

The Future of Civil Society and Social Governance

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THE FUTURE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL GOVERNANCE

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Introduction

The former U.S. Senator Mo Udall would often introduce the final session of a conference by stating “ We now come to the part where although everything has been said, not everyone has said it yet.” So I am conscious that some, possibly many, of the issues that I raise and discuss may already have been aired at previous points in this symposium.

What I hope to do, in order to give at least some distinctive features to my presentation, is to link broader themes of globalisation and its consequences for civil society and social governance with some specific discussion of how a small social democratic country, namely Scotland, is dealing with some of these issues at a grass roots level and the problems and opportunities that this creates for both politicians and citizens.

Let me start by noting a personal paradox that, I think, afflicts many of the immediate post-war generation in Britain. In one of his aphorisms, the eighteenth century German writer Lichtenberg notes that although the farm boy can jump higher than the old woman, and the athlete can jump higher than the farm boy, we should not assume that progress in high jumping can go on forever. At some point there comes a limit to human power and capacity. Because our experience has been one of more or less continuous growth and increasing prosperity (unlike that of say, our parents, or citizens of other countries and continents) we carry a certain optimism that our children will be better off than we were, and that interruptions to the road of progress are temporary blips to be overcome by resolute action and that forces such as globalisation, free trade, new technology and so on will lead inevitably to greater prosperity, more democracy and what Francis Fukuyama seems to have in mind when he talks about the ‘End of History’ with the victory of Liberal Democracy in both economic and political terms.

Though this may be our personal experience as members of an advanced Western state, it jars with any examination of the past, where we are all too aware of the fallibility of progress to be continuous, with a realistic view of the present, where we are all too aware of the devastation that globalisation can have in poorer countries and with a common sense view of the future, where we are all too aware of the uncertainties that prevail (Donald Rumsfeld’s ‘unknown unknowns’ as opposed to ‘known unknowns’). It may be that the period from 1945 to the present is the blip and that the world of uncertainty and insecurity of our parents or those struggling in sub-Saharan Africa is the norm, which will shortly re-establish itself.

Fukuyama’s thesis in ‘The End of History’, apart from being a re-heated version of the Bell, Lipset and Shils ‘End of Ideology’ thesis in the 1950s, is highly questionable and, of course, itself an expression of Liberal ideology. It stands as a warning as to how an ideological and stunted view of progress distorts past, present and future.

This blindness, that the present (and what we perceive as progressive within it) is really the only conceivable state of affairs, also affects our views of government and governance. In particular, it lands us with the view that the nation state is the norm (which it patently is not, at least in historical terms where it is a relative newcomer) and the culmination of a path of progress, which has decreed it to be the best way of governing (which is debatable at least).

Globalisation: a cause for optimism or pessimism?

This leads to a number of problems we associate with the sweep of globalisation and its impact on our citizens and communities.

We are, for example, increasingly conscious of the changing power relationships between government (at all levels) and global companies. This is not just an issue of crude power, in the sense that a company can pull out of a country with consequent job losses and the possible short-term devastation of local communities with impunity. It is also about the fact that established political boundaries (those of local government, for example) within which certain decisions are made do not reflect the realities of either the modern labour market or the modern investment market. And, it is also about the speed and process of decision-making in two very different models. For business, decision-making is determined by the needs of the market place and responding to consumer demand, for democratic governments it is partly determined by the election cycle, the necessary consultation processes and the other elements of public participation. A physical metaphor for this in Scotland is the difference between Glasgow City Chambers, home of the local authority and a beautiful Victorian building from the nineteenth century representing the high point of Glasgow's prosperity as the 'second city of the Empire' and, say, the HQ of BT, a modern glass building which they have recently moved into and may move out of, depending on their success in the market place.

A challenge thrown up by this disparity in power is to the nation state itself. Too small, in many cases to resist the power of large global companies, it is arguable that European nations see in the creation of the EU a way to collaborate around a collective agenda at sufficient scale in order to have real power in relation to global capital and where it will choose to invest.

But the nation state is also challenged at a lower level, where it is arguable that whilst too small to combat global economic trends, it is too large and remote to give citizens a real sense of local identity. This is why many European governments are suspicious about the concept of the 'Europe of the Regions', which they see as a plot by Brussels bureaucrats to remove a number of powers by aggregating them up at an EU level (foreign policy, defence policy, financial policy), whilst simultaneously devolving other powers to regional assemblies and leaving national governments with a reduced and reducing role.

