

Summary: Building the community economy in Scotland: supporting learning and action



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Summary: Discussion Paper

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1. Introduction

This Summary Discussion Paper supports 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. It does this by offering a range of frameworks to support dialogue and participatory research on building such an economy, and builds from our earlier [Community Anchor research report](#)¹

Fundamental to understanding this call for ongoing participatory research are a 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 UN’s 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#).²

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 in supporting them in taking such an agenda forward.

The Report, however, puts the emphasis not solely 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 related to local democracy, community resilience, local sustainable development, social justice, and social and ecologically-related change.

In this 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 explore this notion of the community economy as a system of local (not-for-profit) community sector organisations and networks. And we position this thinking as part of a wider body of thought on the roles of the community economy within the workings of state, market and society³ and on our learning so far on infrastructure for developing the community sector.

We 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 can offer to lead and support change
- the scale of urgent social, societal and global change – ‘social transformation’ would seem appropriate – now required³.

We position these discussions 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.

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.

The full [Discussion Paper is available](#) on the Policy Scotland website.⁴

2. Frameworks to support discussions of the community economy

This section introduces the notion of the community economy and presents a series of frameworks with which to deepen discussion. The community economy is understood here as the potential system(s) of local networks of not-for-profit community sector bodies working across a local community and crossing into neighbouring communities and wider still.⁵

These networks undertake a vast array of local economic, social, political and environmental activities: bringing together social capital and the ‘local commons’ with wider resources from trading activities and through partnership with the state.

The term *community economy* is ‘economic’ in that it is concerned with coordinating the social creation and social distribution of society’s resources⁶. We have had mixed feedback from early consultees on use of the term: some positive, some less so. We are holding to it – for now – because it generates responses, stimulates discussion, and brings the social nature of all economic activity to the fore. A listing of ‘economic’ terms we use is given in the text box below.

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 activities 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.

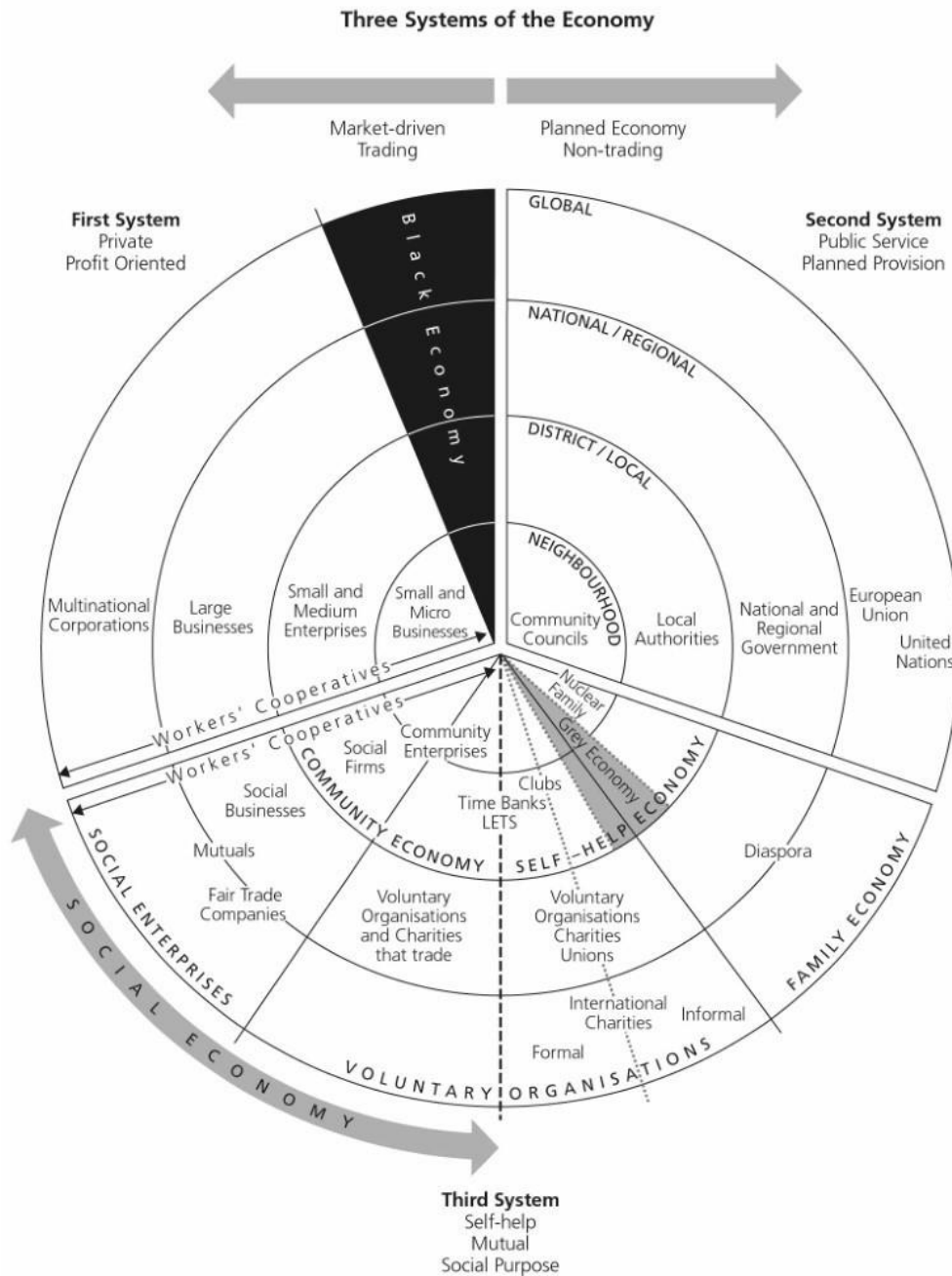
Social commons: a more particular vision or paradigm for sustainable development, social protection and democratic reform via development of commons of economic, social, political and ecological resources from local to global.

