

# The Bridges Project

*New expertise for policy  
in an age of uncertainty*



Counterpoint is a research consultancy that uses social science methods to examine social, political and cultural dynamics. With a focus on how civil society operates in different contexts, Counterpoint helps governments, NGOs and visionary businesses to develop solutions for more resilient and prosperous societies.

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## I The Bridges Project: Context and Objectives

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*Catherine Fieschi and Heather Grabbe*

The rise in populist politics in Europe is weakening support for core elements of the open society, particularly the protection of vulnerable groups, inclusive democracy and the promotion of rights. The centre-ground of politics is shifting away from some core liberal values, which is in turn reducing progressive options in mainstream policy debates.

The situation is serious, but not hopeless. Many high-level policy-makers and centre-party politicians still support the open society, but they believe they cannot win public support for liberal policies in areas such as minority rights, migration and pluralism. However, recent advances in scientific research show that they often have outdated assumptions about how voters form their preferences, opinions and values. If they understood these insights and were able to apply them, policy-makers would have a wider range of options. They would be able to frame policies that nurture open societies in ways that would win wider public support.

The Bridges Project aims to bring new insights from researchers and experts on human behaviour to the attention of policy-makers and policy-oriented activists, and help to apply them to concrete policy and campaigning dilemmas. The premise underlying this project is that policy choices and strategies on many open society issues are underpinned by outdated assumptions about how voters form their preferences, opinions and values, and how they respond to state intervention. Our theory of change is that research insights can influence policy-makers if they see how to apply them to solve policy dilemmas. The main research insights that can do this are those concerning human motivation, preference formation, development of values and norms, and the psychological and physiological basis of human actions. What do citizens really value? How do they make up their minds? What are the real concerns underlying votes for extremist parties? And what is the best way to address them while remaining committed to progressive open societies? If policy-makers and policy-oriented civil society actors base their work on accurate assumptions about citizens' preferences and concerns, they will be more effective in shaping and communicating policies and in developing advocacy strategies.

This essay outlines the main challenges facing the open society in European politics today. It then sets out five examples of insights from the behavioural sciences that offer ways of approaching the issues more effectively, with case studies of where they have been applied in practice.

## Main challenges

### The nature of the problem: how politics has changed

In bringing new insights about human behaviour into policy-making, the Bridges Project is about the next frontier of democratic politics – which is to upgrade the quality of interaction with voters. The technologies used in politics are still largely those inherited from the 1950s, based on what were then innovative approaches to consumers: mass politics was seen as being like mass consumption, with a set of parties and policies made for large sections of society and from which voters chose as if selecting a mass-produced product. Opinion polling emerged as the key tool through which political parties and government departments catered to public opinion and public preferences, much as firms began to use marketing techniques to gauge their consumer base.

The 1990s saw the rise of focus groups, as parties recognised that a more textured understanding was needed as political publics became increasingly educated and sophisticated, as well as differentiated. But this was still an era of mass politics, with political debate structured by a broad left/right division, and communication between political elites and the public conducted through one-size-fits-all media dominated by top-down public broadcasting. In Europe, a mass welfare system rested on similar understandings of public preferences, governed top-down from states to citizens.

Today's societies are much more fragmented, with people's views and preferences shaped by multimedia technologies through which individuals express complex identities, shifting preferences, and growing frustration on varied and simultaneous platforms that are often of their own making. Communication in the political sphere is a very different game because negotiations between citizens and the state happen through multiple channels and often in informal fora. Citizens have new places to form preferences, express dissent and mobilise with like-minded people; but state actors have been slow to develop methods of policy formulation and policy delivery that cater to the changed expectations of citizens. Opinion polls are too broad-brush to capture the new texture of public opinion and the complexity of the contemporary citizen – yet polls and surveys are still a central basis on which policy-makers make decisions. As a result, citizens are presented with political choices and political solutions that seem irrelevant to their concerns and aspirations, because those are poorly captured, poorly understood and oversimplified.

### The scope of the problem faced by governments, policy-makers and activists

Because political parties, governments and other public actors often cling to old-fashioned techniques to gauge public opinion and public preferences, their political dialogue over policy options often seems to citizens to be irrelevant, inaccurate or discredited. A telling example is the debates in several European countries around net immigration, with governments focusing on numbers while publics are concerned about community impact and interaction. The result is shrinking membership of political parties and ever-lower turnout at elections, while policy-makers struggle to meet conflicting demands with reduced state resources.

Populist and anti-establishment politics is thriving as a consequence, because it seems to offer simple, emotionally reassuring solutions to complex problems. Mainstream parties are unable to offer voters significant choices in economic policy or welfare systems because both centre-left and centre-right have embraced the market and globalisation to a greater or lesser extent. Many policy debates have been emptied of political choices, thereby giving the impression to voters that all choice is technical, while no proposed solution seems to be technically working. Politics has therefore been relegated to the fields of identity and exclusion, nationalism and marginalisation – and attacks on political and other elites. This has allowed xenophobic populists to expand their appeal beyond the small minority of outright racists who have always voted for them, and to move into the new territory of bashing elites, public institutions and the EU. Many of the people voting for these parties have never voted for extremists before, and their votes are motivated by a complex of fear, outrage, exclusion and hopelessness.<sup>1</sup>

Over the past half-decade, the political debate about social diversity in Europe has become increasingly negative, and policy proposals to protect vulnerable groups and manage diversity, migration and inclusion in Europe have become more restrictive. Supporters of open society causes do not know how to defend them: officials and diplomats no longer understand what is politically feasible, particularly around vulnerable groups, migration and rights. At the same time, civil society advocates feel that they have run out of ways to interest the public and policy-makers in their causes. Policy-oriented civil society actors are looking for ways of exerting effective counter-pressure to racists and exclusionary politics, but they find that framing them in terms of rights and diversity no longer works.

Often this is because both groups lack deep knowledge about how people come to hold opinions and make choices, which is available from academic disciplines that policy-makers and politicians rarely come into contact with, particularly in the

behavioural sciences. As a result, policy-makers and activists supporting open society values and policies are pressured by populist politics into simplistic interpretations of social and political phenomena, and negative feedback loops have developed whereby policy-makers dare not propose progressive policies because they fear negative public reaction, putting at risk policies, laws and institutions that protect the open society.

#### **The European dimension**

At EU level, officials and politicians are feeling even more baffled about how to respond. The officials and politicians who work in the institutions in Brussels inevitably live further removed from what's happening in European societies than national and regional politicians. This is partly the result of design: the EU was set up to foster European integration by building projects around long-term goals agreed by its member states. These projects were always intended to be isolated to a large extent from the vicissitudes of national politics, so that officials can work on them consistently over many years and many changes of government. They were never supposed to be as responsive to political change as their national counterparts are, because their job is to work in the European interest as a whole.

The result is that many EU-level policy-makers' understanding of the daily social reality across different parts of Europe is broad-brush at best. The framing of policy is done by the European Commission, which initiates all EU legislation and oversees its enforcement. The Commission is staffed by officials who usually work in the same institution their whole lives, with very little rotation to experience other environments or live in other European cities. The Commission is a hierarchical and rules-bound organisation, so officials focus a great deal on internal processes and constraints. The plethora of initiatives to 'bring the Commission closer to the citizens' indicates how difficult it is to narrow this distance, which is structural and built into the design of the EU.

There are many forms of direct and indirect accountability to voters – but officials work at a distance from voters' life experiences, beliefs and fears. Commission proposals are discussed and negotiated with all the member states through the Council of Ministers, where representatives of the 28 countries meet. There national officials meet their counterparts from the equivalent ministry in the other countries to amend Commission proposals, form common positions, and consider future action. Officials from national ministries can influence, alter, resist or even stop Commission proposals. Similarly, Members of the European Parliament have the power to amend legislation and other proposals, and even block to them completely.

However, every EU institution is to a large extent a consensus-building machine among political elites from different countries. The aim of their work is to find the lowest common denominator, and what is broadly acceptable to every country and many different interests, from employers to trade unions, consumers, companies, environmental campaigners, civil society organisations and so on. That means that EU-level actors are very focused on the interests and people involved in their policy sphere, and not necessarily responsive to broader social trends.

The EU has made many attempts to address its structural 'democratic deficit'. One of the most frequent is to increase the powers of the European Parliament, which in theory enhances democratic accountability because MEPs are directly elected by voters. However, the European Parliament aggregates the preferences and choices of voters through party 'families' that are very big tents at EU level – and therefore not very sensitive to changes in voters' preferences and what underlies them. The Council of Ministers and European Council are also insensitive to the flux in views across the European population because national interests are represented through one person per member state, regardless of size.

Because of the way that the EU works, and its structural, partly intentional, insensitivity to political and social trends, EU officials have much to gain from the Bridges Project. The insights into human behaviour, and the social and cultural springs from which it comes, can help them to interpret better the political and other signals from many different national and regional contexts. Because they work on long-term policies, it is especially important that they understand what lies behind political and social trends, and what policies voters will want and be best served by over time.

#### **A possible way forward for the open society**

These political trends pose a threat to the values that underpin the open society when they lead to attacks on human rights, reduction of pluralism in politics, and limits on freedom of expression. Counterpoint and the Open Society Foundations are particularly concerned about the impact they can have on the policies, institutions and public funding that protect minorities and nurture the pluralistic and inclusive political discourse of diverse societies. Populist politicians often attack this infrastructure of the open society, and policy-makers and activists are fighting a defensive battle to maintain it.

The Bridges Project offers new ways to limit the impact of xenophobic populism on the infrastructure that supports the open society. First, it encourages policy-makers and activists to develop a more in-depth understanding of the new political

landscape, in order to help them diagnose their publics' grievances more accurately and respond to what people are really concerned about, not the proxies put forward by the populists. Second, it offers new tools to respond better to those grievances and deliver what voters really want but what is not often captured by mainstream techniques of measuring public opinion.

The project has begun to identify transmission mechanisms by which policy-makers, politicians and activists can be persuaded to adopt new insights through which to elaborate their policies and strategies. Below are some examples of how these insights have been used to change policy and political strategy in many countries in Europe.

## Five examples of how new insights and tools can be applied in practice

### Diagnosing grievances accurately so that politics meets the real concerns of voters

In the past few years, a new received wisdom has emerged in political debates concerning citizens' views on migrants and immigration. The story, peddled by right-wing populists – is that a conspiracy of silence around migrants and immigration on behalf of major parties has misled voters as to the real costs of migration and diversity. This story has in turn led to the view (widely accepted among mainstream politicians and policy-makers) that 'Voters are angry, especially about migration'. This verdict influences their understanding of the rise of xenophobic right-wing populist parties, and has led mainstream parties to propose policies that were supposed to quell that anger. But are voters really angry? And are they angry about immigration? Or is there a different set of emotions at play?

Our research, and that of several others, suggests that other emotions underpin citizen attitudes, and they are more to do with anxiety, abandonment and betrayal. Whatever anger exists is there because these other sentiments have not been addressed, or have even been ignored by the political class and policy-makers.

An accurate understanding of the emotions that motivates voters is crucial to formulating accurate and effective policy provisions that offer an alternative to populist claims. The problem is rooted in deep anxiety about new forms of uncertainty (as David Tuckett suggests in his work<sup>2</sup> and as confirmed by our own research on the ground) and around trusted institutions (public health, public education, housing, transport). The policies that would address this anxiety are ones that would reassure voters about the role, stability and availability of such institutions,

rather than policies that focus on capping immigration. The latter theme is, as one of our researchers put it, no more than a 'convenient molecule' that gets attached to these other more substantial issues. Policy-makers' focus on the molecule rather than the underlying grievances and emotions is unproductive and even dangerous, since it fans the flames of a self-reinforcing nationalism.

To shift the focus from 'retribution' and 'rejection' to 'reassurance' means putting in place policies that create secure environments; drawing on the relationships that reassure and soothe individuals and communities; or creating connections where voters feel they are lacking. This can range from more resources dedicated to promoting neighbourhood exchanges to privileging family relationships in social care.

### Case study 1: Naming the right emotion to frame the right policy

Counterpoint's research on the 'Reluctant Radicals'<sup>3</sup> suggests that supporters of right-wing populist parties are far more anxious than they are angry. Voters feel nostalgic, abandoned, forgotten, disconnected, discarded and, sometimes, hard done by. But few of them voiced anger. To check this analysis, we held community-level conversations around the themes of integration, immigration and the management of ethnic diversity in France, Finland and the Netherlands. Our aim was to understand the real nature of the grievances that lurked beneath the headlines.

