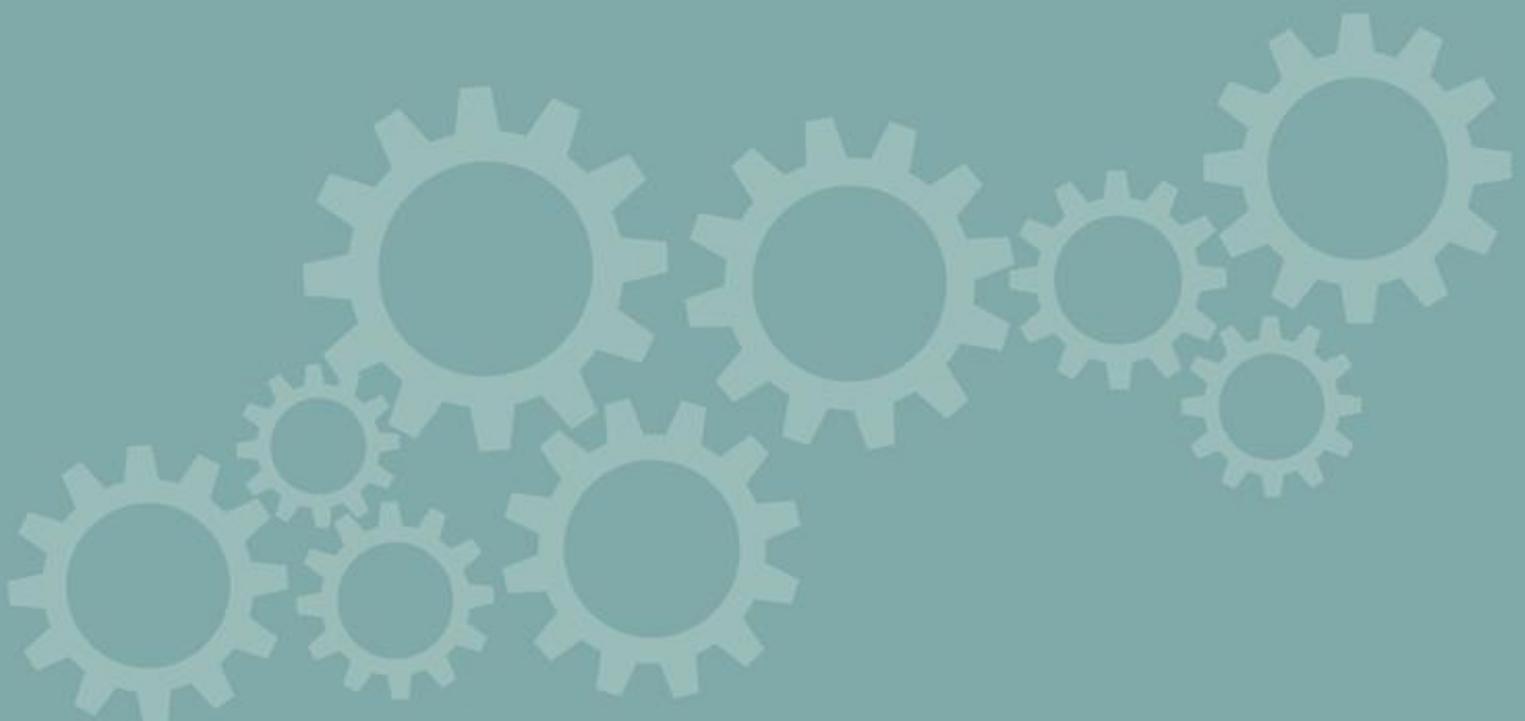# Building the Community Economy in Scotland: Frameworks to support learning and action

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Acknowledgements

Contents

1. Introduction: developing frameworks for research regarding the community economy

This discussion paper looks to support understanding of the key elements and options for an emerging participatory research agenda to support, inform and critically consider the development of the community economy in Scotland, and more widely.

The concluding paragraph of the [What Works Scotland Community Anchor Research Report](#) on their potential roles within Scottish public service reform (Henderson, Revell and Escobar, 2018) argues that the body of thinking developed there is a starting point for further participatory research, not an end point.

> *"This then is an emerging space for ongoing dialogue and deliberation – one that can be both reflective and action-orientated. We are not putting forward this research as the 'final say' on community anchors. Instead, this is a starting point for informed discussions of policy, practice and resources at the new frontiers between community sector and public services in Scotland. Given the dependence of all of us on both these systems, there is plenty to discuss."*

Fundamental to understanding this call for ongoing participatory research are concerns for a growing number of related crises:

- **Political:** local democratic deficit and the rise of populism.
- **Social:** stubbornly high-levels of poverty and inequality – and related demographic change.
- **Economic:** lack of capacity for locally-led development and resilience.
- **Ecological:** the climate emergency and other 'over-demands' on eco-systems.

In effect, the multi-headed challenges of local-to-global sustainable development, as, for instance, expressed as the United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.[1]

The Community Anchor Research Report illustrates through a series of exemplars the *potential* of these locally-led, multi-purpose bodies to facilitate a wide range of local economic, social, democratic and ecological development – or community-led place-making – and so local leadership focused on sustainable development. And it highlights key areas of infrastructure – policy, resources, culture change – that are required to supporting them in taking such an agenda forward.

The report, however, puts the emphasis not simply on community anchor organisations as central to such a research process but sees them as one key element in a wider local community sector and as part of a wider social and political debates across Scotland

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[1] See UN Sustainable Development Goals at: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/; part of Scottish Government's National Performance Framework: https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/sustainable-development-goals.

regarding local democracy, community resilience, local sustainable development, social justice and social and ecologically-related change.

In this discussion paper, we take this further by drawing on the notion of the **community economy** to provide 'space' to support discussions of the relationships, roles and aspirations within that community sector. We begin to explore this notion of the community economy as a system of local (not-for-profit) community sector organisations and networks in Section 2. And we position this thinking as part of a wider body of thought on the roles of the community economy within the wider workings of the state, market and society at large, and in relation to our learning so far on infrastructure for developing the community sector.

We seek to tease out what such participatory research needs to involve and consider, given the complexity of:

- the opportunities, challenges and dilemmas that these multi-faceted crises present
- the roles of community anchors and the community sector more widely can offer in leading and supporting change, and
- the scale of urgent social, societal and global change – 'social transformation' would seem appropriate – now required (Revell and Dinnie, 2018).

And, we position these in the current Scottish policy context and the emerging opportunities for the community sector to engage with and – where relevant – challenge the state, including: community empowerment, community ownership and land reform, social enterprise, public service reform and the ongoing Christie agenda, and sustainable development and climate change, to name but a few.

What we present is a series of initial frameworks and 'language' of emerging issues and opportunities to inform ongoing dialogue and further research. This is not then a research proposal – this must be fashioned through such ongoing discussions.

In Section 2, we outline frameworks to support dialogue on what we term the 'community economy' – the networks, systems and connectivity working across local community sector bodies. This web of thinking provides a crucial backdrop to build shared understandings of the community economy, community sector and community anchors and their relationships with other sectors and systems.

In Section 3, we draw on discussions from a cross-sector stakeholder learning event that engaged with learning from the Community Anchor Research Report to illustrate the potential of participatory research process to deepen dialogue on developing complex areas of policy and practice (and related theories); and, to present a framework of five broad areas of policy and practice to consider in supporting development of the community economy (theory, policy and practice).

In Section 4, we outline a framework of five key themes to be worked with in order to build a suitable participatory research agenda. These include research funding and leadership; values and vision – potentially as 'a social commons' (Coote, 2017); appreciative, action-

orientated and critical research; knowledge generation relevant to all stakeholders; and, the need for both urgent and credible research given the current crises we face.

In Section 5, we conclude by bring together this learning together as four current elements for developing a participatory approach 'now' (urgently) for informing development of the community economy.

Note: There is a [shorter version of this discussion paper](#)[2] which offers a condensed narrative: in particular of the discussions from a cross-stakeholder learning event (Section 3).

2. Frameworks to support discussions of the community economy

This section builds understanding of the community sector and community economy, offering the following material as a series of frameworks to inform discussions:

- Framework: community economy within three systems of the economy (2.1)
- Framework: mapping a diverse locally-led community sector (2.2)
- Framework: the community anchor 'model' (2.3)
- Framework: infrastructure for community sector development (2.4)
- Concluding: frameworks for dialogue that must engage with policy (2.5)

This section introduces the notion of the community economy and presents further frameworks with which to deepen discussion of such an economy. The community economy is understood here broadly as the potential system(s) of local networks of not-for-profit community sector bodies, e.g. local community organisations, enterprises and groups, working across a local community and 'out' in to neighbouring communities and wider still (Pearce, 1993; Pearce and Kay, 2003; Amin, 2009; J K Gibson-Graham et. al, 2013).

These networks undertake a vast array of local economic, social, political and environmental activity: bringing together social capital and the 'local commons' with wider resources from trading activities (market-related) and the state. So, an inter-connecting local community systems that naturally can do more where suitably resourced.

The term 'community economy' is 'economic' in the general sense of being concerned for coordinating the social creation and social distribution of society's resources (Mitchell, Randall Wray & Watts, 2019): here through the not-for-profit community sector. We have mixed feedback from the consultees – see the Acknowledgements – on the use of the term: some positive, some less so. But are holding to it, for now at least, in part because it seems to generate a response from people and, in part, because it brings the social nature of all economic activity to the fore.

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[2] Available at https://policyscotland.gla.ac.uk//building-the-community-economy-in-scotland

A listing of 'economic' terms is given in the text below. The rest of Section 2 sets out a series of frameworks that can be useful for further shared inquiry and participatory research.