NOTE: the term ‘local’ is not tightly defined here and can cover ultra-local or neighbourhood through to city-wide or district-wide⁷ 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).

Framework 1: a community economy within three systems of the economy

The work of activist and researcher John Pearce⁸ and his/their model of three broad systems or sectors of a modern economy – private, public, social – is highlighted here. This is suggested as an important backdrop for discussions of where the community economy fits within the workings of the wider political economy from ultra-local to global. Pearce’s narrative also emphasises working for ‘the common good’ and ecological sustainability.

The work of activists and researchers Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson⁹ on and for a post-capitalist and feminist ecological community economics is also highlighted with their emphasis on: ‘taking back’: work, business, market, property and finance. Both are suggested as valuable sources of insight and inspiration for developing understanding of the potential of the community economy through cross-sector stakeholder dialogue between practitioners, communities, policymakers and researchers who will inevitably bring their own perspectives into what the community economy ‘is’ and ‘can be’.



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.

Framework 2: mapping a diverse locally-led community sector

There is a wide range of local not-for-profit local bodies that seek to be accountable to and work for and with a local community of place, interest or identity – the community sector. Examples include:

- community social enterprises
- community development trusts
- community housing associations
- locally-led voluntary (other third sector) organisations
- community bodies – for communities of interest e.g. environmental groups
- community bodies – for communities of identity e.g. gender, ethnicity, class etc.¹⁰

- smaller community/neighbourhood groups and networks of almost endless variety
- community finance – credit unions, community-led finance institutions.

See the full paper for a fuller table of these.

Framework 3: the community anchor model

The model outlined in the Community Anchor Research Report¹¹ presents three broad aspirations for organisations seeking this local role:

- **Community-led governance:** via a board, membership, community connectivity and community ownership of assets.
- **Holistic working:** for local economic, social, democratic and sustainable development or ‘community-led place-making’.
- **Long-term commitment and responsiveness** to a community and its diversity.