#### How things were handled

Policy-makers and politicians knew that voters were resentful of their circumstances and resentful of what they perceived to be the policy-makers' repeated failures to address them effectively. As surveys and polls seemed to show rising anger towards levels of immigration, policy-makers in several European countries have embarked on campaigns (both communication and policy) to cap the number of immigrants. Recent election results show that despite the much-publicised talk of caps and restrictions, citizens still name immigration as a top worry and 'putting a stop to immigration' as a policy goal they would wish to see.

#### Why it wasn't working

Politicians and policy-makers tend to frame their policies and objectives in response to headlines which are too often perceived as an accurate reflection of the public sentiment. However, both headlines and polling

data capture – at best – the surface of what's going on. Politicians have set too much store by their being an accurate reflection of how people really feel, or what they really want, resulting in ineffective policies or, even worse, policies that backfire.

### **What we did differently**

By looking beyond the headlines to capture grievances with more sophisticated instruments than survey or polling data, we aimed to offer a more textured and accurate picture of citizen grievances and sentiment. This helps policy-makers to elaborate their policies more effectively.

When we engaged with various communities, striking differences emerged. In France, the conversations quickly turned to the role of public services and a perception that housing allocation and public service cuts were conspiring to create a feeling of geographical isolation and unease. When probed, the participants admitted that they were less concerned about migrants and far more concerned about their own sense of abandonment by political elites at a time when the world was 'so unpredictable'. These conversations, which brought participants from diverse backgrounds together, were respectful and constructive. The main emotions that surfaced were confusion and anxiety, not anger. The results were similar in Finland and the Netherlands, and showed that distinguishing between anger or anxiety as the emotion fuelling resentment and mobilisation is key.

### **What the impact was**

We were able to take this evidence to policy-makers. In France, for example, the diagnosis prompted the use of newly produced maps to target specific communities who were at risk of isolation. This is a major step: rather than looking at the concentration of migrants, policy-makers instead looked at how to tackle a major source of real anxiety.

This diagnosis is important also to ensure opinion pollsters ask the right questions. To get an accurate picture of the collective subconscious, politicians, commentators and pollsters all need to see what's in the 'hidden wiring' behind how people are seeing the issue.

The next step is to take this analysis to ministries and politicians, in order to determine which policy lines might actually have purchase over voter behaviour, mobilisation and protest by offering a form of political engagement on the terms that matter deeply to people, rather than on superficial issues selected by broad-brush polling and shallow media analysis.

### **Using frames to activate the values that promote progressive policies**

When it comes to communicating about an issue or policy, cognitive linguists such as George Lakoff argue that humans use particular frames to present arguments or tell their story. These frames are bundles of metaphors and associations. The frames people choose when communicating about an issue can engage people's underlying values in a profound way, which in turn affects how people think about an issue. If you think about how to frame what you say, you are really thinking about how to appeal to people's deeper values.

Counterpoint's recent work on reframing human rights illustrates the potential of this approach.<sup>4</sup> Many UK activists bemoan the growing lack of interest, and even outright hostility, towards the UK's Human Rights Act and subsequent policies, so Counterpoint applied a framing analysis inspired by the work of Professor George Lakoff. The aim was to identify the frames that activate the values that might help the public view human rights in a more positive light.

We first identified the frames that activists had been unwittingly activating. They had accidentally triggered deeply negative reactions to human rights by appealing to ambiguous values that may not necessarily promote human rights. Through an exercise of reframing, we suggested alternative frames that might tap into positive conceptions of human rights and that might more readily trigger an interpretation of values that foster support for human rights. Simply by outlining the right frames and being aware of the different interpretation of values to which to appeal, the work has led human rights organisations to re-evaluate the ways in which to appeal to the public, which frames to reference and which to leave out.

### **Case study 2: Framing arguments to build support for human rights in the UK**

Counterpoint's analysis of human rights coverage in the UK found that there is substantial opposition in the media to applying human rights to everyone. Minority groups are regularly presented as undeserving of human rights protections, and human rights laws are used as proxy for anti-European views. Rather than empowering and enhancing citizenship, human rights are portrayed as undermining traditional freedoms and legal protections.

Our research suggests that this widespread negative coverage has caused more people to be conflicted about human rights in the UK. Although citizens can see the benefits of human rights, they now also feel that these laws are being exploited or abused. To understand why so many British voters were persuaded by the negative media stories about human rights, we held deliberative workshops with those who were conflicted about human rights across the UK. By understanding what values were behind people's views on human rights, our aim was to engage better with people on the issues around rights, and challenge the current negative climate surrounding human rights in the UK. We then sought to understand what frames activate the values that influence this group to be more supportive of human rights.

#### **How things tended to be handled**

People's frustration and anger towards human rights is not directed at rights per se, but to issues they connect with human rights such as national security, unfairness and the role of the EU and European courts. Critics have been able to connect human rights to these issues, putting activists on the defensive. Rather than positively associating human rights with advances in equality, tolerance and fairness, many activists have tried to negate the frames used by their opponents. Even when activists were promoting positive frames, they ran the risk of using language that accidentally triggered values that appeared to build support for human rights but actually undermined it.

#### **Why it wasn't working**

*Negating frames.* As psychology and linguistics show, attempts to negate a frame invoke and strengthen that frame in people's brains. For example, when activists contest the claim that human rights are detrimental to national security, they can end up drawing more attention to the link between human rights and national security, and risk inadvertently strengthening the very position they disagree with.

*Accidentally triggering co-opted values.* Certain values such as fairness are contested and can mean different things to different people. They can and often have been co-opted by opponents of equality policies. For example, some politicians discuss fairness as proportionality and, as a result, claim that some people are superior or morally more deserving of human rights.

Activists accidentally reinforced this view of fairness and unconsciously strengthened the argument that some people did not deserve human rights. For instance, when they hear the words 'vulnerable' or 'victims' around rights, people automatically and unconsciously lock on to a frame about deserving and undeserving. They end up believing that it is fair to provide human rights to the vulnerable people who deserve them, but it is not fair to provide these same rights to criminals and prisoners who do not deserve them.

#### **What we did differently**

Frames and values can help people to understand ways to encourage greater support for human rights as well as other issues. Your values have a strong effect on how important you feel human rights issues are. This does not mean however that if you promote and activate values like fairness or equality, you can predict higher general endorsement of human rights. Similarly, this does not mean that you need to avoid topics that are associated with less support for human rights such as national security, authority or patriotism. A far more textured picture emerges when you are aware of how values can be ambiguous and contested depending on the particular context. The key is to carefully frame your argument or issue to activate the interpretation of a value that will endorse your policy.

During workshops with participants who were conflicted about human rights, we found that people responded differently depending on how we framed the same issue. When we primed people with the view that human rights increases fairness, but used language implying fairness as proportionality ('vulnerable people' or 'victims'), people did not change their existing opinions or they became even more conflicted on human rights. On the other hand, when we primed people with the same view that human rights increases fairness, but used language implying fairness as equal opportunity for all ('equal access' or 'equal to others'), people became more positive towards human rights.

Activists as well as policy-makers need to be aware that the link between language and values can be misleading. They need to be careful and nuanced in how they communicate their messages. While identifying the values that promote your policy is important, it is not sufficient. You need to understand how people in a particular context understand that value and what frames will trigger different interpretations. Context is fundamental.

### What the impact was

We disseminated our findings to a network of human rights activists and advocates through a report and workshops. A number of organisations in the UK such as Equally Ours, Public Interest Research Centre, Migrants' Rights Network, HEAR and others have changed their communication strategies not only to think about what values to promote, but how these values can be contested depending on the cultural context. Rather than avoiding difficult topics or accidentally triggering negative reactions, these organisations can now effectively reframe the discourse to challenge the negative climate around human rights in the UK.

### Social psychology to manage behaviour and attitudes

#### How governments use 'nudge' to change behaviour

Research in social psychology has been widely adopted by various governments, especially in the UK and the US. Applying the recommendation made by Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler in their book *Nudge*,<sup>5</sup> government departments created 'Nudge Units' to change the behaviour of citizens on the basis that this would be more easily done through well-designed incentives than through threats because appealing to norms – i.e. the deeply ingrained desire to behave in socially and morally acceptable ways – is more effective (and often cheaper) than triggering fear. For example: people are more motivated to pay their taxes on time when they are informed of the fact that this is what their neighbours are doing (and that it is the normal and accepted behaviour), rather than under the threat of fines and sanctions which often cause more administrative expense and require repeated interventions.

The Bridges Project wants to move beyond nudge, however. Nudge is an effective way of changing the way in which people behave, but it is less clear that it is good at changing the way people think. The Bridges Project wants to address a more fundamental issue: how people think about a set of issues, and what modifies their thinking. Looking at the previous example, this is not just about making people pay their taxes on time, but getting them to think that this is the right thing to do, that it is a matter of ethics and values, not just what is a socially acceptable behaviour. In the case of discrimination, the project wants to go beyond disallowing certain types of behaviour, and ensure that non-discrimination, openness and tolerance are valued as ends in themselves. Our work on norms is designed to highlight the fact that politicians and policy-makers have a responsibility to uphold these values in order to strengthen their appeal.

#### Going beyond 'nudge' by upholding norms and shaping attitudes

Despite the hardening of the immigration debate across Europe, research suggests that social norms act as a powerful bulwark against racism and xenophobia. The work brought to the Bridges Project by Scott Blinder<sup>6</sup> of Oxford University's Centre on Migration Policy and Society (Compas) is crucial in convincing policy-makers and politicians that their role in maintaining these norms unambiguously is both crucial and strategic to maintaining their strength and relevance.

In our work we have approached a number of policy-makers to ask them to stand firm on the importance and desirability of these norms in public discourse.

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#### Case study 3: Upholding social norms in the French context

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We have taken these results to French authorities tasked with the protection of refugees. In a series of meetings with high-level officials, we used Scott Blinder's research in order to illustrate the ways in which these norms can be upheld effectively only if messaging remains clear, consistent and unambiguous, and if 'respected messengers' are aware of the responsibility they bear. We illustrated our argument using findings provided by Scott Blinder and his team at Oxford University.

#### How things tended to be handled

In order to counter claims that policies concerning asylum seekers did not reflect the concerns of ordinary citizens, policy-makers were eager to show that they were listening to the public and aware of public opinion and public sentiment. In order to appear to address negative views concerning immigration, as well as to counter rising support for the anti-immigrant Front National, agencies began to adopt a language (both internally and externally) that no longer presented their policies as driven by moral duty, human rights, international law and ethics, but rather as the result of limited practical demands placed on France by cumbersome international agreements. Their stance became more qualified, more procedural, and policy was presented as a series of practical choices designed to meet legal obligations rather than embrace a moral duty. In fact, this overall shift in language has done nothing to soften people's attitudes towards asylum seekers and new migrants. The strategy seems to have had negative results.

### Why it wasn't working

By emphasising the procedural aspects over the desirable moral aspects of their policies, agencies were unwittingly weakening powerful social norms against prejudice which normally help to temper any negative gut reactions that people might harbour towards strangers and encourage them to think and behave differently. What social psychologists refer to as 'controlled cognition' – reactions based on accumulated experience or social expectations – helps people react in ways that are socially accepted and rewarded instead of giving in to fear or suspicion. Politicians and policy-makers have a huge role to play in shaping and upholding those social norms that help to counter gut reactions.

As Scott Blinder writes, 'an anti-prejudice norm works as a political resource against anti-immigrant attitudes'. In order for these norms to be maintained and upheld, they must be constantly reinforced by policy-makers. His research demonstrates this by showing what happens when members of the public are given different types of statements by more or less reputable politicians: when the more reputable (non-populist) politicians start to use the same terms as the less reputable, populists, the members of the public are at first confused by the discrepancy between their expectations of the messenger and the message they are putting out. And then they are swayed towards the less tolerant statement by virtue of the fact that it is coming from a trusted, reputable messenger.

If trusted politicians start to use ambiguous or populist rhetoric they undermine the norm for the public. Policy-makers were undermining this norm by sending ambiguous messages and by sending the signal that it might be okay to be less committed to the norm. This in turn allows for citizens to think that it may be acceptable to depart from this norm and weakens society's capacity to withstand the attacks on tolerance or openness led by anti-immigrant or racist parties.

### What we did differently

We used the research by Scott Blinder at Compas/Oxford to illustrate the strength of the social norm, and also to demonstrate the fragility of this norm when messengers (such as politicians and policy-makers) fail to uphold it, or send ambiguous messages.

### What we've learned

We have learned that agencies are custodians of this norm, so their language use must always reinforce it. By doing so, the organisation stands a better chance of countering anti-immigrant and anti-asylum views than when it uses procedural, practical or what it thinks is 'neutral' language. The key here is that the norm has a strong effect despite the loudly expressed views of a minority. Catering to this minority will undermine the strength of norm in the majority.

