



PARADIGM SHIFT

FUTURE

COMMUNITIES

Foreword

Welcome to the Future Communities launch report!

Taking a lesson from the 5G report, we're splitting Future Communities into two: a mini launch report at the start that sets out the groundwork, and the full Paradigm Shift report at the end that covers everything, including the 'so whats'.

We selected community as our second Paradigm Shift topic, because it's so intimately linked to the reason, function and impact of charities in the UK.

This mini report helps set out our definition of community and explores the macro influences that are driving change. Then, over the next 12 weeks, we'll be diving into the trends that sit inside Future Community and exploring how these could change how charities deliver their mission and generate income in the future.

We're going to consider how future community is going to change how charities can create, support and be part of resilient, open, supportive communities; ones that can be a force for social change in challenging times.

Daisy O'Reilly-Weinstock
Director of Big Bets

1

Principles

We've highlighted five principles we believe underpin all communities. They're the principles or characteristics that help define and build community. All communities will incorporate, leverage or exhibit an aspect of each principle. How these manifest will change and develop as the community evolves.

2

Drivers

These are the societal, political, environmental, technological, economic, legal and ethical conditions and forces that are driving change around us. We've explored these through the lens of community and highlight the top 10 biggest drivers influencing change now.

3

Trends

In the coming 12 weeks we'll be taking a look at: post-truth, space re-imagined, life online, shared signals, global citizens, decentralised power, resilience and the empathy crisis.

Welcome to

PARADIGM SHIFT

The Paradigm Shift is an opportunity to travel deeper down the rabbit hole to focus on a **single macro trend**.

In each report we take a look back to look forward to see how the paradigm *might* change and **what that means for you and your organisation, and your supporters**. All framed within the lens of income and impact.

The **Paradigm Shift** Methodology

Combining rigorous analysis of a wealth of secondary data, deep client sector insight and imaginative thinking, we unpack the **macro trend** in detail, and develop a series of potential, plausible future scenarios. We then outline what these might mean for the third sector.

Evidence based

Built on evidence-based secondary research and available case studies.

Multiple lenses

Using a range of lenses to consider each piece of research and understand the potential implications, including STEEPLE (Societal, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political, Legal, and Ethical).

Imaginative but level-headed

Drawing on trend and foresight expertise to develop a series of hypotheses around future societal shifts and scenarios. We're imaginative but also pragmatic.

Bespoke for the sector

Developed for the sector, not from the sector - uniting an expert view on the world outside, and a firm grasp of the challenges faced within. Our team combines foresight and trends experts with charity sector specialists.

Gets to the 'so what'

Considers the implications and opportunities from each shift for the sector articulating a clear '**so what**' to get your thinking started.

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Introducing Community



Community 101

What is community?


Community arises from our fundamental human need to connect with each other, to be together: **to belong**. An entity, collective, movement or tribe that inherently includes an in-group and an out-group as part of its identity.

At its core community is about **people**, joined together by shared interests or characteristics in **common**. *“Community is both a feeling and a set of relationships among people. People form and maintain communities to meet common needs.”*
([Stanford Social Innovation Review](#))

And with that connection comes a sense of responsibility for others. That’s why community is so intimately connected with charity. (Even the **definition of the word** derives from the Latin *communitas* “community” or “public spirit”).

Some communities are subsets of larger groups (like the wide range of sexual orientations and gender identities within the LGBTQ+ community).

“Communities are not built of friends, or of groups with similar styles and tastes, or even of people who like and understand each other. They are built of people who feel they are part of something that is bigger than themselves: a shared goal or enterprise.”
([A City Year](#), Suzanne Goldsmith)



“The word “community” has a strange power to it. It conveys a sense of togetherness and positivity. It speaks both of solidarity and homeliness.”

Toby Lowe

Professor Public Management and the Centre for Public Impact

Community 101

How is community changing?

In the Middle Ages, when districts were governed by religious authorities, local churches served as community hubs, the vulnerable were supported by, and sometimes in, churches and monasteries. Over the years, as religion became less central in governing society, communities stayed connected to that neighbourly, charitable spirit of the work that churches once organised.

