

Citizens Rising



A report from the People's Conversation

Contents

Foreword	3
Rethinking Citizenship for 2016	4
The People's Conversation	4
Challenge 1: Increasing participation in public decision making	7
Challenge 2: Developing and nurturing active citizenship	11
Challenge 3: Building trust and respect	15
Challenge 4: Making citizenship global	19
Challenge 5: Resourcing and empowering citizens	23
The Process	27



Foreword



Foreword

In 2016 we will reflect on one hundred years since the 1916 Rising and the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, one of the foundational documents of our independent state. Although the legacy of the Rising is contested, those who gave us the Proclamation had a clear set of aspirations for an independent Ireland. They dreamed of a free nation in which all citizens, irrespective of background or belief, would be cherished and to which all would happily give allegiance. They dreamed of equal citizens freely contributing to collectively shaping their own future.

As we commemorate the events of 1916 we also reflect on more recent traumas, including the economic crisis which continues to be felt by so many of our people. Ireland's failure of economic policy during the boom period led to a fiscal crisis and the withdrawal or reduction of many public services, significantly lowering quality of life for many of those already on the lowest incomes.

Although headline rates of economic growth are recovering, many people don't have the resources and supports to live life with dignity and others are unable to earn a living wage due to low pay or underemployment. Many more cannot find employment or have emigrated – especially younger generations who take with them Ireland's investment in their education.

In the years since the crisis, levels of trust in government, media, and even NGOs have reached all-time lows and there is a worrying sense of disconnect between the people and their public institutions.

Internationally there are challenges, such as climate change and forced migration, to which our political system seems unable to face up.

The rapid pace of change and a legacy of public policy failures means that radical reform is needed to shore up democratic governance and to increase and maintain trust in government and public authorities. If we stick to "business as usual" the dangers we face include social exclusion, marginalisation, economic failure or even breakdown in social cohesion.

Democratic renewal starts with a radically increased role for the people themselves. People need to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives and their communities as well as an authentic sense of ownership of their institutions. Citizens should be involved not just in choosing their representatives but in the design of public policy and the delivery of services. To achieve this we need a new political culture, developed in how we educate and engage with our young people and how we support and value active citizenship.

The centenary of 1916 is an appropriate time to ask if the dream of equal citizens shaping their own futures is still valid and, if so, how it can be realised in today's Ireland. How can we shape our representative democracy into a fully participatory democracy and make the next century of our independent State the "citizens' century"?

*James Doorley, Fergus O'Ferrall
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Reference Board
October 2015*

Rethinking Citizenship for 2016

As we approach the centenary of the 1916 Rising, Ireland reflects on 100 years of change. For the Republic of Ireland it has been a journey marked by great social improvements and economic development, interspersed with periods of economic and social stagnation. On a number of occasions the State has come close to failing, most recently when the Celtic Tiger boom turned to bust. This economic crisis has also resulted in a collapse in trust in our public institutions, already suffering from a legacy of corruption and lack of transparency.

We now live in a different Ireland, and Irish people have radically different expectations of the respective roles of the State, communities, and citizens. All of this raises questions about our attitude to *citizenship*. What does it mean to be a citizen of this republic? Do Irish people have a strong sense of their rights and responsibilities as citizens? What do citizens expect of the State and what is expected of citizens? How can citizens and communities play a greater role in shaping their future?

The People's Conversation

Over the past year people of different ages, backgrounds and life experiences have been gathering together in different parts of Ireland to take part in a conversation about today's Ireland and how its future is being shaped. They have been talking about their expectations and their responsibilities to each other. This purpose of the conversation is to "rethink citizenship for 2016", to develop a new vision for the role of the citizen in shaping Ireland's future.

"The People's Conversation has developed into a dynamic dialogue, engaging the imagination and the energy of citizens from across Ireland; people who have come together to envision a new version of citizenship, and to explore a new set of principles by which we might live ethically as a society" – President Michael D Higgins, May 2015

Citizenship

In the conversation we asked people to think about "citizenship" in its broadest possible sense. It's not just about who holds a passport or who is entitled to vote in elections. It's about what we expect and what is expected of us, our rights and responsibilities to

each other and our relationship with the state. In the conversations it was acknowledged that "citizenship" is a concept with many different dimensions, and no one definition adequately sums it up. Citizenship can be a legal status that carries with it certain rights and obligations. It can be an activity, meaning participation in collective self-government and the fulfillment of responsibilities to others and to the common good. It can also be a national identity or membership of a certain social group.

Here we understand citizenship as a role that can be fulfilled to a greater or lesser extent by anybody with a stake in Ireland's future. It is a moral category that includes Irish passport holders but equally includes people resident in Ireland such as EU workers, non-EU workers, refugees, asylum seekers, foreign students and others.

The Conversation

In the course of a year, 15 different civil society organisations convened over 30 conversation group meetings. Meetings took place in community centres, in the offices of national voluntary organisations, in hotels, arts centres, and in prisons. People taking part responded to the questions, "What is shaping our future?" and "What do citizens expect and what is expected of citizens?"

These open questions prompted deep and challenging discussions, allowing participants to take a step back from day-to-day issues to focus on the long-term. People spoke passionately and listened respectfully. Each conversation was different and raised a different set of issues reflecting the concerns of the participants. As the conversations continued, however, a number of common themes began to emerge.

Common themes

The common themes reveal aspirations which were widely, if not universally, held among those who took part. People in this conversation want:

- A political system that is not detached from the concerns and experiences of citizens
- Reform of government and administration to involve citizens in making decisions

- An education system that helps people to be active citizens who are informed about their rights and conscious of their responsibilities
- A voice for citizens outside of elections
- To bring back the language of "citizen" instead of "customer", "taxpayer", "client"
- A basic "contract" between citizens and the state – a common understanding of the rights enjoyed by citizens and a level of responsibility, openness and fairness in their dealings with the state
- A society that values activism, community organisation and collective effort
- A model of citizenship in Ireland that takes into account our role as global citizens and provides opportunities to influence decisions taken at international level
- The opportunity for all people to be active citizens regardless of their circumstances

These aspirations represent a challenge to ourselves and to our political system: ***in the coming decades the people themselves must play a greater role in shaping Ireland's future***. The role of participative democracy should be enhanced and given recognition equal to that afforded to the representative democracy which consumes so much of the focus of public life.

Talk into action

In this document we have worked to shape these aspirations into a coherent demand for change by setting five challenges:

- Increasing participation in public decision making
- Developing and nurturing active citizenship
- Building trust and respect
- Making citizenship global
- Resourcing and empowering citizens

Taken together, these challenges represent a ***framework for citizen empowerment***. If we dedicate ourselves to meeting the challenges we can radically alter the role of the citizen in our democracy and in our society. This document sets out a series of actions which can help us achieve each challenge, as well as some best practice examples of what is already happening in Ireland

or elsewhere. Quotes from the conversation group reports have been used throughout to illustrate the challenges and recommendations.

Some of the steps are recommendations that could be adopted immediately; others are proposals for change over a longer time-frame of decades or even generations. This must be a long-term and sustained project but 2016 provides the perfect focal point for a campaign to embed these principles in our public life. As well as the centenary of the 1916 Rising, the imminent general election provides an opportunity for politicians to set out, in response to the demands of citizens, how they propose to address these challenges.

