

SAUL Final Symposium – Closing Address

Thanks

I want to thank Sue Morgan, on your behalf, for her expert job as facilitator today, and for guiding us so efficiently through this final Symposium.

You may have noticed that her consultancy is called 'Round the Block'. Usually a walk around the block gets us back to where we began. But that wasn't the case today, and in my experience, has never been what happens in the SAUL Partnership.

Here in Deptford, like so many previous SAUL explorations, we have been on a voyage that started with the discoveries from our recent work, and led us into new territory with the challenges that climate change will bring for our city regions in the years ahead. It was good to have our guest speakers to stimulate that discussion today.

For the organisation of this Symposium, I particularly want to thank Rachel Kirk, who has worked with Martin Jones for the past year. And I think we all understand very well the debt of gratitude that we owe to Martin, not only for the efficient management of the SAUL Partnership on the pan-European level, but also for his dependable guidance on all our projects.

As well as those who have been able to take part directly in this Symposium, very many people in each of our regions have contributed to developing and carrying out the exploratory actions that have made up this Extension Project. They have all been crucial to its success, and I hope you will all carry that message back to them.

Their collective activities are summarised in the supplement to our Final Report, published today. It also contains perceptive evaluations from two external reviewers. Kathrin Feigs and Jayne Engle-Warnick know the SAUL Partnership well, and their analysis and recommendations are appreciated. I'll return to those later.

Just a word

An important characteristic of the SAUL Project has always been its value as a learning experience – individually as well as collectively. So I was delighted to see an email recently from our colleague, Reinhard Henke, with his plans to use the opportunity of this visit to London to expand his personal educational experience. He confessed that although he has been visiting England since the 1970s, he has never understood the English game of cricket – a gap in his knowledge that he intends to fill by attending a cricket match tomorrow.

I thought I should try to be helpful. So for Reinhard, and for all the German, Dutch and Luxembourgers here who may have been equally perplexed by the rules of cricket, here is a simplified explanation (found on a website called, Mind Your Language).

You have two sides, one out in the field and one in. Each man that's in the side that's in, goes out, and when he's out, he comes in, and the next man goes in until he's out.

When they are all out, the side that's out comes in, and the side that's been in, goes out, and tries to get those coming in, out. Sometimes you get men still in and not out. When a man goes out to go in, the men who are out try to get him out, and when he is out, he goes in, and the next man goes out and goes in.

There are two men called umpires who stay out all the time and they decide when the men who are in, are out. When both sides have been in, and all the men have been out, and both sides have been out twice after all the men have been in, including those who are not out, that is the end of the game.

I hope that was clear?

Anyway, it is a useful illustration of the difficulties we have often had in SAUL with the ambiguities of the English language. Although we may use the same words, they don't necessarily mean the same things to everyone.

Two weeks ago, the people of the Republic of Ireland voted in a referendum on whether or not their country should approve the Lisbon Treaty. In the UK, and I guess in your countries, the press and television made the most of the opportunity to ask politicians across Europe to tell us what the result of the Irish referendum will mean for the future of the Treaty. The remarkable diversity of explanations, ranging from "the Treaty is dead", to "the Irish clearly got it wrong, and must be persuaded to vote again until they get it right", left me wondering just how many different interpretations there could be of the simple word, "NO".

It's not cricket

In English, we have a useful, if rather bizarre expression – 'it's not cricket' – meaning (roughly) 'this isn't the right and fair way to do things'. Of course, we have been here before. When other populations were asked to endorse similar proposals last time in the form of an EU Constitution, the French and Dutch also said "no". In the UK, we haven't been asked to vote, in case we say no. So are we to believe that, when citizens are given the chance to vote, a majority is likely to take a negative view of Europe?

Well, on both occasions, it seems very unlikely that all those who voted had first read the words it contained. How many of us can claim we have read all of the Lisbon Treaty? And if they had, I suspect they would be even less likely to agree on a single interpretation of its legal meaning. The rules of cricket may be easier to understand.

But I do think there are some obvious conclusions that politicians would do well to recognise. First, when given the chance to vote, people tend to ignore the specific questions and instead, seize the opportunity to express frustrations of a more general kind. Secondly, if you tell people what you assume is best for them, and then ask them to agree, don't be surprised if the result isn't the one you had hoped for. If the only serious dialogue you are prepared to have with citizens is through a referendum (if any), our populations are unlikely to feel a warm enthusiasm for the European Union's institutions – whatever they may feel about Europe itself (which may be quite different).

But as you know well, there are better ways to engage citizens in key issues that affect their future lives. In our small sphere, SAUL's practical experience has

produced a very different view of European co-operation. This report illustrates some of the ways you have found to make the questions relevant and accessible to a wide diversity of people from many different backgrounds and age groups.

You reinforced that experience in the discussions this morning. Of course, it is more difficult to translate those approaches to the national level – but not impossible. The principles are the same. We heard earlier from just one group of young people about why their new urban landscape is important to them. These are the citizens to whom Europe's policy-makers should be listening.

If we follow the media debates on Europe, we might believe that the Union is all about treaties and constitutions, commissioners and voting rights, trade agreements and agricultural policies. It isn't. It is about its people, first and last, or it is nothing.

In her external review of the SAUL extension projects, Jayne Engle-Warnick reminds us that, making meaningful changes to the way that city regions internally function, and cumulatively affect the health of the planet, has become a key issue of our time. And, that economic vitality and social cohesion are at the heart of that issue.

But another message for Europe's politicians and bureaucrats – and for those who manage EU funding programmes - should also be that working for and with citizens requires time, patience and consistency – in order to build understanding and trust.

As Kathrin Feigs puts it in her review, "time has worked for the projects already. Most of them have been using the SAUL approach for some time now, with the result of trust between stakeholders and networks developing. Stakeholders have come to appreciate the results of the participative process and want to take it further. Examples like 'SAUL-mates' in Arnhem-Nijmegen or the commitment of elected council members and strategic bodies in the Wandle Valley, indicate that a broad range of people and institutions have been motivated to carry the SAUL approach into the future".

Going forward

And so, we have come on a journey together – one that, for some of you here today, began ten years ago. While today may be the conclusion and celebration of these projects, it is not the end of that journey; rather, a staging post along the way.

Along the way, the world around us has continued to change, and our positioning within it has evolved. Two years ago we held what we thought was our final conference in Amsterdam, and published the SAUL Report. At that time, we hoped to be able to extend the Project, but we didn't know if that would be possible. Today, we are in a similar position, waiting for the outcome of our recent new proposals to Interreg IVB.

Whatever the outcome, I want to take this opportunity to thank you all for making this project a success. It has been my privilege to lead the Partnership, and I want to thank you personally for your support, and for your many kindnesses to me over the past years. As you go forward, I wish you all every success with it in the future.

Clive Fox, Project Director for Lead Partner
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