

CAN Insights

These are extracts from the blogs referenced from the CAN [Resource page](#). That page also provides links to:

- [What is a CAN?](#)
- [Blogs](#) - source of these extracts
- [Loomio group](#)
- [Report on Plymouth online collaboratory](#)
- Other CAN-related initiatives

Summarised by David Wilcox david@socialreporter.com. Please discuss, comment with your own insights, or suggest changes.

[Our society needs a new operating system](#) - March 2018

How many of you reading remember – or were alive! – when Steve Jobs launched the MacOS **operating system**, as a quick and easy way to access all the clever tricks computers were capable of?

What might be **the equivalent for our politics today** - and the society which upholds it? Some might say we need a similar leap in our operating systems. **What kind of “user interface” between calls and capacities might be invented:** one that would immediately make our essential resources - our individual and collective abilities, our natural resources – much more available for the benefit of the shared public space?

Insight: How about a civic operating system?

[What happened at our Plymouth "Friendly" last week?](#) - June 2018

... we began building on an original idea from Alternativet in Denmark, to design a process we have ended up calling a “Community Collaboratory”, which takes place over three parts. While most of the detail of that process will always be co-created by the local groups, we found that everyone wanted to have some sense of what it was in advance, so here is what we described:

1. **The Friendly:** an open gathering of as many micro-communities within a region as we can curate. This gathering – which takes place on a weekday evening for 2-3 hours – focuses on building trust through friendship. To start with, those gathered eat and drink together. And with the help of local artists providing music, theatre, spoken-word, movement and facilitated discussion, we begin to sense and establish some common purpose among those present.

2. **The Inquiry:** this is largely the same people who appeared at the Friendly, plus any additions that might complete the mix. They are invited into a longer and more facilitated process that inquires into who this community is, what’s good and what’s

lacking about it, and how those gathered can imagine a future they can all look forward to. There's a variety of methods that can be used, including [story-bridging](#), [U-lab](#), [constellation work](#), [conflict transformation](#), [change-gaming](#) – all these to be customised and co-designed with the local action group. The Inquiry generally takes place on one or more weekend days, allowing at least 4 hours of work together each time.

3. **The Action:** building on the previous two stages, the group uses open-space technology to decide upon a number of concrete projects they are going to embark upon together. By this time, enough links with local business and funders have been made to allow each project to be considered for support.

Insight: process to build trust and relationships, co-design, develop projects

[From Virtual to Actual](#) - February 2019

CAN is a generic term for new forms that are appearing everywhere. But they only qualify as a CAN if they deliver what they promise. A place – both physical and virtual – that enables citizens to meet the eco-system of activities and services available in their city or region. And on the basis of this range of resources, take actions that directly address the crises we face.

Insight: citizens meet their ecosystem and are enabled to take action

[CTRLshifts into next gear](#) - May 2019

CTRLshift was initiated by members of system-change organisations including Permaculture Association, Transition Network, Shared Assets, The Alternative UK and many others ([see here for partner organisations](#)).

System change is not loosely evoked. These organisations have adopted the task that Buckminster Fuller described as building 'a new model' to replace the old, dysfunctional growth economy that has almost destroyed our planet.

Day 1 offered a number of solution sessions, from Building the Open Credit Network, Citizen Led Economic Transition, Alternative Local Food Systems, Women as a Force for Social Change, to our own How to Build a Citizens Action Network. (The full list and presentations to be published soon).

Insight: CTRLshift is potentially a core network to feed and support CANs

[Citizen Spring: The new movement connecting social enterprises across Brussels and Antwerp](#) - May 2019

We have been trying to articulate what we mean by a "[Citizens Action Network](#)" (or a CAN).

This is a structure - both face-to-face and digital - that brings together civil and social enterprises in an area, along with citizens currently disengaged with politics. A CAN tries to build a combination of concrete services meeting actual needs, as well

as a growing agenda about the need for decision-making power at the lowest possible level.