Community development trusts and community-controlled housing associations are understood as best positioned to pursue this role in Scotland although other community organisations can certainly consider it¹². There is potential, too, for a number of local organisations to work together actively to achieve the role together.

Framework 4: infrastructure for community sector development

The Community Anchor Research Report provides an initial framework of **ten key learning points** for supporting the development of community anchors and the community sector more generally:

Policy

1. State policy-making impacts on community sector income-generating capacities positively and negatively – it is not neutral
2. The need for community sector ‘proofing’ across the policy spectrum (local/national)
3. Community anchors and sector as facilitative of bottom-up policymaking

Resourcing

The local and central state have crucial roles in investing in the sector:

4. to build long-term financial resilience through community ownership and enterprise
5. to develop community anchors of substance in all low-income, working class communities¹³
6. to build the resilience of organisations and their staff, activists and volunteers through suitable training e.g. sector-led ‘change-agent’ programmes¹⁴
7. to resource and support activists and volunteers e.g. citizen allowance, basic income, job guarantee.

Culture change

Public sector and public services should look to:

8. invest in community-led training for public service staff re. community sector
9. work with the sector to build local deliberative and participatory structures
10. invest in community anchors to monitor local social and economic outcomes.

Engaging with the policy context

The four frameworks above can support 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 deliver locally and create change
- the development of this community economy and sector e.g. community anchors
- investing in the community sector through policy, resourcing and culture change.

The focus on infrastructure brings us back into the very real world of policymaking. The Christie Commission continues to provide a key narrative within Scottish policymaking regarding public service reform and the role of the state in seeking more balanced economic development and a more equitable society. This is part of a wider international concern for democratic and collaborative public value governance¹⁵. However, there are other active narratives including: public spending constraints and related centralisation ('austerity'); and, public-private 'top-down' partnerships in which market interests remain dominant.

The Community Anchor Research Report illustrates the cross-cutting roles of community anchors and the community sector through the existing activities of six exemplars. This cross-cutting potential dovetails powerfully with key tranches of current policymaking e.g. community-led regeneration, the Place Principle, land reform, social enterprise, anti-poverty work, public health, local plans and the Local Governance Review.¹⁶

The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework, Economic Strategy (2015) and 2019-20 Policy Programme signal the breadth of aspiration in Scotland. The community sector has crucial contributions to make across this swathe of policy e.g. digital inclusion, Green New Deal, circular economy, transport, local infrastructure, business development and community safety and public procurement¹⁷.

We argue that the frameworks above provide the initial ingredients and language to support informed dialogue on the community economy. That such dialogue needs to consider the *current realities* of Scottish and UK policymaking – 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.*

3. Learning from cross-sector discussions

There was early engagement with the frameworks at the [What Works Scotland Community Anchor Learning Event](#) in May 2018. Here a cross-sector stakeholder group of 50+ practitioners, policymakers and researchers – with strong representation from community sector and wider third sector – explored six exemplars through the lens of the frameworks, particularly Frameworks 3 and 4. We've interpreted and analysed the discussion material from participants to generate five key themes, which are illustrated with reflections from the participants¹⁸. We then present these as an initial framework to stimulate further development and discussions of policy, practice and theory.

Note: the full report presents most of the written material generated by participants on the day and the extent of our own learning from this – and is worth reading for the breadth of views and insights offered - but cannot effectively be summarised here¹⁹.

3.1 Shared understandings of community anchors and community sector

Discussions on the day highlighted an openness from many participants to consider the potential of the complex, multi-purpose roles of community anchors. And this space then led into deepening discussions about community anchors and their relationships within the wider local community sector.

Learning: these discussions point to the potential of:

- **Participatory research:** spaces for sharing learning, considering evidence and reflecting on actions – in sustaining dialogue across stakeholders when seeking to develop areas of policy and practice (and related theories).
- **The notion of the community economy:** informed by the frameworks in Section 2, for instance, in providing a focus for widening dialogue and the building of complex community-led local coordination.