### Using contact theory to increase tolerance and manage social tensions

Contact theory, which was pioneered by Professor Miles Hewstone, a leading social psychologist at Oxford University, has tested and illustrated the ways in which sustained, managed contact can be used to overcome ethnic and community tensions.<sup>7</sup> Large-scale experiments in schools in particular have delivered striking results. Careful planning of interactions in classrooms and cafeterias have shown that managed extended contact does not lead to conflict, but rather to the reduction of intergroup bias, the diffusion of tensions, increased understanding and falling rates of community violence.

In experiments in Northern Ireland, the US, the Netherlands and the UK, Hewstone has shown that simple measures that promote sustained contact across groups (re-organising desks or redesigning seating arrangements in the cafeteria for example), lead to dramatic improvements in intergroup relationships. We have taken these experiments to school administrators in France and the Netherlands. In France, conversations around public behaviour and community tensions have frequently revolved around the issue of the cafeteria: segregation and availability of faith-specific meals were among the most frequently cited sources of tension. In the Netherlands, the problem was similar, though schools were more overtly segregated than in France (teachers referred to their school as being 'white' or 'black', for instance). When we took Hewstone's findings to each country we were initially met with scepticism, and even mild amusement. The view in both cases was that 'if it was that simple, we would have done it by now'. So far we have persuaded a handful of school head teachers in both countries to test the method and to keep a record of behaviour (good, bad, improving and deteriorating, with details on incidents).

## Case study 4: Designing interaction and deepening understanding

### How things tended to be handled

In order to cater to an ethnically and religiously mixed population, schools and community organisations in France and the Netherlands insisted on a combination of secular ‘blindness to difference’ (in the case of France) and a laissez-faire/self-organising approach to tolerance and integration (in the Netherlands). The reasoning in each context was that by allowing pupils in schools, or community groups in various neighbourhoods to self-organise and create their own mixed communities, repeated contact over time would simply lead to familiarity, understanding and, finally, tolerance and integration.

### Why it wasn’t working

The result, in fact, was that community organisations came under increasing pressures to intervene and adjudicate between groups who felt that both the laissez-faire approach as well as the more managed ‘secular guidelines’ consistently benefited ‘others’ while penalising their own group. Festivities, celebrations and public displays of religion or culture led to unease, accusations of favouritism, suspicion and often conflict. In the case of schools, eating habits, dress and religion led to group formation along these lines, which in turn led to self-segregation and often to conflict.

In these cases, both head teachers and community leaders were ignoring the basic difference between random, meaningless contact, which can easily lead to conflict, and sustained meaningful contact, which usually leads to understanding and tolerance.

### What we did differently

Based on empirical research on contact theory, we suggested that for strong group relations and understanding to emerge, the contact needed to be well designed and sustained. Pupils in schools should not be left to their own devices when it came to organising their everyday interactions, and community organisers needed to design exchanges between groups for the contact to create a perception of fairness and further understanding.

Our suggestion in the case of the Dutch schools was to replicate some of the cafeteria experiments or classroom seating arrangements pioneered by

Miles Hewstone. In the case of French local community organisations we suggested that they adapt Hewstone’s advice by co-designing (and publicising) a rota concerning the use of community spaces. We also suggested that the space needed to be used more creatively in between group celebrations or festivals for alternative celebrations that were designed to create repeated and sustained mixings (car-boot sales, bake sales, lectures, children’s fairs) that would bring various groups together repeatedly.

### What we’ve learned

The experiment has only just started, but schools seem to be keen on testing the insights in practice. The key lesson for them is that design needs to play a fundamental role in the way that they manage diversity.

### Time to think increases the chances of positive choices

People need time to think, focus and process ideas and their own emotions. Research in both social psychology and neuroscience has underlined both the possibility of changing people’s minds as well as the need to allow processing time for this to happen. Recent findings in neuroscience support the idea that over time individuals modulate their views and preferences (in part thanks to contact and the work of strongly upheld social norms). As explained by biologist Christoforos Tsantoulas: ‘Studies on the adaptive plasticity of the adult brain have provided very promising results. For instance, individuals are capable of training themselves to become favourably predisposed towards black faces in the implicit association test (IAT), e.g. by watching black athletes triumphing in competitive races or by reading about Martin Luther King.’<sup>8</sup> Therefore, emphasis should be given to promoting interpersonal links and enhancing the ‘in-group’ classification of others.

The Nobel prize-winning work of Professor Daniel Kahneman in social psychology also highlights the need for time to process complex ideas and accomplish complex tasks through the brain’s slower ‘System 2’ rather than its more intuitive and faster ‘System 1.’ In his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*,<sup>9</sup> Kahneman demonstrates that System 2 thinking is more demanding, and deliberative thinking is by definition slower. It mobilises more energy and attention and it needs to be encouraged and given extra time to kick in. That extra time makes people more likely to check their values systems, and their responses are often more tolerant as a result.

### **Case Study 5: Deliberation and time to bring out the best in people**

We have held deliberative sessions on the management of major issues around diversity and the nature of community relations across Europe. One obvious result is that people's views softened dramatically through deliberation and contact. This softening, due to a more in-depth understanding of another's position, also brings a sense of pride and well-being as people repeatedly left the meeting telling us how proud they were of themselves.

#### **How things tended to be handled**

Most public officials or policy-makers who are in charge of dealing with diverse communities and some of the key issues that arise as a result of diversity (school management, housing, public space management, access to health services) tend to try and accommodate diversity by surveying group preferences and expectations group by group, and then attempting to adjudicate as fairly as possible within the limits of their mandate and their resources. What motivates their actions is above all the desire to be seen as impartial, as well as to be as efficient as possible with limited resources. In the case of the French communities we worked in, the use of public space was seen as governed by a set of procedures protected by French law, which promotes impartiality and secularism. However, the resulting decisions were seldom seen as impartial or fair, and most of the processes were seen as highly contentious by local communities.

#### **Why it wasn't working**

One of the key things that such policy processes ignore is the need for people to discuss the manner in which – and more importantly the basis on which – decisions are being made and to do so in conversation with the other parties. The opportunity to become acquainted with the other parties, to have a structured discussion around the issues, to listen and to debate contentious or sensitive points means processing complex issues and slowly taking on board different points of view.

#### **What we did differently**

We invited participants in several French cities to come together to discuss issues they had identified as pressing. Many of these concerned the use of public and school places in areas where there were large ethnic minorities. We made sure to invite a variety of people who had in one way or another

been affected by decisions about spaces which they regularly use. The decision-makers were present, as were individuals who had lobbied for use of the space (both successfully and unsuccessfully). We also held several meetings focusing on the issue of religious dress, which is a highly contentious one in France. In each of the meetings we proposed a set of scenarios depicting what should and shouldn't be allowed, what should and shouldn't be promoted. We asked people to express their views on what they felt were legitimate compromises (not necessarily whether they felt an outcome was good). We had been warned with some urgency that the discussions were likely to degenerate into arguments, or even outright fights. In practice, the conversations often started out very tense and then, over the hour and a half allotted, became gradually more intricate, respectful and yet frank.

#### **What the impact was**

In workshop after workshop, participants thanked the organisers for 'bringing out the best in me' (as many chose to put it) by allowing them to think through an issue. Participants voiced their appreciation for 'time to think' and their own surprise at how their views had changed. The lesson is to keep providing such opportunities in the face of populist parties who claim that fast, common-sense reactions are the solution and the hallmark of good politics. It turns out that slow, deliberative thinking yields greater tolerance and deeper understanding, more respect for others and an increased capacity to manage complexity, and therefore anxiety.

#### **Engagement on the terms that people really want**

We have saved this lesson for last as it contains some of the insights most crucial to our projects: it highlights the relevance of all of the insights we have outlined so far.

Our research for the Bridges Project suggests that the anxiety experienced by people across communities is one that is defined by their perception of the unpredictability of their lives. Radically new forms of uncertainty connected to the 'wickedness' (the interdependence and seeming insolubility) of the problems on the horizon (such as climate change, population management, and their attending consequences in a mobile and globalised world) means that states and government are less able to assuage and control, and publics feel vulnerable and resentful in new ways.

This state of affairs – and accepting that leaders may not know how to solve these problems, or whether in fact they can be solved at all – means that policy-makers

and politicians need to be able to persuade themselves and others to move forward despite this deep new uncertainty. Creating new forms of public action, new participative structures that can tap more easily into all the tools we have evoked so far cannot be done with ‘weak participative narratives’, as psychoanalyst David Tuckett points out, but rather needs to engage people through ‘conviction narratives’.<sup>10</sup> This is a specific form of narrative designed to allow the listener (and perhaps often the narrator) to act (govern, decide, enact, choose a policy, set a course) despite the fact that the outcome is uncertain and there are lingering doubts as to the outcome.

For example, if you believe in the unique qualities of the circumstances of meeting a particular person and the ways in which your relationship with them unfolds, you can create a conviction narrative that allows you to make the major commitment of marrying that person, even if it still feels risky to you. Or you might tell the story about the history of a specific house as a way to justify spending a large amount of money on it. A narrative about being ‘destined to live there’ could be what allows you to take the plunge, despite the risks associated with any such purchase. In this respect conviction narratives are not just stories, but powerful stories that allow you to move forward even if the circumstances are full of uncertainty.

If policy choices were imbued with such powerful conviction-driven narratives, both citizens and policy-makers would feel able to make decisions despite the inherent uncertainty of the world they live in. As explained by Tuckett: ‘You must then engage with uncertainty in a way that is bound to have emotional effects; You can be attracted (excited) by an idea of what is to come and/or be anxious about potential loss. What I call a conviction narrative is what you need in order to convince yourself that there are more reasons to do this than not.’<sup>11</sup>

One of the key lessons for policy-making is that while collective acts of participation and deliberation are essential to deepening people’s understanding of an issue, they will be able to make a decision about it if their anxiety is lessened because they have a conviction narrative, or a set of stories that provide reasons to commit to that path of action.

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#### **Case study 6: Participation within a conviction narrative framework**

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In a recent discussion on the nature of citizen participation with the mayor of a major northern French city, Counterpoint’s analysis and the Bridges

method were used when local politicians announced that they were keen to promote a stronger sense of solidarity between members of a particular neighbourhood.

#### **How things tended to be handled**

The main idea was to get people to work together on a project that would lead them to develop a joint sense of community stewardship based on a sense of shared values and a shared destiny. The plan was to ‘be practical’ and to bring together the people of this relatively deprived community and, by engaging them in activities to beautify their area, develop their sense of commitment to the place, all the while making it a more pleasant place to live and one for which there would be a shared sense of responsibility. This model has been applied to dozens of communities, neighbourhoods and cities across the world: a combination of learning by doing, an opportunity for people to get to know each other while contributing to their shared space. Small community leisure gardens, community art projects, and shared vegetable patches were set up with the lukewarm participation of the locals over a number of weekends and with the active participation of some local officials. Within a few months, not much was left of the spaces, the gardens had withered, and the art project had been mainly dug up and had been subjected to vandalism.

#### **Why it wasn’t working**

There are many reasons why such projects often fail. It can happen because of a top-down approach to matters which need bottom-up solutions, or because the follow-up is poorly funded. But when we spoke to members of the community – informally – to understand better why the project had left so many cold and uninvolved despite the best intentions of the organisers, the key complaint was that the community felt this was trivial compared to the issues that they were dealing with. What they wanted they said, was a chance to talk about what really mattered for them as a community, such as ethnic tensions and underfunding of public services. Many voiced the desire to sit together and tell a different story about their community that they could all share. ‘No one wants to talk about flowers or barbecues here,’ said one elderly woman. ‘This is not what we have in common, and our future is not in the garden.’

#### **What we did differently**

We were keen to point out that our research suggested that locals were much more anxious to have what they repeatedly referred to as a ‘real

political discussion' to develop a 'shared story' rather than to spend their time discussing the pros and cons of community gardening. While deliberation, contact theory and social norms should all inform the ways in which policy-makers and politicians think about engaging the public, most people need a good story to motivate them to get involved. Whether they come up with the conviction narrative themselves, or whether politicians and policy-makers come up with a sufficiently powerful one that can be shared to overcome the public's doubt (and their own) about a particular initiative, the conviction narrative needs to be there to motivate people to act. People are overwhelmingly eager to engage in a form of storytelling that would allow them to project themselves into the future despite uncertainty and anxiety. A strong conviction narrative about a community, a neighbourhood, a city or a set of institutions can allow this to happen.

