

# REFLECTIONS ON COMMUNITY CHANGE | TWO COUNTRIES, TWO PERSPECTIVES, ONE VISION FOR MOVING FORWARD

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New Zealand and Canada have a lot in common: we could be cousins. Positioned at the end of the world – albeit different ends – both countries boast stunning natural landscapes and sports loving citizens. And while we’re often equally over-shadowed by our more populous/popular neighbours, there’s a similar self-assured pride in being independent thinkers and changemakers.

This year both the Tamarack Institute (Canada) and Inspiring Communities (Aotearoa New Zealand) achieve significant milestones. We are celebrating 15 and 10 years respectively in our efforts to empower, grow, support, connect and learn from diverse community-led change efforts. Having mutually benefitted from peer-learning exchanges over the years, it felt timely to compare and contrast experiences and observations from our collective 25 years of wisdom gathering.

What does community transformation really take and what are the big changes we have noticed over the last decade or so? And, as we look forward, what key aspects need our attention and deeper thinking?



## THE CONTEXT FOR GETTING STARTED

### TAMARACK INSTITUTE

Tamarack's story begins in the late 1990s with a series of conversations between Paul Born and Alan Broadbent. At the time, Paul was leading the Community Opportunities Development Association (CODA) and Opportunities 2000, a millennium campaign with a bold goal of reducing poverty in the Waterloo Region to the lowest in Canada by the year 2000. Alan, of the Avana Capital Corporation and Chair of Maytree, a foundation dedicated to advancing systemic solutions to poverty, was interested in the campaign's progress.

Paul and Alan talked about what it takes to get a broad range of stakeholders – business, government, non-profit and faith-based organisations and volunteers – working together with people with lived experience of poverty to address this big, complex issue. CODA and Opportunities 2000 offered much learning in this regard. Alan and Paul began to see the outlines of something bigger: a national organization to promote the art and science of community change for cities, where people are engaged and working together to strengthen their community.

In 2001, Alan as Chair and Paul as President jointly launched *Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement*. Its mission was to develop a process to help people create bold visions for the future of their communities and work together to achieve those visions more easily and effectively (Tamarack Institute - [2017 Progress and Impact Report](#)).

Over the past 15 years, the Tamarack Institute has continued to focus on the priorities of impacting community change, reducing poverty and deepening community. While our focus is on Canada, our network of changemakers can be found in communities across the globe, including our colleagues and partners at Inspiring Communities in New Zealand.

### WHAT INFLUENCES OUR COMMUNITY CHANGE CONTEXT?

- Canada has a population of 36.29 million people (2016). We are a vast country of almost 10 million square kilometres, but a majority of citizens live in urban centres. Tamarack has worked with citizens in both urban and rural communities but navigating our vast geography has been a challenge.
- In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was launched as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) and to lay the foundation for addressing reconciliation across Canada. The TRC report contained 94 calls to action which have been adopted by the Government of Canada and are now the shared work of governments and organizations across Canada.
- Politically, Canada uses a parliamentary government system with three levels of government: federal, provincial and municipal. Decision-making powers and areas of

focus are distributed across the levels of government, although most citizens feel closest to their municipal government leaders.

- Over the past 20 years, income inequality has increased in Canada. There is a large network of cities working to reverse this trend and decrease the levels of poverty which can be found in urban and rural centres across Canada. Most provincial governments have adopted poverty reduction strategies and most recently, the federal government has focused on poverty as a priority as well.
- Canadians are polite, hard-working, industrious people who care for one another and work collaboratively.

## INSPIRING COMMUNITIES

After two decades of massive economic and social restructuring in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ), some communities were tackling challenging local issues and making a positive difference, while others were falling behind. For a group of passionate NZ leaders, this was intriguing. They were determined to learn more about why and how community-led change happens and to share this knowledge, so positive progress could be shared and amplified.