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More on community economy, local economy, social economy and social commons

In this discussion paper we use these terms in the following broad ways to support dialogue:

Community economy: a potential system of local inter-connecting networks of community sector (not-for-profit) organisations, enterprises and groups undertaking a vast array of local economic, social, political and environmental activities. They can bring together the 'local commons' - the full diversity of community-owned or shared resources (local 'capitals' or 'assets') e.g. economic, social, political, cultural, physical, environmental and ecological – with wider resources generated from their trading and partnerships with the state.

Local economy: is used for the wider body of local economic and related social development that includes private, public and wider third sectors as well as the local community sector.

Social economy: is used here for the not-for-profit third sector or civil society as a whole: community sector; voluntary organisations, charities and NGOs; and social enterprises, cooperative and mutuals. These may work at scales from ultra-local to global and whilst hugely variable, work on a range of economic, social, political and ecological activities from outside of the state and not for private gain.

Social commons: a more particular vision or paradigm for sustainable development, social protection and democratic reform via development of commons of economic, social, political and ecological resources from local to global (considered further in 4.2).

NOTE: the term 'local' is not tightly defined here and can cover ultra-local or neighbourhood through to city-wide or district-wide (Thake, 2006) but with the assumption that the community economy aspires to move power down towards the most effective smaller scales as proves possible and workable (subsidiarity).

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2.1 Framework: community economy within three systems of the economy

We don't offer this as a fully-worked through definition of the community economy, but rather as a 'space' to support wider discussions of the roles and relationships between of networks of local community sector organisations – and their position in wider economic, social, political and ecological processes. The model *below* illustrates Pearce and Kay's (2003) rich understanding of the complexities of a modern economy with:

- many layers of activity: local, district, regional, national, international, global …
- three broad systems of ownership and coordination – privately-owned (market); publicly-owned (state); socially-owned (civil society/community)

This framework can support discussions of the many different roles the not-for-profit community economy and the wider not-for-profit social economy does and could further play. Crucially, it helps us to think further about the roles of the community economy within the wider workings within and between the state, the market and the social economy … at all layers.

In this Paper, we suggest – as per the text box above – that it is useful to hold onto a distinction between community economy and local economy, where:

- *community economy* is concerned for the relationships, roles and productiveness – socially, economically, politically and ecological – of local and wider networks of not-for-profit community sector organisations;
- *local economy* is concerned for the wider body of local economic and related social development across all three systems – public, private, social.

In both cases, the sense of what 'the local' is remains loosely-defined e.g. through small neighbourhoods potentially up to 'district-wide' – again to encourage wider discussions, and to reflect the realities of how the term is being used currently.

Further, we recognise that what is 'missing' from this representation – although not from John Pearce's (Pearce and Kay, 2003) thinking which is deeply concerned for *the financial, social and environmental impacts of all economic activity* and developing a shared sense of the common good – is a grounding of the whole in the planet's ecological systems …

Pearce is not alone in exploring the community economy. Ash Amin's (2009) edited book provides a valuable overview of such activity around the globe. Whilst the writings of activists and researchers Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013) on a post-capitalist and feminist ecological community economics provides valuable insights – again internationally – as to the potential of the community economy. Their emphasis is on 'taking back' or reclaiming the activities of work, business development, market-activity, property-ownership and finance/investment which tends currently to be understood through a capitalist paradigm – although they flag there are other narratives and structures at work including their own in different societies.

This further thinking – or indeed Pearce's thinking – is not fully explored in this Discussion Paper but rather they are flagged as valuable sources of insight and inspiration for developing the community economy … but through cross-sector stakeholder dialogue between practitioners, communities, policy-makers and researchers who will inevitably bring their own perspectives into what the community economy 'is' or 'can be'. It would be anticipated, however, that a wider briefing on the community economy – and varied usages of the term – could usefully be written to support such dialogue.

Three Systems of the Economy
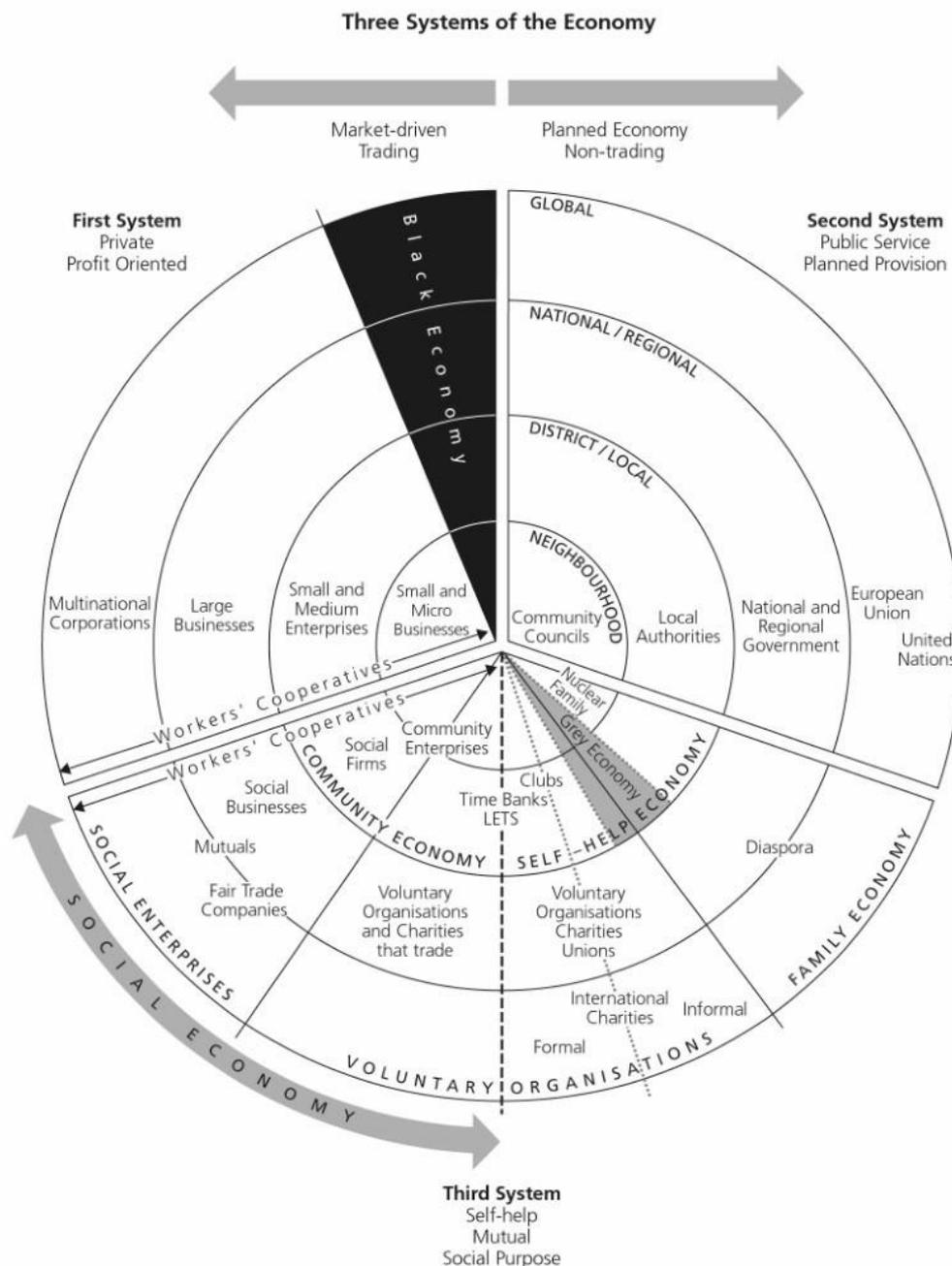
Three systems of the economy: John Pearce and Alan Kay's (2003) model as established in their publication *Social Enterprise in Anytown*. The diagram has been kindly provided and reproduced courtesy of Alan Kay and of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

2.2 Framework: mapping a diverse locally-led community sector

Below, we set out an initial mapping of the community sector that builds from material published on the [What Works Scotland website](#). This has not as yet been 'tried and tested' in discussions with community sector itself and wider stakeholders, so we offer it as a stimulus to support such discussions.

The community sector is diverse and complex, encompassing a wide variety of local organisations, groups and networks. When we use the term 'community sector', we are pointing towards not-for-profit community organisations, enterprises and groups that are owned, run by and accountable to *local communities of place, interest and/or identity*. Further, the term also refers to the connections and interlinking activities and developments that these organisations and groups make together. This is both locally as a local community sector working within a particular locality and, more widely as those connections that spread into neighbouring communities (localities) – as a wider community sector. And, in fact, further still as local communities connect internationally with other local communities e.g. in facing common problems or through global migration.

Such a sector is clearly part of the wider third sector or social economy, but can be seen as distinctive within it given: its focus on and commitment to a particular 'local'; and, its *potential* therefore to be run on local democratic lines and be accountable to its community – whether as local community of place, interest or identity.

Key elements of community sector	Examples
community social enterprises and cooperatives undertaking a very wide range of trading and other related activities	community health, community food, community transport, community renewables, community woodlands, community retail, community housing and so on
community-based voluntary organisations undertaking a range of local activity	health, social care, environmental, volunteering, and many other activities
organisations of local communities of identity	groups relating to class, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, faith/belief, age and so on
organisations for local communities of interest	leisure, sports, environmental, the arts, neighbourhood groups and many more
informal local community groups and networks concerned for mutual support and self-help	across every field of activity
local facilitative, developmental and coordinating bodies	community anchors, e.g. community development trusts, community-controlled housing associations; community councils and others

There are wider community sector networks as well, including:

Community finance*:* local credit unions and other community-owned finance bodies are likely to be working across a number of communities or more widely to provide suitable financial services and sources of investment, for example [the Scottish League of Credit Unions](#) and [Scottish Communities Finance](#). There is a wider body of community development finance intuitions (CDFIs) and social investment finance intermediaries (SIFIs) – find out more about these on the [Scottish Community Re:investment Trust](#) website. However, not all CDFIs or SIFIs are community-owned or led.

