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**Future-Ready Society Conference Series 2023:
Tools for Community Empowerment: Insights from Scotland Study Trip 2023**

By Justin Lee

PURPOSE OF STUDY TRIP

Tote Board, in partnership with the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities (LKYCIC) and Policy Lab of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) launched the Future-Ready Society Impact Fund in May 2023 to support policy experiments and pilot novel solutions to respond to present-day complexities as well as emerging issues on the horizon.[1] The focus for 2023 is to understand some of the emerging trends and opportunity areas in building stronger communities, as well as discover bold ideas or innovative solutions for deepening meaningful citizen engagement.

In 2015, the Scottish Parliament enacted the Community Empowerment Act, designed to "empower community bodies through the ownership or control of land and buildings, and by strengthening their voices in decisions about public services."[2] Sponsored by the Future-Ready Society Impact Fund, a study trip to Scotland was organised to understand how the Act has helped communities to do more for themselves and have more say in decisions that affect them. We were specifically interested in the following features of the Scottish approach to community building:

Participatory budgeting.[3] In 2017, the Scottish government and Scottish local authorities worked together to develop and agree to a framework whereby at least 1 per cent of local government budgets would be subject to participatory budgeting by the end of 2021.

Community planning partnerships.[4] Community planning is a process that helps public agencies work together and with the community to plan and deliver better services. It was introduced by the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003.

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[1] See conference proceedings: https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/events/details/future-ready-society-conference-series-launch-of-the-future-ready-society-impact-fund

[2] See summary: https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-empowerment-scotland-act-summary/

[3] Details on participatory budgeting: https://www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/participatory-budgeting/

[4] Details on community planning: https://www.gov.scot/policies/improving-public-services/community-planning/

Asset transfer requests.[5] This gives community bodies a right to request to buy, lease, manage or use land and buildings belonging to local authorities, Scottish public bodies, or Scottish Ministries. Under the new statutory requirements, their local government works with citizens to co-create these solutions and transfer publicly owned assets to community ownership and self-management.

Participation requests.[6] Participation requests will allow a community body to engage with public authorities about local issues and local services. If a community body believes it can help to improve an outcome that is delivered by a public service, it can request to be part of the process with the public service authority to improve that outcome.

In general, we also wanted to understand the characteristics of community development in Scotland, how local communities work with local and national government, and how their **community centres** are run. We also wanted to understand what a **place-based approach** to community development means, and the vehicle through which this is often carried out, that is the **Community Development Trust**.

We also intended the insights to inform the planning and implementation of our policy experimentation projects on participatory budgeting[7] and Citizens ReAssembled.[8]

ITINERARY OVERVIEW

A total of 19 participants were on the study trip, comprising a mix of non-profit leaders and professionals, researchers, funders, and policymakers. See Annex A for information on the participants.

The study trip was held from 24 to 28 July 2023. We began our trip at the Edinburgh Futures Institute to understand data-driven innovation. There, we also interacted with the founders of Common Ground Against Homelessness, created to buy properties on behalf of charities so they can overcome the financial challenges of providing accommodation for the homeless. They draw on the power of Community Shares, a platform that helps community members buy shares in enterprises providing goods and services that meet their needs.

Our first anchor host for the study trip was the Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS), an independent and incorporated charitable organisation comprising over 350 community-owned and led organisations. DTAS is also a key member of the Scottish Community Alliance and works closely with other community networks. DTAS helped us to coordinate visits with a few of their member organisations, such as the Granton Community Gardeners, Heart of Newhaven, Action Porty, Whale Arts, Lanark Community Development Trust, Cranhill Development Trust, and SWAMP. These organisations have experience in participatory budgeting and/or community asset ownership. Broadly, we learned from their creative

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[5] Details on asset transfer: https://www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/asset-transfer/

[6] Details on participation requests: https://www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/participation-requests/

[7] Participatory budgeting and citizen design for town councils in Singapore: https://futurereadysociety.sg/participatory-budgeting-citizen-design-in-town-councils/

[8] Details on Citizens ReAssembled: https://futurereadysociety.sg/citizens-re-assembled/

approaches to community-led development, as well as how DTAS provides support and facilitation for community-led problem-solving and decision-making.

Our second anchor host was the Scottish Community Development Council (SCDC), the lead body for community development in Scotland that works with both local community partners, practitioners as well as government and policymakers. They are a charity that provides research, training and consultancy services on various issues such as participatory budgeting, local democracy, community health and climate sustainability. They also raise awareness and help to develop a key aspect of the Community Empowerment Act 2015, i.e., participation requests that allow communities to ask to work with public bodies to improve services.

Our last port of call was the Robert Owens Centre for Educational Change at the University of Glasgow. They work on the Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland project, which includes both research and practical implementation of measures to address child poverty. They also run the Network for Social and Educational Equity, which uses research evidence and collaboration to improve classroom practices, build leadership capacity among teachers and students, and support organisational development. These issues relating to social and educational equity are pertinent to community development in Singapore, given that many non-profit organisations have interventions focused on children and education.

Video documentation of key conversations and presentations was done by Cai Dewei from the Institute of Policy Studies. The videos are uploaded on the study trip webpage: https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/research/ips-policy-lab/future-ready-society-conference-series/study-trip-to-scotland

See Annex B for links to the full list of video recordings.