Several visits were made to Canada to learn from our Tamarack colleagues about successful poverty reduction efforts under way and the mindsets and approaches that were enabling this. We were also very aware that the ‘calls to action’ coming from communities in NZ were all different – for some it was restoring the environment and in others rebuilding social connection or sustainable local employment. And so, with an intentional focus on communities of place and collective learning, Inspiring Communities established as a movement to grow and support community-led change. Like Tamarack, we had strong encouragement and financial backing from a strategic philanthropist, in our case Sir Stephen Tindall and the Tindall Foundation.

Now a decade on, Inspiring Communities is recognised as the reference point for community-led development (CLD) in New Zealand. We support a network of around 2,700 people, organisations, and CLD initiatives both in Aotearoa and beyond. Our vision is for all communities in Aotearoa to flourish, with our small team of CLD specialists using our experience to connect, mentor, train and support people, organisations and communities to make their places become even better to live, work, play and invest in. We also focus on systems change to help make things easier for communities to work in locally-led ways.

## WHAT INFLUENCES OUR COMMUNITY CHANGE CONTEXT?

- New Zealand has around 4.9 million people and is highly urbanised. While geographically isolated from the rest of the world, our small population allows high degrees of connection between people.
- The Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840 by the Crown and many indigenous Māori tribes in Aotearoa, New Zealand. This established a nation state under British rule. Like many treaties, it included an exchange of promises – many of which were broken. The

impacts of colonisation (e.g. land confiscation, loss of identity and language and health, education and socio-economic disparities) have had intergenerational impacts on wellbeing outcomes for Māori families and communities. With constitutional processes for redress and healing underway for the last few decades, considerable progress has been made to better 'live' Treaty partnership intents. Many significant new Māori-led development initiatives have also been catalysed following Treaty settlements with the Crown.

- While we have three levels of government (local, regional and central), around 80% of all services and programmes are planned, commissioned and/or delivered from the centre. Engaging with and trying to change large government systems is inherently challenging.
- In recent decades, New Zealand has moved rapidly from a place of relative income equality to one of significant inequality, with growing concerns about the impacts of child poverty and the rise of the working poor.
- Auckland, while not quite Toronto, is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world.
- Linking back to our pioneering spirit, New Zealanders are known for being resourceful, entrepreneurial, and early adopters of technology and new ideas.

## WHAT WE'VE BEEN NOTICING AND WHAT MATTERS

### 1. FRAMEWORKS FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

#### INSPIRING COMMUNITIES – TAKING A PRINCIPLES-BASED APPROACH

Westley, Zimmerman and Quinn Patton's book "Getting to Maybe" (2007) was instrumental in helping describe the complex or 'wicked' problems Kiwi (NZ) communities were facing and the new ways of working required to support transformative community change. We began referring to these new collaborative placed-based approaches as community-led development (CLD).

We debated (and angsted) for months about the core underpinning components of CLD and how to best frame and put language to things. Interestingly, while the principles of community-led development have been refined several times over the last decade, the essence of our original thinking still remains.



#### Te Whakawhanake ā-Hapori

Weaving our connections and contributions

Recent work has focused on more effectively expressing and integrating our uniquely bi-cultural New Zealand practice perspective. This has involved incorporating both Te Ao Māori (a Māori world view) and Treaty responsiveness lenses into our [CLD Framework](#) and practice principles below:

1. **GROW FROM LOCAL VISIONS**
2. **BUILD FROM STRENGTHS**
3. **WORK WITH DIVERSE PEOPLE AND SECTORS**
4. **GROW COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP**
5. **LEARN BY DOING**

We see the CLD principles as fundamental in shaping the values, spirit, mindset and approaches of changemakers, no matter where they sit in the system. While at different times some principles may be more in play than others, collectively they remind us of what matters, acting as touchstones to help guide our ‘why, what, with who and how’ in a practical, real time way.

We have noticed the CLD principles being increasingly picked up as a practice framework by organisations as well as communities. We think this reflects a growing desire (and need) to go beyond pure service provision roles to work *with* local communities in more authentic and life-giving ways.

