

MOVING FORWARD FROM LOCKDOWN: SOME PERSPECTIVES FROM SCOTLAND AND WALES

by Graeme Purves

This paper looks at some distinctive Scottish and Welsh dimensions to the issues addressed in Make No Little Plans, the final report of the UK2070 Commission published in February, and indicates how thinking is developing in the light of the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

As we adjusted to lockdown and the media began to report the grim statistics of the toll the COVID-19 crisis is taking on the economy, it did not take long for voices to emerge arguing that the aim must not be to 'get back to normal', but to build something a lot better. As the columnist Neal Ascherson has observed, 'The state is back.' And "the longer the virus emergency lasts," he points out, "the more the memory of the pre-virus world begins to grow unreal, unconvincing. Now, unmistakably, there's a feeling that 'things will never be the same after it's over' and 'we can't go back to all that'."¹

The sudden interruption to our habitual ways of doing things has stimulated radical thinking about the world we should be trying to create. In the Netherlands, on 11 April, 170 academics issued a manifesto for economic change with the following five elements:

1. shifting from an economy focused on aggregate growth in GDP to one which differentiates between sectors that we need to grow and require investment (e.g. critical public services, clean energy, education, health) and sectors that need to shrink radically (oil, gas, mining, advertising, etc);
2. building an economic framework focused on redistribution, which establishes a universal basic income, a universal social policy framework, strong progressive taxation of income, profits and wealth, reduced working hours and job-sharing, and recognition of the social value of care work;
3. transformation of farming towards regenerative agriculture based on the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable and mostly local and vegetarian food production, and fair agricultural employment conditions and wages;
4. reduced consumption and travel, with a drastic shift from luxury and wasteful consumption and travel to basic, necessary, sustainable and satisfying consumption; and

¹ Ascherson, Neal, *After the crisis, a new world won't emerge as if by magic. We will have to fight for it*, The Observer, 19 April 2020.

5. cancelling debt, especially for workers and small business owners and for countries in the global south (by both richer countries and international financial institutions).²

The state being back means planning in the public interest is back. But if this unexpected shock to the system is to be a catalyst for action to address inequalities of income, wealth and power and the challenge of climate change, we are going to have to act quickly and mobilise public opinion in support of major reform.³ The UK Government has lost no time in dismissing calls by opposition politicians for a universal basic income. There will be many vested interests eager to return to the *status quo ante*.

Transition to a Zero Carbon Economy

The final report of the UK2070 Commission emphasises the importance of a spatially just transition to a zero-carbon economy (ACTION 1).⁴ In a think piece for Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4), Iain Docherty, Professor of Public Policy and Governance at the University of Stirling, argues that the Scottish Government's commitment to delivering a net zero carbon economy by 2045 is a systemic challenge to the way we have conceptualised accessibility until now. He calls for action to reduce the amount of travel required in the economy based on a fundamental reappraisal of where economic and social activity occurs and how we move between and within these places. He stresses the need for much better equality in terms of access to employment and key public services at individual and community level. He warns that on current trends, transport will become the main reason why we will fail to meet our carbon objectives and therefore fail to arrest climate change.⁵

The Scottish Government plans to decarbonise passenger rail services by 2035 and invest over £500 million to improve bus services. It has been suggested that fears about coronavirus infection may lead some people to avoid public transport and rely more heavily on the private car. On the other hand, a poll of AA members revealed that 22% aimed to drive less after lockdown ended, and 36% planned to increase their levels of self-propelled transport such as walking and cycling.⁶ Attention will have to be given to how concerns about public transport can be overcome. The sustainable transport alliance Transform Scotland has stressed that a major effort will be required by the Scottish Government and local authorities to rebuild public transport patronage. It has also called for urgent action to ensure that the increases in walking and cycling evident during lockdown are locked in

² *Planning for Post-Corona: Five proposals to craft a radically more sustainable and equal world*, Universiteit Leiden, 14 April 2020

³ Hassan, Gerry, *Deadly Inequality*, Sunday National, 19 April 2020., pp. 12 & 13

⁴ UK2070 Commission, *Make No Little Plans: Acting at Scale for a Fairer and Stronger Future*, February 2020, pp. 35 - 38.