Member-led networks: membership bodies help facilitate links between community organisations and groups across regions and nationally. The following are a useful starting point:

- [Scottish Community Alliance](#) and its network of 20+ membership bodies
- [Senscot](#) (Social Entrepreneurs Network Scotland) and its networks of social enterprises
- [Development Trusts Association Scotland](#) and its network of trusts.
- [Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations](#) and its network of community housing associations

However, there is a much wider network of membership bodies in Scotland relating to community organisations representing local communities of interest and identity – in particular in relation to gender, class, ethnicity, faith/belief, sexuality, disability, age (equalities/inequalities). Further there are wider body of intermediary bodies that work with and for community-led networks e.g. Community Land Scotland, Poverty Alliance, Social Enterprise Scotland, Scottish Community Development Centre, Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum and Inspiring Scotland. The fuller extent of these community sector membership networks and intermediary bodies would take some scoping.

The community sector is then a hugely complex, vibrant sector that includes thousands of community social enterprises (6000+ social enterprises of all sizes), 100+ credit unions and 20,000-odd community groups (source: SCVO)[3].

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[3] View at
https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiODY1Mzc1YTAtOThhYy00MTlmLThiMDQtYmFkMzc3ZDM4ZDcxIiwidCI6ImMyOTQ5NGY5LTNhY2EtNGE3MS05NWUyLWM4ODBjNWE1ZThmOSIsImMiOjh9

2.3 Framework: the community anchor 'model'

The community economy model – the starting point

Local People Leading (2008) – now the Scottish Community Alliance (SCA) – advocated an initial community anchor definition around aspirations for six key features that individual organisations could work towards – rather than immediately achieve. Other bodies, Development Trust Association Scotland and Glasgow West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations, use similar understandings. The Scottish Government and COSLA's Community Empowerment Action Plan (2009: 10) drew heavily from this initial broad definition.

Initial definition of the community anchor 'model' in Scotland (LPL, 2008)

- Under community control: accountable to the communities they serve
- Taking a holistic approach leading to multi-purpose functions and delivery of a wide range of activities
- [often] Providing a physical hub: as a focal point for the community, and an engine house for local community sector development
- Providing leadership: through support for community groups including marginalised groups and representing the views of the community more widely
- Focal point for community services: supporting communities in assessing and planning services, providing services through community enterprises and acting as a gateway
- Own and manage local assets – in order to achieve economic stability.

In this publication we use the term **community anchor** to point to community organisations holding these three broad aspirations:

- **community-led or controlled:** with robust local community governance and community networks/connections; and financial self-sufficiency for core work sustained through community ownership.
- **holistic, multi-purpose or 'inherently complex':** concerned for local economy and social capital; local services and partnerships; local environment and sustainable development; community sector development; local leadership and advocacy ('community-led place-making').
- **responsive and committed to local community and context:** responding to that context whether urban, rural, remote and experiences of poverty, deprivation and inequality, and committed for the long-term – a credible local brand.

This is not, then, a one-size-fits-all definition but a broad 'model' that supports on-going dialogue within the community sector itself about the role of community anchors and their development in ways relevant to local contexts.

Source: the [Community Anchor Research Report](#) (Henderson, Revell and Escobar, 2018)

The box above outlines the development of and a current articulation of this 'model' in Scotland – and remains broadly similar to expectations across the UK. The role is most often undertaken by community development trusts and community-controlled housing associations – although not all such organisations seek to do this. There is scope for other community organisations to develop the role too (see Scottish Government, 2011). Generally, within actual practice thus far, one organisation within a community aspires to the role. This shouldn't rule out the potential for more than one organisation sharing the role locally; perhaps each with a particular focus but seeking joined-up working together. However, we've not as yet come across a longer-term working example of such shared coordinated working.

It is also useful to recognise that the focus on community anchors has a further potential strength of highlighting the need to develop the community sector and community economy more widely: **investing in community anchors can and should be a proxy for investment in the community sector at large**.

Note: other uses of 'anchors' and 'anchoring' in regeneration and place-making

The term 'anchor' is used widely and internationally often simply as a metaphor within regeneration and place-making to point towards committed organisations and networks - and this is very likely to continue.

The following other particular uses are also active, and distinctive from the Scottish and UK community anchor 'model' outlined above:

Community anchor or social anchor in the USA: used to cover public, private and non-profit locally-based organisation that are committed to a community (Clopton & Finch, 2011).

Anchor institutions: larger 'locally-based' bodies working city- or district-wide, for example, from the public sector, eg councils, health services and police, and from the third sector, eg universities, housing associations, perhaps locally-committed private employers too. They can work together to use their employment, procurement and investment practices to support local economic development; for instance, as the Community Wealth Building model developed in the USA and now being pursued in the UK (Jackson & McInroy, 2017).

Anchoring: used to refer to the role of local groups, organisations and networks within a community that together provide long-term social capital on which community development and community-led place-making can build (Agger et al. 2016).

2.4 Framework: infrastructure for community sector development

The Community Anchor Research Report generates a broad picture of:

- the plausibility of the community anchor model and of the role of anchors and their local partners in building and sustaining rich networks relevant to community-led place-making involving partnership and participation, local economic and sustainable development, local social and welfare, and local democratic development
- community anchors alongside other parts of the community sector providing traction – where suitably resourced – to work to *mitigate* some of the worst aspects of poverty and inequality
- to advocate for wider social change – through the development of local democratic practice; building community leadership and resilience; and focusing on social justice and related systemic change.

The report then goes on to consider infrastructure for developing community anchors and the wider local community sector through ten key learning points or 'recommendations', as below, that can be used to support cross-sector dialogue.

Ten key learning points or 'recommendations' for community sector – in relation to building infrastructure in Scotland for community sector development.

Policy

1. State policymaking has huge impacts on the income-generating capacities of community anchor organisations: there is considerable potential for the state to support a step-change in the development of the community sector across Scotland.
2. The work of multi-purpose community anchors cuts across the full diversity of policy and practice: 'community sector proofing' of local and national policymaking can support the state in building productive long-term relationships with the sector.
3. Community anchors can lead and facilitate local participatory and deliberative democratic activity that supports the development of bottom-up policymaking.

Resourcing

The local and central state have crucial roles in investing in community anchors to:

4. build their long-term financial sustainability through community asset ownership, e.g. suitably supported asset transfer, and community enterprise, e.g. procurement.

5. support the further development of community anchors of substance in all low-income, working class communities.[4]

6. develop varieties of relevant training to build the resilience of organisations and their staff, activists and volunteers – including community sector-led 'change-agent' programmes[5].

7. support local social capital (activists and volunteers) who are so crucial to our society, e.g. via training, citizen allowances and/or the welfare/benefits system.

Culture change

Community planning partnerships, the public sector and public services should look to:

8. invest in community-led training for public service staff to support understanding of the community sector and its potential.

9. work with community anchors to build local deliberative and participatory democratic structures to feed into planning and decision-making.

10. investing in the longer-term role of community anchors in monitoring change in actual (local) social and economic outcomes in their communities, e.g. inequalities, sustainable communities, to support the development of preventative approaches to inequality and related social change.

2.5 Conclusions: frameworks for dialogue that must engage with policy

Across 2.1 to 2.4, we have sought to generate a picture of the community economy and community sector as an interlinking 'local networks and systems' built from a rich tapestry of not-for-profit locally-committed community organisations, enterprises, groups and networks. There is considerable variety of roles and purposes across this body of organisations – most, for instance, are not seeking to be community anchors but to pursue other, equally crucial and more focused, roles. This picture then provides an initial starting point for dialogue rather than a final 'this is how it should be' but it has roots in long-standing thinking e.g. Pearce: 1993; Pearce and Kay, 2003; Amin, 2009; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Scottish Community Alliance, 2016; and Henderson, Revell & Escobar, 2018.

The four frameworks are thus well placed to generate creative discussions about:

- the role of the community economy within the wider economy and society
- the diversity of the community sector and its capacity to respond and adapt

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[4] There is also clearly a role for community anchors more generally to pursue anti-poverty and inequalities-related work in other communities ('not' most-deprived) given many people living in or at the margins of poverty live outside of the most deprived neighbourhoods.
[5] A change-agent programme concerned, for instance, for facilitative leadership and local democratic practice; building community resilience for local sustainable development; and community organising and campaigning for social change.

- facilitation of development of the community economy and sector through the community anchor model, and/or other approaches
- investing in the community sector – via policy, resourcing and culture change.

This last focus on infrastructure for the community sector brings us back into the very real world of policymaking. The Christie Commission (2011) continues to provide a key broad narrative within Scottish policymaking regarding public service reform and the role of the state. We have positioned this as part of the broader international trend for a democratic and collaborative *public value governance* (Bryson et. al, 2014, Henderson, Revell & Escobar, 2018; Henderson, 2019). Although, it is important to recognise other powerful political economic currents with Scottish and UK policymaking as still at work: public spending constraints and related centralisation (austerity); and, public-private 'top-down' partnerships in which market interests remain dominant.

The Christie Commission's fundamental concern for a more equitable society continues to provide and legitimise fertile areas for policy and practice dialogue, including:

- local partnerships and participation, staff empowerment, community-led solutions
- community and citizen empowerment: local democracy, autonomy and resilience
- balanced economic development: between economy, state and community
- preventative approach to inequalities, and likewise of environmental concerns[6].

The Community Anchor Research Report illustrated the cross-cutting roles of community anchors (and so community sector) through the existing activities of the six exemplars, as per the word cloud below

[6] The Christie Commission (2011) doesn't offer a major focus on climate change and environmental concerns more generally but does acknowledge these issues and draw on evidence that points to the need to preventative approaches to environmental/ecological protection.

