able to then connect those people up with, you know, strong and weak ties.

00:39:56 Nina Ruddle

You call that, you have those people that you know in your immediate space.

00:39:59 Nina Ruddle

But what we'll have is very big networks of lots of people we know and know of us.

00:40:05 Nina Ruddle

And it's that connect

00:40:07 Nina Ruddle

role is crucially important actually but woefully undervalued and sort of misunderstood I think as well so that that connecting of people can actually drive such change and that knowledge institutional knowledge that we have is

00:40:25 Nina Ruddle

like Sophie's example, she has to be in the room.

00:40:28 Nina Ruddle

And I've got examples with that where you have to translate for everyone in the room in a way and bring that connecting ability and that ability to understand and frame it and reframe it for those different players so that actually we can all understand it and get that commitment to drive change.

00:40:46 Nina Ruddle

But I completely agree with Sophie, the value of connecting and civic work that we do,

00:40:55 Nina Ruddle

don't think is understood, therefore, it's, it's difficult to value because the nature of what we do, as we are talking now, you know, it evolves, it's organic, it's because we're humans, and we're all building relationships all the time, and they're changing and people move on.

00:41:10 Nina Ruddle

And you have to keep it's a constant cycle of understanding where people are coming from why and how and how you translate it and plug it back into the system to create change.

00:41:21 Nina Ruddle

And that for me is what education is about that underpinning of

00:41:25 Nina Ruddle

learning, research and evidence, but also relations.

00:41:28 Nina Ruddle

And I think universities are so wonderfully placed to be that glue to do that work.

00:41:35 Nina Ruddle

And I find it a bit sad sometimes that there's lots of people like us working really, really hard to do some fantastic work across the UK because they care and it's not as

00:41:48 Nina Ruddle

values as perhaps some others.

00:41:50 Nina Ruddle

And I think it goes back into that theoretical about the role of the university and public and private facing and how do we navigate those challenges as well, which is probably a far bigger debate not to be had now.

00:42:03 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

That's a really powerful and beautiful issue of being human.

00:42:07 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And I want to come back to the issue of translation, which I think is core.

00:42:12 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And it's going to be just a couple more questions before the end of the podcast.

00:42:17 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

One I think is crucial now, it's kind of lingering there and everyone talks about it, but we haven't unpacked is the issue of AI in relation to your role and in relation to local skills, hard soft or system skills as you referred to, Nina.

00:42:36 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

I would like to get your take on that because AI has come to disrupt every industry and how do you see this affecting the issue of building trust?

00:42:47 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Maybe I can start with you, Sophie, with the London perspective, because London is one of the places that is leading on that.

00:42:56 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I would say as much as AI is disrupting all business, or changing whatever you want to call it, all business, AI can't build relationships and AI can't build trust.

00:43:07 Sophie Cloutterbuck

As we know, AI isn't the old saying, it's people feed into AI, what comes out, it's got to come from somewhere.

00:43:15 Sophie Cloutterbuck

But it's not that tangible.

00:43:16 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I'll be honest, I don't think I could do this job just like this on screen the whole time.

00:43:21 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's the fact I go and have coffees with people in cafes.

00:43:25 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's the fact that we'll be out digging trees together, planting trees or whatever.

00:43:30 Sophie Cloutterbuck

That's where you build the relationship.

00:43:32 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's not over e-mail.

00:43:34 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's not that AI could write me some great emails that send and I could get these great relationships going.

00:43:39 Sophie Cloutterbuck

That's not how.

00:43:41 Sophie Cloutterbuck

that trust building and relationship work.

00:43:43 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So it's one area I'm not actually worried about AI taking over that much.

00:43:48 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's, you know, maybe it can help with systems and theories that people are looking at, but the actual day-to-day work is personal.

00:43:58 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It is, Nina said this right at the start of the conversation that we're not going in talking to businesses or talking to organisations or talking to councils, we're talking to people.

00:44:10 Sophie Cloutterbuck

and there's always gonna be people.

00:44:12 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So there's, I can't see, I mean, maybe I'm being naive, maybe Nina's got a better idea of how AI could take over, but I just don't, I think this is one area

00:44:24 Sophie Cloutterbuck

of work that AI can't do, because I also, we haven't touched on this much in the conversation.