I think that this is an issue worthy of debate. In Scotland, it has a particular resonance because of the existence of the Scottish National Party (SNP) which is committed in the long term to seek (via a referendum) independence for Scotland, whilst remaining within

the EU. What is slightly depressing is that the debate is exclusively around the issue of creating another nation state within Europe, rather than looking at alternative (such as Federal) solutions. As the Brussels correspondent of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* put it in Edinburgh recently “Why is Scotland pursuing a nineteenth century solution to the problems and issues of the twenty first century?” Part of this is to do, I believe, with a misconception about sovereignty. The nationalist view of the world is that sovereignty is rather like virginity, you either have it or you don’t, whereas a more realistic view is that, sovereign nation or not, there are always limitations to power and influence which need negotiation and partnership to resolve.

One alleged symptom of the reducing relevance of the nation state to the lives of its citizens is *the long-term fall in participation rates in elections*. In the U.S.A. the level is now below 50% (and much lower in disadvantaged groups for whom political change might conceivably have a greater impact upon their lives) and in the UK (including Scotland) the participation rate in general elections is heading towards those levels. Personally I think that this is a worrying trend, in that it is an early sign of a situation where people first start to regard politics as irrelevant and then start to see it in a more corrosive and cynical light, leading eventually to the position which I assert pertains in Italy; one where there is a general contempt for government and a mistrust of politicians.

Another sign of this trend is the *declining participation in political parties*. The Labour Party, after a brief post-1997 boom in membership has now slipped back to perhaps half the level it enjoyed twenty years ago, and the Conservatives are in a crisis with membership at an all time low and the average age of members now nearly 65. This may simply reflect the existence of more enjoyable activities in the modern world, or as Oscar Wilde put it “The problem with Socialism is that it takes up too many evenings”.

Of course, the rather poor turnout for Scottish Parliamentary elections (scraping above 50% but well below it in many areas) does not bode well for a ‘Europe of the regions’ showing that strong regional government can revive interest in the democratic process on its own. There are a number of specific reasons for this, including the ongoing embarrassment about the actual cost of the parliament building itself (up from an initial estimate of £40 million to £375 million and rising, with the whole project now three years behind schedule), which has hardly convinced Scots that those in the parliament are capable of running the real affairs of the nation. Though the ‘project’ that is Scottish devolution is undoubtedly long-term and should not be judged on its initial four years, there are worrying signs that the long-term will look like the short-term, characterized by small town politics rather than a new vision for the nation. Certainly, the hope that the new parliament would lead to a new style of less confrontational politics by reducing the importance of old party loyalties through a proportional representation system, which virtually guarantees the need for a coalition government, has remained just that – a hope. More seriously, the parliament has exposed both the limitations of the ruling coalition (Labour and Liberal Democrats) in terms of their ability to enthuse the electorate with a convincing and coherent vision and, crucially, it has destroyed the argument that the SNP is a fully-fledged government in waiting, brimming with talent and ideas for the new Scotland they wish to create. The failure of the SNP as an alternative is one of the main

reasons for the failure of the Scottish parliament to ignite the interest and support of the nation.

Perhaps I am being too gloomy here. Though the mainstream parties struggle for members (perhaps reflecting the fact that ordinary members have little influence on those parties with the prospect of power) minority and single issue parties – in Scotland, the Greens and the Scottish Socialist Party (broadly an offshoot of the former Militant Tendency that infiltrated and nearly destroyed the British Labour Party in the 1980s)- have prospered recently and may well revitalise the Scottish Parliament in its second term.

In addition, *there is a boom in the membership of voluntary and community groups in Scotland*. Each year over 1,000 new charities are formed in Scotland to meet the needs of the community. It is an interesting, if perhaps controversial, hypothesis that the entrepreneurialism of Scots shows itself much more in the creation of social enterprises and charities than of ‘regular’ businesses. Since 1997 the size of the social economy (roughly the part of the not for profit sector that provides goods and services) has increased from 40,000 to somewhere between 70,000 and 90,000 employees and that there has been a 300% increase in volunteers over the same time. In comparison, Scotland has one of the lowest business start-up rates in the UK.

We may pause and recapitulate at this point by saying that there is a *trend of reducing participation in the political process, both in terms of voters turning out at election time and in membership of conventional political parties*. This may reflect disenchantment with those parties and a feeling that there are now only marginal differences between the political menus on offer, coupled with a sense that ordinary members are less important than the ubiquitous ‘focus groups’ that seem to be used by professional politicians to determine everything from their policy on abortion to their choice of holiday venue and colour of tie.