Further there are obvious ongoing (national) policy 'hooks' beyond public service reform and the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015), namely:

- Scottish Government's (community-led) Regeneration Policy (2011)
- The Place Principle (2018)
- Social enterprise strategy and action plan
- Land reform, community-right-to-buy and asset transfer
- Health and social care partnerships, public health strategy and preventative working
- Anti-poverty working (early intervention, welfare, employment)
- Locally-led plans – potentially through locality plans and local place plans
- The current Local Governance Review

Yet, this fails to do justice to the potential of the sector regarding sustainable development, health and wellbeing, education and learning and inclusive communities. The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework, Economic Strategy (2015) and 2019-20 Policy Programme signal the breadth of aspiration for Scotland, all of which the community sector could make very significant contributions towards, where suitably resourced and given creative collaboration from state and private sector.

The community sector has crucial contributions to make across this swathe of policy e.g. digital inclusion, Green New Deal and **the climate emergency**, investment and infrastructure, a fairer greener and circular economy, transport ('mission zero'), business development and community safety and public procurement; see, for instance, Schonveld, Gallagher and Revell (2019) and Durose et al. (2019).[7]

We would argue that the frameworks above provide the initial ingredients and language to support informed dialogue on the community economy – alongside those in Sections 3, 4 and 5. *And* that such dialogue needs to consider the *current realities* of Scottish and UK policy-making – not simply their stated aspirations. Here are the potential resources to build infrastructure to develop the community economy and community sector but currently little is aimed at developing this infrastructure. Henderson, Escobar et al. (2019) point towards (some) ways forward in advocating for these resources. *A comprehensive policy briefing further highlighting the relevance of the community sector across policymaking would therefore be incredibly helpful in supporting this dialogue.*

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[7] Schonveld, Gallagher and Revell (2019) outline the potential of the community sector in relation to the climate emergency; whilst Durose et al. (2019) – also Gilchrist et al. (2019) – illustrate the potential of the community sector and other 'smart urban practitioners' to build complex local collaborative working.

3. Building further inquiry from the community anchor event

The What Works Scotland research process into community anchors and public service reform supported a [Learning Event in May 2018](#) where we launched the report and facilitated cross-sector dialogue. Some of the responses and discussion themes from the participants – following presentations by the researchers and the community anchor exemplars in the report – were recorded. An initial interpretation and analysis of this material is offered here by the researchers through the following five broad themes (3.1 – 3.5):

- Toward shared understandings of community anchors and community sector (3.1)
- Seeking constructive partnerships and participation with the state (3.2)
- Investing in infrastructure and resourcing for the community sector (3.3)
- Developing local democratic governance and innovation (3.4)
- Opportunities and barriers to the community sector leading social change (3.5)

In 3.6 we then conclude by arguing for:

- the value of these five themes as an initial framework that provides a more concrete focus for further participatory research to support development of the community economy, and
- the Learning Event itself as an illustration of the complexity of discussions and accompanying insights that can emerge through participatory research given longer-term cross-stakeholder commitments.

Note regarding constraints on this dataset

The Learning Event involved approximately 50-55 people including those from community anchors, the community sector (more generally) and wider third sector; from the public sector and policymaking including the Scottish Government; and from research bodies including ourselves. However, the levels of cross-sector dialogue achieved from this first Learning Event were less than hoped for given the majority of people present were from the community/third sectors – perhaps 30+ – and the rest of approximately 20+ included only 5 people from the public sector and 5 from Government. Whilst most of us came from the central belt and mainly, but not solely, more urban areas. The themes that follow are not then those of a 'full' cross-sector group of stakeholders in Scotland but can be understood as providing a valuable starting point for stimulating wider discussions across sectors, stakeholders and geographies in Scotland, potentially through further participatory research as considered in Sections 4 and 5.

Discussions on the day were initially more centered on community anchors, public service reform and the Christie Commission agenda (2011) – as per the *Community Anchor Research Report*. However, because the event involved cross-sector dialogue, and encouraged consideration of wider issues e.g. local democracy, sustainable development,

social justice, a wider bodies of themes i.e. the community sector, wider third sector and public sector and state, emerged. The interpretation and analysis in this section therefore goes beyond consideration of community anchors (alone) and into wider themes of community sector, local democracy and social change. Again, these must be understood as a starting point for further discussions across more representative body of cross-sector stakeholder organisations and practitioners.

3.1 Toward shared understandings of community anchors and community sector

Discussions on the day highlighted a range of themes for further development regarding the nature of the community sector and the roles of community anchors, as follows.

The value of a community anchor 'model'?

Given the audience on the day this would not be surprising, but discussions and the related comments recorded highlighted that many recognised the value of the work of the anchor exemplars in the Report; and, likewise, the connection to the three aspirations of the stated model (community-led, multi-purpose and long-term commitment):

> *"Working together can bring about changes in public services to benefit local communities (An ideal vehicle: longevity; commitment; often elected; governance and understanding of community)."*

> *"Ideal structures for co-productive approach: expertise, long-term commitment, understandings, rootedness, ability to engage."*

> *"Recognition of CAs as having local expertise and understanding about how services work and are representative of local communities or indeed elected from them."*

> *"Very often partnership working happens organically at a local level and community anchors can be key to facilitating this (complex web of relationships)."*

Further, there was recognition that 'the model' offered particular elements or boundaries for practitioners and policymakers to engage with:

> *"Anchors may not be self-appointed."*

> *"A model and material to promote around."*

> *"Anchor as a "concept" (not just org.)"*

However, others were more cautious or sceptical even as to the value of a named 'model' or, more broadly, 'anchor' as metaphor:

> *"Don't reinvent the wheel!!!"*

> *"What's in a name? C. Anchor? – maybe negative connotations? Stuck in the same place. Not moving forward?"*

"No two places are the same. There is no one size fits all. Everyone needs a different approach. Approach is local."

"Is this the only model? Post Community Empowerment Act – New fad?"

Deepening 'investigations' of community anchor development and roles?

Having a more particular 'model' – even if not universally accepted in the room as helpful – also supported some participants in beginning to dig deeper into what could count as a community anchor:

"Exploring the boundaries of "community anchor": small/large organisations; place-based or/and other networks; and, self-defined or/and perception."

"Who designates a community anchor?"

"Can there be more than one?" [in a community of place]

Similarly, it encouraged further thinking about how an anchor might develop in any one community and whether they are always successful in their role and work:

"What are the different ways that CAO's evolve?"

"When anchors haven't worked."

"Looking at fledgling community anchors not just well-established ones."

"Do anchor organisations evolve or are created? Does it depend on issues or communities?"

Further, some participants began to reflect on the key issues that might support local success or failure of an anchor:

"Actual examples vary across country. Real difference in degree of "success" "engagement": dependent on multitude of factors."

"Individual determination and persistence is critical."

"Emerging issue: CAO's [Community Anchor Organisations] *as social enterprises – is this realistic in every situation?"*

Understanding relationships between anchors and other parts of the community sector

Participants showed awareness of a wider body of community organisations, enterprises, forums, groups and networks – relating to local communities of place, interest and identity – all with important roles to play, and the need to understand and build effective working relationships across this sector:

"Be interesting to explore the other community organisations and their roles e.g. community councils etc."

"Power and influence. Community councils feel threatened by community anchor organisation(s) and action partnerships."

"Nobody has mentioned how those with disabilities are going to be helped."

"A number of organisations can provide better representation areas. Challenge existing networks."

Discussion

Whilst the *Community Anchor Research Report* and the six exemplars (of good practices) provide valuable material to stimulate discussions, inevitably what follows are more (constructive) questions and the potential to deepen 'theory, policy and practice' through engagement with the community sector and other sectors and stakeholders.

Some of the further key questions that arose and can continue to be considered include:

For developing **practice**:

- In what ways is such a 'model' helpful and in ways limiting for a community?
- How do community anchors continue to grow and evolve in very different contexts, and generate the income they need for longevity and effectiveness?
- How can productive rather than competitive relationships be sustained across local community sector bodies?
- How the inevitable 'community politics' – as with any body of organisations and/or partners (across all sectors) – can be managed effectively and even pursued creatively?

For developing **policymaking** – locally and centrally:

- How can policy actively strengthen the social capital – and the status and welfare of activists and volunteers – so crucial to the community sector's effectiveness?
- How can policy strengthen the role of local community organisations (of place, interest, identity) in advocating on equality issues e.g. gender, ethnicity, class?

For developing **theory**:

- What sorts of organisational models can usefully inform the development of community anchors and their long-term development? e.g. might Charles Handy's (1998) four cultural models of third sector bodies provide useful insights?
- What sorts of models of leadership and community leadership can usefully support the development of a diverse local community sector? e.g. a local 'distributed leadership' approach or different remits to different types of local organisation?

3.2 Seeking constructive partnerships with public services and the local state

The *Community Anchor Research Report* generates a wealth of examples of local partnership working and participatory activities between community anchors, other local community sector, public services, wider third sector and citizens, and the local state and public bodies more generally. Yet, both the consultation on the report and discussions at the Learning Event continued to raise testing questions and frustrations in relation to such partnership and participation.