Let's use the 1916 commemoration to widen and deepen the conversation about Ireland's future and the role of citizens in shaping it. Let's use the general election as an opportunity to set out a programme of democratic renewal in which an active, empowered and engaged citizenry is central. As people with a stake in Ireland's future let us take on this role of citizen and engage individually and collectively to demand change. As civil society we must campaign and advocate for radical changes in how our role in Ireland's democracy is understood. Everybody has a role in meeting these challenges – *we must make the most of this opportunity*.

Continuing the conversation

The People's Conversation demonstrated the passion people have to get involved in shaping their futures when they are encouraged and supported to do so. It has piloted a form of citizen conversation which, if adopted more widely, can provide the inspiration for citizens to take on active roles in our public life. A necessary next step in realising this vision of active citizens and empowered communities is to create and resource spaces and opportunities for citizens to gather together for respectful dialogue, to share insights and inspire each other to action.

Everything starts with a conversation.

Challenge 1

Challenge 1: Increasing participation in public decision making

“Councils and state apparatus such as the Dáil and Seanad need to adapt to the needs of citizens, there needs to be more local decision-making rather than the state dictating decisions remotely.”

“We need greater checks and balances within our political system, with a straightforward role for the people, including through a reformed Seanad, the Open Government initiative and a new more inclusive model of Social Partnership.”

People in Ireland strongly value the vote as a fundamental political right, but are seeking other ways to shape our future. The basic structures of democracy, including free elections and independent courts, will always play a vital role but their legitimacy can be fragile without an ongoing role for the people as well as those who govern in their name. Proposals for political reform are common, but in most cases they do not have at their centre this core challenge of greater involvement of citizens.

In the People’s Conversation participants put forward different suggestions as to how the structures of our government and public administration could be altered to better serve the needs of citizens. A unifying theme of this aspect of the conversation was the need for the people to have a greater influence on, and indeed a direct role in, the decisions that affect them and their fellow citizens.

Some participants favoured the implementation of methods whereby citizens are empowered to make individual decisions directly by majority vote (“direct democracy”). Proposals in this category included citizens’ initiatives, where a certain number of signatures to a petition can automatically trigger a referendum. Another proposal was the introduction of “recall” votes for political offices, where a quorum of an elected representative’s constituents can trigger a vote on whether he or she should be allowed to continue in office or be subject to a fresh election.

Other participants favoured the principle that decisions should be subject to authentic deliberation, among informed decision-makers and without reference to inequalities of political power between participants (“deliberative democracy”). Deliberative processes involving engaged and

informed citizens have been demonstrated in practice in Ireland and in many other jurisdictions and could be embedded in our democracy at all levels to deepen public participation.

Many of the conversations took place at a time when large-scale protests were taking place, in this case over the introduction of water charges. This prompted discussion of the role of protest in a healthy democracy. Some saw the need to protest as a symptom of disconnect between people and the political system and a demonstration of the need for citizens to have a voice between elections. Others took the view that protest was a positive expression of popular participation and could be seen as an essential feature of a functioning democracy. In general there was a broad acknowledgement that change has to come from the bottom up.

“Politicians will never go for this. It’s like asking turkeys to vote for Christmas.”



How we could meet the challenge

Make citizen deliberation mainstream

The Constitutional Convention has demonstrated that groups of citizens, properly resourced and informed by expert testimony, can deliberate on complex and contentious issues and arrive at reasoned decisions. A Citizens’ Assembly along similar lines could become a permanent feature of our democracy, strengthening the citizens’ ownership of their Constitution.

“More citizens need to be involved in decision-making. Something similar to the jury system might work. People would be called up to sit on a group to discuss policy proposals. This would get a wider perspective.”

The deliberative model can also be applied to decisions below constitutional level. The “Citizen Jury” model has been used in many places to obtain “thoughtful citizen input generated by an informed microcosm of the public”.¹ In Ireland the PeopleTalk initiative has used the jury model to engage in deliberation on the condition of public services. There is a role for jury-style deliberation in local government as well as in key public services such as health and education.



Reverse the centralisation of government

Public administration in Ireland is particularly centralised, with Government departments or national agencies controlling many services which are elsewhere the responsibility of local or regional government. This is despite various programmes of local government reform being put forward over the years – most recently in the Government’s 2012 *“Putting People First – Action Plan for Effective Local Government”*. There is evidence at a European level that more centralised states lose out economically and that decentralisation and delegation of power and decision-making “fosters economic welfare through greater consideration of citizens’ wishes and needs.”² Many participants in the conversation felt that centralisation of decision-making at national level disempowers citizens and local communities.

“We need to stand up locally first. We know our own needs and how to meet them. We could broaden the church after that.”

“Could local problems be solved by better local structures? If we reformed local government in this way, how would we develop the customs of the new power structures? What would the values of the new structures be? How would we avoid power collecting in cliques?”

“Dissolution of local town councils has taken power away from local people”

The new Public Participation Network (PPN) structure currently being rolled out provides an opportunity, if adequately resourced and engaged with by local authorities, to deepen citizen engagement at local authority level but this does not address the core fact that citizens must look to the national level for meaningful influence on many of the issues of most immediate concern, including health, education and policing. The Council of Europe has noted that recent efforts at local government reform have promised much on decentralisation, but have not provided the concrete steps required to move in this direction – in fact some of the steps being taken are in the opposite direction.³ Local government reform must be viewed as unfinished business, and a great deal more has to be done to move decision-making closer to the people it most directly affects.

Create an ongoing role for citizen conversation

Outside of formal deliberative or decision-making processes, there is an ongoing role for citizen conversations of the type modelled by The People’s Conversation. The characteristics of this approach are that the conversation is open, informal, respectful, creative and sustained. Engagement between citizens and their elected representatives doesn’t always have to be formal or organised in a “them and us” format where citizens list demands and elected representatives respond. A conversation format where small groups of citizens and elected representatives explore issues in a non-confrontational manner can help to deepen levels of engagement and trust, and draw out good ideas through collective deliberation.

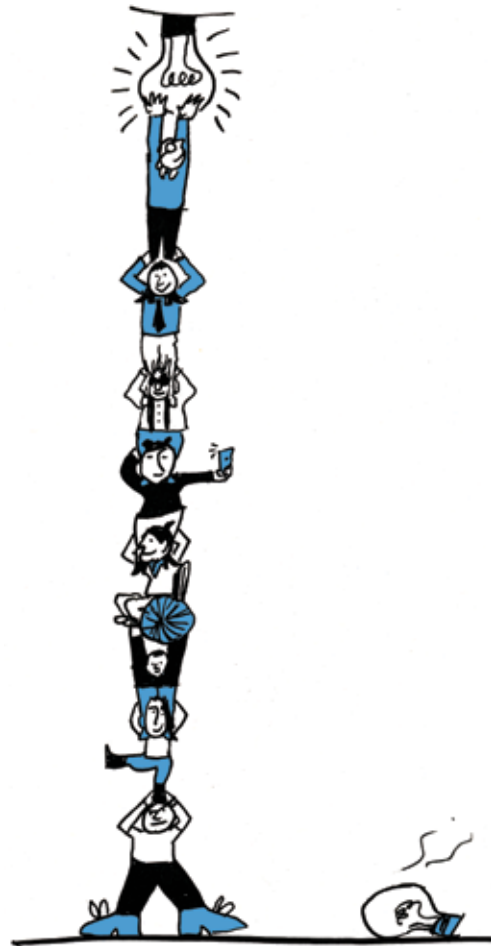
“We can have meetings like this conversation group to engage with politicians.”