We suggested that rather than focus directly on activities, that local policy-makers and politicians set up deliberative sessions to help develop a shared sense of what the story might be for this community of people in the future. We proposed a number of scenarios – all of them political, since people had been keen to point out that they were tired of discussing what they referred to as 'meaningless practicalities' – and to test each in several locally based discussions. The scenarios were not the potential conviction; rather, they were a pretext to hold conversations through which agreement and disagreement would emerge, and where the contours of a conviction narrative would become clearer to the policy-makers.

#### **What we've learned**

So far, the scenarios have been discussed with the mayor and team of advisers. A key lesson we took away from these discussions is that the sessions themselves are the right foundation for the conviction narratives to emerge from, and for subsequent activities to strengthen it and lead to further activities that would make sense in the context of the promoted narrative.

### **How should policy-makers respond to populist politics?**

These insights and tools are especially valuable in Europe, where policy-makers are at a loss as to how to face the challenge of populist politics. Both fringe and mainstream parties are affected by loss of trust in public institutions, including

political parties, and a focus on identity issues rather than policy choices. Populists make few policy proposals, and those that they have made are often incompatible with open society norms or international law.

Through its interaction with thinkers, analysts, researchers, commentators, activists, and the application of key insights in various contexts and situations, the Bridges Project has identified key lessons:

**1** No matter how universally applicable the research findings may seem and how standardised the research design, **attention to context is crucial**. We are able to make claims for the insights we have used because we are applying them in context: tailoring to the local is vital. The manner in which people are mobilising across Europe may seem to have a generic quality to it, and populism seems ubiquitous. But no matter how similar the slogans, or how familiar the rants, populist parties are gifted exploiters of the cultures in which they arise. They make political hay of national myths, stories and traditions. Conversely, it is just as important to bear in mind the manner in which insights from research need to reflect the imperatives of the context in which they are deployed. This is a delicate line to toe: to make the most of rich and universally valued insights, while taking into account the importance of specific contexts. Populist protest and mobilisation against the values of the open society are always conducted with an eye for context. The antidotes will work only if they are applied with cultural sensitivity, historical awareness, and social and political context.

**2 No attitude is unchangeable:** humans are not hard-wired and their attitudes change throughout life. Recent research on brain plasticity has provided a new and more positive understanding of the relationship between biology and behaviour. In particular, research in pharmacology and neuroscience points to the fundamentally adaptable nature of our neural system. This is crucially important because it can help politicians rebut the claim that xenophobia and racism are natural, 'hard-wired' reactions.<sup>12</sup> Our own case studies demonstrate that in the right circumstances, given the time to think things through, and in properly designed environments, people can change their minds lastingly.

**3 Anti-prejudice norms are firmly embedded and valued in most European societies.** But politicians and policy-makers need to uphold them to keep them working in practice. Research on prejudice across Europe is corroborated by the insights of social psychology on the role of social norms and their power.<sup>13</sup> More specifically, recent research in social psychology points to the widespread approval of the anti-prejudice norm in most European societies. In other words, tolerance and refraining from discriminatory practices are attitudes and behaviour that are deeply embedded and valued in these societies. These are continuously at work in allowing

citizens to cope with diversity and change. This is what prevents people from behaving in intolerant or prejudiced ways. These strong, internalised social norms create the motivation to avoid prejudice. They play a crucial role but they can be vulnerable to being undermined over time, so they need to be reinforced at every possible opportunity. This reinforcement happens through clear, repeated messages from political leaders.

**4 Ambiguity from political leaders weakens norms of tolerance and equal treatment.** Recent research in political psychology shows that ambiguity weakens norms and can create situations where prejudice and discrimination are allowed to take over in the absence of a functioning norm.<sup>14</sup> This is an argument for strong, positive narratives around diversity and immigration. Politicians need to get the message that if they pander to populism, they will alienate other voters and undermine social goods – and potentially the very institutions of democracy on which they depend.<sup>15</sup> Research suggests that unambiguously positive narratives prevent the long-term erosion of the norms that control prejudice.

Our research and its application should encourage politicians to be bolder in their rebuttal of populist claims that racism and discrimination are natural reactions against which it is futile to fight. Increasingly, scientists can demonstrate the opposite – that people are not slaves to their inherited biological reactions, and those reactions can be shaped.

As for policy-makers, two lessons stand out: first, they should be cautious about interpreting polling evidence. What insights are surveys and polls really measuring? How well are they capturing the intricacies of a complex system of mental reasoning and emotional responses to the questions asked? And, whatever is being captured, how can policy-makers and politicians affect perception and choice when creating policies? These policies do not have to appeal to basic instincts; instead, they can appeal to ‘the better angels of our nature’.<sup>16</sup>

The essays in this volume bring together the best of these insights. Contributors to this volume have helped to shape and define the Bridges Project by generously sharing their expertise and ideas. Their disciplines privilege different views of human nature, and sometimes they disagree with one other. But they have allowed us at Counterpoint and at the Open Society Foundations to think through some of our key issues of concern in new, more effective and persuasive ways. Thanks to their work, we have been able to put together a set of tools that might allow policy-makers to gain new insights into the publics they serve, as well as to uphold some of the most precious norms in European society. We leave you now to explore these essays and choose what strikes you as the most compelling way forward.

## Notes

1. See Catherine Fieschi, Marley Morris and Lila Caballero, *Populist Fantasies: European revolts in context*, Counterpoint, 2013
2. David Tuckett, *Minding The Markets: An emotional finance view of financial instability*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011
3. Catherine Fieschi, Marley Morris and Lila Caballero, *Recapturing the Reluctant Radical: How to win back Europe's populist vote*, Counterpoint, 2012
4. See the essay ‘The role of frames and cultural values’ by Giulio Carini in this volume, pp. 55–56
5. Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*, Yale University Press, 2008
6. See the essay ‘The role of norms and values in shaping citizen perceptions of migration’ by Scott Blinder in this volume, pp. 44–45
7. See the essay ‘Why any discussion of diversity must also discuss contact’ by Miles Hewstone in this volume, pp. 46–47
8. See the essay ‘The neuroscience of xenophobia’ by Christoforos Tsantoulas in this volume, pp. 38–39. The IAT is designed to measure the strength of the automatic association an individual draws between different mental representations. For more information, see A. G. Greenwald, D. E. McGhee and J. L. Schwartz, ‘Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition: the implicit association test’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 1464–80, 1998
9. Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Macmillan, 2011
10. See the essay ‘Decision-making in an age of uncertainty’ by David Tuckett in this volume, pp. 35–37
11. *Ibid*
12. Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz, ‘Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition’
13. Christian S. Crandall, Amy Eshleman and Laurie O’Brien, ‘Social norms and the expression and suppression of prejudice: the struggle for internalization’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82:3, 359–78, 2002
14. Scott Blinder, Robert Ford and Elizabeth Ivarsflaten, ‘The better angels of our nature: how the anti-prejudice norm affects policy and party preferences in Great Britain and Germany’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 57:4, 841–57, 2013, first published online 7 April 2012
15. Ivan Krastev, *In Mistrust We Trust: Can democracy survive when we don’t trust our leaders?* TED Books, 2013
16. Blinder, Ford and Ivarsflaten, ‘The better angels of our nature’

## II New Expertise for Policy

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# Understanding uncertainty

## Decision-making in an age of radical uncertainty

David Tuckett

*In this piece, David Tuckett, an economist, medical sociologist and practising psycho-analyst, argues that in an age of radical uncertainty, we need a powerful 'conviction narrative' that will allow us to act in the face of anxiety.*

How far can knowledge of the past and the present give you calculable knowledge of the future? In radical uncertainty you have to accept that it may not.

In most academic disciplines this problem is transformed into one of probability – implying that in some way the data we have about the past can be used to predict the future, provided we select it properly using probabilistic concepts such as Bayes law. Clearly, probability, like Randomised Controlled Trials, which suppose that observations in one past situation will predict new future situations, is a powerful tool. On the other hand, attempting to predict things that have not yet happened and so may be unforeseen, for me is ‘radical uncertainty’.

Yet, to make long-term decisions, you must imagine the future and be aware that this is what you are doing. There are usually two aspects to this imagining: picturing the future path of the entity that immediately interests you – project X (e.g. The Bridges Project, the future of the business, and so on) – and imagining the future paths of other entities interacting with each other and project X. This is true complexity.

Given radical uncertainty then, when you make decisions about the future, and in particular, the further out you go, you put yourself in a position where you would be wise to acknowledge that at some level, you can’t know what the outcome will be. But nonetheless many decisions require long-term thinking. You must then engage with uncertainty in a way that is bound to have emotional effects; you can be attracted (excited) by an idea of what is to come and/or be anxious about potential loss. What I call a conviction narrative is what you need in order to convince yourself that there are more reasons to do this than not. Decision-making in this view is both cognitive and affective. It is about looking at evidence and dealing with the anxiety that this evidence might produce. In times of radical uncertainty, that anxiety may be heightened.

*'You must then engage with uncertainty in a way that is bound to have emotional effects'*

## Coming to action in radical uncertainty

The combination of the cognitive and affective impacts of uncertainty are a significant problem that has not been taken account of in economics, and has also been left unaddressed within nearly all the decision-making sciences.

In referring to how long-term investment is made, Keynes talked about the 'urge to action'. The entrepreneur has preferences and choices but, everything, ultimately, is about coming to action. This is a version of the problem that policy-makers face in radical uncertainty. How do you manage to take action in radical uncertainty?

*'This "conviction narrative" supports action by providing an emotionally valid set of reasons for the action'*

In an integrated state, you take decisions in a state of mind in which you are curious about the information in front of you and have a genuine interest as to whether this is going to work. Curiosity implies an open mind, a state of not knowing, and so an interest in both negative and positive information and anxiety about outcomes. But you accept the anxiety. And one way of getting over that anxiety is to rely on a 'conviction narrative'. This 'conviction narrative' supports action by providing an emotionally valid set of reasons for the action and ways of dealing with doubt that would otherwise prevent you from acting.

But, given uncertainty, the temptation is to make decisions in a divided state in which, although you have some kind of information that things can go wrong, this information is not properly processed or investigated. An example of this is the dot com boom – during which people had pages of information on why things would go wrong, but took no notice for a very long time – or financial derivatives. If you enquire into the pricing of derivatives and accept that there is no way of knowing what will happen, you will be very cautious. If you do not enquire and take outcomes on trust, then you can allow long documents and statistical shorthand to perform a symbolic function to support the divided state, replacing the need for curiosity (e.g. rating agencies or in policy, polling).

In a divided state, an idealised solution can appear – something that may seem to be the solution to all your problems. This type of solution is otherwise known as a 'Phantastic Object'.

## The emergence of 'Phantastic Objects'

Various totem poles such as the fail-proof policy, the cast-iron polling result, or the infallible policy leader, become Phantastic Objects supposedly supporting decisions that need to be made. Thus, where evidence is used not for thinking, but rather to feel comfortable, we see tokenism. The uncertainty linking the present and the future is again not taken into account.

Group situations, such as policy affairs in government, create pressurising atmospheres that may make it easier or more difficult to raise problems. Mislabelling radical uncertainty as some sort of calculable risk will be a serious problem if radical uncertainty is relevant. To prevent really large failures we have to tolerate the feelings that come from looking out all the time at what may go both right and wrong. Perhaps, the current epidemic of short-termism is a product of our difficulties in facing radical uncertainty.

# Exploring the brain

## The neuroscience of xenophobia

Christoforos Tsantoulas

*Thanks to recent advances in neuroscience, we now possess a greater understanding of the way human judgement is generated and how our perceptions are influenced by underlying social cognitive and emotive processes. Christoforos Tsantoulas, post-doctoral researcher in neuroscience at the University of Cambridge, explains how these insights have the power to transform policy-making.*

State of the art imaging techniques have for the first time allowed scientists to visualise brain activity in real time, while breakthroughs in genetic inheritance studies have uncovered the intricate interplay between genes and environmental factors. Careful appraisal of this valuable information and appropriate incorporation will be useful when shaping new policies, particularly when combined with conclusions drawn from the social sciences.

Our multi-layered lives are dependent on synchronising social interactions and duties, including securing a mate, child-raising, altruism, co-operation and competitiveness. Underlying these behaviours is an array of social, cognitive and emotive processes, such as love, empathy, trust and morality.

Thus, there are specific brain areas that correlate functionally with complex affective traits like emotional contagion, empathy, sympathy, identification and subjectivity. These affective traits play a role only when interacting with others. The importance of human emotion in everyday relations is emphasised by psychiatric syndromes characterised by lack of empathy, such as autism and various anti-social personality disorders. Therefore it has become evident that neuronal-encoded emotional responses are associated with the strong tendency of humans to form group relationships. For a long time, research results seemed to indicate that emotive susceptibility led to unconscious bias and exclusion of individuals from groups. Promising areas for future research are as follows:

### The malleability of neural pathways and how this can affect intergroup relations

Studies on the adaptive plasticity of the adult brain have provided very promising results. For instance, individuals are capable of training themselves to become favourably predisposed towards black faces in the implicit association test (IAT),

e.g. by watching black athletes triumphing in competitive races or by reading about Martin Luther King. Therefore, emphasis should be given to promoting interpersonal links and enhancing the 'in-group' classification of others.

