

'The Future is Already in the Room'

Image



5 stories of hopeful shifts in journalism, neighbourhoods, politics, a faith community & the economy

Last year we were thrilled to illuminate some incredible stories — stories that reveal our preferred future is already, in many ways, in the room.

Below, we list five of the top stories, each centred in a different practice field — journalism, neighbourhoods, politics, a faith community and the economy — though clearly these also all intertwine.

A theme of creating the conditions for transformation within a community or practice field by changing how people connect and convene runs through all the stories.

Citizenship Unleashed in Peterborough

The referenced media source is missing and needs to be re-embedded.

Ian Attridge helped open the Citizenship Unleashed gathering by evoking a sense of place.

PETERBOROUGH - What if we could change the way the community gathers to discuss and decide what matters?

That was the intriguing invitation that brought more than 40 citizens of Peterborough, Ontario together for a two-hour participatory evening called “Citizenship Unleashed.”

The evening mixed deeply participatory process in a circle, an opportunity to connect with the intentions and aspirations of relative strangers in small-group conversation, and a high-speed, spontaneous design lab to create community projects. At least three live projects emerged from the resulting small groups.

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Belgian Municipalities Open to Third Paradigm

In the municipalities of Olen and Houthalen-Helchteren, Belgium, citizen demands are increasing and resources to meet those demands shrinking. In the face of these challenges, local government leaders are becoming more open to embracing a “third paradigm.”

The referenced media source is missing and needs to be re-embedded.

Illustration: Yvonne Hollandy

German political author Geert Schmitz outlines three paradigms of local government proceedings:

- That of government as primary authority, where citizens have the least amount of influence, especially relevant in the case of security and safety programs.
- That of government as a provider of services, with citizens acting as clients.
- And finally, the third paradigm, that of citizens as the “owners” of the community’s well-being and government as a “modest” entity, acting in support of those initiatives.

All three paradigms are important and necessary. But the third paradigm has largely not been recognized or embraced.

Last fall, the municipality of Olen, with the backing of the local government leaders, held a one-day citizen gathering centred on creating a collective dream for the municipality’s future by 2020. In small groups that included children, citizens then identified specific projects to help realize that dream.

About a dozen projects have been identified through this gathering, including the development of a bicycle corridor between the three jurisdictions of Olen. All of the projects are to be citizen-led, with the local government taking the role of supporter.

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Churches Re-imagining Who They Are In Community

A new initiative spearheaded by the United Church of Canada is designed to help churches re-imagine who they are in their local communities.

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Hillhurst United Church is one of eight churches in Calgary to join an initiative centred on discovering a new place for themselves in their local communities.

The national church association’s research and development arm, called Edge, has launched the re-imagining initiative in recognition of the tremendous assets that so many churches hold.

Edge presents an opportunity for churches to partake in a study that includes a property scan, review of their financials, market research and a community roundtable. The goal is to identify the church's assets and then create opportunities for leveraging those assets in new ways, including through partnerships with other community organizations.

Measurable outcomes include the introduction of new programs, increasing usage of the church facilities, becoming more community focused as a church and redevelopment opportunities to serve the local community.

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Renewed Hope for Journalism Creates Shifts

An energy for discovering and bringing to life journalism's deeper promise was still pulsing days after a gathering in Portland, Oregon, inspiring participants to new connections and possibilities.

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Photo courtesy of Journalism That Matters

"My hope has been renewed," said Renee Mitchell, admitting she had long bought into the pessimist view that journalism was basically a dying industry.

"But I now recognize that what is bubbling up in the void between what was and what is coming is not new journalism but next journalism, where the possibilities are endless on how to use technology to tell stories that build, empower and inspire community. That's what's so exciting for me."

Hosted by Journalism That Matters and UO SOJC's Agora Journalism Center, the gathering drew more than 100 journalists, community activists and others representing a diversity of professions. Called Experience Engagement, the highly participatory gathering or "unconference," as it was called, centred on the question: What is possible when the public and journalists engage to support communities to

thrive?

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Marginalized Neighbourhoods Crafting Their Own Handmade, Place-based Economies

From entrepreneurs in their 20s to established real estate developers, the diversity of people who joined the first few gatherings on neighbourhood economics in Cincinnati had an initiator of the effort, Peter Block, happily stunned.

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Illustration: Jocasta Boone

“The most excited people in some cases were the people who came in with the most responsibility — and they got it,” Peter says.

Neighbourhood economics centres on accelerating the flow of capital into marginalized neighbourhoods or neighbourhoods of opportunity.

The work of accelerating that capital starts with connecting people.

“It’s about revitalizing and keeping alive neighbourhoods or making challenged neighbourhoods ones that people want to move into without gentrifying,” said Kevin Jones, cofounder of the Neighbourhood Economics initiative. “It’s about building neighbourhood value and land value where the whole neighbourhood gets the value.”

Two communities in southern rural Appalachia in North Carolina and one in Allentown, Pennsylvania are also venturing into neighbourhood economics.

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As we look ahead to 2016, we anticipate following up on these stories to discover what’s emerging now, sharing more stories of a similar bent and also deepening our understanding of the larger narrative at work here. We also hope to see more fellow

narrators join this discovery journey — graphic artists, videographers, photographers, writers and more — lifting up and making sense of what's unfolding in an even more alive and generative way.

To a generative 2016!