The Public Participation Networks currently being established in all local authority areas perhaps provide the best vehicle for sustaining ongoing citizen conversations. Conversations among mixed groups of citizens, politicians and officials can complement the more formal decision-making and consultation functions of the PPN, particularly when it comes to creative thinking about the development of local areas and communities. These conversations should be autonomous, complementing and engaged with separate from structures of local government.

Let citizens take the initiative

While Ireland has a strong tradition of decisions being put to the people in the form of referendums, proposals for such referendums always originate from the Oireachtas. Other countries, such as Switzerland and New Zealand, allow citizens to initiate a referendum if they can secure a minimum level of support for a proposal. The Constitutional Convention recommended that citizens' initiatives "with adequate safeguards to ensure that no measures could be adopted that would have the effect of undermining citizens' fundamental rights" should be introduced.

While referendums are not always the most appropriate way of deciding complex or contentious issues, citizens' initiatives can play a positive role by providing citizens with a method of taking action on issues of importance to them where they feel these are being ignored by their elected representatives. Instigating referendums need not be the only role of citizens' initiatives: they could also be used to influence the legislative calendar of the Oireachtas for example.



Some examples

The Constitutional Convention

The Convention on the Constitution was a forum of 100 people, with citizens randomly selected to be representative of Irish society working together with parliamentarians from the whole island of Ireland. The Convention was established by the Oireachtas to consider and make recommendations on a number of topics as possible future amendments to the Constitution. Despite initial scepticism, the Convention was perceived to have carried out its task in a very engaged and effective manner, with members taking on board expert testimony before deliberating and voting on proposals.

The Government committed to respond to the Convention's recommendations within four months. Although the Government is not bound to propose a referendum on matters recommended by the Convention, only two out of the Convention's 18 recommendations for constitutional change have to date been put to the people.

PeopleTalk citizen juries

The PeopleTalk project uses citizen juries to seek the answers to the questions, "How can government organise itself better to serve us, the citizens?" and "How can citizens have a greater say in the design and delivery of public services?" The project was

invited by Galway County Council in March 2013 to establish a Citizen's Jury Council "to develop practical proposals for public sector reform" over a two year period. The Jury has developed proposal on how public service agencies can better communicate with and serve citizens and discussions are under way with Galway County Council, the Department of Social Protection, the Garda Síochána, the HSE and Údarás na Gaeltachta with a view to their implementation.

Melbourne People's Panel

In 2014 Melbourne City Council commissioned a citizen jury to make recommendations on a 10-year financial plan for the Australian city. Forty-three residents and business owners were selected by random sampling and met for six full-day sessions, with access to the Council's financial and organisational data as well as briefings by experts and city officials. According to the newspaper *The Age*, the panel "proved itself to be unencumbered by the entrenched positions of political parties and the powerful lobbying efforts of vested interests"⁴ and has been willing to take difficult decisions in proposing solutions to the city's funding gap. The Council has now adopted almost all of the proposed measures and research by the University of Melbourne has shown that the process has had positive effects on those who participated.

Challenge 2

Challenge 2: Developing and nurturing active citizenship

“Increased local and community involvement can help develop citizenship, although it can be difficult with lack of time and resources, compared to the State apparatus. Also, volunteering is important, though not where it lets the State off the hook.”

“Education is not fit for the purpose of building citizenship and needs to be changed to do this, to encourage and enable better and more participation in society – education on voting is vital.”

“Primary schools are a good model for a well-rounded education where children are taught to be aware of their environment, to be kind to others and to show respect to people. This is not followed through in secondary school.”

“In American colleges, people get extra credit for getting involved in community programmes and groups.”

If we aspire to have active and involved citizens who are motivated to participate in public life we need to support those who help to nurture this activity. Ireland scores very highly in voluntary participation in community activity. Today tens of thousands of people in Ireland come together in groups, clubs and associations to meet their own needs and the needs of others. In doing this they give expression to individual and community citizenship. Voluntary activity is a form of active citizenship in its own right but also prompts and equips individuals and communities to participate more generally in public life and democracy. But although Irish people volunteer generously in clubs, groups and associations, we are below average in our participation in local democratic decision-making processes.

A long-term shift to a society of informed and active citizens also requires radical change in our education system. The development of civic virtue and understanding should be woven into the curriculum from early childhood onwards. It's not enough to teach young people the facts of how our system operates, they should be provided with lived experience of participation in public life.



How we could meet the challenge

Increase appreciation of the role of the community and voluntary sector in sustaining active citizenship (not least within the sector itself).

“Volunteering is not valued from a government perspective. The Government could have a day dedicated to recognising the work done by volunteers. People who are recognised and awarded for their voluntary work could go and speak in schools as part of the educational goal of teaching about citizenship.”

Thousands of organisations ranging in size from small local groups to large charities and national organisations make up what is known as the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. Hundreds of thousands of people take part every year in the activity of these groups, and these people are active citizens, taking an interest in and responsibility for shaping their collective futures.



The community and voluntary sector should embrace its role as an integral part of a healthy participative democracy and demand a greater say in decision-making. There is always an element of tension in the messy business of reconciling the roles of representative and participative democracy. These tensions are healthy in sustaining a strong democracy with active citizens at its core.

In the short term the importance of the sector should be recognised by government through the appointment of a Minister for the community and voluntary activity with the task of engaging with the sector to develop and publish a developmental strategy, one which acknowledges this voluntary activity as an integral part of a participative democracy.

Reorient the secondary school curriculum to allow young people to develop as active citizens

“The CSPE [Civic, Social and Political Education] curriculum is very rote. Young people are taught what institutions do in a mechanical sense but are not taught to be critical.”

Reforms within the curriculum that place citizenship education at the heart of Irish education are welcome. The revised Junior Cycle curriculum that provides 400 hours of wellbeing education is a positive change. However, Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) must be actively promoted in order to ensure that it is central in all schools and not considered an optional add-on. In a context where the Constitutional Convention has recommended giving the vote to 16- and 17-year olds — as has been done in Scotland, Austria, Brazil and Argentina — civic and political education is clearly essential to allow informed voting.

The introduction of Politics and Society as a Leaving Cert subject from 2016 is another positive step for education in Ireland. In addition the Department of Education’s National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development addresses social, economic and political aspects of sustainable development.

We must educate the educators in order to ensure these curriculum changes create open critical spaces in classrooms. Schools and classrooms should be open, permeable and democratic spaces. What young people learn by experience about power and authority in schools shapes their attitudes in later life. Student councils and democratic opportunities for students to engage with and influence their learning environment should be encouraged in all educational institutions. Schools should be encouraged to create permeable classrooms, to invite community groups and civil society to come in to schools and to create opportunities for experiential learning about what it is to be an active citizen.