00:44:31 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We're talking about skills we need, et cetera, but there is a personality needed as well for this work.

00:44:37 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And I don't mean you have to have a personality, you have to have a certain type of personality to do this work.

00:44:41 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's a long slog, it's a lot of letdowns, there's a lot of arguments, there's a

00:44:46 Sophie Cloutterbuck

a lot of everything else.

00:44:47 Sophie Cloutterbuck

You have to be tenacious.

00:44:48 Sophie Cloutterbuck

You have to be a certain sort of person.

00:44:50 Sophie Cloutterbuck

AI can't build that person and have that, you know, do you see what I mean?

00:44:54 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's personality.

00:44:56 Sophie Cloutterbuck

You know, I don't, Nina, I'm sure I agree, but we know lots of people across the countries, across the nations who do this work.

00:45:03 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And we've all, we might not be the same people, but all of us, there's something about us.

00:45:07 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We're similar.

00:45:09 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Thanks, Sophie.

00:45:09 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

I truly hope that you're right.

00:45:12 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And I also believe human relations is probably the only thing that cannot be replaced.

00:45:18 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

But then I see news like yesterday, Mark Zuckerberg creating his AI version where now employees don't talk to him.

00:45:24 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

They talk to his AI sort of version, which I find that quite disturbing.

00:45:30 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

But I still believe that you can build trust only on a face-to-face human interaction.

00:45:37 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And I think that's the stronghold, the part that will never be replaced by AI.

00:45:41 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So thanks.

00:45:42 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Nina?

00:45:44 Nina Ruddle

I think AI is going to be incredibly helpful for the roles that I think Sophie and I do.

00:45:51 Nina Ruddle

Now, the reason I say that is because doing some of the more transactional stuff, AI can be really helpful, make you really productive, really efficient and effective, where we can then deploy our skills in the stuff that we know makes the impact and the stuff that we're good at, you know, and I guess you enjoy.

00:46:11 Nina Ruddle

So for me, AI is an incredibly helpful tool for our work because it will allow us to do that transactional stuff easier to create that time.

00:46:20 Nina Ruddle

I think the other thing that AI can't do that, we can, is to build stories.

00:46:27 Nina Ruddle

And I mean that by bringing almost the heart and the emotion to everything.

00:46:31 Nina Ruddle

So we often, so the AI can do that transactional data, evidence, you know, and used in the right way can be an incredibly brilliant and powerful tool.

00:46:41 Nina Ruddle

I think the difference that we can bring is that stories, emotion, creative, that makes us uniquely human.

00:46:51 Nina Ruddle

And I think it goes back to this existential, like, what is it to be human?

00:46:54 Nina Ruddle

What does it mean now?

00:46:56 Nina Ruddle

And I think for me,

00:46:58 Nina Ruddle

We come, you know, a nation of storytellers in Wales and what are people's stories and how those stories are framed helps us drive what's important for policy and what we do to live well in society together, you know, so I think there's something for me

00:47:16 Nina Ruddle

can retell a story, but you can't bring that emotion into it.

00:47:19 Nina Ruddle

That thing that touches your heart and makes you want to do something or makes you want to stand up and be angry or be sad or be really frustrated with things because it's that that drives us as humans to create the change together or on our own.

00:47:35 Nina Ruddle

And I think that for me,

00:47:37 Nina Ruddle

is at the moment not what AI can do, but who knows where it's going to evolve into.

00:47:41 Nina Ruddle

But that there for me the biggest, those two areas of time back to do the stuff that we're good at and the heart, the emotion and the stories for that I think we probably do in our roles day in and day out.

00:47:54 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Thank you.

00:47:55 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

That's a really powerful intervention as well, Sophie and Nina.

00:47:59 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

A lot of the discussion now about participation and creation taking place.

00:48:04 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

They talk about the issue of co-creation and participation.

00:48:08 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

How do you create spaces where the voices of the community are really heard without being imposed by or silenced by jargon?

00:48:19 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Because your role is to filter that jargon.

00:48:20 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So what does it take to make participation genuinely consequential without just consultation?

00:48:26 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Yeah, I'd like to add just something else on the top of that as well, which I think is quite inherently London, is some of our boroughs

00:48:34 Sophie Cloutterbuck

are over researched and extracted and extracted and extracted and extracted information from them that never goes back to them.