WHAT WE LEARNED

1. Associations and Intermediaries — Implementing the Community Empowerment Act

Context of Community Empowerment in Scotland

There is a push by the Scottish national government to devolve more decision-making from local authorities to communities. The national government has been interested in increasing local democracy through more power-sharing and decision-making by the community, culminating in the Community Empowerment Act in 2015:

- 2011: Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services

- 2013–2014: Scottish Independence Referendum

- Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy[9]

- 2015: Community Empowerment Act

Before the Scottish Parliament was formed in 1999, power had rested in local authorities. Some of our Scottish hosts pointed out that since then, power had been leached away from local authorities to the national government. This resulted in tension between national government and local authorities because the former was enacting legislation that took power away from the latter to empower communities.

A cynical interpretation of the eventual push towards community empowerment was that the 2008 financial crisis had forced the government to adopt austerity measures. Market failure, downsizing of local government resources and pressure to spend more on social services motivated the government to offload the maintenance of public assets and devolve the running of community programmes to the people to reduce cost. Scottish organisations we visited that expressed such a critical view therefore work with communities to ensure that they are not stepping in to fill the void left by government, where community organisations end up paying for the maintenance of services that local authorities had funded. They pointed out that if communities were interested in taking over a public asset, they had to be careful to take over an actual asset and not liabilities.

Most recently, in 2023, the Scottish government completed a consultation on community wealth building,[10] carrying on the general trend towards community empowerment. This was

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[9] "The case for much stronger local democracy is founded on the simple premise that it is fundamentally better for decisions about these aspirations to be made by those that are most affected by them… Put simply, strong local democracy means putting local people in charge of their own lives, and leaving national government to focus on outcomes for the whole of Scotland, and the rights that all communities should enjoy."

[10] Details on the consultation on community wealth building: https://consult.gov.scot/economic-development/community-wealth-building-consultation/

done because of their interest to "tackle long-standing systemic challenges and structural inequalities in their communities" by "enabling more local communities and people to own, have a stake in, access and benefit from the wealth their economy generates."[11] This can be seen either as part of the general trend towards more autonomy and agency for communities, or a push in the other direction, termed "new municipalism", where local government does more.

Development Trusts Association Scotland — Community Asset Transfers

https://dtascot.org.uk/

Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS) was established in 2003 and has over 350 community development trusts as members. A community development trust is a community-owned and led organisation, working to combine community-led action with an enterprising approach to address and tackle local needs and issues. The aim of a community development trust is to create social, economic, and environmental renewal in a defined geographical area, creating wealth within that area and keeping it there. Development trusts can be incorporated as a company limited by guarantee and is governed as a charity.

As an association, DTAS informs, supports and represents this network of development trusts, facilitating the sharing of knowledge and expertise and encouraging co-operation and mutual learning, for example, by bringing newly minted ones to visit their more established peers. DTAS Chief Executive, Pauline Smith shared that a lot of the boards feel unqualified to lead because they feel that they are just community members. The value of bringing them together is to "help them realise that lots of people feel the same way." DTAS has 20 employees over three teams. They engage the volunteer boards to see what they need and offer directors' training. They also act as "critical friends" for the board or help the chairs of organisations in their leadership role. DTAS staff are generalists, but they will assist in finding expertise required by development trusts.

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[11] Scotland's cities and regions for community wealth building: https://www.gov.scot/policies/cities-regions/community-wealth-building/

DTAS staff sharing with the participants.

To support **Community Asset Transfers** of the Act, DTAS runs a community ownership service. This ensures that when a community wants to purchase property for community use, it takes on assets and not liabilities, especially when such infrastructure could be derelict or in need of substantial renovation. For example, if a city council's budget is reduced and the upkeep of community facilities or other development projects are taking a toll, the council may look to sell these buildings. When sold to private entities, these buildings may be torn down for real estate development or other commercial purposes, and the historical heritage or community value would be lost. They could be spaces previously used for weddings, funerals, and other community activities. The Community Empowerment Act creates a framework for community ownership of these public assets.

Other key policies like the Land Reform Act 2003 and the Scotland Land Fund are critical for community ownership. Features like the Community Right to Buy — a legal framework established by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act of 2003 — paved the way for communities to own asset and land, such that underutilised or abandoned land areas would be utilised and repurposed for community benefit. The cornerstone of the Community Right to Buy is found in Part 2 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. This provision empowers local communities to form community bodies, enabling them to register an interest in acquiring local land. (See Register of Community Interest in Land[12]). While legislation enables communities the pre-emptive right to buy land, they will need to demonstrate that at least 10 per cent of "eligible voters" in their communities are supportive. Once an interest is registered, the landowner is bound by the obligation to offer the land for sale to the community body before considering other potential buyers.[13]

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[12] See Scotland's register of community interests in land: https://www.ros.gov.uk/our-registers/register-of-community-interests-in-land

[13] See guide on community right to buy: https://www.andersonstrathern.co.uk/insights/a-guide-to-the-community-right-to-buy-in-scotland/

In addition, many organisations that successfully acquired land from the local councils were heavily supported by the Scotland Land Fund. The development trust governance structure offered a way for community groups to manage large amounts of money in an accountable manner. In Scotland, there is a long history of self-organising, where people will go door to door to seek support from members of their community. However, DTAS plays a key role in navigating policies and funding for such development trusts, which often start with a group of volunteers or a charity who care a lot about a piece of land or building. In this sense, the government is willing to not just to cede power, but also fund it.