Conversely, it may reflect what J.K. Galbraith characterizes as the politics of contentment. In other words, people are not disenchanting, they are quite happy with the state of affairs in terms of economic prosperity and, to be frank, have many more interesting things to do with their leisure time than get involved in conventional politics, including devoting that time to practical activities that they can see benefiting their families and communities directly and in the short-term.

Whether we are worried or not by this trend depends partly on our own political views about the need to create alternatives to the current centre left/centre right choices and whether or not we fear that declining participation gives both extremists the chance to hijack political parties (as so nearly happened to Labour in the 1980s) and the chance to hijack whole elections (as, for example the British National Party has tried to do locally in the north of England). In short, if we as citizens cease to participate in the normal political life of the country through apathy, as opposed to contentment, then this will eventually erode the standing of those democratic institutions and render them susceptible to collapse or impotence. As in a bad marriage, indifference is as destructive in the long-term as dislike.

As I have said, I am worried by this trend. In addition to the reasons given above about the dangers of apathy letting extremism take a grip, I think that the decline in taking citizenship seriously has many deleterious effects, which, once they have a grip, are much harder to remove than to prevent in the first place. Robert Reich, Bill Clinton's former Labor Secretary summed it up very well in an address to Harvard Law School graduates. He suggested that they could, of course, just look at their own needs and those of their immediate family and, no doubt, go on to earn large salaries in the private sector. His warning was that if they did not involve themselves with the wider issues facing society, poverty, deprivation and so on, then this success would be illusory because they would increasingly find themselves having to live in 'ghettos of the rich', fearful of crime penetrating the security gates of their houses, fearful for their children's safety and fearful of the backlash that both envy and desperation can produce. A trip to downtown Cleveland or parts of Detroit is a reminder that these problems are significant and enduring and have not been solved by a general prosperity within society. The engagement of the middle class, for better or worse, is essential to civic prosperity.

In parallel with, and in contrast to, the trends I have been describing above is, however, the growth (in the economically advanced countries at least) of our power as consumers or customers. This trend is again very visible if you ever go to the United States. One is constantly aware of the fact that as workers, Americans seem to have very limited rights (certainly in relation to those in Europe) but as customers they seem to have considerable rights and powers and, for that matter, influence. Though workers battle with their multi-national employers and governments try to regulate multi-national companies, what seems interesting to me is the increase in such methods as consumer boycotts and consumer pressure groups to change behaviour. This can be over something quite specific, as in the case of the English National Consumer Council threatening credit card companies with a 'super action' (the equivalent of an American 'class action') over their charges because of the failure of the government Financial Services Agency to regulate them with sufficient vigour, or something much more general such as the campaign to get western governments to write off Third World debt in recent years.

One argument, therefore, is that an effect of globalisation has been to shift the focus of power from that exercised by citizens and the governments they choose to companies and the consumer as their customer. I hope it does not sound over simplistic to say that despite (or possibly because of) the relative weakness of government in Italy and the contempt in which it is held, Italy as a society still 'works' and still has a powerful and prosperous economy which does not appear to have been held back since the war by the numerous changes of government and even more numerous political scandals. Individuals have simply found ways of sidestepping the inconvenience of government through a web of different connections to goods and services, best demonstrated by the fact that the 'black market' in Italy is estimated at between 25% and 30% of the GDP.

The response of the centre/left in the UK

The recognition of this is, I think, part of the logic behind the Labour Party's policies in both Scotland and the UK as a whole. If we look, for example, at recent pronouncements, especially in Scotland, on Community Regeneration, we can determine a number of strands.

First is the view that not only is employment the best way out of poverty it is also the best way to give citizens a stake in their society. This explains both the reform of the welfare system and the tax system to create a world in which it pays to work for the vast majority. It also carries with it the *acceptance of the market economy* as the driver of overall economic prosperity.

Second is the view that previous Labour governments have erred on the side of 'rights' and previous Conservative governments have erred on the side of 'responsibilities' and this requires a change in the relationship between the state and the citizen from one that has been paternal ('the nanny state') to one that is fraternal (one of equal members of a family supporting each other).

Third is the view that *communities as well as individuals need to be empowered*, though as I shall suggest later, this is somewhat unclear in practice.

Finally, there is the view that none of this talk will mean anything if services delivered to citizens in the least prosperous areas are not of the same high standard as for those in the most prosperous areas, whether this is education, street lighting, crime prevention or rubbish collection. This is not just a matter of *increasing investment in public services*; *it is also a matter of restructuring them to meet consumer rather than producer needs*.