⁵ Docherty, Iain, *An Accessible Scotland*, National Planning Framework 4 Think Piece, January 2020

⁶ Reid, Carlton, *AA Poll of 20,000 Members Reveals 22% Aim to Drive Less After Lockdown; 36% Aim to Cycle More*, Forbes, 27 April 2020

permanently through the reallocation of road space, with provision of adequate space for physical distancing in the short- to medium-term.⁷

Some respondents to the consultation on the [draft National Development Framework for Wales](#) felt that it is too urban in its focus. The strategy it set out focuses change and growth on existing urban areas, particularly the cities and large towns. It equates sustainability with compact, mixed-use urban patterns of development supported by Metro networks or other public transport infrastructure. For rural Wales, the emphasis is on supporting communities, maintaining and improving access to services, and safeguarding land for food production. The Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee of The National Assembly for Wales expressed concern that the Welsh Government had not identified any alternative model for sustainable development and decarbonisation applicable to rural areas. It recommended that the final version of the NDF should recognise the opportunities for people to live and work sustainably outside towns and cities and set out a positive strategy for economic and social development and renewal in rural Wales. The Committee also recommended that the NDF should set out a strategy to support developments based on local energy distribution.⁸ The challenges of developing models for sustainable living which are applicable in rural areas and ensuring that communities are able to realise opportunities for local energy distribution are among those to which policy-makers across the United Kingdom need to respond.

In an essay on the traditional Highland clachan settlement form which accompanied the exhibition *Landscape & (Re)settlement / Cruth-tìre & (Ath)tuineachadh*, on Scotland's Architecture Fringe in 2018, Colin and Martin Baillie wrote that "a resonance between buildings, community, and place exists in successful and enduring settlements."⁹ Might the requirement to consider opportunities for rural resettlement enshrined in the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 provide the opportunity to develop 21st Century models of sustainable rural living, in association with a major expansion of woodlands and the enhancement of biodiversity?

In urban and rural situations across the United Kingdom, the *Triple Access System* of spatial proximity, physical mobility and digital connectivity which Glenn Lyon and Cody Davidson advocate as a framework for policy and investment decision-making may offer the flexibility and resilience necessary to cope with the levels of uncertainty over outcomes which we face as we emerge from this crisis.¹⁰

⁷ Transform Scotland, *Coronavirus impacts on transport & the priorities for recovery*, 27 April 2020

⁸ National Assembly for Wales: Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, *Report on the draft National Development Framework*, December 2019, pp. 18 - 20 & 32.

⁹ Baillie Baillie Architects, *Traces: An accompaniment to the exhibition Landscape & (Re)settlement / Cruth-tìre & (Ath)tuineachadh*, at the Architecture Fringe 2018.

¹⁰ Lyons, Glenn & Davidson, Cody (2016), *Guidance for transport planning and policymaking in the face of an uncertain future*, Transport Research Part A: Policy and Practice, Volume 88, June 2016, pp. 104 – 116.

Delivering a Connectivity Revolution

The Final Report of the UK2070 Commission, *Make No Little Plans* recommends that the UK Government should commit to working with the Scottish and Welsh Governments to plan, fund and deliver a revolution in connectivity in Britain over the next 25 years (ACTION 2). One of the more *outré* visions of what that might look like, the Prime Minister's suggestion of a bridge between Scotland and Northern Ireland, has vanished from public discussion since the onset of the pandemic.