Scottish Community Alliance — Community Learning Exchange

https://scottishcommunityalliance.org.uk/about/

The Scottish Community Alliance (SCA) is a "network of networks" with the purpose of campaigning collectively for a stronger and more cohesive community sector in Scotland. It is a coalition of community-based national networks and intermediaries, each one representing a different aspect of Scotland's diverse community sector. While each is different in terms of their specific interests and areas of specialist knowledge, they all share a commitment to the principles of community empowerment and subsidiarity.[14] They regard the "community sector" to be different, sitting alongside the voluntary/charity sector and social enterprise movement as an equally important part of a broad third sector. They estimate that around 30,000 groups and organisations form the community sector, making it the largest part of Scotland's third sector.

Angus Hardie, Director of SCA (also former Executive Director of DTAS) pointed out that the SCA was always intended to be a small organisation. Their purpose was not to develop the agenda of work the way that DTAS does, but just to help the networks do their work. They provide opportunities for networks to come together and be more than the sum of their parts. If there is consultation from government, they would consolidate feedback from the networks. In other words, the Alliance is not trying to deliver significant services, but to provide a "coherent view of the sector".

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[14] See Scottish Community Alliance, 2023 Our Vision for Scotland. https://scottishcommunityalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/SCA001_The-Vision_8pp_A4_S5_V2.pdf

Angus Hardie, Director of SCA (also former Executive Director of DTAS).

For example, they provide input on the current Community Wealth Building Bill that is on the Scottish government's agenda. Angus explained that with worldwide shifts towards democratising the economy due to the failure of global capitalism, the Bill focuses on bringing the power of the public purse into local economy to create resilient local economies. This includes how local government spends money, carries out procurement, provides fair work employment within communities across Scotland, and enables inclusive ownership of land and properties so that communities can own and finance companies.

Angus pointed out that in the early years, development trusts would often step in when the private and public sectors could not provide solutions. He noted that things have since changed, and community development trusts are not just "plugging the gaps" but actively doing positive things. He added that the community sector should not be defined as merely as a subsidiary to the state or market, but as a significant and valuable sector on its own.

The SCA runs a [community learning exchange](#) that encourages collaboration and partnerships across the community sector, by offering accessible funding that supports community groups in sharing resources and peer learning. This is about groups coming together to share learning and the programmes administrator shared that this is a relatively small grant but has significant impact because it encourages the community to help itself and collaborate more meaningfully and practise mutual support.

Scottish Community Development Council — Participatory Budgeting and Participation Requests

https://www.scdc.org.uk/

The Scottish Community Development Council (SCDC) is the lead body for community development in Scotland. Its stated vision is to have an active, inclusive and just Scotland where their communities are strong, equitable and sustainable. The council works directly with community groups and organisations, community development practitioners, government and other policymakers.

SCDC delivers large-scale programmes across Scotland to help build the capacity of the community sector, support public agencies to work effectively with communities and to widen participation in local democracy. SCDC's Deputy Director David Allan, Development Manager Laura Macdonald and Policy and Research Officer Andrew Paterson hosted us and explained that the organisation was a partnership between Glasgow University and the Community Development Council.

Group photo with the Scottish Community Development Council.

SCDC engages in intermediary work at various levels to support community development in Scotland, and work with policymakers to inform government policies or local planning and regeneration strategies. They work with communities to have their voices heard and provide practice development training and guidance to those who are working with communities including government and non-government organisations. They are funded through a range of grants or commissioned programmes, with a small amount of funding from the Scottish government. They characterise their organisation as independent but enjoying a good relationship with the government, and they can be critical when they need to. A major part of their work is providing research, training and consultancy services, and they offer support to organisations that are interested to implement participatory budgeting and participation requests.

Participatory budgeting

David Allan gave a quick overview of how participatory budgeting (PB) first emerged from Brazil, then to Europe and spreading around the world, including large-scale PB in New York that uses 10 per cent of its municipal budget. Since 2014, PB in Scotland include small grants PB (i.e., local organisations running PB processes) and mainstream PB (i.e., mainly local authorities on municipal budgets with at least 1 per cent of the budget under agreement with Scottish government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, or COSLA). In 2018 the Scottish government earmarked £1.75 million for the Community Choices Fund,[15] for local

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[15] News on the Community Choices Fund: https://www.gov.scot/news/community-choices-fund/

groups to run their own PB projects. More recently, there has been a greater focus on climate justice and just transition in Northeast Scotland, with the commitment of a £10 million-investment comprising £1 million a year on "green PB".

PB in Scottish schools uses Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). PEF resources provide guidance on integrating PB into school improvement plans, fostering democratic decision-making among parents and pupils. Led by community learning and development practitioners, PB initiatives aim to promote equity, family engagement, and learner participation in budgeting decisions.

There is a **national strategy to mainstream PB**, with efforts and advances made by the National Strategic Group that comprises national government, local authorities and community groups. The Group developed a PB Charter that set out what fair and high-quality PB process should look like. The [PB Scotland](#) website provides a resource hub for those interested to implement PB. David Allan shared that while they have met the 1 per cent target overall across the Local Scottish authorities, it is hard to say how much is really PB because some are not. David said the real value of PB is in its ability to empower. "If you feel like you had a say in how the budget was spent," it is more likely to be proper PB, he noted. David also shared that "people have been disengaged from local democracy and now we are trying to reengage them." Instead of appointing people to represent oneself in a representative democracy, PB is a form of direct democracy, a means of addressing low voter turnout for local elections, and a way to re-engage people.

