

Hello and welcome to our Good Place Podcast is run by Good Place innovators, a team of researchers, educators and student fellows passionate about transforming communities with an extra sensitive eye for our place, local context and through community needs, our project demonstrates the importance of why the understanding of enterprise.

The social context and through the series of podcasts, we're exploring a variety of aspects of the place as a resource and inspiration.

My name is Ratka Newton.

I'm a senior teaching fellow in strategy and innovation at Lancaster University Management School.

I'm also an education service, designer and elite of good place innovators project.

Funded by the Enterprise Educators UK.

In the past episodes, we looked at research perspectives related to physical and emotional impact of the place on entrepreneurs embedded in their community.

We took a design perspective to learn

about the value of codesign with  
the community and the importance  
of being able to listen,  
observe,  
and empathize with the place where  
we do business.

If you missed our previous episodes,  
please tune into our podcast series to catch  
up with those fascinating discussions.

And in this episode we take yet another view  
of our place based agenda with Andy Walker,  
head of business Growth and Innovation  
at Lancaster County Council,  
and they welcome to our podcast series.

Thank you.

Apart from his role in the Council  
and is also a leader in the  
residence at the university,  
inspiring our students to become  
more rounded leaders of the future.

Andy.

Let's start with your insights into  
what place means to you as a citizen  
and as a senior council leader.

Thanks, radka.

I think personally because I've never  
worked in the place that I come from,

and in a sense I'm a bit of a nomad

in terms of place, so I can't take a.

More of a I guess a.

A higher level view of these things?

UM, so I've.

I've worked in economic development

all my career around the country

from Scotland to Coventry and

more latterly across Lancashire.

And place is becoming even more

important in terms of what we do.

That's not just in terms of

the government's agenda,

but also in terms I think of.

Us genuinely being driven by the

the businesses and communities that

we work with and being responsive

to their needs.

My my own particular work is is

really centered around promoting

business growth and working with

the business community.

That ranges again from really

established large enterprises

across Lancashire and their needs

around skills or or property all

the way through to what can we

do to encourage a greater level of enterprise and startup in the business communities of Lancashire, and they are very diverse business communities and they do work in different ways.

We also sort of run business parks, so we have a business park in Lancaster at White Cross and one in South Ribble and those in themselves are quite different entities so I think you can see the difference in terms of place between those.

Yeah, like you pointed out already, you know place can be really diverse and you've worked in all sorts of different places and I think you are our first guest who has worked outside the rest of place where they come from.

So that's really interesting, and I'm really interested to hear about, you know some of these entrepreneurial activities that may maybe only worked in specific places, and you know, maybe have a bit of a discussion with you about the entrepreneurial activities

transferable from place to place.

Or maybe they aren't probably

the answer to that is is is,

some are and some aren't.

But there's definitely.

There's definitely a difference to

those ones that are sort of anchored

within a place and and driven.

Driven by local communities again,

I compare and contrast. We we run.

The growth hub for Lancashire.

There's a series of 38 growth

hubs throughout England,

so a national service almost and,

and that is a a Pan Lancashire product,

but we see take up of business

support happening very differently

in different places.

So some of the larger,

larger communities that where

you'd expect there to be a lot

of entrepreneurial activity.

Places like Blackpool don't

really seem to have a strongly

embedded sort of sense of delivery

and enterprise in those areas.

Whereas an area like Blackburn has has the

highest take up of those generic services.

But then at the other end we

also do very sector specific,

very bespoke activity.

So something like Fraser House Digital

Hub which is part of White Cross.

Is is a digital incubator?

Also provides sort of grow on office

space for for digital businesses

that have got to a certain scale and

and that was almost demanded by the

business community in Lancaster.

But contrast that take up of sort

of setting up digital networks or

sector based networks of companies

is very different across Lancashire.

I think in East Lancashire you'll

find that people are very very driven

and have a very strong sense of their

place but don't really want to be.

Build something they they they want

to contribute and they want to act

in a almost an altruistic way to make

sure that young people can get into

business or they can act as mentors

for their own business communities.