Building constructive partnerships takes time, commitment ...and conflict

Trust, patience and commitment to dialogue that builds understanding across partners was one key emphasis on the day as to what supports effective local partnership and participation:

> *"Change travels at the speed of Trust"*

> *"Adopt an incremental approach – small steps grow quickly but provide more immediate outcomes to encourage ongoing dialogue etc."*

> *"Trust, equality, parity, meaningful, Time"*

> *"Enabling dialogue to build trust and resilience in communities is important and valuable – but may not have obvious outputs. It is the foundation for good outcomes."*

But, in the process, such partnership-building could make visible the conflicts and differences. Whilst these may not easily be resolved, conflict was felt by some to be fundamental to productive working:

> *"Progress and development need conflict as well as collaboration and consensus."*

> *"Partnership working – danger of becoming homogenous mass, losing unique voices, functions etc. i.e. conflict is good."*

Inclusive, resourced partnership working

Complementary to this thinking, there was a call for what could be called 'all inclusive' partnership working in which all key local stakeholders have, well, a stake:

> *"Public sector should recognise and value shared and equal legitimacy of diversity of community organisations. Complex!"*

> *"Real partnerships which values everyone's input and investment which gives priority to those partners."*

> *"Partnerships need to be on equal footing."*

> *"At a strategic level, partnerships work really well when the public sector recognises the value of community anchors and the wider community sector."*

Related to this were aspirations for sharing power through building capacity – knowledge and skills:

> *"It is very important that Power is shared equally. Communities need to know what power they have and how that can bring about change."*

> *"Unequal capacities to participate in partnership => unequal powers. Need training, facilitation, support, … tolerance and inclusion."*

> *"Training of community partners to develop complimentary skills – shared with council employees."*

> *"Anchors must be credible partners – mutual respect through capacity building."*

The frustrations and realities of public service partnership working

There were words of caution, too, about building partnerships around values and aspirations rather than finding shared practical solutions to public service problems …

> *"The "Public Services" have to see the point – needs to be real and meaningful "parachute anchors"*

> *"Don't offer simple (at first sight) solutions like "Give CAOs more resources" or "Make councils pay more attention to CAOs" - these don't recognise practical challenges. Focus on how public service and CAOs can and should be inter-dependent on each other in order to meet needs of communities. How can CAOs, help public services to help communities? How can CAOs help community? Why is it good value for public service to direct some of their precious resource to CAOs?"*

In times of public spending constraint, the practical work on-the-ground and related cost-saving activities that community organisations can undertake could create leverage for the sector, where it can be aligned with public service priorities. However, others also spoke of the need for mutual benefits for both/all parties: implying or stating work on an equal footing to be central; and, pointing to a related need for investment in the sector to build its own strength rather than simply adapting to public service contracting and funding:

> *"Interdependence – without which partnership and relationships are likely to fail."*

> *"Needs a "win-win" scenario."*

> *"Don't fund, invest* = trust + equality / parity (* this goes much wider than community anchor organisations)"*

Whilst these two perspectives are not necessarily in conflict, there will surely be scope for considerable tensions here – unless partners are coming to the table on a genuinely equal footing?

There was a further sense of frustrations – likely for both public and community sector parties – arising through current public service culture(s):

> *"Public sector are going to have to have a change in attitude towards third sector."*

> *"Public bodies are realising they do not have all the answers! Community organisations know public bodes do not have all the answers."*

> *"Openness is a barrier". Council staff worry about the information they can share with the public. Are they doing something wrong?"*

Concerns for risk-taking and experience of public services cultures as risks-averse in terms of sharing resourcing and power was likewise raised as a frustration:

> *"Collaborative innovation needs a bit of funding risk taking. Public services may sometimes need to take small financial risk and see what emerges."*

> *"Culture change doesn't just happen – shift in power and resource help?"*

> *"Community anchors are strong resilient organisations able to deliver effectively – should not always be seen as a risk but an able provider."*

What's 'best' done by public services and what by the community sector?

Finally, crucial concerns were raised that community anchors were being or would be asked to undertake public service roles that are best undertaken by state or statutory bodies and public services:

> *"CAs are not about plugging local service gaps but should have a role in informing local priorities. They offer added value and should be regarded as local partner of local government."*

> *"CAO's cannot be a direct replacement for withdrawn statutory / public sector services."*

> *"Responsibilities – important that community anchors not relied on to pick up statutory responsibilities."*

This begs then a crucial question as to expectations around the delivery of public services – or indeed services more generally – who should be involved in their delivery and why? And it points to a different perspective on the role of community anchors in relation to public service delivery as one of helping develop locally-led planning rather than involvement in actual delivery of them.

Discussion

The discussions above resonate with an increasingly familiar litany of opportunities, tensions and contradictions when seeking to pursue public service reform in Scotland: that is, integration of partnership, participation and prevention to pursue improved public service performance and more equitable socio-economic outcomes. For instance, Cook

(2015) and the What Works Scotland research programme more generally point to a language and related issues for public service partnerships as including trust, culture change, win-win scenarios, risk-taking, risk-averse equality and parity, capacity-building, openness, relevance, power and inequality.

Focusing on the *practices* of 'partnership and participation', and the *policies* that can support its development, is certainly one focus for the community sector and all stakeholders to consider – why miss relevant opportunities and resourcing that can emerge? However, there are larger questions regarding the framing of expectations here – so a role for *theory* and related current evidence too – as to:

- What *should* be the roles and purposes of the community sector in relation to public services and society more generally?
- What types of resourcing does the community sector actually *need* in order to develop and where does access to these resources realistically lie?

Less immediately obvious in the discussions presented above, but emerging in 3.3, is the very pragmatic sense that if the community sector was 'sitting down at the table' with the local state in a stronger and independent financial position then the public sector would be listening more closely.

3.3 Investing in infrastructure and resources for the community sector

In 2.4, we highlighted ten key learning points regarding infrastructure development suggested in the Community Anchor Research Report. The Learning Day provided space to raise this focus although it didn't seek to pursue this in further depth. Alongside voiced frustrations regarding. the lack of resources for the sector, a number of themes were highlighted:

The need for strategically committed approaches to invest in community sector financial resilience for the longer-term:

> *"We need to review how we are resourcing this work (needs money)."*

> *"Funding stage by stage – not always output driven."*

> *"Grant giving – avoid going down contracting route (social care)."*

> *"Investment not funding for community anchors."*

The need to invest in community sector people as well as organisational resilience:

> *"Community anchors must have funding and training separately from project funding and links to other C.A."*

> *"Understanding asset people and asset property resource."*

"Experienced volunteers "enable" organisations within a community."

"Funding is needed for "soft" as well as "hard" infrastructure."

The need to focus on and commit to investing in the community sector role in low-income, working-class communities[8]:

"Unequal capacities to participate in partnership => unequal powers. Need training, facilitation, support, … tolerance and inclusion."

"Without an "enabler' some communities struggle to build resilience and capacity. Public Sectors / Partnerships can support start up."

"Discussions around how communities may need extra help to empower them to create strong and meaningful community anchor organisations."

The need to work towards joined-up, strategic approaches across policymakers, funders and the sector – the importance of getting the infrastructure for the sector 'right':

"Re-thinking how funding, income and investment can better develop and sustain CAs."

"How do we have a community anchor organisation in each community?"

"Funding drives behaviour – can funders work together more?"

"Who directs resources is key and what practical steps can be taken to try different approaches."

Discussion

There is common ground between the discussions above and the key learning points on resourcing in the *Community Anchor Research Report* (see 2.4). Certainly, these are not new themes: the call for suitable funding, investment and resourcing through the state is commonplace and long-standing across the third sector and civil society as a whole, and, of course, more generally across private sector and public sector bodies too!

In one sense, then, this is hardly 'big news' but it does continue to make visible the crucial roles the local and central state plays in planning use and re-distribution of resources; and the related competition across society to be a priority for its attention.

Yet in another sense this, as any discussion of resourcing, goes to the heart of the matter as to what as a society we wish to work towards and prioritise resourcing:

If we are serious about social change towards greater local democracy, autonomy and resilience (community empowerment) *and* reversing trends of stubborn, even increasing, levels of poverty and inequality *and* building the links between these two

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[8] We argue too that this should apply as well to local communities of interest and identity and the many people living in poverty outside of concentrated areas of income deprivation.

policy agendas, for instance, as the policy space opened by the Christie Commission (2011) through its concern for 'community-led solutions' …

Then, as a society, we will need to 'get serious' about prioritising the resourcing of community-led approaches to preventing poverty and inequality and creating a step-change in their development.

Henderson (2019), following participatory research within a community planning partnership, argues that public service partnerships tend towards slow-moving change which is dependent on the levels of shared commitment from local public sector leadership – save where there is a sense of pending disaster, financial or otherwise. He argues instead for the need to engage with and explore opportunities for investment and change across the wider activities of the local and central state that include economic development and spatial planning, welfare systems, local economic development and community-led place-making, and to seek joined-up and preventative strategies with committed state partners.

Key current opportunities highlighted include: development of local hubs through relational-commissioning and asset transfer with the state (Watson, 2017; Davidson-Knight et al., 2017); building relationships with spatial planners – as per the work in Neilston in East Dunbartonshire led by the community development trust; and, pursuance of the community wealth building approach ('Preston model') and public enterprise – if there is an emphasis on investing in the community sector (Jackson & McInroy, 2017; Watson, 2018).

As is highlighted in 2.4 – see, too, Henderson, Escobar et al. (2019), community anchors and the community sector work across the full spectrum of policymaking – both are holistic or multi-purpose. Strategies for investing in their development should play to this strength and build from local relevance and opportunity but will require from the state:

- shared longer-term commitment across different public sector partners
- understanding and recognition of the value to the state and society of 'growing' an independent community sector, and
- a willingness to take 'relative risks' as would be the case with supporting any development (public and private too).

3.4 Developing local democratic governance and innovation

The potential of community anchors to support, facilitate and/or lead local democratic activities in many varied forms was a key area of consideration at the Learning Event. Broadly, participants were open to the notion of community anchors as having key roles in extending local democratic activity:

"Community anchors must facilitate wider democratic process to inform their work (independent and with public sector partners)."

"An appreciation of facilitative structures to support communities."