3.2. Constructive partnerships with public services and the local state

Whilst the original Community Anchor Research Report offers many examples of productive partnership and participation with public services, there is often frustration from the community sector with partnership working with the local state. This was echoed at this Learning Event and there was emphasis in discussions about the complexity of such working:

- The need for time and patience and spaces for conflict as well as collaboration.
- Valuing incremental working and relationship-building.
- The public sector needing to be more open to risk-taking and culture change.
- The importance of investing (strategically) in the community sector and its capacity to work on a more equal footing.

However, there were also potentially conflicting views, which highlighted that, particularly in times of public spending constraints, the focus of partnership needs to be very pragmatic and concerned for practical goals and implementation. For the public sector there needs to be a clear value in directing resources to community anchor organisations.

A further fundamental question raised was on expectations (framing) between the two sectors. Are community anchors about partnerships to support statutory service delivery? Or is their role in relation to public services provision something different?

Learning: these discussions point to the importance of:

- Continuing to work at effective strategies for collaborative working in complex public service systems – but to be transparent about current limitations given power imbalances and resource constraints.
- Creating spaces for participatory dialogue to reflect on the current roles and expectations of the community sector and local state – and to consider alternatives.
- Working hard to find ways to invest in the community sector – *if* its role is to be an independent vehicle with capacities to lead on local economic, social, democratic, sustainable development?

3.3: Investing in infrastructure and resourcing for the community sector

Discussions were animated as to the need for more resources for community anchors and sector and how to achieve this given an almost decade-long period of public spending constraint. Discussions often resonated with the learning in the Community Anchor Research Report regarding resourcing and infrastructure. This included the need to focus on resourcing low-income working-class communities and the need for more joined-up approaches from funders and commissioners.

Learning: The need for a more strategic, joined-up approach is sought by all sectors, however the community sector offers unique local democratic and holistic opportunities. This is illustrated by community anchors and their multi-purpose roles across local economic, social, democratic and sustainable development (community-led place-making) and their strong fit with the Christie Commission's agenda for community-led solutions for a more equitable society²⁰.

The community sector works across both local and central policy spectrums, making it relevant across state policymaking and related initiatives – economic development, place-making, health and social care, local energy generation, democratic innovation, local leadership and advocacy and so on. The scope to locate investment of the necessary scale to support community sector development could be through a focus on generating investment strategies to join up these different pots of money. These can be built around different initiatives that suit local contexts, for example:

- development of networks of local multi-purpose hubs to facilitate local economic, social and environmental change
- local (place) plans of real substance that integrate spatial planning, community planning and local community-led planning so that communities have the democratic means to actually direct local resourcing
- local investment strategies that prioritise local community sector development e.g. community endowments, local investment funds, adapting the community wealth building approach²¹.

A further area for consideration would be the potential of state funding to support local residents in their roles as local staff, activists and volunteers – what variations on job guarantee schemes, citizen's training allowances, citizen/basic incomes and so on might best be used to invest in local people, local organisations and local social capital networks?

3.4: Developing local democratic governance and innovation

The potential of community anchors to support a step-change in the levels and variety of local democratic and participatory activity, planning and coordination, resonated within the discussions. These moved into questioning and thinking further about the complexities of what it is reasonable to ask of communities; links to local state democratic process and elected politicians; and, the importance of community anchors and community sector in being able to offer independent facilitation:

Learning: In reflecting on these discussions, we flag the crucial roles that community anchors and a wider body of local community sector organisations – including community councils, community arts, community media, local equalities groups and so on – undertake already and can continue to deepen and develop. In particular, their potential to generate and/or support a dense matrix of local democratic activity – participatory, deliberative, representative – across sectors, layers of organisation, and community diversity. In complex local political landscapes – of local services, organisations, politicians, and differing communities (place, interest, identity) – this is challenging work. Investment in and by the

community sector in getting this 'right' is crucial but offers rich vistas of future local democratic planning.

3.5: Opportunities and barriers in leading social change

The potential of the community sector to support social change both locally and more widely resonated within the discussions. But, crucially, there were also more sceptical voices as to their prospects in creating social and systems change(s) with concerns over vested interests acting as barriers, trust and accessibility and power imbalances.