Preston,

we've got a very strong set of  
businesses in in in that sort  
of digital and creative space,  
but don't seem to come together in  
the same way, and so it's it's.  
It's often quite quite difficult  
to to understand where those.  
Those those differences arise  
from and how best you can sort of  
work with those things,  
because there's a County Council,  
we're trying to make sure there's a fair and.  
An equitable spread of an access to  
those services right across the area,  
but you do need to take quite a  
bespoke approach in each of the  
areas you're working with and it.  
It's really. It's a good point because  
when we think about Lancashire we  
sometimes think it's some sort of a  
homogeneous mass and it's just so diverse.  
Like you pointed it out, you know,  
and so as an entrepreneur you know for for.  
The entrepreneurs will come to this region  
or maybe who even originate from here,  
you know, I wonder how they stop foster  
the relationship with their plays

and how can they understand the place  
dynamics and the needs of the community?

And with this, I wonder what's  
what's the role of the Council here?

How, how do you manage to support  
the entrepreneurs in being sensitive  
to the place dynamics?

I mean your your point about  
diversity as well made.

We've got some of the most.

Well, off neighborhoods in the country  
and some of the most productive  
neighborhoods in the country,  
and you know,  
at the levels of Southeast England.

And yet we've also got areas and  
lower lower super output areas  
to be geeky about it.

Really small geographies within  
within towns and cities themselves  
that have some of the highest levels  
of deprivation in the country.

So it's a massive spectrum that  
we're working across.

I think in terms of our role of of  
creating spaces where young entrepreneurs  
or people are exploring business

for the first time can interact.

It is about creating some of those safe spaces where people can get together.

We do a lot around.

Social activity in the spaces that we operate as well so people can get to talk, and that's that's not market driven.

That's not about selling or that is just about individuals getting to know one another.

Getting to know each other as personalities and and from that comes the can you help with a certain project.

I can see how you can contribute to my business,

or I can put a bit of business your way and it seems tends to happen in that more sort of generic way as opposed to.

To trying to to do that match of I've, here's a here's a set of skills that we think will fit with that business.

So we do have a role,

but it's it's not as as as maybe as directive as you would think.

We do also have, I guess, a a direct role as a as a purchaser of goods and services as well.

So if you think about the public sector  
in in, its in its generality, and.

The local author,  
local authorities in particular  
County Council,  
employs 15,000 people.

We operate majority of of of sort of schools  
across Lancashire and we've sort of that.

The bulk of what we do is  
around social services,  
but if you think of that  
about that as a market and an  
opportunity for local businesses.

Think we we need to be more open  
and sort of permissive around that.

There has been a tendency to go with larger,  
more long lived organizations  
and if we can open that  
up to. Quite often more innovative,  
younger nimble organizations who can  
provide us new solutions may be built on  
some of the data that we already hold.

Then, UM, then there are real opportunities  
there to to work and provide, you know,  
market space for companies to grow into,  
and he also mentioned it with the White  
Cross Industrial Park, for example,

in Lancaster, you are a landlord as well,  
so you provide the spaces physical spaces.

Actually, they also then  
become social spaces.

All the entrepreneurs Sunday,  
the social facilities, they they,  
the cafe and the restaurants,  
and even a gym. And UM,  
sort of childcare facilities that we've got  
in that place have come and gone over time.

So you know, there's there's not always.

There's not always that you really  
need to work at that sort of fabric  
of of bringing these people together.

And we we have got the latitude,  
you know,

in terms of the rental levels that we  
charge to to encourage certain types  
of uses that we that we think will.

Knit that community together better.

We've done, you know,

we do the usual things of newsletters  
and things which which tend to bring  
people together and highlight sort of  
shared opportunities or all those events  
that are going to bring people together but.

Again, it's a constant.

It's a constant drip drip drip.

You can't really let those things slide, so.

I think I think they are

valuable and they do work.

I think they're stronger where there's a.

An obvious sort of community

of interest around something,

but yeah,

we can't take those things for granted.

They are important in the fabric of of

of places like the business parks that

we operate absolutely and you know you,

you spoke about that stuff.

Really deprived areas.

Really rich areas within the

vicinity almost you know.

So once we are here,

you know would be really good

to talk about the leveling,

leveling up agenda.

And I looked at the recent White

Paper and I'm going to quote.

Little from there because one of

the aims they mentioned there is

to restore a sense of Community,

local pride and belonging,

especially in those places where

they have been lost.

And I wonder,

do we have this challenge in Lancashire?

I think, as you've already said,

Lancashire is is such a diverse place

and with so many distinct towns,

cities and villages within it.

That that that sense of place can be lost.

I think increasingly,

with the things like levelling

up White Paper, town deals, UM.

That the recent Community renewal fund.

There's more and more of a sense from

governments about returning some funds, uh,

to localities to pursue their own priorities.

I I do,

I do wonder if there is a sort of.