00:48:42 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So a lot of the time when I go into a room, that's what it's coming from, is there a history of having information extracted from them.

00:48:53 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Before you start anything, you have to get an understanding of what that meant for them, how that hurt them, what that made them feel.

00:49:01 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Before you can even move on to what the actual listening piece.

00:49:05 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's back to what we were saying about our convening powers at the start.

00:49:09 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We're there to hear, we're not there to lead.

00:49:12 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And it's almost, I use the word mediator as well, or a bridge between these people that want to discuss whatever it might be for the co-production.

00:49:21 Sophie Cloutterbuck

The first place is we might think it's the same challenge that different partners are looking at, but is it?

00:49:26 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So going back to the project I was talking to you about in Tower Hamlets before,

00:49:31 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We've been doing this project for three years now and we had a meeting last week and we realised partners still don't have the same view on what the output should be.

00:49:42 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So it's very much about not just hearing but feeding back what a step and doing everything together step by step.

00:49:50 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's not about us as people coming, okay, we've heard you now we're going to go off and do this, see you in eight months.

00:49:57 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It was interesting.

00:49:57 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I'm doing some research for my LPIP fellowship.

00:50:01 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I said to one of the people I was interviewing, OK, when I've got the draft report, I'll send it over to you and you can see it before I publish it.

00:50:08 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And this was a community organisation, a VCS.

00:50:11 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And they wrote back to me going, do you know, you're the first person to ever have offered that.

00:50:16 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And we really like the fact we're the first person.

00:50:18 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So they feel like they're part of it and they understand the next steps.

00:50:23 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's even though I was going off doing something, slight different example, but still the example of people extracting, disappearing in the community, never hearing.

00:50:31 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So it shouldn't be about Nina or I in the room.

00:50:34 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I think that's what I'm trying to say.

00:50:36 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's about how we make those things happen without it being about us.

00:50:41 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Thanks, Sophie.

00:50:42 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Nina, do you want to expand on that issue of avoiding consultation and making it genuinely involving people?

00:50:50 Nina Ruddle

There's two really good examples of work that we've done.

00:50:54 Nina Ruddle

And I think just picking up on the bridge point, there's a beautiful phrase, and I can't remember what it is in Welsh.

00:51:00 Nina Ruddle

If you want to be a leader, be a bridge.

00:51:02 Nina Ruddle

You know, it's almost like people walk over you to get to the other side.

00:51:04 Nina Ruddle

And sometimes you do feel like that in partnership working.

00:51:07 Nina Ruddle

But, you know,

00:51:08 Nina Ruddle

I think there's two examples I wanted to give, which is where we've used different types of methods, engagement methods and research methods to work with communities in all sorts of ways.

00:51:18 Nina Ruddle

The first one is Wrexham City Board, which is again, UK Pride of Place programme across the UK.

00:51:25 Nina Ruddle

We worked with the town board as it was, and engaged 4,000 citizens across Wrexham to go, what is it, what's your one big idea?

00:51:33 Nina Ruddle

And we used postcards as a bit of a reflection and a nod to

00:51:38 Nina Ruddle

olden days when people used to send things and pictures and it was this beautiful method that engaged young people, old people, workplaces that was about what's your one big idea, what would you want to see in Wrexham in order to see the future you want.

00:51:55 Nina Ruddle

We collated that and did a thematic analysis.

00:51:57 Nina Ruddle

It went back into the city board and they've used that to create the plan.

00:52:01 Nina Ruddle

So there's a real clear line to go, we've done this engagement, we've understood and listened, we've created this content that then is driving the priorities of where that funding is going to go over the next 10 years.

00:52:14 Nina Ruddle

Now for me, that's massive because it will be evidence because the work that happens as a result of it is constantly going to be ongoing in Wrexham over the next 10 years plus.

00:52:24 Nina Ruddle

It's messy at the beginning, but it's a linear way of how do we have that feedback loop and evidence it.

00:52:30 Nina Ruddle

I think the second one I just wanted to touch on, it goes back to stories again.

00:52:35 Nina Ruddle

We've got a method called public narrative.

00:52:37 Nina Ruddle

It's a method that Marshall Ganz developed in Harvard.