Until relatively recently, **place** was the most important factor in determining whether we belonged to a community. But globalisation and borderless digital access are bringing change at a deep level. The way we create and participate in community is evolving into something much **freer** and more **active**.

In the age of the individual ([as explored recently by filmmaker Adam Curtis](#)), community has come to be defined by a core question: do I share interests, beliefs, values or behaviours with others, irrespective of the places we come from?



Community 101

Why focus on future communities?

Community was at the heart of [our most recent collective effort](#): fighting the global pandemic. Our response to the COVID crisis was characterised by a remarkable spiritual solidarity and practical collaboration.

But the pandemic also exposed the loneliness that happens in the absence of community, and the yearning for the feelings of belonging and connection that community creates.

In our recovery from the pandemic we face a new combination of conditions and pressures: a climate emergency, a housing crisis forcing migration, and emerging technologies that will fundamentally change the way we interact.

All of these things are impacting communities dramatically. In fact, **our understanding and support of communities will be integral to how we meet the challenges of our time** and leverage those communities to create change.

“Community helps us to understand what freedom means. ... It means being free to find the community that best suits you, and it means participating in the creation of narratives that enable others to be free.” ([Toby Lowe](#), Professor Public Management and the Centre for Public Impact)



Principles



The Principles of Community

How do we recognise it?

What defines it?

Here are five key principles that hold communities together

1



Image courtesy of Nina Strehl on Unsplash

Beliefs

From religious ones like the Church of England to political ones like Extinction Rebellion, communities tend to be united by their beliefs. But even when communities start off with shared overarching beliefs, a closer look at any kind of community will reveal the diversity of beliefs that exist within it. Open conversation and respect play a vital role in managing those differences.

2



Image courtesy of Remi Walle on Unsplash

Connection

The desire to connect is one of our most basic human needs. It's what drives us to form communities in the first place. Being part of a community then involves different kinds of connection, from engaging in ritual (Pride month, Sunday mass, the village fundraiser), to engaging in communication (Zoom town hall meetings, posting with a hashtag), to taking some kind of action (volunteering time, giving money, playing sports).

3



Image courtesy of Dan Meyers on Unsplash

Language

Our communities share points of reference which inform the languages we use to communicate with each other. Local areas may share regional accents or dialects, and communities may use jargon and abbreviations relating to the subjects they discuss most. Language may not always be verbal. Symbols and code play an important part in signalling the communities we belong to, whether that's through how we dress, the gestures we use, or what we display on our digital profiles.

4



Image courtesy of Bethany Newman on Unsplash

Spaces

Communities need spaces where they can gather and operate. In 2021, our communities are interacting across a growing variety of spaces: physical, geographical, virtual and hybrid. How we use these spaces is a complex, ever-evolving question. Online ‘safe spaces’ can provide sanctuary not only for vulnerable groups seeking companionship and acceptance, but also for anonymous individuals peddling conspiracy theories.