What is noticeable here is that issues of fairness and equality (except in the sense of equality of opportunity) take a lower place in the agenda to those of economic growth and labour market flexibility. Though continually calling itself 'new' and 'modernising' there is a curious sense in which New Labour has returned to the thesis of Tony Crosland's book of the 1950s, 'The Future of Socialism' in which overall growth and rising standards of living will enable Labour governments to avoid the issue of redistributing wealth within society. Like Crosland's thesis it is likely to come unstuck when the next recession strikes (assuming that we have not yet abolished the economic cycle).

A lot can be said about the New Labour agenda and whether or not it can reverse voter apathy and revitalise the mechanisms for citizen involvement. My sense is that its supporters claim too much, partly because they misunderstand the relationship between ideas and action within political ideologies. An example of this is Tony Giddens who wants to give the 'Third Way', as the New Labour project is grandly called, some sort of intellectual coherence to distinguish it from its (presumably less coherent) intellectual rivals such as Conservatism and old style Marxism.

In his essay 'The Challenge of Renewal', Giddens argues that the centre left needs to win three battles – those of ideas, strategy and tactics. In the battle of ideas he is able to

dismiss Conservatism because it is “an unstable and inconsistent mix of free market philosophy and the defence of tradition”. Thus Conservatives want to preserve the traditional family and at the same time respond to the needs of the modern labour market for more female workers. Again, a lot can be said here. Giddens, I think, misunderstands Conservatism by failing to recognise that like many ideologies it is made up of different strands and currents vying for both political and intellectual supremacy and that like all successful ideologies it adapts and changes over time to new circumstances. This means, amongst other things, that the intellectual form of Conservatism (or any other ideology) and its manifestation as a political party are quite different and the intellectual incoherence or otherwise of an ideology does not stand in the way of its political success. Conservatism has been the predominant political party in Britain precisely because of its ability to adapt and to steal the ideas of others. Indeed, it is arguable that the biggest case of ‘entryism’ or political hijacking in the last 100 years has not been the attempted take over of ‘Old Labour’ by the Marxists of Militant Tendency in the 1980s but the capture of the Conservative Party by nineteenth century Liberal economics in the 1970s.

The same points about lack of intellectual coherence can, of course, be leveled at New Labour, where nineteenth century Liberal economics (we are all Liberals now!) come into uncomfortable contact with Fabian views of social justice that are equally problematic at the intellectual level, shown best perhaps in the perennial dilemma about equality of opportunity versus equality of outcomes. The more one supports the former, the less the latter is likely.

Again, one could plausibly argue that Liberalism is in fact the ideology of our times (and none the less incoherent for being successful) with Conservatives representing the strand of negative Liberal thought (i.e. the absence of government constraint on the individual) and Labour representing the positive strand of Liberal thought (i.e. the T.H. Green view of government creating liberty through its interventions).

My point here is that the success or otherwise of ideologies is related only contingently and weakly to their ‘coherence’ as intellectual edifices; it is rather that their success in political terms gives support to their claims of coherence. The early perceived success of the Soviet Union gave Marxism/Leninism status, the success of Thatcherism revived nineteenth century Liberal economics and so on. At the end of the day, all ideologies are incoherent in an intellectual sense, they are simply more or less plausible at a given time to a given set of problems, be they those of war torn Russia in 1917 or strike torn Britain in 1979. Our choice of preference is that of James Joyce when he remarked ironically that “Whilst Catholicism is a coherent absurdity, Protestantism is an incoherent one”.

To return from this slightly abstract discussion to civil society and social governance. I do want to argue that Labour in both the UK and Scotland has problems with reconciling the four strands I outlined earlier at a practical level for its citizens.

First of all, an acceptance of market economics immediately brings in the idea that government is limited in its actions and, in particular, it cannot buck international trends on investment and on the working of the labour market. This, in turn, must have

implications for how communities can be empowered. If a job is a key element in personal empowerment because of the choice it gives as a consumer, then the existence of large areas in Scotland where unemployment and economic inactivity are the norm must lead to powerless communities. Yet how can government realistically bring jobs to these areas, as opposed to making the individuals 'job ready' for when opportunities arise?