00:52:41 Nina Ruddle

We use it and we coach and work with young people to use this method of sharing what matters to you and what you want an audience and people to do about it.

00:52:49 Nina Ruddle

And it's about building efficacy and advocacy and your leadership skills in young people.

00:52:54 Nina Ruddle

And we do it with all sorts of age groups.

00:52:56 Nina Ruddle

We hosted an event with the national Ace Hub, Adverse Childhood Experiences in North Wales.

00:53:02 Nina Ruddle

And we worked with three schools, a primary school and two high schools, Welsh medium and English medium.

00:53:08 Nina Ruddle

And those young people, some of primary school age, their years, they were nine.

00:53:13 Nina Ruddle

They stood on a stage with 120 people in the audience from Welsh government, policy leaders, policy makers.

00:53:19 Nina Ruddle

And they said, This is what I care about.

00:53:21 Nina Ruddle

And this is what I want you to do about it.

00:53:23 Nina Ruddle

And there was amazing narratives of a young girl who'd come to a school in Flintshire, and she'd been, well, Croeso Cymru, which is welcome to Wales.

00:53:33 Nina Ruddle

And she'd been welcomed in to Wales with open arms.

00:53:36 Nina Ruddle

And she was from Afghanistan.

00:53:38 Nina Ruddle

And she was she was came over here four years ago, and she just went,

00:53:42 Nina Ruddle

I want every child in Wales to have Croeso Cymru so they can be welcomed into Wales into, you know, and I think that's just that kindness and compassion at the heart of everything we do is so simple, but really sometimes so difficult to achieve.

00:53:58 Nina Ruddle

And that framework that we taught those young people on those stages, but the simplicity and the powerfulness of their messages, not only have they got that skill to take away in their lives, but actually then Welsh government and other partners were working together

00:54:12 Nina Ruddle

go and speak to those schools again and continue that journey with them to go, okay, how do we make this happen now?

00:54:17 Nina Ruddle

So they are two great examples for me.

00:54:20 Nina Ruddle

Like as you can see, I get quite animated, but it makes me realise that the work I do, the work we do, the work many of our colleagues do makes such a difference.

00:54:30 Nina Ruddle

And when you feel it and see it in that way, it really motivates you to continue doing this work despite some of the challenges.

00:54:39 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

That's amazing.

00:54:40 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

That's very powerful, especially because you're talking about impact.

00:54:44 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

It's real.

00:54:45 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

It's something that did happen and the longevity of it all.

00:54:50 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Yeah, I just, while Nina was talking, it got me thinking about young people as well and what we teach young people.

00:54:55 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So we have a project at London Met that's been running.

00:54:59 Sophie Cloutterbuck

20 years this year where we have 200 local young people in every day and part of it is about helping them with their GCSEs but a big part with these students and also our students at the university is teaching them to be active civic leaders.

00:55:14 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So we actually do courses with them on change, on campaigning, etc.

00:55:18 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And what's been really interesting is for the last 18 years, the young mayor of that borough has come from our project every year for the last 18 years.

00:55:29 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So the fact that they've gone, and these young people on this course, just to put it in context, were put on this course because they were predicted to fail their GCSEs.

00:55:38 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So not only are they passing their GCSEs, but they're learning about citizenship.

00:55:42 Sophie Cloutterbuck

They're becoming not

00:55:43 Sophie Cloutterbuck

just citizen, but really active citizens.

00:55:46 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Not only always got the mayor of the borough now, but also some are working with the Greater London Authority.

00:55:52 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Some are now actually going out being civic leaders themselves.

00:55:55 Sophie Cloutterbuck

So I think one part we have, I just want to make sure we got onto this podcast.

00:55:59 Sophie Cloutterbuck

All my projects, I have students from the university working on all of my projects.

00:56:04 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We are actively trying to teach them to be good civic leaders as well.

00:56:07 Sophie Cloutterbuck

The same with the young people that are coming in.

00:56:09 Sophie Cloutterbuck

We're doing the same.

00:56:10 Sophie Cloutterbuck

And I think the more we can do of that, the more people there will be with that thought again.

00:56:16 Sophie Cloutterbuck

There used to be more civic change.

00:56:19 Sophie Cloutterbuck

People as residents used to speak up more.