[Citizen Spring](#) is a network based in Brussels that aims to connect local projects so that groups can identify ways to support each other, coordinate their activities, and promote sustainable and future-facing ideas.

Insight:connect with networks globally. Also a CAN is “a structure - both face-to-face and digital - that brings together civil and social enterprises in an area, along with citizens currently disengaged with politics. A CAN tries to build a combination of concrete services meeting actual needs, as well as a growing agenda about the need for decision-making power at the lowest possible level”.

[How To Make the 20s A Decade Of Transformation \(via Citizens' Action Networks\) July 2019](#)

A Citizen Action Network has at least three distinct qualities:

1. It's where any person – *regardless of their perceived values* – can go to, in their local community, to participate in the solutions to the multiple crises we face. And in so doing **find belonging, meaning and agency**.
2. It's where local civil society organisations can collaborate with local, national and global organisations to provide real, creative and effective solutions. While **prototyping a new democracy**.
3. It's where we can begin the process of **getting the UK to carbon neutral by 2025** without waiting for Westminster to agree. And in so doing, pattern-match with others around the globe to reach critical mass.

3 Stages of a Citizen Action Network

1. Deep Hanging-Out

- Meeting the usual suspects: people who have been constructing a new system of operation for a while. Civil society, social enterprise, volunteer networks
- Spending time in the community, finding out who is there but not appearing in the public spaces where people meet and discuss
- Go to meet people where they congregate. Listen and understand what binds them. Make friends.
- Always ask who is not yet in your field of vision. Are there people you are unconsciously ignoring or afraid of?

2. The Collaboratory

- We begin this process with **The Friendly**. Design an event that all of the above would feel welcome at. This may not be a conversation up front. Ideally free food and drink. Invite artists – music, dance, theatre etc – to create and run an event that would help people to find emotional equilibrium with each

other. Through shared experience – eg from witnessing a remarkable piece of theatre, humour, magic – weave surprising bonds of trust.

- We follow this with **The Inquiry**: working with the same group (not rigidly), moving into a space of inquiry. This is not unlike a People’s Assembly but with the hard edge of knowing you will move into Action after. How do you see your community today? How would you like to see your community in 2030? Avoid the rabbit holes of fixing the current system. Or imagining you have to start from scratch: many of the building blocks will already be present in the space. This is a place for shared imagining. Work full days at all levels: constellation work, mapping, theatre and improvising... the full tool box. What is being imagined frames the CAN. What is needed to bring it about is in the CAN.
- The final Collaboratory part is **Action**, where we begin to build a Citizen’s Action Network. If you have the optimum mix in the room described above, the CAN arises from collaboration. Those with access to resources – not just their own, but also from outside the community - bring them into the space to meet the shared vision. The sort of things that might be on offer in a CAN could be food/energy/social enterprise hubs, learning clubs, “space invaders” (taking over empty buildings to use for talking, working, re-enchanting), local currency. Everyone plays a part, including joining a carefully chosen (or designed) digital network/group of networks.

3. Activation:

- Turn the CAN into a ‘package’ everyone might join, regardless of their values. To achieve this, you have to develop attractors – from food and energy deals to free stuff (meaning “access to excess” produce or services, for example free cinema tickets, free transport).
- To get to those who are not bothered, or alienated, sell this package door to door – possibly with young people earning Countercoins (ref).
- People can join the CAN digital network. Every member has a web page of their own and can sign up to multiple spheres of interest.
- Everyone is invited to monthly events which consist of something ‘Friendly’ and something more like a People’s Assembly. Followed by chances to raise money for ideas. The model for this is Devon Convergence. [ref]
- CANs around the country form a network through which they share ideas and resources. They could also develop a shared manifesto of new political ideas, arising from this new political space.