> *"To support participatory democracy, and independent rep. could (should) facilitate / support a process."*

Further, that community anchors need to explore and learn more about democratic working and develop and/or make more visible their own commitment to these approaches:

> *"The need to cement the notion of CAs as being locally democratic, representative and effective – in the minds of the local people – particularly if they are to be afforded more power and resources."*

> *"Continue to explore wider participative tools."*

However, there were also more cautious voices in the room regarding increasing local democracy:

> *"How do you hand power over to communities and to who?"*

> *"Are communities comfortable with taking on power and responsibilities?"*

Others saw value in anchors supporting communities to coordinate local resources, budgets and plans:

> *"How we must help local communities to benefit from resources in order to change."*

> *"Role of CAs to inform local planning – rather than fill gaps in services."*

Given the potential for diverse local democratic activities – participatory, deliberative, representative and across a range of state structures and layers (ultra-local to city/district-wide), there were also questions raised about how to engage productively in this inevitably political and politicised landscape. For instance, there was recognition of the complexity of working with local representatives and politicians:

> *"Is there value in linking with elected members on anchor organisations?"*

> *"Political representative(s) have split loyalties with communities – they function differently."*

Likewise, for developing community anchors and other larger community sector bodies, the dilemmas of working increasingly closely with public services and related partnerships:

> *"Danger of community anchors being used a "barometer" by public sector."*

> *"Do the drivers change when anchors become involved in wider partnerships? Could this be good but risky – must retain community led."*

Further, all local community sector organisations, of whatever type, are themselves active in doing things locally and needing resources for those activities. So, a key challenge for developing more complex local democratic practice is how to build credible 'systems' of wider local democratic activity that all local people feel that they can trust, across a range of local organisations and alongside local representative democracy:

"How do community anchors remain neutral in enacting participatory democracy?"

"What place for community councils and other layers of local democracy?"

Discussion

This feels a very rich area for developing local practice and policy – and there is a growing body of theory and related evidence to support democratic innovation, see for instance Elstub and Escobar (2019). There are definite opportunities, certainly challenges and perhaps dilemmas too, but the discussions above illustrate a growing body of knowledge relevant to such work across key stakeholders.

The discussions point to the potential to develop local democratic networks in which the different strengths and roles of various community sector bodies can come into play, for instance (see Henderson, Escobar et al., 2019):

- Community anchors through their potential to facilitate community-led planning.
- Community councils through their potential to create local forums and offer 'representative' spaces for deliberation.
- Community arts through their potential to support and facilitate participatory activities across community diversity.
- Community media through its potential to inform and develop local debate and deliberation across community diversity.
- Community sector as a whole to build networks of participation together that can engage across 'hard-to-reach' groups.

There are examples where community anchors and community councils are working constructively: although there also examples of tensions (Henderson, 2014; Paterson, Nelis and Escobar, 2019). And there is considerable scope to build productive relationships between the community sector and the local state, local elected politicians and local services – where the community sector can sustain sufficient independence from the state and maintain its commitment to community-led democratic processes (Cotterill & Richardson, 2011; Escobar, 2017; Henderson 2019).

However, political landscapes are always complex and demanding places to work constructively within, whether they be: organisational and partnership politics; state politics, party politics and electoral cycles; business and market politics; or local politics and community politics. So, there is a lot to learn about the integration of local democratic activity and a need for serious commitment in resourcing and backing such work. The community sector has considerable experience, knowledge and commitment to bring to this area of working.

3.5 Opportunities and barriers to the community sector in leading social change

The Christie Commission recognises that effective public service reform needs wider social and societal change e.g. a balanced economic development, local democratic accountability and autonomy, reducing poverty and inequality and so on. In this vein, the *Community Anchor Research Report* highlights key roles for anchors and the community sector as including advocacy for social justice, democratic innovation and commitment to local sustainable development … so social and systems change, for instance as a social commons (see 4.2).

Participants on the day responded to the broad theme of the role of anchors in social and systems change in both committed and more questioning ways. Some saw opportunities for community anchors to act as catalysts for change both locally and more widely:

> *"Community anchors as "agents of the future!"*

> *"Catalysts and also stable organisations."*

> *"Enabling Voice – Anchor organisations situated in a "place" of need."*

> *"Anchor organisations will be pivotal to communities for their identity, advocating for place and to support the impact of social policy reform over the next 10 years."*

Some participants positioned such work as part of wider movements or concerns in Scotland:

> *"The big opportunity that lies ahead to do something different in Scotland and the issues that should be discussed to make the most of it."*

> *"Freeing up the current planning processes."*

> *"Need for change around differing approaches to public service provision, inequalities and democracy."*

And this included democratic reform:

> *"Devolution of Power."*

> *"Continue to strive for better local democracy and societal change."*

> *"That there are opportunities to build democracy and further empowerment."*

> *"Imposing a top down model does not work."*

The importance of local empowerment was a common reflection:

> *"Community anchors – preserving communities and fighting back against Central control!"*

> *"The need for transformation (of power, services, structure) rather than transfer."*

> *"Power is currently unequal. Power should be shared: if it is not given, it should be taken."*

> *"COA Empower Member / Volunteer (not recipient)."*

Some finished the day on a confident note:

> *"I will look out for the local governance review and continue to seek ways in which we can work in a collaborative way."*

> *"Anchor organisations are a way to progress and have created a legitimate way forward from legislation and development."*

> *"[having] knowledge about community anchors and effective change."*

> *"In order to bring about "social change" you need to roll up your sleeves and get down in the trenches and work together!"*

However, some caution is needed in part – as indicated in 3.0 – because of the mix of this particular cross-sector stakeholder group, with potentially the most committed to the community sector and mostly from the central belt attending; and, in part, because those with less certainty about the role of community anchors in social change went away to reflect rather than wrote down their thoughts for inclusion as part of the record of the day.

What did emerge from some in the room was a healthy caution as to the prospects for social change via community anchors and the community sector.

Some indicated a broad sense of significant institutional and policy barriers to change:

> *"Are there vested interests acting as a barrier to anchor organisations?*

> *"Trust: Accessibility (anchor benefits) – What's next? Direction and end game for Anchor Organisations. Or it is just about being sustainable with national agenda."*

> *"Top down, SG level delivery still silences local anchor organisations. Policy can't just fit government, it can't always use a "national is best" approach."*

There were concerns about the potential for effective partnership working with the state:

> *"Assuming it is Partnership working??? The biggest barriers are NO EQUAL PARTNERSHIP. Co-Production is talked about by not evidenced."*

> *"There is a power imbalance and that is hampering delivery of benefits for people."*

Alongside such thoughts, others – perhaps with previous experience of processes that aspire to social change – recognised the scale of these challenges:

> *"Looking forward to see how it develops (vested interest vs independence)."*

> *"Managing expectations so that disappointment and competing demands on resources are not seen as proof of powerlessness."*

> *"Investment and resources need to be in place in order to bring about "Social change". Confidence and resilience are key factors required for communities to thrive!"*

Discussion

The participants and the researchers have joined the Christie Commission in engaging with the complex territory of social and systems change. The discussion illustrated above points to the commitment of many in the room to see this as a crucial element in the working of and thinking about the community sector (theory and practice) – although as noted above this was the more 'visible' mood of the room and doesn't necessarily take account of the views of all the participants on the day.

The holistic nature of the work of community anchors and community sector again emerges with different trends in policymaking highlighted - social policy, local governance, democratic innovation, inequalities, de-centralisation of services, citizenship - illustrating the cross-cutting nature of the sector in relation to policymaking as highlighted in 2.4.

Alongside commitment to social change and energy for change, there is also a more reflective and cautious trend within discussions as to: the scale of expectations and ambitions; the dynamics of power including in relation to national policy- and decision-making; the blocks to systems change from other powerful interests; and, the importance of seeking to sustain the community sector's independence.

What does come through strongly is the relevance of such discussions of the wider role of the community sector in social change: there weren't calls to keep the focus on local activity only. In the *Community Anchor Research Report* we highlight the potential of discussions of 'a social commons' (Coote, 2017) to act as a framework to support this combination of local and wider change – given its emphasis collective responsibilities for shared resources (social, economic, political, ecological), participatory democracy, social protection (eradicating poverty), and sustainable development. We suggest it offers scope to stimulate pluralist discussions of social vision and values, the relationship between the community sector and the state, and social and systems change (local-to-global) at a time of social and ecological crises.

3.6 Concluding: an initial framework for learning, action and research

Section 3 illustrates the diversity of cross-sector stakeholder discussions at the learning day in response to the C*ommunity Anchor Research Report*. Our interpretation and analysis of thinking from the day generates the five broad themes and related issues. It offers a 'language' and/or framework to support on-going dialogue and these themes are summarised as follows:

- Building understanding of the community sector and respective roles, relationships and potential of community anchors and other community-led bodies (3.1).
- Seeking productive relationships between the community sector and public services/local state (3.2).
- Building cross-cutting strategies for suitable infrastructure, investment and resourcing to step-up development of the community sector (3.3).
- The roles of community anchors and community sector in supporting complex local democratic practices and decision-making (3.4).
- The potential (or otherwise) of the community sector in leading and supporting social and systems change (3.5).

These aren't the only important discussions that will be needed. but together provide a sufficiently rich and nuanced 'language' around policy and practice to support discussions of further steps forward. They can also support stakeholders in considering which of these are current priorities and which could take more of a back seat for now. We suggest, for instance, that infrastructure and resourcing (3.3) for the sector seems a particular priority at present.

The reasoning for our focus on the community economy is also made more explicit. The discussions above in 3.1 (community sector mapping) and 3.4 (local democracy) both illustrate the value of looking across the local community sector as a whole – rather than community anchors alone. They point to the value of joined-up coordinated approaches that make the most of the diversity of community organisations. Whilst 3.2 (partnership-working) and 3.3 (infrastructure) highlight the aspirations of many participants for the sector to seek a certain independence – or 'distinctiveness' – from the state. The notion of the community economy as a local system intentionally seeking such a distinctiveness whilst recognising the fundamental imperative of collaborative working, too, helps sustain the visibility of such debates.

Section 3 also helps us imagine further the uses of such in-depth participatory research through the dialogue on the day and the interpretation and analysis generated from this in this Discussion Paper; both building from the *Community Anchor Research Report*, itself participatory in nature. We return to consider further what a suitable ongoing participatory process should involve in Sections 4 and 5.

Finally, as we've argued in 3.5, the Learning Event points to the value of cross-sector discussion of local change and of wider social change – as imagined by the Christie Commission (2011). A framework such as a social commons (Coote, 2017), that recognises the potential of the community sector and offers a range of themes relevant to local and wider action, can be used stimulate and sustain focus on pluralist discussions regarding such change. Again, we return to this potential in Section 4.