SCDC's role is to develop good practice in PB. They do not disburse funds but supports PB in principle and in practice. They run the PB Scotland website to provide learning opportunities and training, and to highlight case studies of PB work in Scotland. They also co-developed the PB Charter and a supporting code of practice and guidebook — that has no legislative power — to outline what good PB should look like. SCDC also holds PB conferences where they attract a good mix of local groups and projects, practitioners and funders, including those at government level, those already running projects, and those who are just interested and curious to learn more.

David shared that the PB charter was drafted to create inclusivity and avoid the tyranny of the majority. There is a general worry that PB may be divisive because different groups tend to put their ideas against one another. Some also worry about the process becoming a "beauty contest" where people rope in their friends to vote even though the project is not that useful, and that such projects get passed because the group can rally a lot of friends. Effort needs to be made to ensure that vulnerable groups or minorities are represented in the process.

However, his experience supporting the community groups running PB processes is that these groups tend to be inclusive. David said some groups are already very well acquainted with the ground; this is apparent when they can get the word out to the larger community to ensure representation. In his estimation, "99 per cent [of] PB process is done up and fair and 1per cent is not done well." In general, communities have also managed disappointment on their own when their ideas are not selected, without the authorities having to step in. The process is almost "self-correcting" as the community groups know what to do. Davide added that the process would often end up being an opportunity for networking rather than polarisation.

When asked how resource-intensive it is to facilitate and implement a PB process, David explained that more training was required in the early days, but now that communities are equipped, having templates and frameworks suffice. However, relatively little support does not

mean no support is required at all; some funding is required to make this happen, as is the case for all other types of community engagement exercises. Now, SCDC also engages in international work; for instance, SCDC staff Francesca Lynch has participated in [People Powered](#), a global hub for participatory democracy where citizens' assemblies learn and contribute to development in Brazil, Paris, Portugal, Barcelona, New York and Ireland.

Participation requests

Part of Community Empowerment Act enables communities to request to participate in decisions and processes that are aimed at improving outcomes. It gives community groups more say over how services are designed. Any group can potentially make such requests to start a conversation with a public body on how to improve services. There are no strict criteria and any group that has an interest can make a request. Groups do not have to be formally constituted, but they must be not-for-profit and be able to show that they are open to members of the community joining their group. Nevertheless, not many are informal groups and most that do make requests are from formal organisations.

Requests are framed in terms of how a service could be improved, with a focus on what the longer-term outcomes should be rather than on a specific concrete action. For example, the request should be framed in terms of "educational improvement" instead of "longer hours for library," or "I want a safer neighbourhood," or "I want to see more police officers patrolling." This makes sense because there may be more than one way to achieve the intended benefit. A group must state exactly what they want to improve in a longer term. Participatory requests do not need the group requesting to run the service themselves, as it could also be a discussion on how to do it.

David shared that public service authorities are required to report participation requests received and their outcomes transparently, but this has so far been inconsistent. The public sector also has mixed feelings about participation requests; some agencies are supportive and welcome them, but others may feel that receiving one constitutes some kind of failure on their part. No capacity building or extra resources were given to public bodies to do this, so when the Community Empowerment Act was enacted, certain public service bodies did not necessarily know how to engage the community. For example, public service bodies like the traffic or parking authorities did not historically conduct community engagement so they do not know how to do this well.

A public body has 30 days to decide whether to grant it or not, and 45 days if you have included more than 1 public body in the request. The public body must agree to engage your group unless there is good reason. If some other group wants to be part of the process, the public body has the responsibility to involve them as well. An agreement to engage is just the start, not a guarantee of positive outcomes. Once they have agreed, an "outcomes improvement process" starts. Meetings between representatives of the public body and the community are conducted and the process varies in terms of how long it takes.

Currently, there have been fewer than 100 requests made since 2017, and within that only half were granted. Part of the reason is that participation requests are still quite obscure and not well known to the Scottish people. Most of these have been made by Community

Councils[16] and run by people who are older, have a higher capacity, and are quite well-connected and organised. There are relatively few applications from vulnerable groups.

SCDC supports participation requests by creating resource packs and workshops done to raise awareness, especially amongst vulnerable groups. Public bodies tend to use legalistic language that can be difficult for laypersons to understand. SCDC focuses on improving accessibility through easy-to-read versions using plain English, supportive graphics and "jargon buster" glossary. Easy-to-read versions break down information to short simple sentences for people with learning disabilities and impairments, and they also have braille and narratives in audio with multiple languages. Such resource packs are also used by public bodies that want to better understand the process.

SCDC also offers consultations to help groups make those requests. They start by considering whether those groups should be the ones making those requests, considering other participation processes in the public sector, and determine whether requests are being made to the right public body. They also manage expectations about the timeframe and share case studies written by communities. This process encourages groups to think about who should be involved, whether there are alternative ways they can go about achieving their desired outcomes, and even help them envision what success looks like.

Supported by the Scottish government, the SCDC also runs the [Scottish Co-production Network](#) to share case studies and stories of co-production from across Scotland. According to David, SCDC has been trying to strengthen the process because public bodies lack capacity. David shared that participation requests are supposed to empower communities but some authorities "have not really let go of that power as well", so some of them feel like it is not meaningful participation and do it in a tokenistic manner. As a result, some communities that participate also feel that the authorities "still have the final say".