“Some citizenship is taught in primary school, but once you enter secondary school the ‘points race’ begins and people’s focus goes to getting their exams for a place in college.”

The intense focus on the “points race” during the Leaving Certificate cycle inevitably results in a discontinuity in the student’s pursuit of broader topics such as civics or political education. In many cases students who are already active in their communities will drop such activities in order to maximise their academic performance. In this way our current system could be said to actively intervene to stop the community engagement of young people.



Some Examples

Vote.ie: the Active Citizenship/Voter Education Programme

To achieve a more inclusive and just society it is necessary for all citizens to appreciate the power of their vote, to participate in the democratic electoral process and to engage in civil society. It was with this in mind that the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice undertook to promote a Voter Education/Active Citizenship Programme with communities in disadvantaged areas which are alienated from the democratic electoral process.

The Abbey's Theatre Making and Citizenship programme

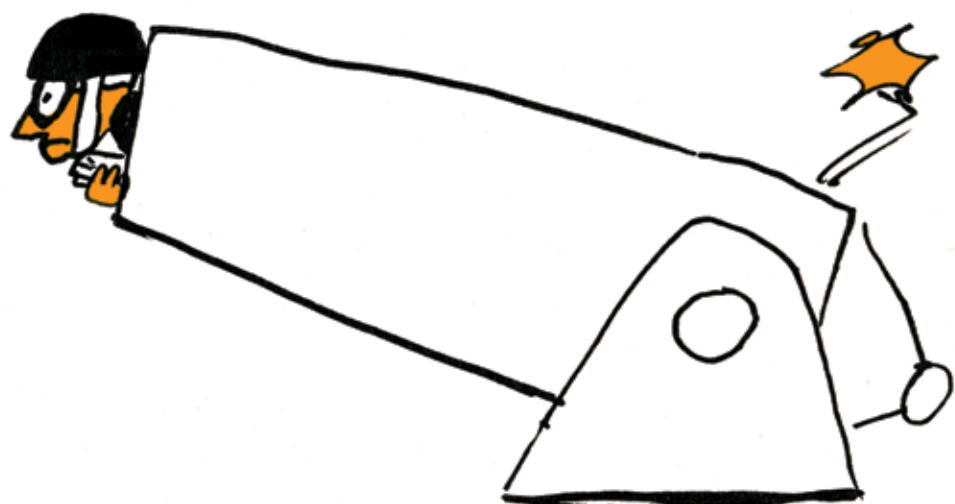
The *Theatre Making and Citizenship* pilot programme in the Abbey Theatre provides an example of a practical module that enhances the CSPE curriculum at Junior Cert level. The course was developed by the Abbey in collaboration with Larkin Community College and piloted between September 2013 and May 2015. Over two years the students use engagement with theatre and theatre making to animate the key principles of the CSPE course. Ultimately students develop their own piece of theatre to raise awareness of a social issue that affects their community.

Civil society leadership in referendum campaigns

On a number of recent occasions civil society has shown real political strength through leading referendum campaigns. Most recently the Yes Equality campaign is an example of a civil society campaign developing real political strength through the engagement of communities, families and individual citizens. Although all the main political parties endorsed a Yes vote, the Yes campaign itself was led by a group of civil society organisations which came together to mobilise activists in every corner of the country. In the past civil society groups have also stepped in to campaign on European referendums and on the Children's Rights referendum.

Better Together and Get Involved

These award schemes highlight and reward the best examples of community and voluntary activity in Ireland. The Better Together campaign, run by The Wheel, invites any non-profit organisation to make a short video about their work and showcases these on its web site during the campaign, culminating in a celebratory evening in Dublin Castle where the best videos in various categories are awarded prizes. Get Involved is a sustainable communities initiative developed by 51 local newspapers throughout Ireland, and provides funding for local communities to work together to improve their own lives, create local jobs and protect the environment.



Challenge 3

Challenge 3: Building trust and respect



"There is a need for those in power to trust Citizens and for Citizens to be able to trust those in power, to act in the common good."

"Can new ways, ethics, etc. be brought in or enforced through changes in law? Or is the better way to tackle the lack of respect that is at its core? How do we teach respect? A real-world example of residents of a street expressing their disgust at dog foulers in chalk writing on the street demonstrates power of effective social outrage."

"The social contract has been eroded – people are working and donating for the benefit of the country but the country is not looking after those people when in need."

"A citizen's basic responsibilities are to pay taxes, to work, to obey the law and participate in the community. From those in power we expect transparency, honesty, fairness and accountability."

"Do we need a 'charter of rights'? What about a 'charter of responsibilities'? Does the constitution not provide this already? Do we want to write it down or should it exist simply as shared expectations? If we write it down, will it go stale like the out-dated portions of our current constitution?"

A positive vision of citizenship requires trust and respect between citizen and state, between citizens and other public institutions, and between citizens themselves. Levels of trust in Ireland are low: the 2015 Edelman Trust Barometer ranked Ireland as the second-least trusting country of 27 countries surveyed.⁵ Only 26% of those surveyed trust Government, 34% trust the media and less than half (48%) trust NGOs. We must look to structural and cultural changes to address this crisis of trust.

Building trust and respect starts with what many people see as the basic "contract" of citizenship: the citizen can expect to enjoy certain fundamental rights and in turn is expected to comply with the basic laws and customs of the State. But too often citizens are disempowered by the need to battle the State for basic rights and entitlements. We need to work towards a culture change whereby our public institutions assume good faith from the citizens they deal with.

Trust in public institutions is important to a functioning State, but we have moved beyond the idea that institutions can demand citizens' trust as of right. Institutions must now demonstrate their *trustworthiness*, making transparent their workings and decision-making and encouraging challenge and questioning from citizens.

How we could meet the challenge

Bring back the language of “citizen”

“People are never referred to as citizens, we’re looked at as consumers. You’re of no value unless you’re consuming.”

“I object to term customer or client. We should reclaim the concept of citizen.”

“Language is a very powerful thing and referring to someone as a citizen can make a person feel more important and powerful.”

Many participants in the conversation raised an objection to the erosion of the role of “citizen” in their dealings with the public service. Increasingly citizens are dealt with or referred to in the specific role of “customer”, “client”, “service user”, “tax payer”. “Citizen” implies a relationship with public services that is not merely transactional but which contains an appropriate degree of ownership and empowerment. If we adopt the broad sense of “citizenship” used throughout this document, the term need not be exclusionary of those who do not possess “legal” citizenship of the Republic of Ireland.