The CLD principles also sit at the heart of two other key frameworks Inspiring Communities has developed. Over the last decade we have observed community-led change in New Zealand to be iterative and emergent - with one thing frequently leading to another - rather than being more formally underpinned by long-term policy, plans and investment frameworks. Our [CLD Theory of Change](#) helps describe our observations of how community-led change happens.

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In contrast to North America, attention and investment by government and philanthropic organisations in Collective Impact and community-based planning and regeneration has been much more limited here. As a result, locally-led change initiatives in New Zealand have tended to be smaller in scale, often succeeding in spite of government/agency systems rather than because of them.

That said, we strongly sense increasing levels of understanding nationally about CLD and why it matters. Community-led language is more frequently referenced in current engagement and policy intents, with questions and inquiries now more focused on how to do things in community-led ways. Changing mindsets, systems and practice to ‘do differently’ isn’t easy.

To help build understanding about the skills, behaviours and capabilities required to do this work well, we've crafted a [CLD Capability Framework](#). Linked to the CLD principles, the Framework seeks to name the different kinds of interlinked competencies that support locally-led success.

## TAMARACK INSTITUTE – FIVE INTERCONNECTED PRACTICES

The Tamarack Institute works with changemakers to accelerate community impact and build vibrant communities. Tamarack's theory of change acknowledges that when changemakers have access to tools, resources and effective learning opportunities, they can lead impactful change in their communities, reduce poverty and build strong and resilient community networks. We accomplish this by investing in the Tamarack Learning Centre and creating Vibrant Communities.

### The Tamarack Learning Centre

The Tamarack Learning Centre has identified five interconnected practices which are pivotal to community change. Each practice area evokes a question to challenge changemakers to think, act and work differently.

**Collective Impact:** How can we mobilize collaboration across sectors for systems change?

**Community Engagement:** How can we bring the right people together in constructive ways?

**Collaborative Leadership:** What approaches to leadership are required for community change?

**Community Innovation:** How can we create, test and scale new approaches?

**Evaluating Impact:** How can we identify and amplify what works?



## Creating Vibrant Communities

The five practices of community change are embedded in the place-based convening work supported by the Tamarack Institute. Under the banner of Vibrant Communities, **Cities Reducing Poverty** is a network of cities across Canada and the US which engage multi-sector roundtables to create poverty reduction strategies at the local level. The network also aligns with poverty reduction strategies being advanced in municipal, provincial and federal governments.

**Cities Deepening Community** is dedicated to developing our collective understanding about the power of citizens and supporting programs, policies and practices that strengthen communities and neighbourhoods and mobilize citizen leadership to enhance social capital.

We are discovering the power of community as an essential driver of effective community change and compiling a body of knowledge – including research, tools and practices – that make the work of creating strong communities and neighbourhoods easier and more effective. We are inspired by Meg Wheatley’s wise words: “Whatever the problem, community is the answer.”

## 2. AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT OF CITIZENS IN COMMUNITY CHANGE EFFORTS

### TAMARACK INSTITUTE

At Tamarack, we define community engagement as: citizens engaged in inspired action as they work and learn together on behalf of their communities to create and realize bold visions for the future. Tamarack’s approach to community engagement is rooted in the belief that the best solutions to complex community issues are most often discovered when a dedicated group of community leaders, from multiple perspectives, work together to better align their individual efforts and partner together on new community innovations.

Engaged citizens are a tremendous source of ingenuity and creativity and they are, perhaps, the greatest untapped resource for solving the most complex and intractable issues of our time. The knowledge, passion and capabilities of community residents are rich, often underutilized, sources of innovation as well as much-needed resources in the implementation of promising solutions to our toughest social and environmental issues.

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Authentic community engagement requires a long-term commitment to relationship-building and an investment of adequate resources so that engagement becomes more than a “one-off” event that occurs only at the start of an initiative. To fully harness the “extraordinary power of ordinary people” community engagement should be a pillar within every effective community change strategy.