Many public bodies also do not engage in a productive co-creation process with communities. For example, when community groups fill up participation request forms badly, the public body should follow-up by supporting their intent, but currently many of them simply reject the requests. SCDC wonders whether some corrective measure can be written into the legislation so that it is harder to reject such requests. They also think that an appeal mechanism is important so that rejected requests go up to the Scottish government for review. (There is current an appeals mechanism for Community Asset Transfers described in the previous section). For public bodies that do this well, there should also be some recognition or credit going to them.

2. Community Development Trusts and Community Asset Transfers

DTAS brought the participants to visit various local community development trusts and they shared their experience acquiring land or buildings through the Community Asset Transfer

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[16] Details on community councils: https://www.communitycouncils.scot/what-is-a-community-council

process, as well as their own creative approaches to community-led development. (See video https://youtu.be/RFOIqj5LQX0)

Action Porty / Bellfield (Old Church Building)

https://www.bellfield.scot/about-action-porty

Action Porty grew out of a campaign to save the former Portobello Old Parish Church building for community use. After a long community consultation and mobilisation process, Action Porty's purchase of the building for the community became the first successful urban community right to buy in the country. People rallied, signed petitions and raised funds to buy the building from the Church of Scotland and to save it from being given up to a private developer for housing and potentially from being demolished. The refurbished church was renamed Bellfield after it was acquired in September 2017. After essential repairs and maintenance were carried out, Bellfield was opened to the public in June 2018 as a community hub. It now plays host to a range of classes, activities, community meetings and events, concerts, performances, children's parties, and other social gatherings. They have four paid staff, their anchor tenant is the Edinburgh Youth Theatre, and the space is also rented to many smaller groups as a multipurpose hub for events and classes.

Former Portobello Old Parish Church.

At Action Porty's first public meeting in April 2016, over 70 people attended and generated many ideas. At the time, the group was called "Friends of Bellfield". They subsequently set up Action Porty as company limited by guarantee and then applied for the Scottish Land Fund. Action Porty was a membership company; led by and accountable to the local community. The support for its objectives was so strong that when it started, it recruited 340 members in four days.

They subsequently studied what services and facilities were already available and engaged potential tenants and users to ask what facilities they needed. They were conscious that there was already a community centre, but the community felt that they could do with more facilities. An open day was organised where the community came to vote on the ideas, but voting was

also possible for residents to do though the post. They needed physical signatures to demonstrate that their proposal had community support. The petition to demonstrate community support was signed by 1,500 people, making up 25 per cent of Portobello's registered voters. They then had eight months to raise funds. They opened the space in 2018 so the whole process took 18 months.

Action Porty is now a "Community Benefit Society", much like Singapore's charity status, so that they can run a community share issue to partially fund the redevelopment of Bellfield, specifically to revamp the celebration foyer. Action Porty has since gone beyond saving the building and wants to organise as a community to better recognise and meet their needs, challenges and opportunities. To this end, Action Porty is in the process of becoming a Development Trust, to better advance community development, urban regeneration, environmental protection and relief of those in hardship.

Our hosts at Bellfield told us that community work is about the big picture but also all the small details. They recognised that Bellfield is not the building, because the people are the community, but they also appreciate that the space is important. There are people who have used the space for a long time, e.g., from a 77-year-old resident who attended the church since she was 12 to young families with children, and young people who exercise and participate in social activities.

Cranhill Development Trust

https://cranhilldt.org.uk/

Cranhill's primary charitable aims are to promote resilience, tackle poverty and address social exclusion through a holistic range of programmes, opportunities and events. Their programme includes employability and welfare support, health and well-being activities (e.g., community gardening), and learning and development that provide certificated courses and volunteer opportunities. They also run a post office in their community centre. The trust has continued to evolve and seek out new opportunities — such as participatory budgeting — to encourage, support and enable the local community to become active citizens, empowered to have a voice and involvement in the decision-making process for services in the community.

Their funding comes from the Scottish government and Glasgow City Council but also from philanthropists, banks and charitable organisations. They have a total of 27 funders, and a big part of the job is to apply for funds and report.

Cranhill Development Trust.

Cranhill engaged in participatory budgeting five years ago, funded by the city council. They brought community together and had people put forth their budgets along with their ideas in an event, where people then voted on the ideas. There was a limited amount of money that applicants could ask for, and the ideas that were funded were small-scale projects for a dance group, a music group and a community clean-up. However, they also tried to broker with different groups so that everyone could get something, by negotiating with some to propose lower budgets because of limited funds. Eventually, some funding was distributed to most of the applicants, but some unfunded ideas were also taken up by other organisations. Cranhill felt that the PB exercise was very successful because it brought a lot of the community members together.

Granton Community Growers

https://www.grantoncommunitygardeners.org/

Granton Community Growers is a community-led charity that creates and cultivates community gardens, hosts community meals and events, and supports anyone in the area who wants to grow food. They are situated in an impoverished community with residents in social housing, so their focus is on how best to make sure everyone in their community is fed well. Currently they provide community meals (lunch and dinner) weekly for 70 people. They also have a bakery (using wheat that is harvested from their plots) that provides an affordable and accessible source of healthy bread, sold on a pay-what-you-can-afford basis. There is space for families to rear chickens (i.e., 14 families contribute chicken feed and are rostered to look after the hens once per week in exchange for 12 eggs), a cooking club, parent-child activities and a free shop. They attract about 600 visits a month and people can come and take what they want from the gardens and the shop. In general, Granton is also a space for the community to hang out and talk to one another.