5



Image courtesy of Elaine Casap on Unsplash

Action

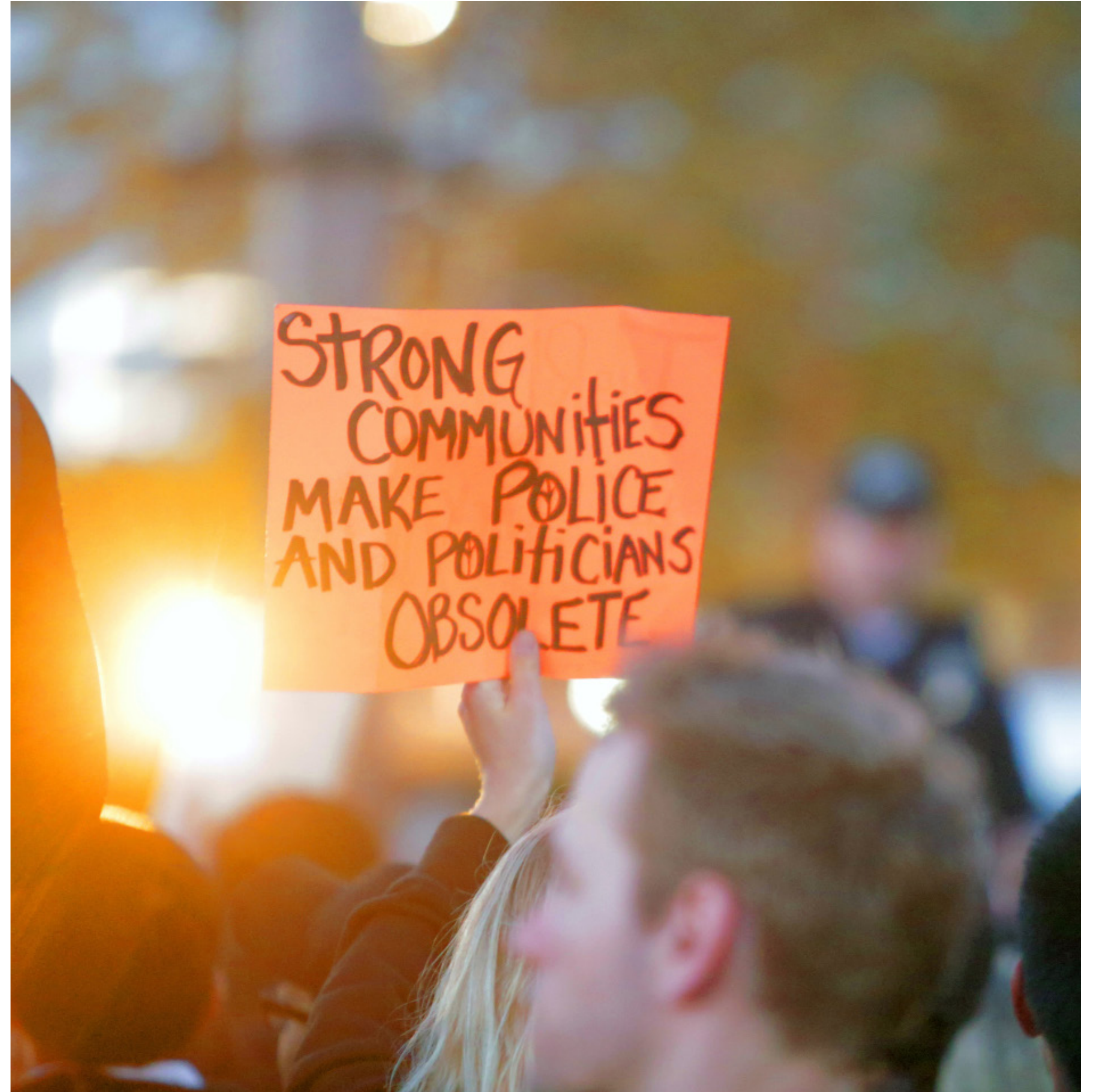
When we belong to a community, we’re normally asked to take some kind of action on its behalf, for the good of that community. The spectrum of participation is broad, and spans acting as a campaigner and spokesperson to making small changes in our daily lives. Increasingly, our younger generations are being proactive in their creation and support of communities, the internet making them less reliant on external organisers and better equipped to act on their own behalf.

“Community... is not merely something that one fits into; it is also something one chooses for oneself, through a process of self-discovery. It is based on shared circumstances, certainly, but offers a transcendent kind of togetherness. It is active rather than passive. The LGBTQ community. The Latino community. The intelligence community.”

Megan Garber
Writer, (The Atlantic)

3

Drivers



1

Economic Insecurity

Austerity had already damaged our economic infrastructure, when COVID-19 came along to compound it. Our minority communities have been hardest hit.

Physical community spaces have been deteriorating for decades, through lack of funding. [Around four million UK workers live in poverty](#) and lack of affordable housing is [forcing councils to leave people homeless](#). Meanwhile, there's a [near-exponential gap](#) between how much people work and how much they get paid – our pay is not rising in line with inflation and cost of living.

2

Powerless Populations

Despite movements like Black Lives Matter going [mainstream](#), vulnerable communities around the world are still suffering. You only need to look at the [disproportionate impact](#) of COVID-19 on ethnic minorities to see the devastating impact of social inequality in the UK.

People have been left disillusioned with conventional politics, especially when they see politicians behaving in ways that seem detached from their struggles. At the same time, we've watched governments losing control to big tech companies that are now so influential they're in a position to act as a kind of global police force. Disturbingly, they are also rife with [entrenched biases](#).