The intentional commitment to meaningfully engage residents and ‘people with lived experience’ in the issue as leaders and co-designers of new solutions is at the heart of the practice of community engagement. These individuals, often referred to as ‘context experts’, bring a deep appreciation of the unique characteristics of the place where the innovation is to be implemented. This knowledge is invaluable in tailoring a promising solution to capitalize on the strengths and mitigate against the limitations of each neighbourhood or community.

A focus on aspiration, combined with an attitude of curiosity and continuous learning, is central to building an effective foundation for authentic community engagement. The power of a strongly held and shared community aspiration anchors people in their connection to the community and their common purpose. This is an important step in moving a shared aspirational vision forward and identifying “manageable pockets of change that help the community to achieve the small ‘wins’ that generate trust, stronger relationships and greater confidence in the capability of their community”.

A modern paradox faced by community changemakers is that, while today’s networked world makes it easier than ever to mobilize support around ideas, the complexity of the issues facing our communities, combined with a scarcity of funding and shrinking public attention spans, has made the work of mobilizing for lasting systems change more difficult than ever. Bringing a lens of movement-building to the work of community engagement has proven to be an important evolution which is best articulated in the four principles of the Directed-Network Campaign Approach.

#### THE FOUR PRINCIPLES ARE:

- 1. Open to Grassroots Power** – Give members an active role in shaping their own direction and greater ability to customize their participation. This approach increases enthusiasm for and commitment to the campaign and often benefits from key insights and member-generated innovations.
- 2. Leverage Cross-Movement Network Hubs** – Rather than trying to “own” an issue, focus attention on creating resonance with allied groups and providing ways for them to collectively focus their power simultaneously.
- 3. Frame a Compelling Cause** – Key ingredients in building a compelling cause include: great storytelling; a simple and believable rationale for why audiences should care about the issue; the illustration of a path to victory; and the identification of clear roles for members.



4. **Run with Focus and Discipline** – Be disciplined in tracking progress; prototype key messages and deployment strategies; and utilize the network’s power only when clear “winnable moments” are identified. This conserves resources for the long-term work required to achieve systems change.

For individuals, the mindset shift is to move beyond seeing themselves solely as a recipient of service or source of information, to seeing their role as also including a responsibility to be a participant and leader in generating the kind of communities that we want to be part of. For organizations, the mindset shift is one from seeing themselves primarily as ‘the doers’ and providers of programs and services, to embracing a role as the catalysts and co-facilitators of conversations and multi-sector collaborations that share a commitment to strengthening the well-being of the community.

A significant challenge to the practice of community engagement is the growing levels of loneliness and lack of a sense of belonging amongst Canadians of all ages. The experience of social isolation also has a significant negative impact on how connected and committed people feel to their communities and each other. People’s sense of belonging is directly relevant to those of us concerned with the engagement of our community. Research conducted by the Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) found that there is a direct correlation between people feeling a sense of belonging and their subsequent willingness to act “in the common good.”

For communities to be resilient and thrive, they need to be built on a foundation of care and deep connection. For communities to address complex issues, they need to bring together many sectors and tap into the potential of citizen leadership. Communities become more resilient when they strengthen their natural networks of care. Community engagement can play a foundational role in helping to nurture and create an enabling environment to foster the necessary community leadership in order for community change efforts to thrive.

## INSPIRING COMMUNITIES

In our original framing of CLD, we believed that the voice of local residents (people who live in a place) was missing from community change efforts. We were concerned that the space of ‘community’ was increasingly taken by community groups and organisations as the proxy for local people. While there is frequent overlapping of the hats we wear in community, interests and perspectives at neighbourhood and organisational levels are clearly different. Authentic engagement and participation of **all** voices is essential in locally-led change processes.