More broadly, Granton seeks to support the advancement of a well-functioning community in Granton by creating opportunities for people to meet around fresh local produce (i.e., growing,

cooking and eating) and by supporting those who take initiative on this to advance their education and skills. They also promote environmental improvement, including protecting and increasing biodiversity, by creatively imagining the best uses for their open spaces, and by caring for these spaces, particularly the community gardens. The organisation grew organically through word of mouth and started with only volunteers; now they have two part-time staff.

Lisa Houston from Granton Community Gardeners.

Granton started as an initiative to make use of street corner plots to plant edible food. These street corners were looked after by residents who lived near the plot. This was entirely self-organised, and plots soon grew from five to 12. Eventually, the local council offered the current site in 2017 and later used the Community Empowerment Act to do a Community Asset Transfer in 2020. What was very useful in kickstarting the process was a grant from the Scottish Land Fund — to first make a business plan that was then sent it to the local council. An additional grant from the Scottish Land Fund was used to pay the council for the asset cost — which was below market price — and pay staff and other legal fees. The asset is owned in perpetuity by the charity, and they report to funders and the charity regulator. There are no reporting requirements from the council.

Some of our study trip participants noted how different Granton's community garden feels when compared to Singapore's fenced-up allotment style. It is entirely open and many of the items in the garden, like tables, stools and benches, are built by the volunteers because they wanted to do it. The trip participants asked questions like "Do the garden items or fruits get stolen? How does the government trust that you will use the land for community purposes?" Their response is that while they are run as a charity and have governance processes and a board that keeps them accountable, their neighbours would be the first to keep them in check if they did not serve community needs.

Before they started selling boxes of fresh vegetables, they did a survey to find out how much people would pay for them. They found that neighbours were willing to pay more for their share to help others, and being in solidarity could be more powerful than seeking economic benefits. It is this solidarity amongst the community that has resulted in their success. Next door to the Granton's community garden is a £2 million community centre building run by the local council,

with many facilities. However, our hosts tell us that the community do not see that as a welcoming space, and people who go there are seen as "poor people" whereas residents can simply come to their garden to have a chat. In their own calculation, they would much prefer a garden that costs very little.

Heart of New Haven (Former School Premises)

https://heartofnewhaven.co.uk/About.php

Heart of New Haven is a charity that acquired the former Victoria Primary School in Newhaven from the City of Edinburgh Council through a Community Asset Transfer in August 2022, with funding from the Scottish Land Fund. DTAS helped them with the process and referred them to other groups they could learn from. As they are a new group, they were careful not to duplicate services and went out of their way to meet people with similar goals. They also learned from other long-standing charities. They have since developed the former school into an intergenerational community hub. They seek to help people experience, share and exchange culture and heritage, engage in formal and informal learning and develop business and enterprise skills in an accessible and welcoming environment that contributes to the positive well-being of their community.

Participants attending a Victorian class.

They have regular tenants (i.e., artists/creatives) in the rooms who help to cover the operational costs. They also have a childcare centre and offer space for meetings and activities. The Heart also set up a "Men's Shed" for men to meet and connect with one another by engaging in carpentry. It is a place of support and friendship, where men can work on their own practical projects or together on projects for the local community. Heart of New Haven wants to use their space for intergenerational activities, as the community has older people and young families. Their aim is to help older people who are socially isolated but also younger people with anxiety by using creative pursuits and keeping them away from addiction issues and keeping them in school. They also make efforts in organise taxis for people with mobility issues to come to the centre. Currently, they carefully manage the space amongst different

tenants and groups because there are activities that are noisy (e.g., basketball for youths) and others that require quiet space (e.g., for seniors).

Lanark Community Development Trust

https://lanarktrust.co.uk/

The Lanark Community Development Trust was founded in 2009 with the vision of creating a revitalised town centre and creating a destination and an experience for visitors. They created trails, improved signage in and around Lanark (e.g., welcome signs, high street banners), spruced up the train station, and brought trade and shopping to the town centre. Observing that the local council was the owner of the carpark but did not have the money to look after it, they took over and opened it up as space for a farmers' market. They also developed a horticultural and educational centre and commissioned the Clydesdale Horse Statue at Lanark Market.

Sylvia Russell, Chairman of Lanark Community Development Trust.

They also applied for government regeneration funding to restore derelict buildings and unused space. For example, at Castlebank Park, they redeveloped a derelict tractor shed and sawmill into a training centre and community hub. They renovated and repurposed a tennis court for horticultural use and provided space for community gardeners to generate income. They have also tapped Community Service Order youths to help with the hard labour.

Some of these initiatives were more ambitious and others quite small, but our hosts reflected that building community often involved "doing many small things well".

Southwest Arts and Music Project (Youth Work)

https://www.swampglasgow.co.uk/

SWAMP is a Community Development Trust that started with a focus on using arts and creativity to engage in youth work. It was founded in 1986 as an arts charity for youth, with "just a few guys with a guitar in community centre." The founders started it to attract youths who were at risk of addiction and crime, and it never had a problem attracting young people through the arts, music or film because it gave the latter an outlet to express themselves. The people behind SWAMP listened to the youths and earned their trust and for many years and they did not have funding.