In policy, these findings can be used to minimise any expression of outdated or dogmatic ideologies that may foster negative associations, particularly early in life during brain development. Such misinformed attitudes can often persist in cultures, through a process of sterile imitation. It is therefore imperative to reinforce positive influences that will help the community reach the critical threshold of informed transformation.

Policy must also dynamically highlight the advantages of endorsing tolerant attitudes in multicultural societies.

Furthermore, since the positive effects of immigration on social progress are likely to be long term, it is of key importance to minimise risk-averse behaviours by providing incentives in a manner that emphasises gradual rewards. Ideally, this approach should be directed at both native and immigrant populations; the more new members of a society familiarise themselves with the language, history and culture, the quicker they will be endorsed by the native population. In that sense, an extension of the British Citizenship Test or an equivalent requirement for immigrants could be beneficial for smoother integration in the community.

*'It is of key importance to minimise risk-averse behaviours by providing incentives in a manner that emphasises gradual rewards'*

### The promise of epigenetics

The emerging discipline of epigenetics (the study of how behaviours regulate gene dynamics) has revealed that certain behaviours manifested during adulthood can modify the genetic message and, unexpectedly, these adaptations can be passed on to children. We are thereby introduced to the concept of acquired inheritance, an area of research that is blooming and expected to revolutionise the way we think about gene expression. This phenomenon is particularly suited to explain how adverse experiences in early life can have persisting effects via epigenetic modulation of key brain structures.

*'Policy needs to create positive feedback loops that promote long-term inheritable changes towards equitable attitudes'*

Policy needs to create positive feedback loops that promote long-term inheritable changes towards equitable attitudes by fostering tolerance and reducing social stress.

## Open agency

Patrick Haggard

*How do different views of human agency surface in social policies? And how fundamental are they to open societies? Patrick Haggard, Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience at University College London, examines the nature of human agency and explains how an open society can engage with it in order to harness its potential to create social good.*

A striking feature of the human mind is its ability to generate actions that transform the environment. Look around you: most of what you see is probably man-made – buildings, tools, computers, clothes, etc. Psychology invokes the concept of ‘instrumental conditioning’ to explain how many animals learn to associate their actions with particular outcomes, particularly valenced outcomes. A rat in a box can famously learn to press a lever to obtain food, associating its sensory responses with particular perceptual outcomes. But in humans, this capacity is dramatically extended and transformed in several ways. For example, human actions often produce intermediate objects, such as tools, which are then used for a second action to achieve a desired effect. Our actions often produce outcomes that are spatially and temporally remote from the original action. The range of flexibility of different action–outcome mappings that humans can learn and use is apparently infinite: look at the number of different things you achieve during a day by pressing a button with your index finger. Humans therefore have a ‘sense of agency’, a capacity and subjective experience of controlling the external environment that goes dramatically beyond that of other animals.

*‘In an open society, each individual views another’s agency as potentially enhancing’*

However, human agency also creates a social problem. The range of possible outcomes an individual agent can produce is effectively infinite. Many of these outcomes have impacts for other people. At the same time, one individual cannot easily predict what another individual can do. For example, you could steal my wallet – or I could steal yours. For a society to function, individual agency must be constrained. Individuals must accept that, although they *can* act to achieve a desired goal, this may be denied them because of the impact their action would have on others. Norms and laws are effectively social mechanisms for agreeing and maintaining constraints on individuals’ agency.

We can therefore characterise different societies according to how they engage with individual agency. One obvious dimension separates individualistic from socialistic views. In individualistic societies, agency is largely unconstrained by concerns about others. In socialistic models, individual agency is effectively limited to what state power allows. But here I want to suggest a second dimension: societies

may be either *closed* or *open* to the possible social advantages of individual agency. In a closed society, one individual views another’s agency as a threat: whatever you do is likely to be done at my expense. In an open society, each individual views another’s agency as potentially enhancing: whatever you do represents a potential positive benefit for me. Only in the open society can the astonishing potential of human agency be unleashed.

All societies need rules and guidelines to govern individual behaviour. Policy-makers face the challenge of producing rules that balance the generative power of individual agency against the interests of society as a whole. Open agency does not just mean maximising individual agency – it also means my accepting the constraints on my agency that follow from your and my joint presence in society.

*‘Policy-makers face the challenge of producing rules that balance the generative power of individual agency against the interests of society’*

## Public policy and behavioural science

Simon Ruda

*Does behaviour change when people's minds change, or is it the other way around? Can a gentle set of incentives that 'nudges' individuals towards best behaviour work for their benefit as well as that of the collective? Simon Ruda, Principle Advisor at the Behavioural Insights Team, explores the advantages of applying behavioural science to public policy, and shows us how seemingly small details can have a surprisingly large impact.*

The behavioural sciences have taught us that human behaviour is not always the result of reasoned consideration. A number of surprising factors can affect people's decision-making and subsequent actions. These factors include how people believe others would behave in a similar situation, what they were doing directly before they took the relevant decision and the ways in which choices are presented.

In order to effectively formulate and implement public policy, policy-makers need to understand how these factors affect our behaviour in different contexts.

Research conducted in recent decades gives us many clues to how people will respond in different scenarios, but context is critical. Often seemingly insignificant contextual differences between situations can lead to vastly different outcomes. For this reason we must prioritise rigorous trialling when implementing a new public policy, testing an intervention before roll-out, or rolling it out in such a way as to evaluate its impact to a high degree of scientific robustness. This way, we can establish exactly what is working and what isn't. Knowing the impact of an intervention early on means that we can then iterate until the desired outcome is reached.

*'The basic idea is to design policies that go with the grain of how individuals actually respond, rather than how policy-makers might assume they will behave'*

The basic idea is to design policies that go with the grain of how individuals *actually* respond to government programmes or processes, rather than how policy-makers and economists might assume they will behave. Often, we marvel at the way seemingly small changes to the way a policy is implemented result in surprisingly big impacts – for example, merely changing a few words in the phrasing of a tax letter can significantly increase the number of people paying their tax on time. From the trials we have conducted across a wide range of policy areas, the Behavioural Insights Team is building up a sophisticated understanding of these contextual nuances. And there

are some findings that hold true in every area we have encountered. Chief among these is that people are much more likely to do something if it's made easy for them to do it. The implication for policy-makers is to think carefully about the 'friction costs' for citizens: small increases in friction can deter large numbers of people from taking certain actions.

By combining this approach with a rich understanding of the behavioural economics and psychology literature, and with an awareness of the factors affecting behaviours in specific policy contexts, we can effectively encourage specific behaviours, both habitual and one-off, across the policy spectrum. So far, successes include getting people back into employment, helping people save more energy, and making it easier to give up smoking. And there is huge potential to extend this approach to new and more challenging areas. Immigration is a prime example. Individuals' decisions in this area are complex, and the resulting behaviours unpredictable, creating fertile ground for a behavioural science-informed approach.

## The role of norms and values in shaping citizen perceptions of migration

Scott Blinder

*Recent research in political psychology suggests that xenophobia can be systematically countered by strong social norms. Scott Blinder, Director of the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, explains how this works and why it is important.*

My research argues that attitudes towards immigration and minority integration are informed by competing impulses: some negative gut-level responses to 'out-group' members on the one hand, tempered by a widespread social norm against prejudice on the other. In certain circumstances, anti-prejudice norms limit the appeal of anti-immigrant parties. At the macro-level, the strength of anti-prejudice norms can help explain why many anti-immigration parties – particularly those who do not benefit from a mainstream, clean image, i.e. those without a 'Reputational Shield' against accusations of racism, such as the BNP in Britain – fail to mobilise many voters, even in societies where anti-immigration sentiments are prevalent. They are simply seen as working too directly against the anti-prejudice norm to be 'frequentable'.

The research is based on a well-validated underlying social psychological framework, the 'dual process' model of attitudes, which says that attitudes are jointly produced by automatic and controlled responses to stimuli. Automatic

responses are gut reactions based on accumulated experiences, similar to a Pavlovian, conditioned response; controlled cognition reflects more conscious, 'impression management' goals that may involve conformity to a social norm or to one's own personal motivations. In the case of the anti-prejudice norm,

some people may want to act in a normatively approved manner as a signal to others, while others may have internalised the norm and are motivated to act in keeping with it. Thus, it is a mistake to think that all individuals have one single attitude towards immigrants or other groups of people.

***'It is a mistake to think that all individuals have one single attitude towards immigrants'***

***'Controlled cognition can override automatic responses if the two conflict'***

makers and politicians. In certain circumstances, controlled cognition can override automatic responses if the two conflict.

My co-authors and I find that anti-immigrant political choices are less likely (a) among individuals who are internally motivated to avoid prejudice, and (b) in contexts that highlight the anti-prejudice norm, making people aware that their behaviour is likely to be taken as a sign of their prejudice, or lack thereof.

Therefore, the anti-prejudice norm functions as a political resource for those working against extremist movements or anti-immigrant policies. Many people in Britain are motivated by this norm and do not want to appear prejudiced, even to themselves. The anti-prejudice norm limits the appeal of extreme parties or policies that put one's anti-prejudice bona fides clearly at stake. The macro-level work of my co-author Elisabeth Ivarsflaten completes the story. She argues that the successful anti-immigration parties of Europe have almost always had a 'reputational shield' against accusations of prejudice, in that they started out with some other aim (e.g. a tax revolt, a defence of agrarian interests, Euroscepticism) and they can use their initial stance as a reputational shield against accusations of racism or xenophobia. By contrast, parties that formed as anti-immigration parties focusing only on the issue of immigration do not have a reputational shield and have been less likely to succeed. In Britain, the differing public responses towards the BNP and UKIP illustrate this difference. Ironically, by being less focused on immigration than the BNP (and more moderate in rhetoric), UKIP has been more successful in mobilising British voters' opposition to immigration.

## Diversity with and without intergroup contact

Miles Hewstone

*Miles Hewstone is Professor for Social Psychology at the University of Oxford. In this piece, he illustrates how designed and meaningful contact between different groups can be used as a powerful tool against prejudice.*

Tell me why, tell me why, tell me why.

Why can't we live together?

Tell me why, tell me why.

Why can't we live together?

*(Timmy Thomas, 1972)*

In an influential article published in 2007 Harvard political scientist Robert D. Putnam seemed to agree with Timmy Thomas, arguing that ethnic diversity has negative consequences for trust.<sup>1</sup> He suggested that diversity poses a threat, to which people respond by 'hunkering down'. He reported in a large US survey that people living in diverse neighbourhoods not only trusted members of other ethnic groups less, but also trusted members of their own group less, compared with people living in less diverse areas.

Putnam's research and his pessimistic conclusions about diversity, at least in the short term, have received huge publicity, and have reached the ears of prime ministers and presidents. But Putnam's research focused only on the proportions of different ethnic groups in an area. This can be considered a measure of mere 'opportunity for contact', but not whether actual contact takes place, how often and, most important, what the quality of that contact is. He also did not measure the threat that he argued was posed by diversity.

**'Diversity might have quite different effects depending on whether people do or do not engage in actual, face-to-face contact'**

Eminent social psychologist Gordon Allport proposed that 'intergroup contact' involving members of different and often opposed groups was a powerful weapon against that prejudice.<sup>2</sup> Starting from Allport's insightful work, I argue that diversity might have quite different effects depending on whether people do or do not engage in actual, face-to-face contact with people from ethnic groups different from their own. There are good grounds for taking this view. A meta-analysis of over 500 studies on intergroup contact revealed beyond doubt that positively toned contact is negatively related to prejudice, an effect that occurs across different social groups (including groups based on ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation), and settings (neighbourhoods, schools and work places).<sup>3</sup>

We recently conducted research aimed at challenging Putnam's pessimistic conclusions.<sup>4</sup> Our survey included 868 White British and 798 ethnic minority respondents from a wide range of English neighbourhoods varying in both diversity and deprivation. We found that Putnam had indeed been too pessimistic, and that contact provided the missing link. We did reveal some negative effects of diversity, similar to those noted by Putnam, but only for White British, and not ethnic minority, respondents, and only when we did not consider people's contact experiences. In fact, we found that for both groups diversity was consistently associated with *more* contact, and contact with *lower* threat. This then resulted in diversity being indirectly, and positively, associated with greater trust. Our results thus suggest that the positive indirect effects via contact cancelled out any initial negative direct effects of diversity on trust.