Second, there is a major issue about improving and restructuring services to give equal quality to all. Part of this is about how to move from producer power (represented by the unions, determined to protect members' rights and conditions) to consumer power in the sense of choice or at least redress. Labour has ducked most of these issues in Scotland, though it has been more adventurous in England, using the voluntary sector as an alternative source of provision for public services. What we still see in Scotland is a failure of political will rather than a failure of intellectual coherence. And, of course, the timescale for restructuring and improving services is very different. It is relatively easy to see how rubbish collection could be improved, or housing repairs carried out more quickly, much less easy to see how under performing schools could be improved.

There is little doubt that although public services are technically 'owned by and accountable to' electors, that sense of ownership is weak if not non-existent. But the dilemma here is do people want to own the service or do they just want it to be better run? Empowering communities, if what we mean by this is giving local control of certain local services, merely runs the risk of putting an even heavier burden on individuals within stressed communities. It ignores the issue that poor services in many areas are caused by lack of resources. Not only will we ask individuals in these communities to work during the day, in the evenings we expect them to take decisions about crime prevention, educational priorities and the rest. Either this will require massive levels of support and the transfer of resources from better off areas, or it will run the danger of failing to address the main issue, which is as much about quality as about control.

Social governance: some practical examples

Uncomfortable though many of these issues are, we do need to address them and at a practical level. I want then, to spend the remainder of this paper looking towards some of those solutions. Again, I am conscious of the gap between global issues and local solutions and how the type of solution often seems puny in comparison to the issue it is meant to address. It resembles in some ways the problem in the plays of Christopher Marlowe between ambition and action in his heroes. Faust is given all the power in the world by Mephistopheles and what does he do with it? He decides to kick the Pope on the bottom.

At the general level of re-inforcing the attributes of civil society it seems to me that there are a number of things that need to be done in the long-term. If we want more people to vote in elections and to participate in political parties then of course those parties need to offer a vision that is beyond the immediate, and above all a vision of optimism. The often-touted solution of making voting compulsory merely masks the problem and

solutions such as e voting attack the symptoms and not the cause. It is significant that both Mrs. Thatcher and Tony Blair are both in this sense, optimists over the future of Britain and have struck a chord in the electorate. Blair has, however, like Faust, been very timid with the power given to him, as has Jack McConnell in the Scottish Parliament. The trick is to move from Blair's strengths as a leader – the ability to articulate a broad vision in suitably ambiguous language – to recognizing that exhortation to improve, coupled with ill-defined increases in public resources will not improve bureaucracies and that, contrary to the New Labour ethos, *retaining power actually means giving up control*.

But we also need to *change the mechanisms for selecting those who go into politics* so it ceases to be a lifelong career and more a period of public service within a broader career plan. This may mean limiting periods in office or in elected roles, but this will not be sufficient unless party hierarchies start to look for different people to encourage at the grass roots level.

In addition we can, in Scotland at least, start to *do politics in a different way*. The advantage of the current Parliament is that back benchers as well as the government can propose legislation and we need to make more use of this, along with finding ways of bringing public concerns directly to the Parliament. This will, of course, require the political parties to think differently about their relationship with each other, closer perhaps to *Michael Porter's model of 'competitive collaboration' in the business world* than the current model of either being a friend or an enemy with no middle ground.

But more importantly it is outside of conventional political mechanisms that we can both help to revive civic society and increasing social governance is a method of this. The key issue here is that consumers want more choice in public services (because they see this in many other areas of their life) and *models of social governance give both increased choice and give local people a stake in the delivery of their services*.

My own view is that this can all stem from a political desire to improve public services but to recognise that privatisation is not the only and not always the best way of doing this. Five types of model are worth mentioning.

The first is where social economy organisations are simply allowed to compete on a level playing field for public service contracts, based not on an old fashioned model of grants from local authorities to subsidise a series of 'projects', but on a new model of investing in effective service delivery from organisations. I don't think that this model will work everywhere, but one area where it has huge potential is in what I would call (following Professor Peter Lloyd) 'trust based services' such as child care, care for the elderly and so on. The key here is that consumers are less interested in price than in quality and whether they 'trust' someone to look after their child or an elderly relative. The other obvious area is around environmentally sustainable issues such as recycling or forestry.

The model here will be different depending on the appropriate level of community involvement required and on the sophistication of the local community. For example, is it important to have local people on the Board, or more important to involve them at a

more practical level? But experience over 25 years in Glasgow shows that such organizations can both deliver services in more acceptable ways than a local authority and simultaneously build up local expertise and capacity. An example is that of environmental improvements around housing, with local tenants not involved on the Board, but actively involved in the design of the improvements, leading to better after care and less vandalism. In short, social economy organizations give people a stake as workers, as volunteers or as managers. It is encouraging to note that in its review of the social economy in Scotland, the Scottish Executive has recognized the need to provide equal access to markets and to recognise that this will mean social economy organizations making (but not distributing) a profit.