They are now leasing a refurbished government building and have created a community hub and hope to buy it in an asset transfer. Creative media, digital arts and new technologies remain a mainstay for how they engage youth. They now have funding for accredited training programmes in creative media, where they provide young people with the skills they need to successfully make the life transition from school to employment or further education. They have a music recording room, a jamming studio and an arts room for this purpose. For example, out-of-school youths who do not have much literacy skills get opportunities to make films for charities, and through such projects become more employable. SWAMP's aspiration is to engage youths and get them off the streets, give them positive experiences, and teach them to be confident and communicative.

Group photo with the staff from SWAMP.

While focusing on youth, they have since expanded their scope to engaging the larger community. SWAMP now aspires to "inclusion through creation", working collaboratively with children, young people, older people and communities to achieve social change. Their community centre runs a food bank, thrift shop and woodwork shed, and leases space to a community transport service for people with disabilities who need to visit the hospital or just to go shopping. People can rent space for dance, exercise or meditation, and there is space for seniors and a cafe that plays live music every Friday. They also ensure that their tenant mix includes non-commercial or charity tenants so that families are not turned away because they cannot afford to attend a dance class or other activities.

A few years ago, the youths there led a **youth-organised participatory budgeting** process when the Scottish government had put aside £200,000 for this purpose. The youths planned and implemented the whole the process themselves. The oldest in the group was just 23 years

old. The youths who had experience in the organisation helped to take on leadership roles, and SWAMP only needed to trust, support and guide them. They gave the youths ownership of what they want to do, through discussion and mentoring, and did not need to control their activities. The youth formed into groups, each tasked with delivering a presentation and engaging with additional individuals to garner support. The youths filmed presentations for each of the 18 proposals submitted by organisations, then hosted an event at a cinema where participants engaged in "live" voting for the budget, resulting in over 2,000 votes cast by young people. In retrospect, SWAMP found that everyone who had applied for the PB could be accommodated because they were able to make reasonable budgets.

Our hosts reflected that sometimes organisations like SWAMP are the first positive experience that some young people have. When youths start gaining respect for an organisation, they will show it in their behaviour. The hosts also recounted how the building was once vandalised, and the youths organised to repaint over graffiti without the organisation telling them to do so. Perhaps this concretely expresses what their community hub has become a place "where you want to be, not where you have to be" — their motto emblazoned on their wall.

3. Research Institutes

Edinburgh Futures Institute — Data-Driven Innovation

https://efi.ed.ac.uk/

The Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) undertakes action-oriented research and practice to affect the futures of society, education, health, and democracy. Gemma Cassells (Head of Strategy) and Douglas Graham (Business Engagement and Partnership) hosted the study trip participants group to share about data-driven innovation (DDI). The premise for it is that data is ubiquitous, but a challenge for all organisations are to effectively use data to shape, develop and deliver innovative processes — including new digital products and services — to consumers and citizens. They focus on the use of computation to augment and improve processes and provide insights for decision-making.

Gemma Cassells and Douglas Graham from the Edinburgh Futures Institute.

In 2016, the UK government sponsored science and innovation audits that provided justifications for what universities should specialise in, based on an analysis of their competitive advantage. Edinburgh was in one of the first waves of the audit, and the only from Scotland. It identified DDI as the region's competitive advantage. The UK government then encouraged combining Edinburgh and the South-East Scotland city region deal — a £1.5 billion deal for mostly capital investment in buildings — while DDI is £661 million investment in an innovation initiative. The funding will be disbursed for 10 years till 2028 for a 15-year programme.

It is easier to execute incremental changes, but given the importance of disruptive innovation, EFI first tested "can't fail" services at the university. To do this, EFI had to create alignment with key economic sectors (e.g., fintech, public services, tourism and festivals, infrastructure). They had to do proactive engagement, sometimes with organisations that are new to using technology and data. This requires patience, according to Gemma, as it takes time (about two to three years) for market development work. For example, to create their travel tech cluster, they had to bring together tourism companies and cultural industry with the tech sector to explore challenges. This included hosting, listening, curating and building a knowledge base around what problems are, and by building trust and not just selling solutions.

The work requires multidisciplinary collaboration, mapping problems, understanding opportunities and increasing capacity before getting to innovation. It also requires reaching out to the many academic schools and departments in the university that have generally worked in silos. A lot of co-creation and design techniques are applied, with training and support to increase capacity and broaden the sense of what an entrepreneurial mindset is. Put simply, EFI helps external partners and internal schools to collaborate. As it is difficult to get people to conduct multidisciplinary research and work with multi-stakeholder groups, EFI has had to play a hybrid role as academic research and professional services provider. It bridged academic and practitioner expertise and found common language between the two. They also had to invest in human capital to navigate the space and build trust between partners. Gemma also noted the value of adopting the role of a "critical friend" to government by highlighting gaps in policy or programmes.

For the university to sustain financial viability beyond the city region deal, they had to look to investment from partner companies and thus develop value-added services and business models. The surplus from revenue-generating activities is used for community, third-sector or public projects (given that public sector funding usually cannot commit to long-term funding and depend on yearly budgets). They also leverage students as change agents in a 12-week intensive course where students from different disciplines work on public sector challenges. Students love such challenges, and it is a useful way to brand a university to attract talented candidates and develop long-term partnerships with key stakeholders. In general, there is benefit for the university beyond financial reward, as it creates differentiated student experiences and establishes better relationships with communities and partners.

Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change — Research-Practice Collaborations and Place-Based Approaches

https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/robertowencentre/

Housed within the University of Glasgow, the centre focuses on developing tools that promote system change within educational institutions and across educational practices to enhance attainment and build educational equity. They have established Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland (CNS), a placed-based approach to support children and youths from disadvantaged communities and Network for Social and Educational Equity (NSEE).