A stronger role for the Ombudsman

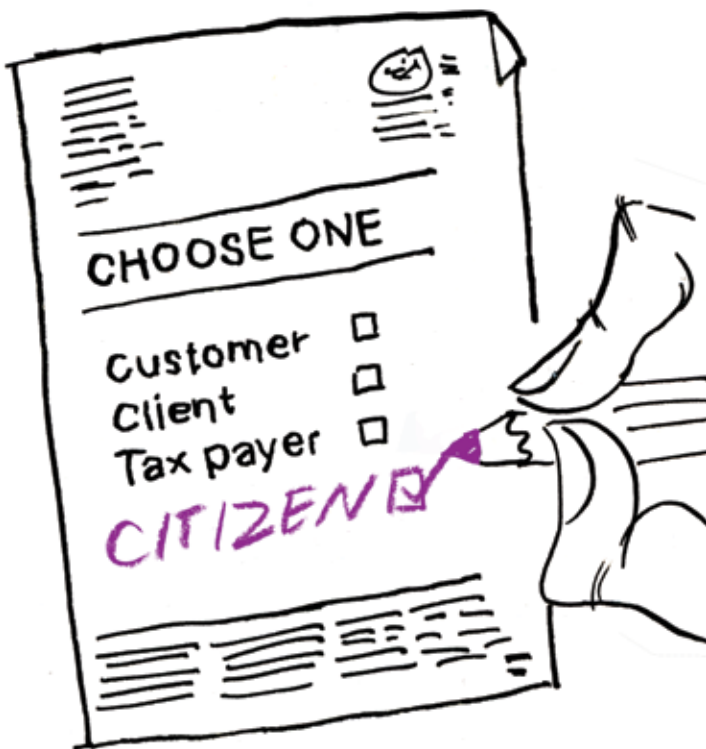
The primary advocate for citizens in their dealings with the state is the Ombudsman. A strong and independent office of the Ombudsman with the resources necessary to hold the Government of the day to account on behalf of individual citizens is essential to empowering citizens. The office of the Ombudsman is established in legislation and could in theory be abolished or undermined by a future government. Giving the office constitutional status, as recommended by former Ombudsman Emily O’Reilly, would safeguard its independence and give the role the same status as, for example, the Comptroller and Auditor General.⁶

Open up government

“Because the civil service acts in secret (even where they act for good), we do not see the whole picture. Much of the goings-on of the state happen hidden behind a curtain for ordinary citizens. We only see the outcome but we don’t see the process.”

Access to information is an essential requirement for meaningful citizen participation. Public bodies should move to being “open by default”, where information is understood to be publicly available unless there are compelling reasons to keep it private. Information should also be available as open data in accessible formats to allow for the development of technology solutions that empower citizens.

As part of the process of developing Ireland’s National Action Plan for the State’s membership of the Open Government Partnership, an extensive list of proposals was compiled through consultation with civil society, covering the areas of accountability, citizen participation, technology and innovation, and transparency.⁷ These proposals, not all of which were adopted by Government in the final action plan, represent a strong set of actions which would have the effect of greatly enhancing the openness of our public administration and consequently allowing greater citizen participation.





“Citizen Information Centres could act a ‘one stop shop’ to find out about the services available when you need them.”

“A mobile Citizen Information Bureau: something like a mobile bank or library, that could visit rural areas on a monthly/ bi monthly basis.”

Citizens Information is an already existing network of offices and resources providing citizens with access to information about their rights and entitlements and the operation of public services. This network has in some ways suffered from being in competition with the traditional clientelist system of public service mediation or brokerage through the clinics of elected representatives. However it has the potential to be the primary source of vital and timely information for citizens, particularly if it can expand its services to take account of digital technology and plug the gap left behind by the erosion of local post offices and Garda stations.

Some examples

The Enabling State

The Carnegie UK Trust has been mapping a shift in thinking on how public services are delivered in the UK. The Enabling State is a body of work which explores citizens and communities take more control over their own wellbeing and the public services that they receive and how the state, civil society and others can play a more engaged and responsive, enabling role.

Open Government Partnership

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a global initiative, launched in 2011, to secure commitments from governments to share more information about their activities. The intention is to increase civic participation in decision-making, fight corruption and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. Membership of the OGP requires governments to collaborate with civil society in the drafting and implementation of national action plans. In other jurisdictions, this has led to innovative co-operation between civil society, individual citizens and public authorities across the whole range of public services.

Challenge 4

Challenge 4: Making citizenship global

"We have obligations to people overseas, not just our fellow citizens."

"The EU, though more external than the State, is seen by many as better at protecting our rights than our own Government, perhaps because it doesn't have the baggage we have as a nation."

"Possibly it is not a question of removing ourselves from the EU or international frameworks but not allowing ourselves to be dominated by them. We want to be more self-sufficient and to learn from our mistakes."

"We're not 100% Irish anymore. We're also competing against other societies for resources and trade. Does this mean we're losing our identity?"

"Our understanding of citizenship must include our role as global citizens, not as an 'add-on' but as a central facet of our identity."

The People's Conversation is about rethinking citizenship in Ireland, but participants were often keenly aware of the international dimension of citizenship. In today's connected world, the role of citizen cannot be limited to the borders of any one state.

Although in its early decades the Irish republic aspired towards self-sufficiency, more recently it has become one of the most open economies in the world, with trade links with every part of the globe. Our people have spread out also, with millions of people identifying as Irish around the world. In recent times we have seen increased migration to Ireland and a consequent increase in Irish residents who do not hold the full legal status of "Irish citizen".

More fundamental than these factors, of course, are the simple bonds of common humanity we share as global citizens. We are also confronted by global challenges such as climate change, forced migration, and resource depletion which affect us all, however unequally, and demand an international as well as local response.

"How stable will the world be for future generations? Will there be climate refugees?"

Any definition of Irish citizenship as an exclusive concept is challenged by the realities mentioned above. This was evident throughout the conversation, as participants raised the



international context for the topics discussed. Ireland's membership of international organisations such as the United Nations and the pooling of sovereignty with our neighbours in the European Union has contributed to the development and vindication of a set of common rights, but has also had the effect of putting some decisions at a greater remove from the individual citizen. Often citizens feel they have little or no influence on decisions taken at international level.

We live in an interdependent world. Our actions locally affect our fellow citizens in all parts of the world. Our consumption of goods and energy, our policies on issues from taxation to energy use to foreign relations, our support or lack of support for solidarity and charity initiatives, all impact on others. We need to develop a stronger culture of global citizenship and an awareness of our responsibilities as global citizens that informs all our choices.



How we could meet the challenge

Address the disconnect in EU democracy

"The EU brought us so many good things but is now part of the disconnect. At the same time that more and more decisions are made in Brussels, citizens feel a further and further disconnect from it."

"It's critical who we vote for in Europe, as we are being very badly represented. Could it be viewed that sending people to the European Parliament is a way of getting rid of bad politicians?"

In Ireland, debate on EU issues is usually limited to referendum campaigns on treaty changes. Even during European Parliament elections the issues that dominate are often more Irish than European. We need to make space in our public discourse for critical engagement with the European project, and with the operation of democracy in the EU. The Institute of International and European Affairs paper, *"Europe is our story: Towards a new narrative for the European Union"* considers how citizens can be more centrally involved in the political process at EU level. It concludes that "Irish citizens should not be faced with decisions – for instance in a referendum – unprepared and uninformed. It is therefore vital that the Irish political class, the media and opinion-formers, should themselves be informed and will ing to discuss the matters as they develop. Citizens will then be better able to consider how their interests and values are reflected in the process."

Mainstream development education

There are opportunities in our education system to expose people of all ages to perspectives on global justice, international development, human rights and equality issues. Development education engages learners in formal and non-formal education with our role as global citizens and with our shared responsibility for creating global justice. Development education takes place across formal and non-formal education in Ireland and engages civil society, educators and citizens through schools, community settings, youth work and public engagement. We need to make sure everyone in Ireland has the opportunity to engage in lifelong learning and active global citizenship through development education in formal and non-formal settings.