Contact is not, however, a golden bullet; it has two notable limitations. First, when people live in highly segregated areas, or attend segregated schools, how should they experience direct contact? Second, even in ostensibly mixed settings, people may and sometimes do 're-segregate', as when students from different ethnic backgrounds sit apart during free time in the cafeteria. Such limitations can be overcome by exploiting knowledge of other people's positive outgroup contacts, and by changing norms about what is acceptable behaviour, as judged by ingroup members (i.e. 'it is OK to sit with members of that group').

Attending the Elmau meeting,<sup>5</sup> and taking part in the stimulating exchanges between people from other academic and more practical backgrounds made me realise that the contact approach can complement and benefit from other approaches, such as the view that we can 'nudge' behaviour. Perhaps there are ways, for example, to nudge cafeteria occupants into mixing, rather than re-segregating. But the contact approach is deeper, and thus likely to be more enduring, because it changes attitudes via processes including reducing anxiety and promoting empathy. It is an approach that has huge promise as we contemplate, as we did at the meeting, how to integrate Roma immigrants into communities across Europe.

### Notes

1. R. Putnam, 'E pluribus unum: diversity and community in the twenty-first century. The 2006 Jonathan Skytte prize lecture', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30, 137–74, 2007
2. G. W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954
3. T. F. Pettigrew and L. R. Tropp, 'A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90:5, 751, 2006
4. K. Schmid, A. Al Ramiah and M. Hewstone, 'Neighborhood ethnic diversity and trust: the role of intergroup contact and perceived threat', *Psychological Science*, 25:3, 665, 2014
5. Bridges Project meeting at Elmau, 19 November 2013

## De-stressing society

Susanna Abse

*Susanna Abse is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and CEO of the Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships. In this piece, she talks about today's most pressing health issues and how they can lead to the breakdown of tolerant and cohesive communities.*

There is growing evidence that human beings are becoming more stressed. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon observed in 2011 that some 350 million people of all ages, incomes and nationalities suffer from depression. Millions more – family, friends, co-workers – are exposed to the indirect effects of this underappreciated global health crisis.

This is a serious and growing problem, posing a threat to the building of healthy democratic societies that are able to be resilient in the context of an uncertain, fast-paced, changing globalised world. Anxiety and depression diminishes people's ability to cope with the daily challenges of life, precipitating family disruption, interrupting education and causing job loss. In the most extreme cases, people kill themselves.

Obesity too has reached epidemic proportions globally, with at least 2.8 million people dying each year from this malaise. Once associated with high-income countries, obesity is now also prevalent in low- and middle-income countries with research increasingly showing the link between stress, weight gain and again, anxiety and depression.

These two 'societal symptoms', together with the increase in the use of drugs and alcohol, the worrying numbers of children with behavioural and mental health disorders and the epidemic of relationship breakdown, tell us that all is not well. And while these statistics represent much pain and distress at the individual level, they are worrying at the macro level too.

The increase in these conditions presents governments with serious and growingly unaffordable, economic costs, but we also know that insecurity and stress within a society can additionally lead to the breakdown of tolerant cohesive communities and civil society. Stressed and unhappy people become angry and blaming, creating schisms and fostering an abhorrence of difference that leads to persecution and hatred.

Because no politician can ever guarantee to protect a population from trauma (whether that is war or worldwide economic recession), it is vital that governments build resilience within their populations so that people can survive and even thrive in the face of inevitable adversity.

Resilience in the population allows communities to deal with shock and these shocks can come in many forms. Most recently in developed countries, it has frequently been in the form of the shock of the newcomer, where established tight-knit communities have needed to embrace strangers with unfamiliar habits, foods and beliefs. The capacity to flexibly manage these changes and challenges requires both economic and emotional security. Relational resilience is founded on the human capacities of empathy, compassion and trust and these are built in the context of stable, developmental relationships. Resilience is not a result of character or genes (though this may be part of the picture), it is primarily a result of nurture, connectedness and security.

If governments fail to create the conditions that promote nurturing, connectedness and security, relationships will not thrive. This has political as well as personal impacts, such as the undermining of the human capacity for empathy, a capacity which is fundamental to the development of communities based on reciprocity, tolerance and co-operation.

So, protecting and supporting relationships that build resilience needs to become a primary function of the state – perhaps even its most important function. Governments need to shape policies that are focused on this goal. It is vital that we avoid unnecessary traumatic disruption and that we protect institutions, such as the NHS, that act as societal 'containers', which help populations feel safe and secure. Most importantly we must nurture and support families so that they, in turn, can nurture and support each other; because in the long run most families are better at caring and nurturing than the state can ever be. We must reduce the gap between the richest and the poorest and the damaging envy and dislocation between people this produces and we must build environments that encourage and facilitate communities to be neighbourly and care for each other.

Lastly governments should test all policy initiatives on how they will impact on relationships, whether these are family, workplace or social – checking whether the policy enhances people's connectedness to others and thereby builds positive inter-subjectivity and realistic developmental interdependence.

**'Resilience is primarily a result of nurture, connectedness and security'**

# Social and cultural considerations

## The risk of universalising theories

Dace Dzenovska

*How do the insights examined so far apply in specific countries and moments in time? How does culture and history shape policy conception and implementation? In this piece, anthropologist Dace Dzenovska explores the importance of cultural specificity, how it affects people's attitudes and behaviour, and how these insights can be applied to better inform government policies.*

*'Actual ways of thinking and conduct are the products of complex interactions ... that come together in specific times and places'*

It is commonly and correctly assumed that humans everywhere share the same cognitive and psychological make-up. However, it does not mean that humans everywhere produce the same forms of collective life, think alike, or conduct themselves in the same way. Actual ways of thinking and conduct are the products of complex interactions between biological make-up, social relations, cultural meanings and power relations that come together in specific times and places. There is no such thing as human mind in general, or human conduct in general.

Universalising theories assume a universal subject whose patterns of thinking and acting can be discerned and explained on the basis of ideal-type models or controlled experiments. For example, some theories posit that fear, such as fear of strangers, is natural, if misplaced in the contemporary world. When transposed from the individual to the collective level, such theories may lead to the conclusion that group animosity is natural, but can be reworked through efforts of familiarisation and education – for example, by putting members of conflicting groups into direct contact with one another. While not necessarily outright wrong, such theories entail a number of risks. First, they risk naturalising social phenomenon. In other words, they may attribute boundaries constructed as a result of historical, social and political factors, to the general human tendency to draw boundaries, thus rendering the specificity of the boundaries in question irrelevant. Second, they risk producing universal solutions – such as putting people into direct contact with one another – that are assumed to work despite the specificity of context. It is when such solutions don't work that specificity enters the picture. Namely, universal solutions are assumed not to work, because of the specificity of the intergroup conflict in question or the specificity of the conditions in which direct contact was attempted. However, this is precisely the point – conditions are never general. Conditions are

complex, social, political and historical articulations that cannot be created at will. It is the specificity of conditions that needs to be accounted for in both cases – those that work and those that do not work.

It is in these kinds of situations that the ideal-type models of universalising theories, while intended as heuristic devices by early sociologists such as Max Weber, risk becoming normative. In other words, the cases that do work may be taken as ideal-type or normative cases, which need to be replicated in other contexts. Deviance from the norm may be explained by invoking the specificity of context, such as culture, while the norm itself emerges as the general case. Such a set-up, when translated into real-world situations, can reproduce hierarchies between individuals, peoples and states that resemble colonial power relations. For example, if people in an especially poor area of London are found to be thinking or acting differently than the human subject assumed by universalising theories, their difference may be explained away by their 'backward state' or 'a culture of poverty' rather than attributed to a different way of seeing the world that emerges out of a context that is as specific as the context that assumes a universal human subject.

The most serious downside of universalising theories, however, is that they risk producing ignorance about the present. Namely, they risk producing knowledge on the basis of universal models transposed from context to context without undertaking the hard effort of trying to understand a particular situation on its own terms.

## Policy-making, context and tradition

Serge Bossini

*Serge Bossini is a high-level French civil servant in charge of the modernisation of the French state apparatus. In this short piece he reflects both on the constraints under which he operates as a servant of the French state, as well as on his own dual aspirations as a civil servant and an educated citizen.*

The Bridges Project powerfully highlights my dual nature: I am both a high-level civil servant – a servant of the state (entrusted with the task of increasing its prosperity, through whatever means necessary), as well as a reader of Michel Foucault. My profession is an exhortation to set up soft but powerful mechanisms to ‘lead’ citizens in the name of reason and freedom. On the other hand I have long recognised that any ‘disciplinary technology’ is at heart fundamentally contrary to reason and freedom.

I find consolation in two things. First, others have suffered from this contradiction: Plato, first and foremost, who had to invent the myth of ‘hell’ in order to persuade human beings who were less susceptible to reason without having to resort to physical violence. But also the French revolutionaries who, much like the American founding Fathers, had to resort to the same ‘technology’ of a belief in a future state or a vengeful God, to tame the behaviour of those over whom the Rational Truth of the Enlightenment had little sway.

My other source of consolation is the knowledge that I share these contradictions with all human beings. As Daniel Kahneman has now made perfectly clear, two systems co-exist within each of us: one is susceptible to rational argumentation, the other cuts corners and goes for the easy conclusions. For the first, truth is that of the Enlightenment: constructed, logical, counter-intuitive. For the other the truth is simply what makes sense, what is familiar.

*‘As an heir to the French revolution the aim of “my” state is the emergence of a rational nation, composed of citizens who are educated, equal and free’*

This last consolation is also bad news because this intrinsic duality makes the teleology of ‘my’ state as a French civil servant much harder to achieve. As an heir to the French revolution the aim of ‘my’ state is the emergence of a rational nation, composed of citizens who are educated, equal and free: the point at which the Republic and democracy become one and the same. And at which techniques such as discipline or the legitimate use of force are no longer required, where reason – rather than the state – governs,

and where respect for human rights is a given rather than a fight. Such an aim may seem naive of course – and it is. But I’m fairly convinced that it is nevertheless an

aim that is shared – either consciously or unconsciously – by a number of French public and civil servants.

This aim, or rather this destination, is the continuation of our legal tradition – a tradition that at every available turn, and in every era, seized the opportunity to replace more and more criminal law with more and more civil law (it is in fact the root of the word ‘civilisation’); and replaced physical engagement with contractual engagement. As the 17th-century maxim went: not everyone gets flogged because those who can pay in silver, do not pay of their body.

For an heir to the French revolution, it then becomes a matter of following that arch: our historic role has been to promote an ever-growing proportion of administrative subjects into the sphere of reason. Three key mechanisms were available: the road, the barrack and the school.<sup>1</sup>

Roads and barracks went out of fashion, but the purpose of the state education system is still to pry individuals away from their irrational beliefs, especially religious ones, and to tame their bodies, their emotions and their violence. The fact is that we still categorise people according to whether they can be persuaded by – won over to – rational argument or whether they are merely able to cling to the superstitious fear of one emanation or another (god or the police) in order to regulate their ‘humours’.

In the face of populism we think that we are dealing with popular culture’s ‘lack of culture’ – a grotesque denial of rationality. And we seem to think that simply sticking to the facts and reaffirming the power of rational thought is enough. But by doing this we actually fuel more grotesque populist behaviour.

This both explains and illustrates our difficulty in coming to terms with the fact that higher levels of education do not actually make for easier governance or leadership. Because the bad news is that higher levels of education, better access to information, improved citizen capacity, all translate into, on the one hand, greater expectations of state capacity and rationality (more transparency, reliability, coherence...) as well as an increase in emotionality, and susceptibility to the grotesque and the crass. Part of the problem is that we haven’t yet been capable of drawing the political lessons of our newfound scientific knowledge that reason is a bodily function (Francesco Varela and ‘enaction’); nor been able to make sense – again, politically – of the philosophical affirmation that rational claims are shaped by subjective experience.<sup>2</sup>

To my mind, this is the area where the Bridges Project can make the most significant contribution: for progressives, this is not an easy ‘system update’ since it pits

two radically different progressive visions against each other. One that recognises as legitimate only those movements that make 'objective' claims, that is 'rational' claims that are detached from individual interests, against a vision that recognises only the legitimacy of the lived, subjective – and physical – experience, regardless of the 'imperfection' of ideas and thought.