Engaging with community groups and agencies is relatively easy as there are structures and email addresses through which to make contact. At a resident level, engagement is much, much harder. More tailored and relationally-based processes are generally required to invite and encourage connection and participation. In a community-led change context, we have come to understand that *authentic* community engagement also requires a commitment to addressing inherent community-agency power imbalances, which means:

- Only engaging if you are committed to doing something with what people tell you.
- Meeting people in their place, in their time and in their way.
- Being prepared to listen more than talk, using simple language and powerful questions to open up hearts and minds.
- Enabling conversations that bring together diverse perspectives – moving people to new understandings and out of siloed thinking.
- Being straight up about any challenges and constraints.
- Understanding everyone has a contribution to make. This means structuring engagement processes so that they generate ideas and actions that different parts of the local eco-system can lead to support change. Finding ways to resource and support these at the grassroots level is also key.
- Feeding back engagement results in a timely way so the community can tap into its own narrative and ideas.

More and more, we see that processes and investment to build community capacity is required before agencies can authentically engage and partner locally. Our experience is that communities facing the greatest socio-economic challenges tend to be those where trust and confidence in agencies/government is the lowest, with little faith that things can or will be different. Turning this around takes time, new skills and attitudes, committed relationship building. It also requires resourcing to support both engagement and collective action to achieve tangible, visible results - ones that demonstrate that a different future is possible.

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**“Engagement and participation of *all* voices is essential in locally-led change processes.”**

In a nutshell, we now understand that community-led change requires an intentional coupling of community engagement *and* activation planning. Focusing just on community engagement runs the risk of creating a wish-list of things that ‘others’ should do.

Transformational community engagement must also pay attention to building ‘agency’ and seeding and supporting solution-making at both individual citizen and community levels.

### 3. ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

#### INSPIRING COMMUNITIES

**Kāore te kumara e kōrero ana mo tōna ake reka.  
*The kumara does not brag about its own sweetness.***

For Māori, the whakataukī (proverb) above and the humility it engenders underpins leadership culture in Aotearoa New Zealand. When we started talking openly and proactively about growing leaders and leadership the typical response was “Who me? I’m not a leader.” This has taken some time to break through!

Knowing that leadership was a key ingredient in living systems, we started from the position of leadership as collective work and the domain of everyone. [Raelin's work](#) on leaderful organisations helped us frame and communicate our aspiration of ‘leaderful communities.’ We also put an early stake in the ground by defining leadership as intentional action by any individual or group that seeks to sustain and/or change the way things are.

But the deeper we delved into CLD, the more clearly we saw just how contextual leadership is. In the early phases of community change, having individual leaders out front is essential - without them, it’s often difficult to generate the momentum and resources required to get and sustain lift-off. Longer term success however, equally relies on leaders with the skills to nurture and empower ownership and actively involve others. They also need to skillfully hold and balance polarities that are always in movement – such as diversity and inclusion, process and action, awareness of self and others, and time and no time!

So how does one stay sane while navigating the messy, complex reality of CLD? Seeing [leadership as learning](#), best supported by processes of collective inquiry, takes the pressure off us to have the ‘right answer’ for every situation. By noticing and naming what we’re seeing and taking time to make meaning together, the cues for ‘what next’ for us and for others become more obvious. In the process of collaborative inquiry we grow the confidence and competence of all involved to play a part in leading. Sometimes that means stepping forward, stepping back or even stepping right out.

## TAMARACK INSTITUTE

The face of communities in Canada is changing. Communities are trying to cope with complex and inter-connected challenges which are exacerbated by an increased rate and pace of change. Even though the challenges are more complex, the capacity of leaders to adapt and cope with changes are often limited by the systems in which they work.

In a recent paper, [\*Making Sense of the Multiple Faces of Leadership\*](#), Tamarack identified five principles for leaders coping with rapid and persistent community change. These principles provide a framework for community changemakers and are drawn from diverse leadership frameworks including grassroots leadership, catalytic leadership, collaborative leadership, adaptive leadership and systems leadership, to name a few. The principles are especially relevant to changemakers coping with adaptive and changing community environments and complex challenges.

### PRINCIPLE 1: MAKE THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE CENTRAL

Engaging community or citizens' voices, particularly those individuals impacted by the problem trying to be solved is critical to the success of any community change effort. Citizens with lived or direct experience bring an important perspective to the issue as they are navigating the challenge on a regular basis. They will have insights about what is or is not working and where changes need to be made. However, engaging citizens often means paying attention to building relationship and trust. We often have a bias toward working with those we already feel comfortable with. Engaging with others takes time, patience and a focus on building connections.