00:56:21 Sophie Cloutterbuck

They used to build more civic marches, etc.

00:56:25 Sophie Cloutterbuck

I think getting them to understand again is really interesting and seeing that movement as well is actually an important part of our role, but really great to see.

00:56:34 Sophie Cloutterbuck

Nina gets enthused.

00:56:35 Sophie Cloutterbuck

It's so lovely seeing this next generation who's hopefully going to allow us to retire, Nina.

00:56:47 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

I just have one last question, and this is about the Placecast magic wand.

00:56:52 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So I'm going to let you have a wave with the place-based innovation magic wand.

00:56:57 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And it can grant one wish, so you can have absolute power to do one thing, but it has to use the SMART approach: specific, measurable, actionable, recordable, and transferable.

00:57:09 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

I'm going to give you a few seconds to think about what is that one thing you would wish

00:57:15 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

that would happen that you could do either power that you can have to change something or change something directly into the system that would benefit the most of the people in the community.

00:57:28 Nina Ruddle

It just relates to my previous point I just made that I would like being specific every child in the UK

00:57:37 Nina Ruddle

to be educated with or understand the public narrative methods.

00:57:41 Nina Ruddle

So how they can use their voice to drive change, because then we would create leaders for the future that understand how they can influence and mobilise an audience about what matters to them.

00:57:54 Nina Ruddle

And then therefore we will create future leaders that can galvanise people to come together for the greater good.

00:58:01 Nina Ruddle

So I think for me,

00:58:03 Nina Ruddle

It's looking towards the future leaders that we need to be adaptable and resilient and tenacious and articulate and clear in what they want and need.

00:58:12 Nina Ruddle

So for me, having used the methods and the frameworks a lot with children across North Wales, I'd like every child in the UK to be able to benefit from it.

00:58:23 Nina Ruddle

So that would be my wand moment.

00:58:26 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Thanks, Nina.

00:58:28 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Sophie.

00:58:29 Sophie Cloutterbuck

See my wand moment isn't very SMART, because my wand moment would be that I'd want people to respect each other's expertise, and I think that would make a massive difference

to the day-to-day work that we do that if people just started respecting each other's expertise.

00:58:46 Sophie Clutterbuck

They're respectful of each other but the expertise but I know that's not smart so that's not the answer that you want necessarily.

00:58:54 Sophie Clutterbuck

SMART. I'd say put more funding into the convening roles, put more space to allow these networks to form because they do make a big difference in the long run.

00:59:04 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Right, those were two wishes, Sophie, and I like them both.

00:59:06 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So yeah, we'll grant both and to yours, Nina.

00:59:11 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So thank you very much, Nina, Sophie, for joining me.

00:59:14 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

What I think really comes through from this conversation is that innovation in place is not only about ideas or investment or infrastructure.

00:59:23 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And in fact, largely it is about relationship, it's about trust, it's about stewardship and the often unseen work of helping people, institutions and communities move together.

00:59:35 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So we've heard from you about the differences between London and North Wales because of scale context.

00:59:43 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

But it looks like there are some common lessons.

00:59:46 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Skills are broader than we often admit.

00:59:50 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Convening and translating matter a big deal.

00:59:54 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And we also know now, and we learn from you, that participation, if it's to mean anything, it has to lead to action.

01:00:05 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And we can probably start from a young age.

01:00:07 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And perhaps most importantly, we've been reminded that the so-called 'Glue Work'

01:00:12 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

work of local development, that brokering, that listening, that campaigning, that trust building, is not and should not be thought of peripheral to change.

01:00:22 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And in fact, it should be centre stage, especially by funding institutions like UKRI, because in many ways, that's what makes change possible.

01:00:31 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

So yeah, thank you both for sharing your insights, your experiences, reflections, and work, really powerful, really impactful.

01:00:39 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

I'm really pleased with this podcast.

01:00:41 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And

01:00:41 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

And thanks as well everyone for listening to the Placecast podcast from the Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub at the University of Birmingham, part of the LPIP programme financed by UKRI.

01:00:52 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

I've been Gerardo Javier Garcia and I hope you will join us again for the next episode.

01:00:58 Gerardo Javier Arriaga-Garcia

Thanks for listening and see you next time.