4. Key issues for developing a participatory research approach

In this section, we outline five key issues and related challenges that must be considered when developing an on-going participatory research process – and related research proposal – to support development of a community economy. This builds from a growing body of participatory and action research concerned to support policy analysis (Wagenaar, 2007; Bartels and Wittmayer: 2014, 2018) – alongside some of our own various recent works (Nugent and Escobar, 2017; Henderson, Revell and Escobar, 2018; Revell and Dinnie, 2018; Henderson, 2019). The issues explored are as follows:

- Who leads and who funds this research process? (4.1)
- Values and vision to inform a research process: drawing on a social commons? (4.2)
- Participatory research: appreciative, action-orientated and critical? (4.3)
- Varieties of knowledge relevant to all stakeholders? (4.4)
- Seeking 'urgent change' and credible knowledge: building a plausible process (4.5)

In 4.6, we conclude by suggesting that this framework provides a range of issues and questions to support the development of a relevant research process in actual practice – rather than planned abstractly in advance. And, we point towards the potential role of *a social commons* in supporting participants in sustaining clarity as to the direction-of-travel of the research process.

4.1 Who leads and who funds this research agenda?

A number of options for the leadership of – or at least influence on – further research are plausible including:

- **Community sector-led:** with research undertaken or commissioned by a community sector organisation, institution or membership network, and perhaps funded by them too.
- **Researcher-led:** university, public or other third sector research institution(s) with a research team likely and largely drawn from a particular sector, drawing from academic, state or foundation research funding institutions that may be tightly-focused or open to more creative and exploratory approaches.
- **Policymaker/funder-driven or led:** through commissioning potentially tightly-defined research projects in line with their own current understandings – these may be widely consulted upon.
- **Hybrids:** in which a variety of institutions, researchers and funders can take leading roles in constructing a shared research agenda – and one or more proposals – relevant to differing stakeholders.

If, and as, interest in and funding of community sector research continues to grow, there will likely be different research projects and agendas undertaken by various bodies and stakeholders, and all active at any one time - a diversity of options rather than 'one agenda'. Currently, and pragmatically speaking, however, funding for this agenda *feels* in relatively short supply and so the priorities and concerns of a limited number of funders will most likely continue to be a key element in shaping any research agenda. So, the current priorities of funders – academic research funders; philanthropic foundations; public sector and government; private sector; social economy sources – are likely to give explicit direction. Although, as always, wider policy priorities and dynamics will actively influence most funders as they seek to generate currently 'relevant' research rather than that supporting counter-narratives.

This points, then, towards the continued importance of an advisory group for this research agenda with strong representation from the community sector itself as well as other sectors. And, it points as well to the value of a wider range of stakeholders willing to ask challenging questions in order for the process to generate the sorts of critical and accountable discussions to which democratic research processes aspire (see 4.3 – 4.5 below).

4.2 Values and vision to inform a research process: drawing on a social commons?

We use the terms 'values' here to point to a broad social space that supports dialogue regarding matters of ethics, morals, justice, politics, faith and beliefs as to what '*should* happen' (prescriptive, normative). All social research – indeed all research – whether explicitly, implicitly or unwittingly requires researchers and their institution(s) and funders and commissioners to draw on and pursue values – to be 'value laden'. Sometimes the range of values used within a process may be contradictory, even if this isn't always immediately obvious – and this could generate productive or divisive tensions. For some aspects of the research process, researchers may seek to maintain a certain 'objectiveness' or perhaps even 'distance' from the data – seeking to describe and analyse via particular frameworks and theories. However, we suggest that inevitably this thinking (theory) holds value-judgements that generate interpretation from particular perspectives.

In the *Community Anchor Research Report*, we sought to pursue a participatory research that aspires to a democratic and action-orientated value-base; and to support, inform and consider critically aspirations for a more equitable society – as per the Christie Commission (2011). In so doing, we also, in the final section of that report, highlighted the potential of the notion of a 'social commons' as a social vision (value-laden) to support discussions of the developing role of the community sector in Scottish society and more widely – *see the text box below.*

We suggest that this social vision, and its key aspirations of participatory democracy, sustainable development, social justice, offers one key narrative to support a proposed participatory research approach to informing development of a community economy. This is not to say that it is the only relevant narrative in this context of social and ecological crisis – and we aspire to pluralist and democratic research – but that it is one that asks crucial questions about the direction-of-travel of our society and about what accountable participatory research processes for our times *should* 'look like'. It also therefore provides provocations for all stakeholders – including researchers – about 'what values' and 'what type of society' … not all will simply accept these (working) assumptions and the influences on any research process will likely be dynamic.

A social commons as a narrative to support local-to-global democratic change?

In the final section of our research report in community anchor organisations in Scotland (Henderson, Revell and Escobar 2018), we argued that aspirations for a social commons provide a key narrative for bringing together concerns for local democracy and resilience, sustainable development and social justice (Mestrum, 2016; Coote, 2017).

In particular, we highlighted its resonance with many of the themes in the Christie Commission's focus on:
- A more equitable society and long-term sustainability of public finances
- public service reform and balanced ('inclusive') economic development
- local partnership, participation, prevention and outcomes-based (eg inequalities)
- Localism: local democracy, resilience and autonomy
- A variety of empowerments of staff, citizens, service users and communities.

However, we also argued that a social commons seeks to progress such thinking within *the context of the now clear ecological crisis or 'climate emergency'* through its concerns for and commitment (local-to-global) to:
- collective responsibilities for rights to, our shared social, economic, political and ecological (natural) resources and systems
- shared roles of state (public commons) and communities (local commons) in coordinating a social commons
- human and collective rights, reduction of inequality and the *eradication* of poverty
- democratic processes: participative, deliberative and representative processes to support development of a social commons - as understood 'locally' rather than imposed from above.

Crucially, a social commons is *both* about our democratic processes *and* the shared collective social visions that develop though them. It must both seek to 'co-ordinate':

- the complex, ambiguous democratic tasks of valuing pluralism, diversity and inclusive informed participation; yet, and *crucially*
- make *urgent* practical differences to local control, eradication of poverty, and ecological sustainability (climate emergency) as per sustainable development.

4.3 The role of participatory research: appreciative, action-orientated and critical?

There are a range of social research methodologies that could be relevant and insightful in relation to seeking to work with the questions being generated in Section 3: qualitative, e.g. interview-based; quantitative, e.g. survey-based; mixed methods (elements of both qualitative and quantitative); and, case study research, e.g. in-depth case-analysis.

The *Community Anchor Research Report* was informed by:

- **participatory and action research:** that brings together diverse stakeholders to engage in shared inquiry and learning (Bartels & Wittmayer: 2014, 2018)
- **case study research:** in our case as exemplars of good practice (Fflyvbjerg, 2005) – in which examples are constructed to support dialogue through a variety of evidence-sources e.g. interviews, desk-research, group discussions, participation observations (Merriam, 2011), and
- **critical and interpretative policy analysis:** qualitative interpretation, analysis and synthesis led by the research team but involving wider participation of stakeholder through a democratic rationale (intersubjectivity) (Wagenaar, 2007).

The claimed benefits of our approach are that it is:

- **Appreciative:** beginning with current practical problems that are relevant to a range of stakeholders (practitioners, policymakers, citizens, researchers); supports understanding of their aspirations and efforts to work towards them; and, provides spaces to re-consider (re-frame) what's happening, why and what should happen.
- **Action-orientated:** either indirectly through shared learning or more directly through action planning and potentially implementation, it seeks to work toward change. For only in seeking change across systems, institutions, organisations and agents (people) can understanding emerge of 'what is going on and why, and for who' and develop learning as to the current realities of opportunities, barriers and dilemmas.
- **Critical:** building shared and informed reasoning and a related evidence base; looking to understand social systems, human agency and the related distribution of power at work; and, considering the social values and visions that frame our expectations.

Participatory research can offer spaces for mixed stakeholders including the researchers to deepen learning (appreciatively) and consider more critically what happens in relation to creating change. For instance: in relation to the community anchors and the community anchor 'model' (2.3), 'we' can further consider: how to increase their effectiveness in facilitating democratic practice; in what ways policymaking is supporting and/or limiting their aspirations; and what type of society (vision) are community anchors likely to be relevant to creating. In designing participatory research processes, we have the opportunity therefore to reflect in advance on what combinations of appreciation, action and critical thinking could be helpful but, inevitably, without being able to control or predict all that actually happens in the process or beyond it.

4.4 Varieties of knowledge relevant to all stakeholders?

The *Community Anchor Research Report* – see also Henderson's (2019) account of action research and reflective learning with a community planning partnership over a longer-period – builds an understanding of the potential for multi-layered inquiry, for instance, involving:

- **desk research regarding theory, policy and practice** - various evidence reviews to illustrate and support discussions of relevant practice, policy and theory.
- **participatory dialogue** with key and diverse stakeholders (practitioners, citizens, policy-makers; researchers) – locally, regionally, nationally – including through an advisory group and local workshops
- **case study research** (or other focused piece of research) – developed as relevant to deepening dialogue and related interpretation and analysis within the shared inquiry
- **online dialogue** - to support wider discussion and sharing of emerging learning amongst key stakeholders.
- **researcher interpretation, analysis and reporting** - to sustain an accountable, transparent process and support development of critically-inform discussions.

There is scope through such processes to :

- be **action-focused:** highlight and learn from likely small actions – both 'success' and 'failure' – over a longer-period
- **generate diverse forms of knowledge** through individual learning and storytelling, network building, and formal reporting that is relevant to different stakeholders such as practitioners, policymakers, citizens and researchers
- generate **actionable or implementable knowledge** relevant to making actual change in different contexts whether in practice, communities, policymaking or research.