Learning: through these discussions, we suggest, firstly, the legitimacy and relevance of discussions of systems and social change in relation to the developing role of the community sector. Perhaps this is surprising given a more 'natural' focus on local activity? Or is this easily anticipated given the Christie Commission's concern to work with bottom-up approaches to partnership, participation and community-led solutions that support wider social and systems change for a more equitable society? Either way this focus found a fit with a significant number of participants.

Further, building from our concluding section in the Community Anchor Research Report, we point to the notion of a social commons²² as one potential framework to support and sustain longer-term pluralist discussions of social vision and direction-of-travel. It offers a policy narrative that brings together local democratic participation, social protection and poverty eradication, and collective responsibility for shared resources (a social commons) in a time of growing social and ecological crisis and change.

3.6: An initial framework for learning, action and research

These five broad themes (3.1-3.5) create a sufficiently rich language or framework of issues, actions and ideas through which to sustain further dialogue and research – and across the complexity of actually-existing policy and practice (and related theory). Stakeholders can use these themes and this framework to reflect as to which elements are current priorities for development and which are more relevant as the backdrop to developing policy and practice.

The rich discussions of community sector roles highlighted the potential value of the notion of the community economy - both the diversity of the community sector and its roles, and a 'system' that is distinctive from the state but, crucially, can and must also find ways to work constructively with the state. The discussions illustrate how bringing together evidence, dialogue and practice experience over the longer-term through participatory and action research can be used to build collective learning and inquiry with cross-sector stakeholders.

Finally, given the emphasis on the potential of the community sector in creating wider constructive social change, the case for using a framework such as a social commons to stimulate and sustain pluralist democratic dialogue and deliberation has also been made. We argue that this framework can support dialogue on shared social resources and collective responsibility, participatory democracy, social protection (poverty eradication) and sustainable development.

4. Key issues for developing a participatory research approach

We have argued that participatory research is a particularly relevant process for supporting development of the community economy given that it draws from varied sources of evidence to support learning; uses stakeholder dialogue to build shared inquiry; and is concerned to support action and change – whether directly or indirectly.

It provides a *potentially* dynamic alternative to ‘traditional’ social research, one that:

- can adapt rapidly to context and the diversity of participants
- supports spaces for both sharing learning and more fine-tuned (researcher) interpretation and analysis, and
- values a deliberative (democratic) rationale across diverse stakeholders.

These aspirations are challenging to pursue and in this section we outline five key themes – and a related language of issues and challenges – that can usefully be considered when continuing to construct a credible, relevant participatory research agenda. These themes form a further framework that can inform the development of particular research proposals as well as perhaps a wider ongoing participatory research agenda more generally.

4.1 Research leadership and funding

There are a variety of sources of leadership for such research – the community sector itself; the academic (university) sector; and, other research bodies from the public, private and third sectors. Likewise, there are diverse sources of funding and commissioning of social research from within or relevant to particular sectors – public including government, private, philanthropic, and the social economy itself. However, locating suitable funding for this participatory research agenda may prove challenging given the focus on community economy may still be considered a low priority relative to the ‘needs’ of other sectors. It will likely be important to find very pragmatic ways to sustain both a credible sense of ‘community-led’ research *and* suitable sources of research funding. *In this context, an advisory group with significant community sector representation and wider cross-sector representation is one valuable strategy for building credibility and locating funding.*

4.2 Values and social vision

Values and social vision are central elements, if often implicit, within any social research process. Here we argue for a *social commons*, given its focus on participatory democracy and the current social and ecological crises (local-to-global), as one key narrative for sustaining clarity about (pluralist) discussions of values and social visions for: (1) policy and practice re. the community economy and (2) the participatory nature of this particular research agenda itself. It is not the only viable framework that should be used to inform this agenda but it offers an initial direction-of-travel and provocations ‘against’ which participants, stakeholders and researchers can reflect on the developing trajectory and aspirations of the process.