### PRINCIPLE 2: WORK ACROSS BOUNDARIES

Similar to engaging the voice of people in community change efforts, tackling complex community challenges requires us to work across boundaries. This means engaging individuals and sectors which can play a pivotal and influential role in the community change effort. This also enables changemakers to leverage new and different resources that the sector actors can bring to the table.

### PRINCIPLE 3: CATALYZE CHANGE AND WORK ADAPTIVELY

Communities are not static: there is a rhythm and an ebb and flow to them. Even as a collaborative group begins an intervention, changes emerge. Adaptive leadership is about having micro and macro or systems vision. It is about catalyzing the changes as they emerge but also creating enough space to leverage new opportunities as they emerge.

## PRINCIPLE 4: ENGAGE IN SYSTEMIC THINKING AND ACTION

Being able to ascertain the health of the entire forest as well as individual trees is an analogy for engaging in systemic thinking and action. This principle requires adaptive leaders to view their change efforts from different lenses: seeing and navigating the whole system; engaging different parts and resources in the system; and considering your role as a changemaker within the system. Having these three lenses enables changemakers to leverage opportunities as they emerge.

## PRINCIPLE 5: BE COURAGEOUS

Adaptive leadership requires us to step outside our comfort zone and to be bold. It is risky and at times we might not get it right. It takes courage, purpose and a relentless passion to work toward something better.

## 4. SOCIAL (COMMUNITY) INNOVATION

### TAMARACK INSTITUTE

At Tamarack, we see Community Innovation as a particular form of social innovation that is place-based within the specific geography of a community. As dynamic ‘living labs’, communities offer the perfect container for innovation. We have come to understand that to be effective, innovation requires an appreciation of both the issue one is hoping to address, as well as a deep understanding of the unique characteristics of the community – the place and the people within it – where the innovation will be implemented. Innovations that have proven successful in one community can, at best, serve as a source of inspiration for another. But they must be adapted and modified if they are to maximize the strengths and assets of the community where they hope to be replicated.

Community innovation is not just a lofty theoretical pursuit reserved solely for experts and academics. In his book *Six Patterns to Spread Your Social Innovation*, Al Etmanski reminds us that “humans’ ingenuity and creativity in the face of adversity is what defines us as a species.” In every community, ordinary citizens – individuals, neighbours and families – are constantly hard at work striving to make things better. These individuals, referred to by Etmanski as passionate amateurs, “are motivated by necessity and inspired by love. Someone or something they care about is vulnerable, under siege or in trouble and they have no choice but to respond.” Rarely however are ‘passionate amateurs’ successful in advancing community innovation alone. It is only when these individuals join together in a movement and also team up with champions from a diversity of sectors that promising ideas evolve to have the kind of lasting impact that changes systems. The complex nature of our communities’ most intractable issues requires wisdom and insights from multiple sectors, working together, to generate measurable and lasting change.

The promise that innovation offers communities has recently been well articulated by Jean-Yves Duclos, Canada's Minister of Families, Children and Social Development. He said:

"To get better lives, economic development must be coupled with both sustainable development and inclusive development. If innovation is the driver of economic growth, then social innovation is the driver of inclusive development – of a Canada where all citizens are thriving and not just surviving."

Innovation emphasizes the intentional cultivation of new ways of thinking and learning. The way that we think influences the options that we can see, which in turn determines the choices that we can make. The practice of Community Innovation requires us to learn how to think differently – together. It is about experimenting and learning as well as prototyping promising new approaches to determine which ones should be taken to a scale in order to generate lasting positive change within our systems and communities.

The catalyst for innovation is often a frustration or dissatisfaction with the status quo, a belief that the way things have always been is not good enough and that new possibilities are waiting to be discovered. As living systems, our communities are continually evolving and changing. The promise of Community Innovation is the belief that we do not need to remain a powerless recipient of the whims of change, but rather that, together, we are capable of shaping and guiding the changes unfolding around us in ways that help to orchestrate a better future for all.