Insight: In a CAN anyone can find belonging, meaning and agency. Civil society organisations can collaborate with local, national and global organisations to provide real, creative and effective solutions - while prototyping a new democracy. We can begin the process of getting the UK to carbon neutral by 2025. There is a three-stage process to achieve this.

[More Radical Than Expected](#) - August 2019

In the weeks leading up to this 100th editorial, it's become clear to us that what we initially thought of as a simple ask – a democracy that properly reflects human needs and capacities – is in fact a truly radical demand. [Citizen Action Networks](#) are closer to a [benign or friendly anarchism](#) than simply municipalism. Even the new municipalism – which [we have often profiled here](#) – tends to be trapped in the existing and dysfunctional party-political framework.

Insight: [Citizen Action Networks](#) are closer to a [benign or friendly anarchism](#) than simply municipalism.

[Mastering Overwhelm](#) - September 2019

A CAN might include spaces to meet, learning clubs, crowd-funding hubs, and much more. It will likely have its own currency, attaching a different kind of value to its activities. And – when the time is right – a digital network, specifically designed to amplify the network of relationships built amongst the people. When all this is achieved, the CAN becomes a concrete unit of a new, broader system, with a new political and active culture, capable of responding to the multiple crises we now face. The CAN might be missing piece of the puzzle in the search for individual agency in a shared space.

Insight: CANs are likely to have its own currency, a digital network, and become a concrete unit of a new, broader system.

[This Really Is From The Grassroots Up](#) - September 2019

Trying to take whole system action slows everything down when we clearly need to accelerate. Unless you work at the level of the microcosm. Capturing the essential patterns of how things fit together well at a manageable level – say a town, city or region. Then offering that as a **prototype for rapid acceleration** across the nation, even the world. This brings everything within our reach.

Of course, there is no one-size fits all – **the prototypes cannot be rigidly replicated**. Nor can they be scaled up by a central body. Instead, for speed, they must be fluid, capable of adapting to the conditions and the people they find themselves in.

We tend to describe **the elements of each one of these prototypes as fractals**. Partly because that suggests the conditions in which these elements can be found are naturally occurring. And partly because the nature of a fractal is to replicate itself in relation to its environment: giving rise to a very diverse set of responses.

Insight: work at the local level to develop prototypes that cannot be rigidly replicated, but can adapt to local conditions. The prototypes will be made up of fractals.

Come And Play March 2020

After three years of reporting, engaging and co-creating with you all, we've seen six ways to focus energy and give rise to a future we can all look forward to. If you're already a co-creator, [click here](#). And if you can, please [contribute](#)!

1. **Telling the story** – let's generate new media, narrative, myth making
2. **Shaping the system**– for over a decade, people have been developing a new socio-economic-political system that makes the old one obsolete. Whether we call it the Well-Being or Regenerative or Transformative System, how do we work better together to make it visible and effective? Make it the system of choice?
3. **Design democracy** – we're living in a new era of democracy. Community assemblies and juries, flatpack democracy, citizen action networks – there are so many new mechanisms and structures available for deliberation, decision making and good governance. Let's build the architecture for the age of people power.
4. **Share learning** – what do we need to know to make ourselves capable of a better life? How do we upgrade ourselves – individually and collectively?
5. **Build economies** – when does caring, volunteering and activism become paid work? How does the ingenuity of people working together, responding to the problems in their environment, give rise to a new economy? Welcome to the 4thsector.
6. **Create the feel** – if the old politics was smoke-filled rooms, with a top table of career politicians telling the rest of us what to think, what does the new politics look and feel like? Viscerally, energetically, aesthetically?

In addition to these six entry points, we're highlighting two core practices of the new politics. Firstly, the patient **construction of Citizen Action Networks**, connecting every kind of person to the cosmo-local solutions already available.

CANs (a generic term) are already taking shape in many different shapes and sizes around the country. Observing the unique way they draw in people of all different political tribes, they may have the potential to become new socio-political units in the era of post-party-politics. Let's build!