However, working across these different layers and seeking knowledge relevant to very different groups of people working in diverse contexts is inevitably challenging and potentially conflicted. Activist and academic researcher John McKnight (1995: 171) argues that the power and control that professionals, working within the state and market, exercise

over knowledge is very often disempowering of communities and their own forms of knowledge-production:

> *"In universities, people know through studies. In business and bureaucracies, people know by reports. In communities, people know by stories. … Whenever communities come to believe that their common knowledge is illegitimate, they lose their power and professionals and systems rapidly invade their social place."*

In seeking more inclusive and democratic approaches to support participatory research then it is valuable to make visible 'who' is saying what and why they think this. This can support discussion, reflection and transparency as to the dynamics of power at play within the research process(es) and within the social context(s) that form the backdrop to the research. The types of knowledge emerging can be varied and relevant to different stakeholders but also challenging of all stakeholders and our assumptions.

4.5 Seeking 'urgent change' and credible knowledge: building a plausible process?

We have highlighted in the *Community Anchor Research Report*, in Section 3 of this report and in (4.2) above regarding a social commons, that there is now a 'very real urgency' for social change given ongoing challenges that continue to gather a disturbing momentum (local-to-global), including:

- **democratic deficit:** the lack of opportunity to engage meaningfully in decision-making, and resulting rise in populism, violence, state control and centralisation.
- **stubborn social, economic and health inequalities:** seemingly intractable poverty and other forms of inequality and oppression in both developed and developing nations.
- **state systems under financial and other pressures:** despite economic growth nationally and globally, resources 'seem' to be lacking to support change.
- **ecological crisis and climate emergency:** emerging harm from climate change and other ecological systems-change/destruction – trending towards 'irreversible'?

Participatory and action research tends to focus on the potential for collaborative change and systems change, and at different levels – local, national, international. Given the urgency outlined above it might be considered an 'obvious' candidate for supporting change. Yet, there are reasons to be cautious too.

Kothari and Wathen (2013: 188) discuss a process of knowledge exchange[9] in which researchers and knowledge-users (practitioners and policymakers) work together to co-produce knowledge. They point to the risks of *positivity bias* in these contexts, meaning by this that there is an assumption that social research (in general) and knowledge-sharing

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[9] Kothari and Wathen (2013) call this Integrate Knowledge Transfer.

processes will always provide new learning/findings, innovative solutions and/or new forms of knowledge.

Instead, they argue that the realities are often very different. Social research rarely provides striking new findings: knowledge gain is more likely incremental and *may* end as critical of the impacts of the intervention and actions undertaken and investigated. The seeming 'failure' of such interventions and processes can be hard for everyone to admit given the investment of time and funding and the need for credibility to sustain further investment in projects and institutions. Given social research inevitably takes place in political contexts, there is also the need to cope with varied electoral cycles and competing interest groups so as to be understood as 'successful' – hence significant risks of a 'positivity bias'.

They note that one way of reducing the need for social research to be seen to forever be creating new knowledge is by recognising the wider benefits of collaborative learning to organisations and institutions e.g. practical partnership building, shared cultures. Henderson (2019) is cautious about this element, too, given risks that positivity bias creeps into assessing the value of the co-production and its impacts – and the resistance of larger public service institutions to systemic change (Cook, 2015).

Henderson (2019) does point to the potential of participatory research to generate varieties of knowledge – abstract, applied, relational – relevant to varieties of sectors and stakeholders. If these processes are backed by key (powerful) players within systems, e.g. senior management, politicians, community leaders and so on, then provocations for change and transparency *could* be sustained.

Crucially, however, simply assuming that participatory research will be useful in working to resolve crises because it talks of 'action and change' cannot by itself be convincing. We need to create and sustain plausible participatory research processes for achieving this. Research proposals and agendas need to engage with these issues, and again there would seem to be a crucial role for an advisory group in working toward such an approach.

4.6 In conclusion: a framework for generating credible knowledge for all?

Across 4.1 – 4.5, we've highlighted some of the key issues and challenges emerging from our own previous – and that of others – participatory and action research that will be relevant to sustaining a participatory research process(es) concerned to build the community economy. Issues raised include:

- pragmatically sustaining suitable research resources whilst likewise sustaining a research process that is credible to the community sector itself
- holding on to vision and values within a complex, dynamic research process
- being supportive of aspirations and actions for change whilst generating critical insights as to the realities of making progress and the barriers faced

- sustaining research relevant to the needs of all stakeholders (practitioners, citizens, policymakers, researchers) in order to maintain cross-sector participation
- creating a process that can both 'keep pace with events' given fast-moving social and ecological crises *and* hold on to credible forms of knowledge generation.

Further, we are arguing that in terms of vision and values that the thinking on a social commons offered by Mestrum (2016) and Coote (2017) provides one valuable narrative for informing dialogue on systemic change – a narrative that can continue to ask challenging questions of all stakeholders including the researchers. This shouldn't be the only influence on discussions of values, visions and change if a pluralist dialogue is to be built and sustained but it offers a certain focus needed to support the 'critical bite' required of a more accountable research processes.

Each of the above is being pursued in dynamic and changing contexts and will interact and influence each other. They will have to be worked through pragmatically 'in-situ' – both in planning and implementation – rather than resolved in advance abstractly. This allows us to now return in Section 5 to outline current key elements and next steps to support this direction-of-travel – a developing participatory approach and research agenda.

5. Concluding: next steps in a participatory learning and action process

In this final section, we draw on the thinking and frameworks from across Sections 2, 3 and 4 to consider potential next steps in a participatory research process to inform and support development of a community economy. This isn't simply about:

- seeking to consult on a credible research agenda with a wider range of stakeholders nor
- building the case for further research and related resources 'some-time soon'.

These are key two objectives, for sure. However, crucially, this is also about seeking to engage, given the urgency of the social and ecological crises we currently face (local-to-global), in participatory research 'now'. We are looking to develop research activities that actively inform and support development of the community economy and a related social commons as rapidly as we can; and, likewise, to seek to generate forms of knowledge relevant to diverse stakeholders – across theory, policy and practice. We must then continue to juggle pragmatically with emerging opportunities, challenges and dilemmas in search of suitable resources and to sustain a relevance to the concerns of practitioners, policymakers, citizens and researchers 'right now'.

In 5.1 below therefore, we outline four initial elements that are particularly pertinent to sustaining a suitable current direction-of-travel.

5.1 Four initial elements regarding mobilising learning and action for the community economy

To give further direction to aspirations for an on-going participatory research process, we point to the following four elements as providing the next steps and sustaining a relevant research agenda.

(1) Creating a web-based presence – which offers the potential for:

- rapid dissemination of emerging learning and a sense of urgency in responding to social and ecological crisis
- relatively low start-up and maintenance costs and can be established rapidly
- space to present diverse learning and reflections from different stakeholder groups and sectors.

(2) Initially focusing on three 'simple' types of research activity:

- **participatory research activity:** across different stakeholder groups using this Discussion Paper and a related presentation and web-based material as an initial resource for generating such discussions
- **desk research:** that explores and makes accessible online a range of relevant and existing research, policy and practice resources
- **locating further funding:** using the participatory research process and desk research to continue to build the case for funding for relevant research proposal(s).

(3) Using the frameworks to support and focus ongoing inquiry: the frameworks outlined in Sections 2, 3 and 4 provide a rich 'language' for stimulating and deepening discussions. In summary:

Section 2 offers initial frameworks on:

- existing thinking on the community economy and its position in the wider economy
- mapping the diversity of the community sector
- the facilitative, community-led role of community anchors
- infrastructure for the community sector – policy, resources, culture change

It also argues for the development of briefing material:

- on the existing thinking of the community economy (Pearce, 1993: Pearce and Kay, 2003; Amin, 2009; Gibson-Graham, 2013) and,
- across the policy spectrum that illustrates how the community economy can engage with the full diversity of policy.

Section 3: the broad themes and the more subtle issues, nuances and questions they hold, provide a valuable entry point for engaging stakeholders in further participatory dialogue:

- mapping the complex workings of the community sector
- effective partnership and collaboration with public services and wider state

- infrastructure and resourcing for the community sector
- supporting local democratic governance and innovation
- working for wider social change – opportunities and barriers.

Section 4: key issues for sustaining a credible participatory research process:

- resourcing a community-led approach;
- using discussions of values and social vision to keep visible the direction-of-travel
- integrating appreciative, action-orientated and critical elements within the process
- generating varieties of knowledge relevant to differing stakeholders
- holding on to urgency and credible knowledge generation – learning from 'failure'.

Further, in Section 4, we have argued for thinking on a social commons (Coote, 2017) as central, at least initially, in sustaining a relevant and critical direction-of-travel given the urgency of the emerging social and ecological crises.

(4) A pragmatic process needs a democratic rationale and governance: given the necessarily pragmatic nature of this developing research process currently, the following strategies can be used to support democratic governance and accountability:

- a cross-sector advisory group – with credible community sector roles – to sustain appreciative, pragmatic and critical approaches and maintain a relevant and urgent focus on the community economy and a social common to support systemic change.
- commitment to widening participation to sustain genuine 'sense-checking' as to the value and relevance of what's being learnt – in particular the role and participation of the public sector is crucial here.
- making links to a wider body of current relevant research processes, particularly where community-led.

The longer-term aspirations for any such participatory research strategy drawing on a democratic rationale should include a shifting of 'the locus of control' and resourcing towards wider democratic governance and/or community sector-led research institutions.

5.2 Spaces for feedback on this developing approach

As we indicated at the beginning of this section, this developing approach involves holding on three objectives: developing (consulting on) this participatory research agenda: seeking resources for suitable research; and, undertaking (actual) research 'now' given the social and ecological crisis. We will then be seeking opportunistically to meet and discuss this thinking with relevant stakeholders – practitioners from the community sector and other sectors; policymakers and funders; and researchers, citizens and others.

This Discussion Paper will inform such dialogue but we would also be keen to hear other responses to this emerging process in writing and can be contacted in the first instance via: james.henderson@hw.ac.uk

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