In its [report on the draft National Development Framework for Wales](#), the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee of National Assembly for Wales has recommended that the final version of the NDF should include specific proposals to address connectivity within Wales and across the border into England; that it should address the poor connectivity between north and south Wales; and that it should include policies for the development of ports and freight transport.¹¹

Universities

Make No Little Plans accords our universities a key role in balancing the economy and building innovation capacity across the UK. It calls for the establishment of new global Centres of Excellence (ACTION 3).¹²

The draft *National Development Framework for Wales 2020 - 2040* recognises that research and development are key drivers of competitiveness and opportunity¹³, but some respondents felt that the strategy needed to say more about higher education and research and development. The Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee of the National Assembly for Wales has recommended that the NDF should make a clearer statement about the important role of universities in supporting strategic development and renewal at national and regional levels.¹⁴

In Scotland too, there is recognition of the important role which our universities can play in national and regional development. But there is also growing concern about the impact of the current crisis on their ability to do so. In an article in *Urban Policy and Practice*, Dr. Peter Matthews argues that a crisis is emerging in higher education, particularly in English-speaking countries.¹⁵

For decades, universities in the UK have relied on the demand for tertiary education from rapidly developing countries – particularly China – to fuel the growth in the sector. It is a model which has served them well, but many now rely heavily on a source of income which,

¹¹ National Assembly for Wales: Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, *Report on the draft National Development Framework*, December 2019, pp. 28 - 29.

¹² *Make No Little Plans*, pp. 45 - 50.

¹³ Welsh Government, *National Development Framework 2020 – 2040*, Consultation Draft, 7 August – 1 November 2019, p. 14.

¹⁴ National Assembly for Wales: Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, *Report on the draft National Development Framework*, pp. 20 - 21.

¹⁵ Matthews, Peter, *The emerging crisis in Scottish higher education*, *Urban Policy and Practice*, 20 April 2020.

in the space of three months, has all but entirely dried-up. Matthews believes that the impacts may be highly differentiated, with universities which have fostered strong local, domestic student markets proving more resilient; others, including some of the UK's most prestigious institutions, may face severe challenges.

In the UK, universities are private charitable companies and governed as such. But they get most of their income from government. The Scottish Government needs growing universities to educate growing numbers of Scottish undergraduates as it seeks to meet its targets for improving education equality; to invest in national and regional research and development; to bring in export income; and to promote Scotland internationally. Scottish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), trades unions, the Scottish Funding Council and Scottish Government are currently engaged in talks on future funding. How will the crisis precipitated by the coronavirus pandemic impact on university priorities and development strategies and might it, as Matthews suggests, result in our universities becoming public sector institutions?

Food Retailing and Local Economies

Our experience of lockdown is likely to have lasting impacts on patterns of food and other retailing. The world has changed, and we are all having to get used to new ways of food shopping. Leigh Sparks, Deputy Principal in Marketing and Retail at the University of Stirling, argues that the retail system in the UK is broken in many ways, favouring the affluent and the car-borne at the expense of society and local economies. He believes that it is unsustainable and does not meet the obligations we must now accept in rebuilding our future. He calls for an enhanced local focus, with an emphasis on strengthening neighbourhoods and local supply chains and assets.¹⁶

Sparks points out that large-scale food retailing over the last 60 years has been built on the idea of maximising dwell and interaction times. Large food stores have been designed to be engaging and experiential. The location of items, the end aisles and other promotions, the cafe and the checkout offer are all designed to engage, provide interest and sell. Now, the aim is to allow people to shop safely, with a minimum of interaction with other people.¹⁷

If the priorities are now social distancing and ensuring that products are handled as little as possible, it may be time to ask whether we need to go to such stores to shop at all, and whether people will want to do so given the attendant risk. The internet offers an obvious alternative. Both major and local producers and suppliers have been quick to move to online platforms and home delivery or click and collect, and the crisis appears to be prompting more consumers to choose this option. The changes we are seeing in shopping patterns may create more opportunities for the development of local supply chains to the benefit of local economies. On the other hand, the experience of lockdown may make some people less inclined to walk to the local town centre and more dependent on food delivered from

¹⁶ Sparks, Leigh, *What Should We Value about Retailing and Towns and What Should We Do About Them?* Stirlingretail, 29 April 2020.

¹⁷ Sparks, Leigh, *Supermarket Nightmares: Keeping your Distance*, Stirlingretail, 21 April 2020

distant locations. Policy should be focused on skills and capacity-building to ensure that opportunities to strengthen local economies are spread as widely as possible, and not confined solely to affluent communities.