Combat racism and help newer arrivals to Ireland to join in culturally, economically, socially and politically

"We need integration from the policy side of things. A situation where immigrants are boxed is dangerous so we need them to be involved in policy steps. A policy for migrants where migrants are segregated is where the challenge lies."

"Need for representation from new communities. If not, there is a danger of making the same mistakes as other countries in sowing the seeds for racial conflict."

"Everywhere you go there is a fear of you, which disappears when you integrate to citizens. This removes fear from the people. When they are welcome and integrated then fear leaves and you can start living and working with automatic respect."

Participants in the conversation attested to the fact that racism is still a fact of life in Ireland, and can affect anyone perceived not to fit the "norm" of settled, white and Irish. Despite this, Ireland has let its strategic approach to racism lapse since the conclusion of the National Action Plan Against Racism 2005-2008. While there must be a strategy at government level that addresses the issue across the spectrum of public policy and public services, there is also a role for community-level action to support integration and anti-racism.

Some examples

Global Goals for Sustainable Development

As an outcome of the Rio+20 Conference the United Nations undertook to engage in an open intergovernmental process to develop Sustainable Development Goals, to build upon the Millennium Development Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals are universal, applying to all countries in all parts of the world. Under the Global Goals we are all, in all parts of the world, responsible for acting to tackle global challenges of poverty, inequality, injustice and climate change.

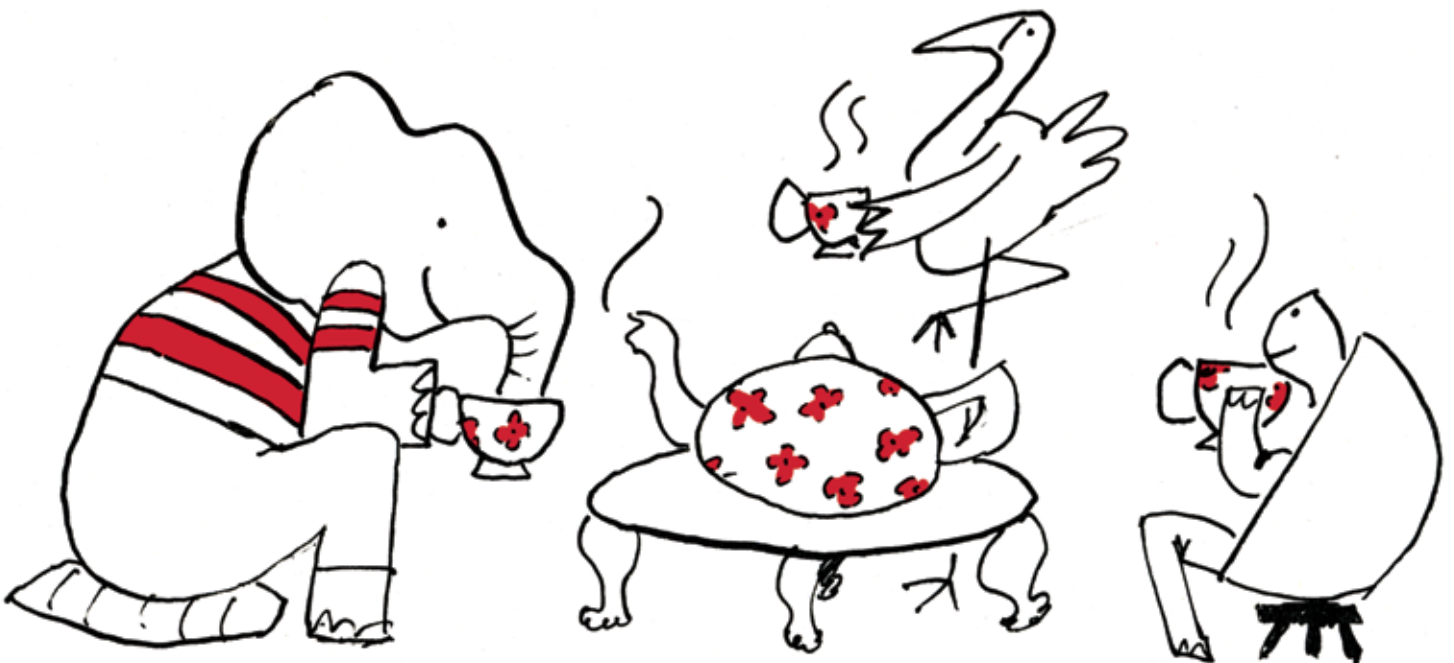
Popular mobilisation on climate change

350.org is leading a bottom-up mobilisation of citizens in 180 countries demanding action on climate change. Through a series of targeted campaigns designed to be replicated all over the world, the organisation has provided a focus

for activists to build a global climate movement. Local, loosely organised popular movements are now capable of demanding a voice alongside the traditional environmental NGO sector in the climate debate.

