

Education, population, poverty, tax...getting views on topics like those in Jersey isn't the difficult part – but have you ever noticed how many people sound eminently credible when talking about them, even though they may actually be basing their views on conjecture, false facts and blind guesswork?

There is a real danger in making the 'facts' fit the opinion, rather than the other way around – which is exactly the point at which someone with an eye on the latest buzzwords will smugly insert the phrase 'post-truth' into the conversation, imagining its actually helpful.

So, we've asked the Jersey Policy Forum to add some robust material to those crucial local debates – the point is not to provoke agreement or acquiescence; it is to provide reliable material on which others can build their views.



Gailina Liew, Director, Jersey Policy Forum

Is it really, “the economy, stupid?”

Why is it important for adventurers and explorers to know how to use a compass? The obvious answer is that it is important to stay on course. A compass (or GPS for most of us these days) shows you where north lies, and everything else then becomes relative to that reference point. That's the same underlying principle behind most great achievements, whether personal, corporate, community or, indeed, globally-oriented.

The States of Jersey has just published its annual financial statements, and most of the political chest-pounding has been focused on economic performance. But is the economic dimension the only one that matters to people in society? Many would suggest that there is much more involved, and the global discussion to look at parameters that underlie a healthy society

and drive economic success has led to the introduction of measurement tools such as the OECD's Better Life Index, the UN's World Happiness Report, Gallup's Global Wellbeing Report, the UN's Statement of Global Sustainable Development Goals, to reference just a few.

These are a step in the right direction but it is also clear that defining an overall destination or vision is also important. So, as we're heading into summer and perhaps spending some time on our beautiful beaches, we might engage in some reflection and that brings a song to mind...

Do you know where you're going to? Do you like the things that life is showing you? Where are you going to? Do you know?

The opening words and refrain to a thoughtful, melancholy song from a past era (theme song written by Michael Masser and Gerald Goffin to a film called Mahogany, as notably performed by Diana Ross -https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOil_ht0khI) that might have meaning for Jersey as it contemplates what lies ahead in waters that are getting more and more turbulent, due to all of the disruptive factors we're all too familiar with, including Brexit, profound changes and increasing regulation/complexity for our primary economic sector, ageing population, technology displacing workers, fundamental changes in societal organization, commercial models, etc.

How does Jersey navigate safe passage through this rough patch? The questions posed in the song might help us with our reflection.

Do you like the things that life is showing you?

On the plus side, the last 50 years has produced a 50-fold increase in the strength of the economy due in large part to the success of the financial services industry. Jersey is stunningly beautiful in its natural attributes, offers an enviable work-life balance and quality of life to most residents, has a long and rich heritage and record of success, and is largely autonomous in defining its own public policy agenda. Jersey has also been able to preserve over 70% of its natural landscape (coastlines, green spaces, agricultural land), a key aspect of the island's identity, despite a doubling of the population. On the other side, Jersey is starting to grapple with issues such as road congestion, infrastructure that is needing attention like our hospital, Fort Regent and the thousands of empty buildings/houses that are falling into disrepair, declining air and water quality indicators, growing social divisions and income disparity, challenges to support an increasingly diverse and aging population with access to necessary health, educational and social care services, and the list goes on. Just a few specific facts to highlight some of the challenges: over 50% of the population is overweight or obese; one-quarter of households live in relative low income; per capita alcohol consumption exceeds the EU's average (noted as the highest in the world); almost half of working households

THINK-TANK



cannot afford to take on a mortgage for a house purchase; independent inquiry into historical abuse.

Do you get what you're hoping for? Do you know?

Are the facts in the preceding paragraph what Jersey was hoping for? Probably not. Most top athletes, artists and performance coaches will emphasize that it is important to visualize what you want to achieve and then train for it. For example, it would be very difficult if not impossible to reach the summit of Mount Everest without committing to it as the destination and then planning, preparing and training for the journey. Would Jersey benefit from articulating and then visualizing its 'hopes' or aspirations as a destination?

The next two verses are more personal in the song but the substance and resulting question is useful for our reflection.

Once we were standing still in time Chasing the fantasies that filled our minds You knew how I loved you but my spirit was free

Laughin' at the questions that you once asked of me Now looking back at all we've planned We let so many dreams just slip through our hands Why must we wait so long before we'll see How sad the answers to those questions can be?

We might interpret this set of verses to say that when times were very good here, we were all having such a great time that we didn't see the need to think about the future. Or perhaps we did plan and formulate 'dreams' (for example, as various strategies) but didn't take action. Questions and opportunities were shrugged off but with the passage of time and benefit of critical hindsight, we can look back and understand how opportunities may have been missed. As we look at where we are now, we can assess the impact of what these missed opportunities and lack of action has produced. How do we feel about the current state of our society?

The final verse is a warning: Do you get what you're hoping for?

When you look behind you there's no open door What are you hoping for? Do you know?

Opportunities come and go, like the opening and closing of a door. Is Jersey ready to take advantage of open doors as a small jurisdiction that can be agile in its thinking and bold in action as it has historically? Where are the opportunities now? Where do we have natural attributes to give us a unique advantage and head start? Might we leverage our success over the centuries as serial entrepreneurs? What do we, as a society, want to achieve? How do we go about defining an action plan and taking the first steps?

Do you agree?

Please share your thoughts by email to contact@jerseypolicyforum.org. The Jersey Policy Forum is running a series of roundtable discussions to focus on understanding social and economic inclusion/exclusion in Jersey, education and population drivers and the development of a more comprehensive dashboard to assess how well Jersey is performing beyond GDP and GVA.