Housing

The final report of the UK2070 Commission points out that reliance on market mechanisms has failed to deliver the required level of affordable housing across the UK. It calls for a fundamental rethinking of our approach to housing policy, with housing seen as a key element of infrastructure in wider policies to develop the economy. It stresses the need for the wealth generated by public policy to be shared (ACTION 5).¹⁸

In early May, Scotland's social and economic equality think-tank Common Weal published a paper setting out how Scottish local authorities could build high quality green houses with secure and sustainable financing at a much lower cost than can be delivered at present. It proposes that local authorities should be able to purchase land for such housing at current use value in order to capture the uplift in value for public purposes and then borrow from the Scottish National Investment Bank, spreading the cost of borrowing over an extended period so that rents can be kept low. It proposes that a maintenance budget should be built into the model so that the quality of the houses is secured over a long period. Common Weal argues that a public rental house building programme linked to an industrial strategy could contribute to economic and social recovery from the current crisis.¹⁹

The draft *National Development Framework for Wales* identifies a shortfall in the delivery of new homes and indicates that the provision of affordable homes should be a key focus for housing delivery.²⁰ The Climate Change, Rural Affairs and Environment Committee of the National Assembly for Wales has stated that the NDF needs to specify the mechanisms to be used to deliver new affordable housing on the scale envisaged by the strategy.²¹

Make No Little Plans highlights the need to shift towards higher housing densities in accessible locations. But will the value of access to a garden which quickly became apparent to families in lockdown make them less inclined to see the merits of flat-dwelling and high density living?

¹⁸ *Make No Little Plans*, pp. 57 - 60.

¹⁹ Dalzell, Craig, *Good Houses for All: How Scotland can Build Unlimited Homes – Without Subsidy*, Common Weal, 4 May 2020.

²⁰ Welsh Government, *National Development Framework 2020 – 2040*, Consultation Draft, 7 August – 1 November 2019, pp. 30 & 31.

²¹ National Assembly for Wales: Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, *Report on the draft National Development Framework*, pp. 24 - 26.

Culture and the Environment

Make No Little Plans highlights the need to harness the potential of cultural and environmental assets across the United Kingdom (ACTION 6). Tourism, heritage, culture and the arts are sectors which face particularly acute challenges as a result of restricted travel and lockdown, and the road to recovery remains uncertain.

Before the crisis, there was growing concern about the adverse social and environmental impacts of over-tourism in parts of Scotland, particularly in Edinburgh and parts of the Highlands and Islands. Recent research for the Scottish Government examined the rapid growth in short-term letting, highlighting the adverse impacts on the availability of housing for rent, residential amenity and sense of community.²² In Edinburgh, there has also been a backlash against the adverse impacts of its festivals and major events on local communities and the public realm within the city centre World Heritage Site.²³

Scottish academics are working with colleagues across Europe on a study of the impacts which large volumes of visitors have on the local population, using Edinburgh as one of their case studies. Impacts they are examining include higher living costs, housing shortages, congestion of public services and spaces, increasing casualisation of work and changes in the character and identity of places.²⁴

Restrictions on travel and a prolonged requirement for social distancing will have major repercussions for Edinburgh and its festivals, for Glasgow's Celtic Connections festival, and for the arts, culture and heritage across Scotland. The contributions of tourism to the national economy and city development require to be reassessed in the light of this crisis. Will the tourism sector which emerges beyond lockdown be more willing to work in partnership with local communities and respect social and environmental constraints?

What will be the long-term impacts on patterns of tourism and leisure, and on a heritage sector which relies heavily on visitors? It will certainly take time for the airline industry to recover from the economic impact. Holiday flights are likely to become more expensive and the range of destinations offered may be significantly reduced. Against that background, can we expect overseas visitor numbers to return to pre-crisis levels? Will people in the UK be as ready to travel abroad, or will some be inclined to look for alternative leisure and recreation opportunities at home? In its submission to the Scottish Government on the fourth National Planning Framework, Reforesting Scotland's Thousand Huts Campaign has suggested an expansion of rural hutting on the Scandinavian model could offer an alternative to overseas holidays.²⁵ A [COVID Historic Environment Resilience Forum \(CHERF\)](#)

²² Evans, Anna; Graham, Eddy; Rae, Alasdair; Robertson, Douglas; and Serpa, Regina, *Research into the impact of short-term lets on communities across Scotland*, Scottish Government, October 2019.