There almost seems to be a standard recipe

for what people are using those funds for,

so you know.

Uh, some highways work.

You know,

strengthening markets,

putting in some sort of

social facilities within

town centers. How do you compensate

for the loss of retail units?

And you wonder if that's just another phase of professionals developing town centers as opposed to genuine communities saying what they want in those spaces.

So there is. There is probably an argument that with that that levelling up move to a sense of pride in place.

We need to be more inclusive of the Community in terms of how we design, what those interventions are.

That's probably the biggest challenge.

I would say that we also spoke about with our other guests previously about Co designing with the community and you already mentioned the Community Renewal Fund.

Wonder whether there is any role of the local business community to somehow understand the Community needs and whether they could help to stop tuning that code design with the local community.

There's probably less of an emphasis on enterprise and business within the Community Renewal fund than there was in the European structural Funds that it's providing a replacement to.

So there is an argument about a general sort of weakening of that support

infrastructure as Community renewal  
fund and UK shared prosperity fund come  
into play as the main funders of that activity,  
but I don't think that's  
necessarily a bad thing.

I think Community refund  
is a bit of a funny animal,  
it's only it's only around for 12 months,  
it's it's about piloting,  
transitioning, trying new things.

So we do need to look at.

And I think evaluate what's what's  
actually taking place and what's worked  
in terms of the use of community  
or annual fund before we move into  
the UK Shared Prosperity fund.

I suppose one of the things for  
for businesses within all of that,  
and I guess this.

It's kind of runs contrary to to the  
the place based agenda is what we  
have been able to provide both through  
the County Council but also through  
universities and and other partners  
has been a pretty standardised and  
understandable offer for businesses  
and enterprises across the area.

The danger is that if we divide that into sort of 14 district authorities, each of whom have a different set of priorities.

Businesses don't really understand what the support infrastructure is as they move from place to place and it becomes very time consuming both for the businesses and and the the agencies that are running those things at that micro level to actually navigate around that.

But at the same time, it also gives you some space to do something that's very customized and very bespoke to your own business community, and that business community can be just in South. One Custer for example.

Absolutely yeah, absolutely.

I'm so glad that we mentioned in this episode, and we're coming to to an end, unfortunately.

But, you know,

I'm glad that we mentioned that diversity.

That stuff you know, importance of understanding those smaller communities,

how they are then neighboring communities.

That's something that we really

don't talk about enough,

Andy. Is still intrigued to know what's

your personal definition of place.

It's it's interesting that we we were

having a discussion with the leaders of the

Lancashire authorities last last Tuesday.

Umm, around formulating a sort of new

strategy which would be the thing

that underpins maybe a county deal for

Lancashire moves us along that devolution

route that a lot of other places have

have already have already got and are

able to to have more latitude and.

More flexibility in the way that they

approach a lot of these issues about

regeneration and about enterprise and

and and growth and and the leaders

there were talking about place for

them and you would have thought that

given their own political instincts

and their own their own.

Focus on the places that they come from,

they that they would have

been quite defensive,

but they did buy into the concept

of Lancashire as a place and  
a place with its own identity.

I think place operates at  
very different levels, so.

There are certain sectors and  
activities within Lancashire that really  
require a national or international  
geography to actually work.

There are things that we can tailor that  
make sense to do at that Lancashire level,  
but as you say,  
if that never shifts the dial on  
those areas that have got that.

Deep seated long lived deprivation.

You have to ask the question about  
whether those policies are actually.

Lifting all boats,  
or whether you know that there's  
still intransigent parts of the  
economy that we we never touch.

So I think the current challenge and.

The challenge that the leveling up

White Paper sets us is how do we?

How do we get back into those communities

and do something that's meaningful,

not just making them look better,

or, you know,

sort of running training programs,

or?

You know keeping young people entertained and off the streets.

What is the long term change in the trajectory of people's lives that you can actually make through those projects?

And it's a great way too.

And today's podcast Sunday as well.

Thank you so much for your time.

I think this debate needs to be brought into the curriculum.

We do need to talk about this with our students because these issues are not just UK issues, they are worldwide issues.

And if our students understood better.

The dynamics of the places I believe there will be better entrepreneurs, so thank you so much for your time.

That's all for today and I hope you enjoy taking yet another view of place on the importance of the understanding of local dynamics, local politics and support available for local business community.

Feel free to drop us a message,

comment or recommendation for our  
project and we look forward to  
talking to you next time.  
So stay tuned and take care.