#### Notes

1. E. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: the modernization of rural France, 1870–1914*, Stanford University Press, 1976
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## The importance of narratives

### The role of frames and cultural values

Giulio Carini

*In this piece, Counterpoint researcher Giulio Carini applies his expertise in cognitive linguistics and political psychology to explain how applying different frames about human rights can dramatically impact the way people think and feel about them.*

An increasing proportion of the British public hold conflicting attitudes towards human rights: they see that human rights promote fairness, but also feel that human rights laws are being abused or exploited. It is no surprise then that the current UK government is prepared to scrap the Human Rights Act and even withdraw from the European Court of Human Rights. To explain this climate in the UK, policy-makers should use techniques from cognitive linguistics: they must understand how the current debate is *framed* in the media and elsewhere and how these frames activate particular conceptions of culturally specific values.

To make sense of the world, cognitive science tells us that our brains structure and connect information from our memory to create a picture or a reference point. Linguists call these structures frames. Without frames, we would be overwhelmed by information and would struggle to digest the world around us. Frames break up our ideas and experiences into manageable chunks.

*'Without frames, we would be overwhelmed by information and would struggle to digest the world around us.'*

When issues are communicated, particular frames are used – consciously or unconsciously – to present arguments or tell stories. The frames chosen and used when communicating about an issue can engage people's underlying values in a profound way, which in turn affects how they think and behave about the issue. When the media think about how to frame what they say, they are really thinking about how to appeal to the deeper values in our society that they want to elicit.

For the human rights debate in the UK, we carried out research into how these debates are currently framed in the public discourse and the values these frames evoke. The dominant frames in the media, online blogs and political speeches linked human rights with 'undeserving' groups such as foreign criminals, terrorists, benefits scroungers, or prisoners. Through several workshops, we discovered that these frames often engaged the value of equality in the British public.

Of course, the concept of equality in the UK is contested and can mean different things to different people. In our focus groups we found the majority of the frames used by the media, online blogs or political speeches when talking about human rights activated a particular conception of equality – what philosophers would call ‘luck egalitarianism’, which encouraged more negative attitudes towards human rights.

Under this conception of equality, the injustice in society is the natural inequality in the distribution of luck where some people have good luck while others have bad luck. The point of equality is then to compensate individuals for their misfortune and crucially ensure that everyone gets what they morally deserve. Where people have undeserved bad luck, they should be made equal. But people who are responsible for their own bad decisions such as foreign criminals, prisoners or terror suspects should not be made equal because it’s their own fault for losing their rights. Those who are responsible need to be punished and held morally accountable to pay for their debts to their victims.

So, while there are vulnerable people who are not responsible for their bad luck and should be made equal, there are those who are responsible for their bad choices like criminals who do not deserve to have human rights.

When the UK media and others who frame the issue of human rights appeal to the above conception of equality, they influence public opinion to question whether human rights laws are often abused by those that don’t deserve them and should be scrapped. By understanding what frames and what values are activated in the public discourse, policy-makers can gain a better understanding of what remained hidden before – why a large percentage of the British public are conflicted about human rights. The repeated use of these frames to activate the above conception of equality has now determined the way many Brits think about the issue and what they consider to be ‘common sense’. To respond more effectively to attacks on human rights, the challenge now for policy-makers is to repeatedly reframe the issue to claim a different conception of equality – one that will promote and protect human rights in the UK.

## What stories can do

*Lisa Appignanesi*

*Lisa Appignanesi is a distinguished writer, novelist and broadcaster. Here she explains why stories are so powerful and how they can be used to pave the way for better integration of migrants in society.*

They were two. He – a thin stick of a boy with a determined thrust to his jaw and cold blue eyes that hid more than they conveyed. She – a frail girl in a dirty floral dress that had seen sturdier figures in its folds. He grasped her hand, though it wasn’t clear which one was holding the other up. Alien voices barked around them. The words were impenetrable, but the tones prodded and pushed until the two abutted on a man in uniform. They ran then, zigzagged through the crowd, still clutching each other. That uniform had taken away their mother.

This is not a story. But the brief paragraph above might be the beginning of one. It might be the story of Roma or Syrian children separated in travel from their parent. It might follow them through the hurdles of migration, the hostile encounter with strangeness which also turns them into strangers.

What stories can convey is the life behind the statistics, the inwardness that headlines leave out in their blare, the experience that hides and cowers behind the bland bureaucratic protocols or the repetitions of human rights discourse.

**‘What stories can convey is the life behind the statistics’**

Fiction focuses on the individual, even when that individual blends into a group or type. It is individuals who emigrate, who travel between languages and cultures bearing their unique pasts with them in tattered cases or bodies. It is individuals who can act violently, despite themselves, or engage in unexpected acts of kindness.

Fictions of migration filled out the American dream: the tired, poor, huddled masses found any number of memorable embodiments in the novels of Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Toni Morrison and countless others. Stories such as these introduced cultures to one another and shaped the idea of a melting pot nation.

In Europe we have only recently begun to build a tapestry of migration stories. Such fictions can help us imagine the other inside and out – that hapless look-alike who has been given the lineaments of a monster in headlines or by hostile politicians. Anxieties, fears, hopes, uncertainties, the shapes of lost and promised worlds – all are there in story.

Salman Rushdie's classic *Midnight's Children* gave us the experience of partition, with its vast displacement of peoples, better than any history book. Monica Ali catapulted millions into the life of a Bangladeshi woman who could barely speak to her neighbours and was at the mercy of her husband. Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*, then *Buddha of Suburbia* and *My Son the Fanatic* functioned a little like the accounts of a wry participant observer. The fictions brought us into the minds, hearts, customs and rituals of generations of Muslims. Sometimes they had married out; their children, rebelling like their peers, were radicalised into a retro-purity, the imagined Islam of their forebears. All of them, like the characters of various ethnicities in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, also made us laugh – a starting point for cohesion rarely mooted in policy circles. In Germany, Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* particularised and enlivened the lives of Turkish immigrants.

I could go on. But that said, there have still been very few imaginative overtures into the terrain of either Roma or Romanian or indeed Polish experience. I would love to read a novel which characterised Roma women and their everyday life from the inside. When such voices come, they will help us all see beyond the mask that migrants often wear in host countries where tolerance can feel all too kin to hostility, and often is.

One final point about novels: since they often follow several characters, arguments and a variety of positions can be voiced without answers having to be instantly sought; nor are these usually offered by storytelling. This can be a useful (dare I say educative) addition to the democratic process, which in our time rarely moves much beyond treating people as consumers of the sound bites politicians presume their electorate wants.

Perhaps we might consider placing some writers or would be writers in places they rarely go – on the road, at borders, at home and foreign offices – in order to feed their fictions.

## The Eurozone crisis and its fear narratives

Susanne Mundschenk

*Susanne Mundschenk is an economist and Co-founder and Director of Eurointelligence. In this piece, she analyses the fear narrative that has been constructed around the Eurozone crisis, and how it could have played out differently if leaders had acknowledged failures, uncertainties and fears right from the start.*

The sovereign debt crisis hit the Eurozone at the end of 2009. After ten fair weather years this was the crisis that would change narratives. It would test policy-makers and their commitment to the common currency. Over the next three years, bad news would rattle the markets. Politicians would give untenable promises with the intention to control the process and ground expectations. But with no EU backstop institution or strategy in place this only heightened the crisis, pushing risk premiums to unsustainable levels, compounding the sovereign debt crisis rather than solving it.

Since then, lessons have been learned. Though with the underlying economic inconsistencies still present the construction remains fragile. The crisis also triggered narratives of fear and anger, and a sense of powerlessness and resentment.

The crisis divided the Eurozone into debtor and creditor countries. Within three years, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Cyprus became debtor countries that had to accept drastic austerity reforms in return for a bailout loan from their international creditors. The EU, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) became the main actors in the negotiation process. But it was also Germany, as the most important contributor, that dictated the terms.

The division brought up and reinterpreted past fear narratives on both sides. Reports in the German media focused on signs of being taken advantage of as a benevolent creditor, while the Greek media easily found evidence for what they considered a national humiliation. In Portugal there was a painful debate about being under external control, evoking unhappy memories of an earlier IMF-assisted programme. Ireland, once portrayed as the 'Celtic tiger', made sure to come out of the crisis as the poster boy of crisis management, even if it meant making some economically risky decisions.

*'The euro, and the Eurozone, once symbols of European integration, are now more likely to be considered as a threat to it'*

As the crisis got worse, 'fear narratives' disintegrated into 'blame narratives'. A visit from Angela Merkel or Wolfgang Schäuble to Greece produced an avalanche of anti-German news coverage, while portraits of an early-retired Greek or holiday-

enjoying Portuguese was enough for the German newspaper *Bild* to publish front page headlines such as 'This is what they do with taxpayers' money!' Compared to the pre-Eurozone world, none of the national narratives and stereotypes seem to have changed. Eurozone countries, as it turned out, were happy together in good times, but quickly fell apart in bad times.

For many people, the experience of the euro crisis also shifted the meaning of various European concepts. The euro and the Eurozone, once symbols of European integration, are now more likely to be considered as a threat to it. Fiscal policy, once discussed using a variety of models, now all follow a single doctrine of austerity. Public spending cuts and supply-side reforms become publicly accepted, even in France, as the only possible policy.

Policy reactions were often driven by fear, especially in the early phase of the crisis. The harsh austerity programmes had to be negotiated, agreed with parliament/coalition partners and implemented by different ministries in debtor countries. Creditor countries had to continue to sell bailout programmes to an increasingly Eurosceptic public at home. There were thus plenty of occasions for policy-makers to come out into the public sphere either in 'compliance', 'rebellion' or 'control' of the bailout programme. At the height of the crisis, prime ministers were quick to ensure that everything was under control, even though the situation was already out of control. Some governments staged a rebellion in the media against the bailout terms ahead of the next round of negotiations just to move the goalposts a tiny bit, continuing to reinforce distrust. Compliance was the most difficult one for debtor countries to sell in the public sphere, as it was easily exploited by opposition parties as a betrayal that put their own political survival in peril. For fearful creditor countries, the reaction was to take the negotiation process hostage and ask for additional guarantees or austerity efforts even if the act was sometimes more symbolic than of substance. These acts did not solve the issue of trust. On the contrary, they fed the underlying fears.

The image of control that policy-makers liked to convey in public starkly contrasted with citizens' experiences of uncertainty. It created a discussion that divided people into undeserved versus deserved, into winners versus losers. The result was a resurgence to reclaim sovereignty on both sides. It allowed a nationalistic perception inside the Eurozone to become the 'norm'. Creditor countries started to debate the costs and benefits of the monetary union while debtor countries were threatened with discussions of a Eurozone exit. The policy-makers were also caught up in the conflicting narratives they told their citizens, their investors and their EU creditors. This produced a sense of dishonesty and unfairness on all sides.

Could it have happened differently? With hindsight, yes, of course. We could have ended up in a different place today if we had acknowledged our failures,

uncertainties and fears right from the start. We could have used conviction narratives like Odysseus to steer through the crisis without losing sight of our common purpose despite all the difficulties on the way. We could have managed the process better if all negotiations happened through consensus-finding processes rather than using avoidance strategies to push the problem onto someone else's plate. The process would also have improved if debtors and creditors had exchanged points of view. Bailout countries complaining about unfair treatment only provoke creditor countries to reply that it is the countries' own fault and that they are only there to help. This type of discussion is not very helpful.

But the deed is done. And it may take decades to recreate the trust and the institutions the Eurozone needs to thrive. This, too, will be a journey of an *Odyssey*-like quality. Let's hope that this time we find our way together and remember what the Eurozone was once intended to be: a stepping stone for ever-deeper European integration.

*'We could have ended up in a different place today if we had acknowledged our failures, uncertainties and fears right from the start'*

# Involving citizens

## Digital democracy

Tom Rees

*Tom Rees is a games designer currently helping governments and institutions change their internal processes to be open by default. For the Bridges Project, he looks at how the communication revolution has fundamentally changed citizens' experiences and expectations of society.*

We will be the last generation to remember a world without the Internet. It is too easy to overlook this point: many people view the Web as just the latest addition to our tool belt, intriguing and helpful and occasionally relevant. It is more difficult to ingest the idea that there is no going back, and that communications technology will be central to the lives of every person born from this point on. In three hundred years, civilisation will mark its stages of development by the Industrial Revolution and by the Communication Revolution, and not much else.

In the last fifteen years technology has set about changing the way we fall in love, the way we make friends, the way we discover the world, and the way we buy and sell. The changes have reached nearly every aspect of our lives and could not have been more radical. Nobody saw this coming, and many were resistant to change. It would have been difficult to convince a CEO in 1990 that a company called Amazon was going to come along and put them out of business. For a long time it was difficult to convince businessmen that they might need an e-mail address.