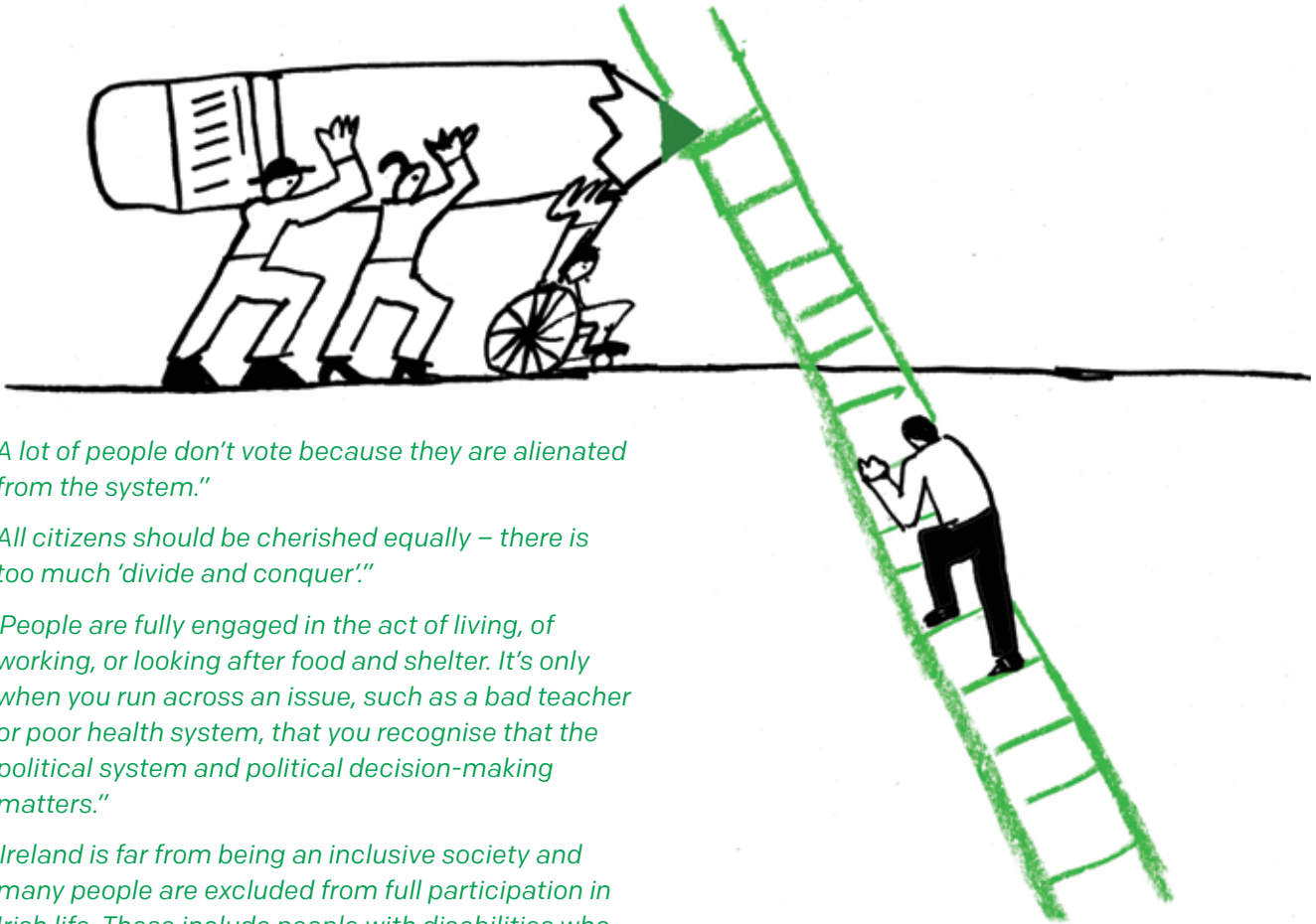
European Citizens' Initiatives

The Lisbon Treaty introduced the concept of European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), whereby groups of at least one million EU citizens from at least seven different member states can invite the European Commission to propose legislation. Although the Commission is not obliged to accede to the demands expressed in the ECI, the process provides a focus for transnational cooperation between citizens around issues they feel are not being adequately addressed by the EU's leaders.



Challenge 5

Challenge 5: Resourcing and empowering citizens



"A lot of people don't vote because they are alienated from the system."

"All citizens should be cherished equally – there is too much 'divide and conquer'."

"People are fully engaged in the act of living, of working, or looking after food and shelter. It's only when you run across an issue, such as a bad teacher or poor health system, that you recognise that the political system and political decision-making matters."

"Ireland is far from being an inclusive society and many people are excluded from full participation in Irish life. These include people with disabilities who are anxious to make a contribution through work and through opportunities to speak for themselves."

"A lot of people claim to speak for people at the margins but people need to be more than 'spoken for'. They need to be enfranchised to speak for themselves."

To realise the vision of a society in which all people are empowered to be active citizens, we must not limit ourselves to merely creating opportunities for participation in civic life. We must recognise that the material conditions and basic security of people affect their ability to participate. Many of the citizens who will be most affected by political decisions are those least likely to participate in influencing them. This diminishes our democracy. Participation in the various facets of civic life in Ireland was a common theme of the conversation. There were many expressions of a general sense of disconnect from the political system. There was discussion of the ways in which many citizens find

themselves with less opportunity than others to engage in our democracy or to participate more generally in the public sphere. For example people with intellectual disability often encounter the assumption that they have no role to play in broader public life.

"Ireland is a 'caring' society that feels it has to protect people with disabilities and shelter them. People find it hard to understand that those with disabilities don't want to be protected from the world; instead they want to experience it."

Ensuring the welfare of citizens has been a stated aim of the Irish State since its foundation documents. The 1916 Proclamation declares the resolve of the Republic "to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all of its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally". The first Dáil's Democratic Programme declared "the right of every citizen to an adequate share of the produce of the Nation's labour."

Even the 1937 Constitution, which might be said to enshrine a more conservative vision of citizenship, provides that the State "shall strive to promote the welfare of the whole people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice and charity shall inform all the institutions of the national life."

The challenge now is to explicitly connect the aims of social inclusion and equality with the aim of improving our democracy.

How we could meet the challenge

Guarantee citizens a material "floor"

A guarantee of a minimum standard of living to all would remove many of the material barriers to participation. Whether via a living wage or a guaranteed basic income, ensuring every citizen has sufficient resources to meet basic human needs is a prerequisite for citizens to engage with each other on an equal basis. As the philosopher and political theorist, Philip Pettit puts it, people "should be so resourced and protected in the basic choices of life – for short, the basic liberties – that they can look others in the eye without reason for fear or deference."

Progressive vindication of economic rights

"Should we be fighting for what is essentially a basic right?"

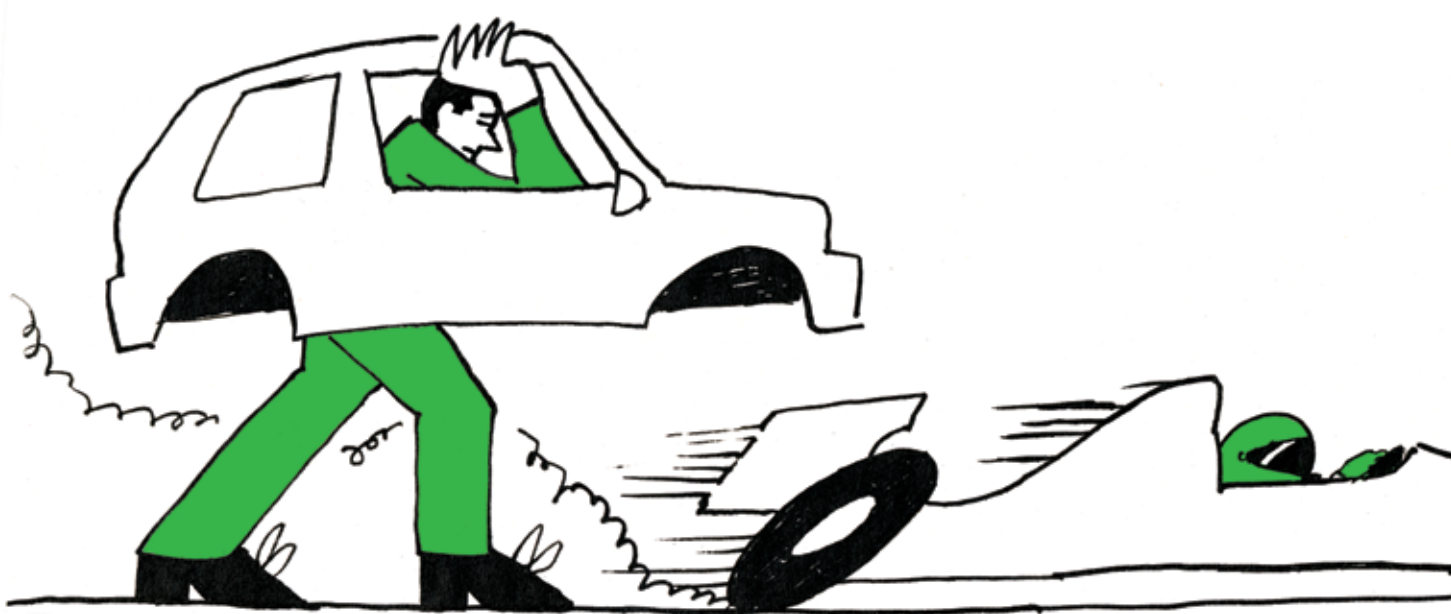
"There is 'a disconnect' between the services that are out there and knowing where to start. Accessing services can be like the '12 tasks of Hercules'; designed to wear you down!"