By 2050

it is expected that there will be

1.5 billion

people aged 65+ in the world

3

Limitless Access

The growth and capability of the internet has made it our go-to resource for accessing and understanding the world. For billions of people, information that used to be difficult or impossible to access is now available any time and almost anywhere.

More and more people are interacting online, across multiple social media channels. Each new generation is now growing up with social media as an integral part of their friendships, relationships, and engagement with the world.

4

Ageing Population

We're entering an era when the bulk of society will be made up of people over 65. Concerns that there will be too few working adults to fund their retirement have been pushing the state pension age up and up, to the point where the concept of 'retirement' is disappearing. Unless, of course, you adopt a 'FIRE' approach.

Then there's the challenge of an ageing population's disproportionate political influence. How do we address the generational rift that causes? We've also been dealing with the rise of chronic conditions as more older people require longer-term, ongoing care.

5

Individualism

Self-reliance and personal independence still hold a lot of cultural sway. This tends to be concentrated in more economically developed countries, and in younger generations who have been spending a lot of time thinking about how their backgrounds and life experiences inform their differences and similarities.

All of this self-understanding has led to more mainstream discussion of mental health, but it's also resulted in people prioritising themselves over the collective. The cult of self-optimisation has created an intense pressure to strive for increased productivity, happiness, health, and intelligence.

6

Atomised Society

As society has become more fragmented, and more defined by demographic divides, loneliness has been rising. With an ageing UK population living mostly in rural and coastal areas, there's potential for that isolation to grow.

The pandemic prompted a wave of community-minded initiatives that showed our collective desire for connection. Now we're facing the challenge of how to serve that desire, particularly as generational differences are deepening.





Image courtesy of Markus Spiske on Unsplash

7

Work, Reimagined

Pre-pandemic, [digital nomads](#) were taking the lead in remote working, as calls for flexible working were increasing. COVID-19 demanded an immediate, collective reappraisal of the way we work, [normalising remote working](#), and raising questions about whether we can ever go back to the way things were before.

As AI keeps advancing, automating jobs and rendering swathes of employees redundant, we face some big questions about our [purpose and meaning](#) in the future. Perhaps unsurprisingly, [membership of UK trade unions keeps on rising](#).

8

Borderless World

Even with fewer people travelling in the past year, and despite the tide of pro-nationalism that has bolstered [post-Brexit efforts](#) and [power moves on Big Tech](#), the world is still as borderless as ever. [Global information flows surged during COVID](#) and business leaders have claimed economic recovery relies on stronger global connectedness.

In the UK, immigration flows have increased to [historically high levels](#) in the past 25 years. Our social fabric is increasingly now defined by [racial and ethnic diversity](#), raising awareness of the [differing experiences of ethnic communities](#), as well as the many other global communities now able to form.

9 Lives Lived Online

We're living in a time when some of our deepest interactions are enabled and played out online, from relationships with friends and family, to work, dating, shopping and banking. Now we have digital tattoos: records of our online actions, and the digital identities we create to present ourselves to others, standing in for the way we size each other up IRL.

The digital world has also provided an unprecedented resource for creation and money-making, giving rise to the creator economy.

10 Climate Crisis, Now

Our planet is reaching its temperature limit, the population is skyrocketing, and conventional agriculture is struggling to provide enough food. Our biodiversity is shrinking at an unprecedented rate, and threatening the communities depending on land at risk of destruction.

Communities are being forced to move, reorganise and reform. While we're sharing the planet with eight million nonhuman species, one technologist has advocated we "build the digital anew in a way that is rooted in nature". This would involve "a *digital currency that could allow several hundred billion dollars to be held by other beings simply on account of being themselves and no other and being alive in the world.*"

Nearly
40%
of opposite-sex couples
meet online

What

NEXT?

Over the next 12 weeks we'll explore 8 trends within Future Community and consider what implications these have for charities delivering impact and income.

We encourage you to reflect on the communities you are part of personally and professionally. Consider how these may have changed and evolved in the past 18 months. Are there new communities you have joined, or ones you have left? What defines each of those communities: the shared beliefs, connections, languages and signals, spaces and actions?

Get in touch.

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