Secondly, the **importance of equipping ourselves**, personally, for the very different future that lies ahead. That includes learning how to take back our own minds from the incessant and pervasive trance of the mainstream news, advertising and even social media. That doesn't mean becoming a monk. But it does suggest actively developing our capacities for more autonomy and creativity.

Insight: we need to develop CANs, in order to connect every kind of person to the cosmo-local solutions already available. At the same time we need to equip ourselves personally for the very different future that lies ahead. The are six energy pathways: Telling the story, Shaping the system, Designing democracy, Sharing learning, Building economies, Creating the feel

Cause and Effect March 2020

we have begun to explore all of these questions within the newly launched Action Forum of The Alternative UK. If you haven't had a look yet, there are six *mutually inclusive* paths to a different future. In other words, although there are six different entry points, each implies the other five within them. Integrating them is what brings forth a new system of change.

... this is our attempt to take a lot of the good and great *talking* about collaboration that we do, and turn it into collective *action* that is capable of rising to the moment.

This is not another [murmuration of many small interactors](#), producing intriguing shapes in the sky (itself a good metaphor for the current state of play). What's evolving is more [like a mycelium network](#) of projects that integrate and replicate through a growing awareness of, communication between, and relationship with each other. It's more – much more - than the sum total of its parts.

Insight: integration of the six A/UK development pathways can bring forth a new system of change. What's emerging is a dense network of connected elements (mycelium).

Want to keep a city participating in Dagenham, or citizens assembling in Paris? Online community tools are now powerful enough to support vital activity - April 2020

Coronavirus, and its strange distancing, compels us all to rethink how we come together. Our mutual care and sense of collective responsibility is expressed by NOT being physically close, or even proximate to each other.

So counter-intuitive is this - and perhaps especially so, after our recent periods of street activism, whether over environmental or constitutional matters - that it's no surprise we've rushed to our online spaces, especially in their more sociable forms.

And where they're not sociable enough, we've made them more so. People use Instagram for Q&As, or Zoom to conduct large, pulsing conferences, or Facebook to instantly organise their community's mutual aid.

References [A time for quick action](#) Tessy Britton blog about how Participatory City [Every One Every Day](#) is [moving online](#)

Insight: online community tools are good enough, and sufficiently widely adopted, to enable action.

Everyone Is Implied May 2020

How can we keep going our intensely personal thoughts about what is wrong and needs to be righted, as a shared conversation? So that those people who have

recently begun to know their neighbours, might find some onward field of action as we move out of lock down?

To this end, over this period we have been participating – either remotely or up close – in at least 11 kinds of fast developing genre of citizen action networks (CANs). CANs do the work of developing the people power arising from new and deeper thinking about the future:

- [Transition Towns](#)
- Trust the People (arising from XR's Future Democracy Hub. See this week's blog)
- [One Small Town](#) (an ambitious project to transform the economy through the actions of only three hours of citizens voluntary labour per week).
- [Participatory Cities](#) (Dagenham)
- [Co-operation Jackson](#)
- [Preston Model](#)
- [Flatpack Democracy](#)
- [Commoning initiatives](#)
- [Co-operatives /Platform co-operatives](#)
- [Pop Plymouth / CAN](#)
- [Neighborocracy](#)

Each have slightly different dynamics between the individual and the local collective, the wider tribe of those that share values and the state. But what they have in common is a determination to 'reclaim' their power and agency from 'business as usual' – the growth economy that has weakened our social bonds and destroyed the planet.

Insights: there are different genres of CAN that might share learning

[Alter-Narratives, Co-create Sheppey and TinCan.TV : our Loomio Action Forums are getting active](#) May 2020

References

- Alter-Narratives
- Co-create Sheppey CAN
- TinCan.tv

Insight: A/UK Loomio forums are helping CANs to form

[Scenario Planning - July 2020](#)

In similar spaces of intense reflection around the world, more people have connected the dots between corporate globalisation, the unchecked extraction of natural resources from the planet, the instrumentalization of human beings for mechanical work and wasteful consumption, and the pandemic.