Key elements of the social commons concept: a narrative to support local-to-global democratic change?

In the Community Anchor Research Report 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. In particular, we highlighted its resonance with many of the themes in the Christie Commission. 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 co-ordinating 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 through 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 Appreciative, action-orientated and critical participatory research

Our previous participatory research on community anchor organisations focused on six existing organisations as exemplar case studies. These were used to build understanding and dialogue on the potential of community anchors more generally to facilitate, advocate for and, as relevant, challenge for effective public sector reform in Scotland – as understood via the Christie Commission's agenda. It sought to be *appreciative* of the work and aspirations of both the community sector and of Scottish public service reform but *not uncritically*. Central to the process was the concern to continue to challenge all sectors and ourselves in developing local democratic practice, working for local sustainable development, and reflecting on social justice and realistic opportunities to *actually* reduce poverty and inequality.

By keeping the focus of participatory research on action (and actionable knowledge) and what happens when change is proposed and/or attempted, we argue that all stakeholder will be better placed to continue to generate a *critical and action-orientated edge* to further research on the community economy. By revealing the opportunities, challenges and dilemmas within actual practice and policymaking, as well as within participatory research, the process *can* keep asking testing questions

about the role of the community economy and about social and systems change: What helps? What gets in the way? And who benefits?²¹

4.4 Varieties of knowledge relevant to all stakeholders

The research process seeks to remain relevant to the community sector, other practitioners, policymakers, researchers – and potentially citizens too. However, this requires a significant investment of time and resource to generate different forms of knowledge relevant to each audience – for instance:

- Practitioners, including local staff, activists and volunteers, *tend* to look for knowledge that support their actions and plans on the ground.
- Policymakers *tend* towards knowledge that engages with current political questions, challenges and timescales.
- Researchers *tend* to look towards theory and abstractions that can be used more widely.
- Citizens and residents *tend* to want to be heard (initially) and then see meaningful change emerging from their inputs.

So, aspirations to engage constructively across all stakeholders (on policy, practice and related theories) are going to be complicated, challenging and potentially conflicted. Activist and academic researcher John McKnight argues that the power and control that professionals, working within the state and/or 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.”

(John McKnight, 1995, p171²³)

In seeking more inclusive and democratic approaches to developing and sharing knowledge, it becomes crucial to make more visible ‘who’ is saying what and why they may think this. This supports discussion, reflection and transparency regarding the dynamics of power at play within the research process, the policy and practice landscape and the social and economic contexts that form the backdrop to the research focus. A suitable advisory group is a key strategy for sustaining this transparency and critical edge. The types of knowledge emerging should be varied, relevant to and challenging of different stakeholders – given suitable resourcing and time.

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

There are a variety of social and ecological crises developing currently (local-to-global) that give a very powerful sense of urgency to learning about the potential of the community sector to lead and support local and wider social change:

- A democratic deficit and lack of meaningful participation – and resulting frustrations and reactions e.g. populism, violence, state control, centralisation.
- Stubborn levels of poverty and inequality – in both developed and developing nations and related demographic changes.

- Ecological crises – in various guises as our impacts on ecological systems deepens, including most prominently the climate emergency.
- Local financial resourcing ('austerity') and the assumption that despite current ongoing economic growth the state lacks resources to invest in social and ecological change.

Kothari and Wathen²⁴ discuss knowledge exchange process in which researchers, practitioners and policymakers work together to co-produce learning. They point to one key area of risk here, that of positivity bias, in which all key stakeholders feel obliged to continually create 'new' knowledge, be innovative, and demonstrate 'success'. The risk here is of losing a critical edge and the opportunity to learn from seeming 'failure' and so to be able to effectively engage with the urgent need to develop relevant and credible knowledge at this time of crises.

Henderson points to the need to generate plausible research processes in which leadership within the state, both political and senior management, understand the value of 'failure' and of remaining critical in creating change.²⁵ This offers the potential for knowledge and learning relevant (actionable) to the needs of all stakeholders. The role of a diverse advisory group again seems to be crucial in constructing and sustaining such a research process.