"We're not all automatically 'entitled' – nobody is entitled to anything. Vulnerable people in society should be looked after but there has to be something to give people an incentive to work."

"Basic needs should be met: housing, food, work, education."

To ensure that citizens do not become disempowered or burnt out in seeking access to basic rights we can start by adopting a clear and universal statement of what we understand these rights to be. Ireland has signed up to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) 1996, acknowledging that fundamental human rights include economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights. These include the right to work, to social security, to an adequate standard of living, to education and to take part in cultural life, among others. In March 2014 the Constitutional Convention considered whether ESC rights should be given constitutional protection. The Convention's favoured option was to insert a provision into the Constitution along the lines that the State shall progressively realise ESC rights, subject to maximum available resources.

If Economic, Social and Cultural rights were recognised in the Constitution, as recommended by the Constitutional Convention, successive governments would be given the clear direction to ensure they are progressively vindicated, subject to maximum available resources.





Meet people where they are

Creating a society in which there is greater participation in public decision making implies that citizens must make an effort to engage. Some citizens, however, will find it easier to engage than others, through greater resources of time, mobility, proximity and other factors. We cannot limit ourselves to increasing levels of participation amongst those who already enjoy these relative advantages.

We need spaces for people to engage with public life in ways that suit them. For some, including young people and people with work or family constraints, this may be through online channels. For others, it will be through their existing involvements in local community groups or communities of interest. Special efforts may be required to involve harder-to-reach groups but for large numbers of citizens greater participation can be secured simply by fitting engagements around their existing patterns of daily life.

This is not just a challenge for public agencies in involving citizens. In businesses, civil society organisations and in other contexts we should be equally careful to ensure we don't end up constantly "talking to ourselves".

Some examples

Minimum Essential Standard of Living

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice has developed a methodology for assessing a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) – one which meets an individual/household's physical, psychological and social needs at a minimum level. The research is derived from a negotiated social consensus on what people believe is a fair minimum and draws primarily on the engagement of focus groups which consist of representatives of the household types under consideration, drawn from different socio-economic groups. This research is the basis of the Living Wage campaign in Ireland. www.budgeting.ie

Guaranteed basic income

A basic income is a social security system under which every individual resident receives a payment from the state, without any means test or work requirement. Sometimes referred to as a "citizen's income", it would replace most social welfare payments and, for those in employment, most tax credits. The rate would be set to be sufficient for a decent but frugal lifestyle. Proponents of the system argue that it is more suited to our modern, flexible economy than the current social welfare system as it eliminates poverty traps and allows people to move more easily between periods of full-time and part-time employment. To date it has been implemented in different countries mostly in the form of pilot schemes but the system has recently been attracting attention worldwide as an imaginative response to changes in the labour market.

www.basicincomeireland.com



The Process

More than 150 people took part in small conversation groups convened by a range of civil society organisations and campaign groups. Participants were drawn from the organisations' wider networks, including members, staff, volunteers, service users, and interested members of the general public. Over 200 more people took part in "public conversation" events.

A full report on each of the conversation group meetings was compiled by a note-taker and each meeting was attended by at least one of the authors of this document. An initial analysis of the reports identified a number of common themes which were then presented to conversation groups for feedback and discussion. The themes were also presented to an expert Reference Board comprising civil society leaders and people from the public and private sectors, who participated in the development of this document.

Conversation groups

Convener	Location
Basic Income Ireland	Dublin
COPE Foundation	Cork
Gaisce – Mountjoy West prison	Dublin
Gaisce – The Dóchas Centre	Dublin
Global Citizen Contact Point	Cork
Irish Countrywomen's Association	Blackrock, Co. Dublin
Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed	Dublin
KARE	Newbridge, Co. Kildare
Monaghan Integrated Development	Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan
Second Republic	Dublin
SpunOut	Dublin
StartStrong	Dublin
The Africa Centre	Dublin
The Carers Association	Cork
Little Museum of Dublin	Dublin

Project leader and report author: Ryan Meade

Public conversations and other sessions

Citizenship or Self-Interest?,
Mansion House, Dublin, 11th October 2014
The People's Conversation launch event

Participation in Ireland and the World, European
Commission Office, Dublin, 17th April 2015
Joint event with the European Year for Development

Rethinking Citizenship and Community for 2016,
Croke Park, Dublin, 14th May 2015
Special session at The Wheel's annual conference

Reference Board

Fergus O'Ferrall (Co-Chair)

James Doorley (Co-Chair)

John Buckley
Avril Clarke
Ivan Cooper
Sue Duke
Michael Ewing
Niamh Gallagher
Deirdre Garvey
Frank Geary
Edmond Grace
Jackie Harrison
Iseult Honohan
Helen Johnston
Deirdre Kennedy
Bernadette MacMahon
Mary McDermott
John McKeever
Yvonne McKenna
Ruairí McKiernan
Pauline McKiernan
Kieran Murphy
Nat O'Connor
Andy Pollak
Liam Reid
Charles Stanley-Smith
Barney Whelan
Trevor White
Hans Zomer

The role of the Board has been to consider reports on common themes and ideas emerging from the Conversation Groups, to help shape the content of this document, and to advise on how the recommendations of this document can be turned into action through advocacy and political engagement.

What next?

If you agree with these ideas you can take action to support a greater role for citizens in Irish public life.

We will be campaigning to put these ideas into action. Sign up to support this campaign by:

- Visiting www.peoplesconversation.ie;
- Emailing info@peoplesconversation.ie; or
- Writing to *The People's Conversation*, *The Wheel*, 48 Fleet Street, Dublin 2
- Make this an election issue by contacting your local candidates to tell them that this is important to you
- Start a conversation group in your local area or in your organisation, company, club or team - see www.peoplesconversation.ie
- Follow @citizenship2016 on Twitter and like *peoplesconversation* on Facebook

We would like to thank all the individuals and organisations who made this project possible. We thank in particular all the people who volunteered their time to join the conversation

Endnotes

1. From the Jefferson Center definition of a citizen jury
2. BAK Basel Economics for the Assembly of European Regions, *From Subsidiarity to Success: The Impact of Decentralisation on Economic Growth*, 2009
3. Council of Europe, *Local Democracy in Ireland*, 2013
4. *The Age*, Melbourne People's Panel makes bold decisions where politicians fear to tread, April 1 2015
5. Edelman Trust Barometer, 2015
6. Office of the Ombudsman, 2011, *Delivering and Optimising the Role of the Ombudsman*
7. <http://www.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Final-Report-on-a-Consultation-with-Civil-Society-Representatives-and-Citizens-on-Irelands-Participation-in-the-Open-Government-Partnership.pdf>



The centenary of 1916 is an appropriate time to ask if the dream of equal citizens shaping their own futures is still valid and, if so, how it can be realised in today's Ireland. How can we shape our representative democracy into a fully participatory democracy and make the next century of our independent State the "citizens' century"?

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