²³ Hague, Cliff, *Green oasis? Or corporate sell-out?* The Scotsman, 26 February 2020, p. 25.

²⁴ Swanson, Ian (2020), *Academics to study how mass tourism affects Edinburgh*, Edinburgh Evening News, 20 April 2020

²⁵ Reforesting Scotland Thousand Huts Campaign, *Response to NPF4 Call for Ideas*, 14 April 2020.

has been established to develop high-level strategies for rebuilding, recovery and resilience in the built heritage sector in Scotland.

The final report of the UK2070 Commission points out that countries such as Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands have gone further than the UK in integrating the natural environment into urban policy.²⁶ In its report on the draft National Development Framework for Wales, The Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee of the National Assembly for Wales has recommended that the Welsh Government should take the opportunity to make links between green infrastructure networks and the housing and urban renewal agendas, and that links should also be made between green infrastructure networks, the national forest and the tourism and leisure agenda through initiatives such as the National Cycle Network.²⁷

Devolved Administrations

The final report of the UK2070 Commission advocates a comprehensive framework for inclusive devolution and indicates that the range of powers devolved to Scotland should be similarly devolved to the regional level and beyond within England. However, the Scottish and Welsh Governments have been criticised for too readily falling into line with the UK Government's 'four nation approach' to the management of the coronavirus when lives might have been saved if they had shown more initiative in developing their own distinctive policy responses.

Dr. Kirsty Hughes, Director of the Scottish Centre on European Relations is one of those who has been critical of the Scottish Government for being reluctant to diverge from UK Government strategy despite health and education being devolved, suggesting that it was well behind civic society in recognising the need to cancel events.²⁸ In an essay, Professor Allyson Pollock, co-director of Newcastle University's Centre for Regulatory Science and Dr Louisa Harding-Edgar, an academic fellow at the University of Glasgow, have argued that the Scottish Government should have acted more promptly, imposing a *cordon sanitaire* combined with social distancing around those parts of the country that had no cases of infection, including the Western Isles, Orkney and parts of the Highlands. They say that the Scottish Government should have continued with the test, trace and isolate strategy recommended by the World Health Organisation rather than agreeing with the UK Government decision to stop.²⁹

If the benefits of devolution are to be fully realised, the bodies to which powers are devolved must have the confidence to use them to develop appropriate policy responses to the challenges they face. *Make No Little Plans* recognises that successful devolution

²⁶ *Make No Little Plans*, p. 63.

²⁷ National Assembly for Wales: Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, *Report on the draft National Development Framework*, p. 36.

²⁸ Hughes, Kirsty, *Why was Westminster dictating Scots policy?* The National, 21 April 2020

²⁹ Pollock, Allyson and Harding-Edgar, Louisa, *Coronavirus Crisis: Underfunding, Restructuring, Privatisation and Fragmentation at the Heart of the Crisis in Holyrood and Westminster*, Scottish Centre on European Relations, 23 April 2020

demands a change in the culture of government in the United Kingdom to create a *parity of esteem* between different tiers of government.³⁰ That is something which has been conspicuously lacking in the UK Government's dealings with the devolved administrations on Brexit and the management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Changes to Institutions and Processes

The final report of the UK2070 Commission emphasises the need for changes in our institutions and the way they work, and for a move away from the culture of negotiation and deals to one of collaboration and levelling up, while allowing diversity and experimentation.³¹

Comment on the draft National Development Framework for Wales gives no hint of a readiness to abandon the art of the deal, but there is recognition of the importance of the relationship between strategic development plans, the Welsh Government's Regional Economic Development Plans and city region deals. The Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee of the National Assembly for Wales has called on the Welsh Government to indicate how it will ensure that national and regional strategic planning and city region deals are coordinated and properly aligned.³²