4.6 A framework for generating credible and effective knowledge for all?

Working towards this participatory research agenda for the community economy, and constructing and holding onto complex credible research processes, will be challenging given the elements outlined in this section. Further, all of these are being pursued in dynamic and changing contexts, whilst they themselves interact and impact on each other. However, we argue that the notion of a social commons – as an initial expression of the values and social vision to inform research – can support participants and researchers alike in reflecting on the direction-of-travel of the research. It can be used to generate and sustain questions about trajectory of the process and related aspirations for change.

Together these elements provide a framework to support a developing research process, but they to be worked through pragmatically 'in-situ' during the development and implementation of any research process – rather than resolved in advance and abstractly.

5. Next steps

Sections 2, 3 and 4 provide a series of frameworks – a 'language' of opportunities, challenges and current dilemmas – to support the building and progressing of a relevant participatory research agenda. These can be used to generate further dialogue; build more particular research proposals; and, support funding applications. In looking at the potential next steps for such a research agenda we seek to work with tensions between the following challenges:

- The need to engage more widely across sectors and stakeholders and develop the relevance of these frameworks.
- Locating funding and resources to develop the research process.
- Continuing the participatory research process 'now', given the urgency of social and ecological crises.

The four elements in the next section could usefully inform the development of this participatory research agenda.

5.1 Four key elements to build momentum for mobilising relevant learning and action

(1) Creating a web-based presence: this offers the potential for rapid dissemination of learning; low-start-up costs; and contributions from diverse stakeholders.

(2) An initial focus on three types of 'basic' research-related activity:

- group discussions to support cross-sector dialogue and share learning.
- desk research to make accessible existing research, policy and practice resources.
- building the case for and locating further research funding.

(3) Using the frameworks to support and focus ongoing inquiry:

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 economy²⁴ and across the (Scottish) policy spectrum that illustrates how the community economy can engage with the full diversity of policy.

The broad themes of Section 3, and the more subtle nuances and questions they hold – as illustrated in the full report – provide a valuable entry point for engaging stakeholders in further participatory dialogue, as follows:

- mapping the workings of the community sector as a system or community economy
- 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 presents key issues for sustaining a credible participatory research process:

- resourcing a community-led approach to research
- 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 to urgent and credible knowledge generation – learning from 'failure'.

Further, in Section 4, we argue for thinking on a social commons as valuable starting point in sustaining relevant and critical (pluralist) discussions of the direction-of-travel for such a research process 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 and wider stakeholder representation – to sustain appreciative, action-orientated and critical approaches.
- Commitment to widening participation to sustain genuine ‘sense-checking’ as to the value and relevance of what’s being learnt – particularly from the public sector.
- 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

This developing approach involves holding on to three objectives:

1. developing (consulting on) this participatory research agenda
2. seeking resources for suitable research, and
3. undertaking (actual) research ‘now’ given social and ecological crisis.

We will be seeking 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, and the full Discussion Paper can help to inform this dialogue. We are keen to hear responses to this emerging process and if you have thoughts please do contact: james.henderson@hw.ac.uk.

What Works Scotland was a Scottish Government and ESRC-funded research collaboration, 2014 – 2019, which aimed to improve the way local areas use evidence to make decisions about public service development and reform.

Notes and references

¹ Henderson J, Revell P and Escobar O (2018) *Transforming communities? Exploring the roles of community anchor organisations in public service reform, local democracy, community resilience and social change*, report: What Works Scotland. <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/exploring-the-roles-of-community-anchor-organisations-in-public-service-reform>

² UN Sustainable Development Goals: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>; part of Scottish Government’s National Performance Framework: <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/sustainable-development-goals>

³ Revell P and Dinnie E (2018) Community Resilience and narratives of community empowerment in Scotland. *Community Development Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsaa006>