To bring together groups of response-able citizens, willing to build the relationships with everyone in their community in order to 'wake them up in time to get out the house' is what a CAN is for. [Trust the People](#), [Local Trust](#), [Transition Towns](#), [Devon Convergence](#) – all of these are CANs, trying every day to attract and serve new and more people.

Insight: further examples of CANs

[How do we do the “feminisation of politics”, asks Indra Adnan? Municipally, locally—or starting with the basic quality of our relationships? July 2020](#)

It's what we've found as we've engaged with many different areas and constituencies: a thick relational web of women-centered and women-initiated works, keeping atomised individuals and groups connected. And with executives above them, that - surprise surprise - are still often predominantly male (or practice power in a predominantly masculine way, even if the biological numbers are even).

References Indra Adnan on [The Feminisation of Politics – an Alternative Journey](#),

Because women have historically been kept in the home to nurture the family, their understanding of both human strengths and weaknesses, needs and offerings is part of their cultural heritage. You might say it is because women understand care and flourishing that they do care and cause flourishing.

But it's also that their idea of a human being is holistic (or whole-istic). They see much more in a person than their working potential, their ability to succeed or fail within the current rat race. They see the spark of individuality in a child that no-one else sees and continue to see that in adults too.

For that reason, women need to be at the heart of the design process of a new society. Where old models have failed, rather than improve incrementally upon the old model, they are already evoking new visions of a society that could respond directly to the crises we are now facing.

Insight: Community initiatives reveal a thick relational web of women-centered and women-initiated works, keeping atomised individuals and groups connected. Women need to be at the heart of the design process of a new society.

[Look to communities - they're the real testbeds of tech innovation - August 2020](#)

I suggest we need the equivalent of “homebrew” digital clubs today. These would be locally specific, friendly spaces (we assume the spaces would be virtual as much as actual). Here, residents and citizens could explore, benchtest, and co-develop tech that serves their concrete and communal needs. (We've [called for Learning Clubs](#) before on this site).

It's the kind of club we (at A/UK) easily imagine being an element in a [CAN](#) (a citizen action/community agency network). But you can see it happening in practice with Ed Saperia's [Newspeak House](#), which regularly matches needful communities with tech practitioners.

Presuming that central government doesn't have the willingness or foresight to support such civic tech, is this where philanthropic or foundation money could usefully go? The recent embrace of readily available social tech by hundreds of thousands of mutual aiders shows, at the very least, there is demand that would respond to possibilities and partnerships.

Could one part of the question, "what is the next level of organisation for this flourishing mutualism?" be about how we develop the next stage of civic tech? That is, not just for survival needs, but as a springboard - towards ambitions and visions for more self-organising and self-provisioning?

Insight: we need digital learning clubs in CANs, and evolution of civic tech to support CANs.

[The pandemic invites us to be bigger](#) - September 2020

Our caution on the GND is that, under our current UK regime at least, the government end of the bridge may only fitfully be constructed (if at all). Those with enough energy and inclination to contribute to the slow, uncertain grind towards a progressive parliamentary majority - one that might change direction at the macro-level - have our full support.

But we would prefer to advocate for change right now, at the level of community, network and region, made concrete through working prototypes and constitutes. Our theorising of [CANs \(citizen action/community agency networks\)](#) is being taken up by several localities - and one of the common themes is the importance of a combination of education, deliberation and media services to be provided by CANs.

How much more calming and grounding it would be to speak and explore with your fellow citizens about the measures needed to tide you through the next wave of biospheric disruption? That is, instead of being barked at by far-off government regimes who themselves are in a crisis of their own authority, by virtue of their own erratic and compromised behaviours?

Insight: a common themes in change now is the importance of a combination of education, deliberation and media services, to be provided by CANs