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## INSPIRING COMMUNITIES

In New Zealand we talk fondly about our 'number 8 wire' mentality. Number 8 is the gauge of fencing wire used by resourceful Kiwi farmers to fix anything and everything! While this notion reflects the ability to creatively solve problems with whatever is at hand, it also misses the importance of taking time to reach deeper into community systems to identify and connect wider resources and strengths that could equally be applied to progress the presenting opportunity or challenge.

In bringing together different people, perspectives, visions, resources and assets, CLD is inherently a process that brings about innovation and new ways of working. Here in New Zealand, like elsewhere, social innovation (change labs, design sprints, social entrepreneurship and social enterprise) have become ‘the new black’, with the promise of bringing both business and community disciplines closer together.

In principle there is much to gain from trading learning, tools, skills and approaches. For example, a co-design focus has led to more consumer/citizen voice and input into broader service design and planning, and more intentional teaching of discovery and design thinking skills to assist the start-up of new businesses, enterprises and community problem solving efforts alike.

But we also note some shadow sides. The simplicity of a lean canvas (a business model start up template) does not always reflect complex realities and dynamics in a community, or the expectations and assumptions about how change will happen. The notion that solutions underpinned by personal relationships can be easily purchased and scaled across communities resulting in a similar impact is also hugely naïve. Similarly, it can sometimes feel like good old fashioned community development and engagement practices (e.g. brainstorming with all those who are have a stake and finding key themes) are being marketed and ‘sold back’ to communities as ‘co-design’. Simple language and concepts innate in community are being technocratised and commercialised in the process. While those immersed in systems/large organisations often benefit from having more structured processes within which to engage, there is also a danger of new technical language further isolating those at the very grassroots most needing to be engaged and enabled to lead.

## AND LOOKING OUT INTO THE NEXT DECADE...

These are compelling and challenging times for changemakers and communities alike. The rise of localism will increase the focus on place as a locus for change. However, to be truly transformative, localism needs to be accompanied by mindset, investment and systems changes that enable and embed more collaborative ways of working and genuine power sharing with local citizens. Just because it’s local, doesn’t mean it’s community-led.

“ **Just because it’s local, doesn’t mean it’s community-led.** ”

We also need to acknowledge many communities as diverse, fragmented and disconnected. Connecting and empowering citizens and community leaders can build bridges across the divides of social isolation, loneliness and inequality. This in turn helps grow resilience and spur new collective action on complex issues such as mental health, child poverty, climate change, food security and inclusive economic development. When willing systems meet activated and mobilised communities – the potential for transformative change is so much greater.

We need to continue to look both at our own context and experiences, but also at the global experience. The patterns and trends in New Zealand and Canada provide useful lessons for community changemakers. While the contexts are different, and the experience of change is unique, there are patterns and rhythms to change which can enrich practice and progress in both countries.

To sustain and build on the momentum generated in the last 10-15 years we need to:

- **Build connections and collaboration opportunities** between communities, leaders and change movements to validate and support transformation efforts, transfer real-time learning and create new opportunities for doing and learning together.
- **Better align local, place-based efforts with government strategies** to address pressing issues such as poverty, climate change, homelessness, population ageing etc.
- **Support and invest in community change leaders** to build their capacity to make impactful change. Similarly, continue capability building across government, business and agencies so the behavioural and mindset shift required to truly respect and enable community context expertise as a key resource for community transformation is effectively understood.
- Continue to **bring in new ways of working and thinking** to shift practice and mindsets.
- **Strengthen links with, understandings of, and support for indigenous community change** efforts so that our collective efforts to improve community wellbeing are better enabled.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Megan Courtney is a founding member of the Inspiring Communities core team, and (amongst many things!) leads co-ordination of IC Team activities. She loves working in the 'spaces in between' to help make change happen.



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## LEARN MORE ABOUT:

Inspiring Communities

<http://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/>

Tamarack Institute

<https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/>