⁴ Building the community economy in Scotland: frameworks to support learning, action and research Discussion Paper <https://policyscotland.gla.ac.uk/building-the-community-economy-in-scotland>

⁵ Pearce J (1993) *At the Heart of the Community Economy: Community Enterprises in a Changing World*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation; Pearce J and Kay A (2003) *Social Enterprise in Anytown*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation; Gibson-Graham J.K, Cameron J and Healy S (2013) *Take back the economy: An ethical guide for transforming our communities*. University of Minnesota Press

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- ⁶ Mitchell J, Randall Wray WL and Watts M (2019) *Macroeconomics*, London: Red Globe Press
- ⁷ Thake S (2001) *Building Communities Changing Lives: the contribution of large, independent neighbourhood regeneration organisations*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- ⁸ Pearce 1993; Pearce and Kay, 2003
- ⁹ Gibson-Graham et al., 2013
- ¹⁰ Includes age, culture/language, disability, faith/belief, sexuality; and the intersectionality between different types of social and political identity.
- ¹¹ Henderson J, Revell P and Escobar O (2018)
- ¹² Scottish Government (2011) *Renewing Scotland's Public Services: priorities for reform in response to the Christie Commission*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- ¹³ There is also clearly a role for community anchors to commit more generally to prioritise anti-poverty and inequalities-related work in other communities ('not' most-deprived) – and to invest in them to pursue this –given so many people living in or at the margins of poverty live outside of the most deprived neighbourhoods.
- ¹⁴ 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.
- ¹⁵ Bryson J.M, Crosby B.C, and Bloomberg L (2014) Public value governance: Moving beyond traditional public administration and the new public management. *Public Administration Review*, 74(4), 445-456; Henderson J (2019) *At the frontier of collaborative and participatory governance: Eight key discussions to support putting Christie into practice – reflective learning with practitioners from Aberdeenshire CPP*, report: What Works Scotland.
- ¹⁶ Scottish Government Place Principle <https://www.gov.scot/publications/place-principle-introduction/>; Local Governance Review at: <https://www.gov.scot/policies/improving-public-services/local-governance-review/>
- ¹⁷ Schonveld E, Gallagher B and Revell P (2019) *Climate Action Pioneers: weaving a new story - Interim Report: Collation of Themes from interviews*, report: Scottish Communities Climate Action Network) outline the potential of the community sector in relation to the climate emergency; whilst Durose C, Escobar O, Gilchrist A, Agger A, Henderson J, van Hulst M, and van Ostaijen M (2019) *Social smartness: making in a difference in our neighbourhoods and cities*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh – also Gilchrist A, Durose C, Escobar O, Agger A, Henderson J, van Hulst M, and van Ostaijen M (2019) *Social smartness: policy briefing*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh – illustrate the potential of the community sector and other 'smart urban practitioners to build complex local collaborative working.
- ¹⁸ In the longer version of the Discussion Paper, we also recognise the limitations of this data-set.
- ¹⁹ The potential of community anchor organisations to engage with, lead and challenge the reform of public services in Scotland Learning day and Shared Inquiry <https://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/events/community-anchor-organisations-and-public-service-reform/>
- ²⁰ Henderson J, Revell P and Escobar O (2018); Henderson J, Escobar O et al.* (2019) *Supporting smart urban intermediation: learning and recommendations for the Scottish policy context from the Smart Urban Intermediaries project*. University of Edinburgh. *Inputs from Scottish partners: 9 local organisations/services, 4 intermediaries.
- ²¹ 'Preston model' as per Jackson M and McInroy N (2017) *Community wealth building through anchor institutions*, report: Centre for Local Economic Strategies.
- ²² Coote A (2017) *Building a new social commons: The people, the commons and the public realm*: New Economics Foundation.
- ²³ John McKnight (1995) *The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterfeits*, New York: Basic Books
- ²⁴ Kothari A and Wathen N (2013) A critical second look at integrated knowledge translation, *Health Policy* 109, 187–191, p 188
- ²⁵ Henderson J, Escobar O et. al. (2019).