There is much to be learned from the practices and processes of those who successfully embraced change and toppled the giants of their industries to become overnight millionaires. Fortunately many of them are very happy to publish books about their ideas. *ReWork*, by 37 Signals, is a fascinating reflection on how their company is run, and most of it is the exact opposite of 'best practice' embedded in our minds from thirty years ago.

**'We believe that a 21st-century government should be open by default'**

Digital Democracy is the extension of this revolution to our governments. I work in the field of Open Data, helping governments and institutions to change their internal processes to be open by default. This means a cultural shift in the way that government interacts with citizens. Freedom of Information requests should be almost unnecessary: a citizen should be able to access government data via the web, and to discuss and explore the provenance and meaning of that data. Barring exceptions for national security, privacy and some economic interests, we believe that a 21st-century government should be open by default. In a culture of communication, citizens will accept nothing less.

## Co-production in public services

Laura Massoli

*How can policy-makers win back the trust of the public? And how can civil society be utilised to enrich and strengthen policy-making? Laura Massoli – Head of Unit at the Italian Public Administration Department – explains the process of co-production and how it has improved the design and implementation of public services.*

Co-production may be defined as a 'way of planning, designing and delivering public services, which draws directly on input from citizens, service users and civil society organisations'.<sup>1</sup> Co-production has to be seen as a chance for partnership between citizens and public administrations, which takes place in order to achieve a desired outcome. In this regard, real co-production of public services does not just mean 'self-help' by individuals or 'self-organising' by communities – it's about the contributions both from citizens and the public sector. This approach actively supports citizens and uses them as assets that benefit the community. The government acts mostly as an enabler, which enables the positive resources from civil society and addresses them to fulfil the public interest. Moreover, as highlighted in a 2009 OECD study,<sup>2</sup> there are several benefits that governments may obtain by investing in greater involvement of citizens. These include greater trust in government, better public outcomes at less cost, higher citizen compliance with public decisions, greater equity of access to public services and discovery of innovative and non-conventional solutions.<sup>3</sup>

**'Users become active agents who first co-define the primary dimensions and indicators used to evaluate the service'**

The pilot initiative 'Civic Evaluation' represents, within the Italian public central administrations, a significant experiment of civic involvement in public service management. The initiative, which involved fourteen local authorities of four southern Italian regions (Calabria, Campania, Puglia and Sicily),<sup>4</sup> was launched in 2009 by the Italian Public Administration Department in partnership with the national civic association 'Cittadinanzattiva'.<sup>5</sup> The general aim was to promote wider collaboration between public administrations and citizens (users) in assessing public services.

Civic evaluation can be defined as a form of 'not fully structured assessment' in which citizens express motivated judgements on relevant public services. In this regard, civic evaluation may be considered as a way for citizens to assess public services in close collaboration with the administrations, with the final aim of providing relevant suggestions to improve the services.

In this respect, the civic evaluation initiative goes beyond customer satisfaction. Users do not simply respond to a customer satisfaction survey but provide valuable feedback on the actual quality of the delivered service.

Users become active agents who first co-define the primary dimensions and indicators used to evaluate the service, then conduct the direct monitoring/assessment and finally communicate and discuss the results with other citizens and local authorities.

On the administrative side, the civic evaluation is not a sort of inspection conducted autonomously by citizens to criticise governments. It is instead a shared evaluation performed by citizens/users, in partnership with administrations and civic associations, in which the co-ordination and mediation role of the association plays a strategic role.

One innovative element featured in the civic evaluation project refers to *the centrality of the citizens' involvement*. Citizens were involved in a focus group, conducted in November 2009 (together with public managers, members of citizen associations and technicians who were considered to be 'experts'). The outcome of the focus group was the common definition of ten main elements of urban quality: security, access and reliability, connectivity, sociability, waste management, health, urban maintenance, subsidiarity, weak social actors and information. These elements were then grouped into dimensions, operationalised in indicators and finally organised into monitoring grids and used by citizens, with the support of Cittadinanzattiva, during their monitoring activities.

From the point of view of the administrations involved and their relationships with local citizens the referents of the administrations appreciated the participation of the citizens, not only as an opportunity for learning new ways of managing public services but also as an effective instrument to develop social capital and civic belonging. Taking into consideration the results of a survey addressed to the participants and carried out at the end of the pilot phase (July 2010) 80 per cent of the respondents (project managers of the local administrations) said that they acquired new knowledge in evaluation methodologies and citizen participation that they could use in other projects. One of the managers involved in the project stated: 'I learnt about new methodologies to improve neighbourhood management. The involvement of citizens has filled an important gap in our public service management.'

In addition, the managers considered the citizens' participation very useful mostly in terms of the 'creation of a participative attitude' (44% of the respondents), 'support in the identification of new problems/criticalities, which the administration has not addressed' (34% of the respondents) and 'identification of new

solutions that the administration has not recognised' (11.5%). The representative of the administrations also highlighted that this experience contributed to letting citizens have a view from inside and better understand how a public administration works and how difficult it is to administrate it.

A further important factor that emerged from the project is related to the level of political commitment among municipalities. It can be mentioned that, overall, the *political support* to the initiative strongly affected the final result. In fact, where the political commitment was strong and active (for example the mayor or town councillors effectively interested and involved in the project) the initiative was much more successful in terms of final outcomes.

#### Notes

1. David Boyle and Michael Harris, *The Challenge of Co-production* (discussion paper), London, NESTA, 2009, available at [www.nesta.org.uk](http://www.nesta.org.uk) (last accessed 6 August 2014)
2. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Focus on Citizens: Public engagement for better policy and services*, Paris, 2009
3. OECD, *Focus on Citizens*
4. The project was funded under the European Structural Funds – PON Governance 2007-2013. The local municipalities involved were Lamezia Terme, Reggio Calabria, Vibo Valentia (Calabria); Sorrento, Pagani, Salerno (Campania); Bari, Lecce, Putignano, San Severo (Puglia); Mazara del Vallo, Salaparuta, Siracusa, Porto Empedocle (Sicily)
5. Cittadinanzattiva – [www.cittadinanzattiva.it](http://www.cittadinanzattiva.it) – is a nonprofit organisation that promotes citizen and consumer rights in Italy. In 2006 a protocol was signed between the Public Administration Department and Cittadinanzattiva in order to promote new citizen participation initiatives related to service quality

## Making citizens

Emran Mian

*Emran Mian is Director of the Social Market Foundation. In this piece, he reflects on the ideas of Roberto Unger and looks at how they could impact the future of UK government, its citizens and the state itself.*

There is the possibility of an economic vanguardism outside the economic vanguard.<sup>1</sup> It's an idea from Roberto Unger, the critical legal studies theorist from Harvard who has written on everything from the future of the left to the problem of time in theoretical physics.

But the idea of inventing an economic *avant garde* isn't his alone. The centre-right coalition government in the UK espouses it too, by creating tax incentives for employee-owned businesses, fostering the creation of mutuals in public services and priming a market for investment in all of this.<sup>2</sup>

***'The point is to open public services to these communities, not merely as users, but as makers too, or replacements'***

Unsurprisingly, the two proponents of this agenda hold different views on the personality of the citizens who would participate in the new economy. Unger reckons that the fundamental shaping force in personality is an idea of the future and it is this which drives us into the world of others.<sup>3</sup> The left, he argues, has been far too timid in reshaping either the market or the state to create a higher-energy politics which would be responsive to the higher energy in each of us.

I don't think Conservative or Liberal Democrat politicians identify with this analysis. Their view is more likely to be that the true sources of human motivation are in communities smaller than the nation-state, what Prime Minister David Cameron calls the 'big society'.<sup>4</sup> The point is to open public services to these communities, not merely as users, but as makers, too, or replacements.

Are citizens though to be taken just as they are into either of these projects, or must they be prepared in some way? Patrick Haggard's experiments suggest that we're ready.<sup>5</sup> Put alone in a room, at what seems a basic level of neurological function, we bind ourselves more closely to our acts – the simple ones he tests involve pressing a button to make a sound – rather than to mere events.

What this means is that we record the made-sound as occurring closer in time to our action than it was; and the effect is stronger when the sound is a pleasant one.

The catch is that the effect persists when the sound is unpleasant too. We feel a tiny bit closer to the pleasant sound, but it's risky to make large political and economic choices on the basis of a few milliseconds' difference.

Can we make sure, in some acceptable way, that citizens do the right thing? Human rights frameworks are one way of doing that, taking our basic dignity out of scope, throwing down lines that can't be crossed by anyone, no matter how *avant gardist* they might be. While some UK politicians – and many Brits – are uncomfortable with European interpretations of rights, even the boldest proposals are about bringing rights home, creating a British Bill of Rights rather than the rule of the mob.

The government is already scaling up a National Citizen Service too.<sup>6</sup> Mid-teens are spending time away from home in their school holidays learning more about community organisations, each other – and themselves – at the taxpayers' expense. These digital natives might in fact be surprised if they can't disrupt the business models of traditional public services; the point is to show them that disruption can be social too.

Perhaps the truth is that everyone will have an Ungerian phase and then grow up to be a new social economy democrat.

You'll have noticed that there is no mention of the state in any of this. Is it to have any role other than what is left over by the *avant garde* or the Facebook generation? In the UK, we're pragmatic and don't talk a lot about the state. We have no codified constitution, our public law is an emanation of the big society too. Oddly enough, withdrawing from the European Convention on Human Rights might force us to write some stuff down and sign it. Before then, making citizens in the retail sense will be the essence of what works.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

1. Roberto Unger, 'The Labour Party and the British alternative', available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJq8VImEBTc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJq8VImEBTc) (last accessed 6 August 2014)
2. See, for example, *Growing the Social Investment Market: The landscape and economic impact*, UK Cabinet Office, 3 July 2013
3. Roberto Unger, *Passion: An essay on personality*, Free Press, 1986
4. See, for example, David Cameron, 'Big society speech' on 19 July 2010, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/big-society-speech> (last accessed 6 August 2014)
5. Presentation to the Bridges Project meeting at Elmau, 19 November 2013
6. 'Welcome to NCS, it all starts at YES', available at [www.ncsyes.co.uk/](http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/) (last accessed 6 August 2014)
7. 'What works network: using evidence to make better decisions to improve public services', available at <https://www.gov.uk/what-works-network> (last accessed 6 August 2014)

## Leading authors

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**Dr Catherine Fieschi** is Director of Counterpoint, a research consultancy that provides governments, NGOs and visionary businesses with research and analysis on how cultural and social dynamics affect politics, policy-making and markets. Prior to directing Counterpoint, Catherine led the London-based think tank Demos (2005–08).

With a focus on institutionalism and new social movements, her work is intrinsically comparative and draws on a variety of social science disciplines as well as interpretive approaches in order to reveal the hidden wiring and civil society dynamics that are too often absent from mainstream risk, political analyses and policy-making. Her research has focused on populism and mobilisation; she is the author of *In the Shadow of Democracy* (MUP 2008) and of numerous pamphlets and articles on populism, identity politics, emotions and politics, as well as political and social innovation.

Catherine is a Senior Associate in the Department of Government at LSE and a regular contributor to press, radio and television debates. Her work has appeared in the *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *Libération*, *Le Monde*, *The New Statesman*, *Prospect Magazine* and others. She has a PhD in Comparative Political Science from McGill University and is fluent in several languages.

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Among her publications are *The EU's Transformative Power* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and 'Six lessons of enlargement ten years on: the EU's transformative power in retrospect and prospect', *Journal of Common Market Studies: Annual Review 2013*, 52:S1, 40–56, 2014. Her work has appeared in the *Financial Times*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *Aspenia* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

Heather's academic career includes teaching at the London School of Economics, and research at Oxford and Birmingham universities, the Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House, London), and the European University Institute (Florence). She has a PhD from Birmingham University and a BA and MA from Oxford University. She speaks French, Italian and German.

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The Bridges Project aims to bring new insights from researchers and experts on human behaviour to the attention of policy-makers, politicians and activists, in order to help them work through some of the most sensitive and complex policy dilemmas facing the open society in Europe. The project encourages policy-makers to develop a more in-depth understanding of the new political landscape in order to help them diagnose public grievances more accurately and respond to what underlies them.

This publication is divided into two parts. The first illustrates some of the ways in which the Bridges Project has identified transmission mechanisms by which policy-makers, politicians and activists can be persuaded to adopt new insights. It further illustrates how these insights have been used to change policy and political strategy in many countries in Europe. The second part is a collection of essays written by members of the Bridges network, who are intellectuals and top researchers working across a number of disciplines – including cognitive neuroscience, social psychology, anthropology and psychoanalysis. Their findings have enabled us to create a set of tools that will allow policy-makers to gain new insights into the publics they serve, and uphold vital norms in European society.



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