The second model is based on the potential for local authority workers to 'buy out' their own service and run it as a social enterprise. Perhaps the best example of this is Greenwich Leisure Services in London. For a number of years the Leisure Department in the local Council had been cutting back on services because of financial constraints and had reached the point where the only alternatives were those of closing leisure centres or coming up with a more radical solution.

The radical solution chosen was to establish a workers co-operative and to take control of the former local authority services provided by the Leisure Department. The results have been both fascinating and spectacular. The new service has, since 1993, massively increased its turnover and halved the subsidy required from the Council. It has over 50% of local residents as members and now employs more people than when operated as a Council Department. Interestingly, it is still heavily unionized and it now operates services across several other London Boroughs.

What I find particularly interesting and encouraging about this model is that the people running it are exactly the same management team as the one formerly running the Leisure Department in Greenwich Council. In other words, transforming a public service has not needed an injection of private sector management. This leads me to believe that there are more public sector entrepreneurs than we imagine, who, given the right incentives and framework can provide first rate products whilst retaining a public sector ethos of service.

The point about incentives and frameworks is crucial here. As the Managing Director put it to me "When we were a Council Department we always knew that we were low down on the list of political priorities and that if the Council did have more money it would always choose to spend it on, say, improving school toilets rather than leisure facilities. What the new structure has given us is the ability to choose our own priorities and determine our own future".

The third model is that of the Housing Association movement which has flourished in the UK over 30 years and provided a robust way of owning and controlling assets locally, combined with the ability to play a role in reviving the local economy through broader economic measures such as business support and workspace development. What is significant here is that local communities can actually control substantial assets (i.e. the housing stock) and use it to leverage in other investment. What is also significant is that

over 30 years, many housing associations have learnt how to balance community involvement with professional standards of management and to deal with the complex issues of succession planning amongst Board members and staff. Again, it is encouraging that in Glasgow, the single biggest transfer of local authority housing stock in Europe has taken place with 84,000 houses now in the possession of a single housing association, to be followed by subsequent devolution to 13 more locally based associations over the next two years.

Fourthly, we can look at the Local Enterprise Development Company (LEDC) network in Glasgow as a model of area based regeneration in under-invested areas throughout the city. The eight companies cover about half of the city's population and are governed by a Board drawn from public agencies that fund them, local communities and the private sector. To be fair, performance is not uniform, but the best of these companies have developed an interesting mix of community asset building, training and business development without sacrificing professional standards to community politics.

Finally, the last few years have seen the development of interesting hybrids involving the public, private and not for profit sectors around economic development themes such as employment and property development. Examples include Working Links (two private companies and the government's Employment Service) to run the government's Employment Zones programme, and EDI Ltd. an arms length company to develop property and land for the Council in Edinburgh. My sense here is that the future will see more of these collaborations and joint ventures to reflect what partners can bring to projects and a greater understanding between agencies that have lived in separate silos for too long.

Conclusion

Two final points: I think that *timescales are important, as is a sense of realism*. Put crudely, we have taken 20, perhaps 30 or 40 years to get into the present mess and to erode the links between politicians and voters, politicians and communities and so on. We need, therefore to be realistic and assume that it will take similar periods of time to restore the balance in these areas. The temptation for politicians is to look for a quick fix that defeats long-term planning or to change things in the short-term because quick results do not seem to be forthcoming. To choose an analogy from horticulture, if you keep digging up a plant to look at the roots it will not grow. This is, as we know, the principle behind bonsai – trim the roots – and may explain why we get so many bonsai projects despite massive public investment.

If time is important, so are resources. These solutions will not be cheap because they require sustained investment in people, places and ideas.

I mentioned earlier that Glasgow has a magnificent Town Hall. The design was chosen by a public competition. What is less well known is that the second placed design, itself a huge and magnificent building, was taken up by the Co-operative movement and used as the plan for their HQ in Glasgow. The building today has been sold off to property

developers and remains a powerful image of how, over 100 years the co-operative movement lost its way and its market. There is no single answer, co-operative or otherwise, but recreating or re-inventing for our present century the sort of movement that the co-operative building symbolized, with its focus on fair priced goods and services allied to progressive social control, will not be a short journey or an easy one. But it will be worthwhile.