In January, a report by Audit Scotland concluded that City Region and Growth Deals have been positive for Scotland's economy, but expressed concern that the Scottish Government had not set out how it will measure the value for money of the programme. It warned that a lack of aims and objectives meant opportunities might already have been missed to ensure deals contribute to national outcomes. It also highlighted the limited transparency around the process and the fact that local communities have had little involvement in deals, commenting that it was not clear why some deal projects were approved for funding over others.³³

Tax expert Richard Murphy suggests that the coronavirus pandemic may lead to a lasting change in our relationship with the state. He writes that:

“Instead of markets being primary and states secondary what we suddenly see is that the reverse is true. The state is the greatest risk taker and the underpinner of markets, and therefore the ultimate source of our wellbeing in all aspects of life. It alone can get us through troubled times. And it alone has the means to deliver essential services, which are of much broader variety than we might ever have imagined. The narrative of the last forty years was wrong, as some of us always thought.”³⁴

³⁰ *Make No Little Plans*, p. 69.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 91.

³² National Assembly for Wales: Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, *Report on the draft National Development Framework*, December 2019, pp. 17, 20 & 21.

³³ *Scotland's City Region and Growth Deals*, Audit Scotland, January 2020.

³⁴ Murphy, Richard, *Question of the day: what is our new relationship with the state going to be like?* 28 April 2020

In mid-April, an independent advisory group was established to provide expert economic advice to the Scottish Government on recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.³⁵ George Kerevan, formerly the Scottish National Party MP for East Lothian, has expressed concern that the Scottish Government is relying too heavily on the advice of people who take an establishment and conservative view of the economy and finance and urged the First Minister to appoint a wider range of thinkers, including people with a detailed understanding of the green economy, to the advisory group.³⁶ The Scottish Government's Council of Economic Advisers includes the former Chief Medical officer, Sir Harry Burns, who has long promoted a Wellbeing agenda which emphasises the links between public health inequalities and the built environment,³⁷ and Marianna Mazzucato, the champion of the entrepreneurial state.³⁸ However, figures of a conservative and conventional bent outnumber progressive voices on the new Economic Recovery Advisory Group.³⁹ Kerevan believes that more radical perspectives will be required if we are to build the sustainable, inclusive zero-carbon economy Scotland needs.⁴⁰ We may also need to take a more sceptical view of the pronouncements of lobbyists and think tanks of uncertain provenance, and consider whether retired bankers and others with a similar corporate background need to be quite so well represented on the boards of our public bodies.

The independent advisory group on economic recovery submitted a report entitled [Towards a Robust, Resilient Wellbeing Economy for Scotland](#) to the Scottish Government on 22 June.

⁴¹ Some of the recommendations it makes are very much in tune with the thinking of the Commission. It calls for an investment-led recovery. It recognises the need to address regional disparities in Scotland and advocates a regionally focused model of economic development. However, it fails to make the connection between economic development and strategic spatial planning. Planning is presented solely as a regulatory impediment to recovery, part of the problem rather than an important part of the solution. It must be hoped that the Scottish Government will recognise the importance of regional agency and the spatial planning dimension in developing its strategy for economic and social recovery.

³⁵ *Advisory Group on Economic Recovery*, The Scottish Government, 17 April 2020

³⁶ Kerevan, George, *FM needs radical thinkers around her for the economic challenges ahead*, The National, 20 April 2020, pp.12 & 13.

³⁷ *Equally Well: Report of the Ministerial Task Force on Health Inequalities*, The Scottish Government, 2008.

³⁸ Mazzucato, Mariana (2013), *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Sector Myths*, Anthem Press, London & New York.

³⁹ *Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: Economy Secretary's statement*, The Scottish Government, 21 April 2020.

⁴⁰ Kerevan, George, *Recovery, Covid-19 and the Scottish Economy*, Bella Caledonia, 23 April 2020

⁴¹ *Towards a Robust, Resilient Wellbeing Economy for Scotland: Report of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery*, Scottish Government, 22 June 2020