Decentered-Podcast-048-2020-01-06-Mixdown.mp3

Rob Watson [00:00:10] This is a Decentered Podcast from Rob Watson. Conversations about community media. Look out for Decentered Media on Twitter and on iTunes, or go to https://decentered.co.uk.

Rob Watson [00:00:28] Some would say that it's a risky business making predictions. Some might also say that it's easier to look at the glass we have in front of us as half empty, before we can consider the possibility that the glass that we are holding in our hands, might actually be half full. An easy prediction to make at the beginning of this new decade, is that the coming ten years, whether we like it or not, will be shaped by deep and profound social change. However, we may need to work out some basic parameters that can help us to respond to these waves of change. The question is, what should we be anticipating? For example, and to extend the metaphor, how full can we expect the glass to be in the future? Or more precisely, how big or small are we expecting the glass to become, and what will it be filled with? We also need to be thinking about who is responsible for replenishing this glass and with what? This means, giving careful attention to how we renew its contents, and in what way this renewal will be environmentally sustainable and socially democratic?

[00:01:37] We can predict based on present trends, that this coming decade, like the last, will be one of pivotal social transformation. This means, however, that papering over the cracks of the social and environmental dysfunction that we regard as normal today, will no longer be a practical way to deal with many of our deep-rooted social problems. The coming decade is going to be a time when our ability to 'have-our-cake-and-eat-it' is no longer a viable option. The bill is going to be presented in one form or another, and we're going to have to pay, not just for the excesses of the present, but also for the excesses of the past.

[00:02:22] Pick up any newspaper, listen to any news program, or follow any social media news feed, and the problems stack up quite quickly. Economic inequality. An aging population. Technological change. Mistrust of globalization. A rapidly changing climate. Automation. Political polarization. Fake news. Conflicts of cultural identity. Dysfunctional democratic systems. And, the ever-present threat of war in the Middle East. The list goes on. It's understandable, then, that we might succumb to fatalism in the face of so many challenges, particularly when we think about how we can be thrown out of balance by this relentlessly negative stream of news and information. Some of us are better equipped to deal with these existential challenges than others, but we know from past experience that many of our fellow citizens are not.

[00:03:19] We spend very little time thinking about those who are least equipped to deal with the sharper edge of social change, and are affected by the unremittingly negative deluge of news and fake media, that we are expected to process and consume, either through our social media, or on the legacy platforms of television, radio and newspapers. The crisis of social identity and loneliness, that many of us experienced today, has not come from nowhere, but has been building for decades. The maelstrom of global uncertainty and information anxiety gives us an opportunity, however, to shift the lens of scrutiny back to the media that we use to understand the world. It is an opportunity for us to ask questions about how our media assists us in learning about the communities that we are a part of and to share our experiences of the changes we are witnessing.

[00:04:16] We need to be thinking more deeply and practically about how we can use our media to articulate, report and explain what's going on in the world. It is through our media that we get to define and shape the boundaries of what needs to change and what we can potentially do to meet the challenges we face. It's through our media that we learn what's possible. Why, then, are we so often content to put up with such a narrow media agenda? While the corporate media world in many ways is in rude health, and has become stronger and more independent, it's also deeply troubled. Our media is facing a crisis of trust and relevance.

[00:04:59] Globalized media is highly competitive, financially lucrative and powerful. Global media giants such as Apple, Google, Netflix, Disney, are capable of reaching deep into our lives, our homes and our

communities. They use the most exciting and up-to-date technologies to stream entertainment, information and interaction on a global scale. They turn our attention into profit. Local media, on the other hand, is tentative, beset by uncertainty and seemingly fated to irrelevance. Local media plays a less central role in people's lives than it has in the past. Local media is less representative of the people who live in very different places and communities. Consolidation, homogenization and corporate control have all played their part in hollowing out local media as a force for good. And as a representative counterbalance to national and international media interests.

[00:06:02] We should be using our media to explore our own experiences directly. We shouldn't be waiting for other people to come and report about what our lives are like in the 'far flung regions.' Instead, we should be creating the space, the networks and the social economic circumstances that allow us to build our own local media in positive ways. Ways that are shaped and defined by our own social experience. If we can't speak directly and honestly to one another, without the bias of a billionaire proprietor, or the unseen algorithm of a global tech company, then we're not really taking responsibility for our own identities and ideas. Being a member of a community is about being responsible for what we discuss, share and depict. And if we are always waiting for other people to tell and validate our stories, then we will never learn to take responsibility for our well-being and the well-being of others in the communities that we are part of.

[00:07:01] Over the next 12 months, the Decentered Media podcast is going to explore more of these ideas and seek out the experiences of people who are making a positive social change to their communities on the ground. The idea is to hold conversations with community advocates and activists who use media to shape and share their experience of positive, constructive social change. We aren't going to ignore the problems. Indeed, they need to be given a thorough airing. But we are going to be putting them in the context that we can do something about them.

[00:07:35] Podcasts are a good way to explore and examine topics that are uncertain that we don't have a clearer sense of what's going on. Podcasts are also a great way to think things through and explore ideas. Where a podcast can be different from more traditional forms of media, though, is in the way that is grounded in local social experience and turns away from the marketing public relations dream and fantasy worlds of corporate media. There are many, many questions to be asked about how we can support positive social change and use media as an integral part of this process. And while the focus is going to be grounded in Leicester and Leicestershire, because that's where we are physically based, there's no reason why different conversations can't be recorded and shared with people who are active in other places at the same time. There's a lot of flexibility, and we can pretty much do what we want within reason. We're going to record the podcast on Tuesday evenings. That's John Coster and myself, Rob Watson, from 5 p.m. at the Documentary Media Centre in Leicester. If you have a story to tell or want to pick up from a point that's been made in a previous podcast, then get in contact and we can look at scheduling a future recording session. Just follow the contact instructions at the end of the podcast. We're always looking to find out more about how people are using media in any form to support a social change project. If you don't mind having a chat brew and a biscuit, it would be great to hear from.

[00:09:16] You've been listening to the Decentered Media podcast. I'm Rob Watson. If you want to find out more information, contact me on descent of media by Twitter or go to https://decentered.co.uk.