The Robert Owen Centre engages in significant **research-practice collaborations** to address childhood poverty and educational inequities. The impetus for this was the shared recognition and urgency of need for new and radical approaches to support families in response to pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, which local government cannot do alone. Partnerships with universities allowed researchers to create an in-depth, real-time understanding of the problems, which then supported the co-creation and implementation of research-informed work. Researchers are deeply involved in a programme with public bodies and local communities. They enhance and support learning, reflection and knowledge mobilisation through toolkits, case studies and reviews. In this way, they also help create a common vocabulary so that different groups understand one another enough to be able to address a problem as complex as child poverty. Beyond that, there is also the use of metaphors that contribute to a shared logic and understanding. Aside from knowledge work, there is a lot of relationship building, so that the process can move from a transactional ethos to a more relational ethos that facilitates system-wide collaboration.

Magriet Cruywagen sharing with the participants.

Magriet Cruywagen explained how research-practice collaborations can make a meaningful and evaluable contribution to tackle child poverty in Glasgow. See video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rp2QG2mzCOk

The rationale for adopting a **place-based approach** to poverty is because there are differences in social and education issues faced by different neighbourhoods. The community assets also differ, based on the characteristics of the city council, private corporations, third-sector organisations and the locals themselves. A place-based approach helps to create a common agenda, a shared understanding of the issue, and an agreed approach to tackle problems.

Professor Chris Chapman shared how the CNS creates equal opportunities for disadvantaged young people, reducing poverty and increasing participation and capacity within the community. He also discussed the importance of data-sharing and transparency, and how CNS uses a collective-impact approach to work with local people and organisations in the communities. See video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z66d5hSMdKc

4. Common Ground Against Homelessness — Community Shares
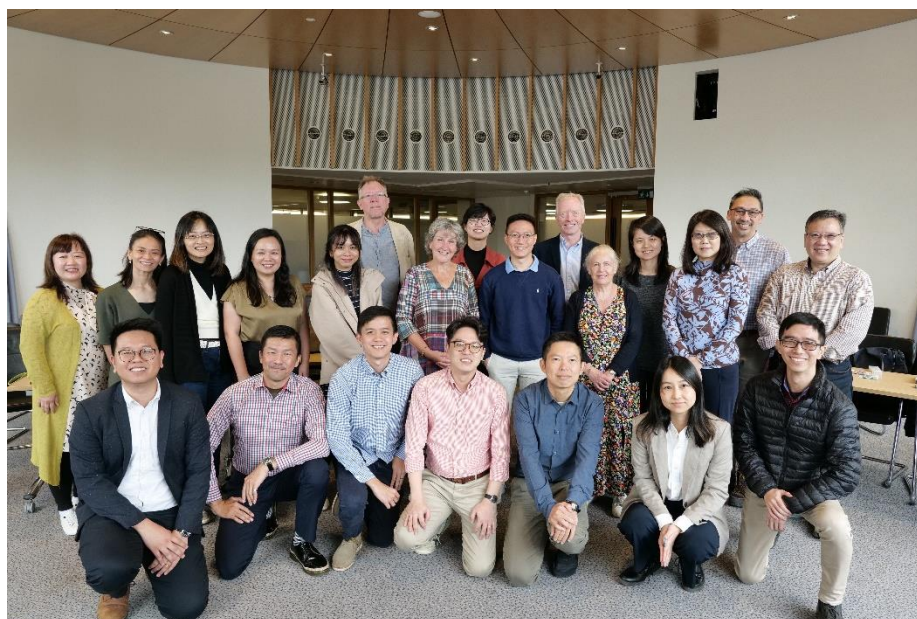
https://www.commongroundagainsthomelessness.org/

According to Helen Carlin, founder of Common Ground Against Homelessness (CGAH), Edinburgh has 4,000 homeless households and 7,500 Ukrainian refugees. She makes a distinction between "**poverty homelessness**" and "complex" or "chronic homelessness". The former is made up of the working poor or even a sandwiched middle class that do not receive the government's Department of Social Security (DSS) housing benefit. An estimated 75 per

cent of homeless people fall into this category. Landlords also often discriminate and refuse to rent to people receiving DSS benefits. She pointed out research by Danny Dorling[17] showing that Edinburgh has 17 per cent of its population living in social housing — compared to the national average of 25 per cent — but with housing increasingly being privatised and sold for profit, such housing is becoming inaccessible to the poor.

Complex homelessness, on the other hand, is due to drug and alcohol problems — and faced by people who repeatedly cycle through the police, courts and social services because they get picked up off the streets, get referred to a shelter and get kicked out for bad behaviour. Helen estimated about 5 per cent of 4,000 homeless households are complex cases with comorbidity of issues like drug and alcohol abuse.

CGAH focuses on providing home tenancy for this specific group. It was created to buy properties on behalf of charities working with the homeless, so that those charities can focus on service delivery instead of securing accommodation. They would identify a suitable property, raise funds from investors to buy and convert it to housing to address those facing repeat homelessness. CGAH believes that frontline charities are innovators in creating environments that work for people and keep them off the streets, whether they are helping people recover from drug and alcohol dependence or escape domestic violence or other problems. It believes that such innovation can only happen when the charity is able to do its work without needing to find ever-increasing amounts of money to pay rising rents. This allows charities concentrate on what they do best, i.e., supporting their clients and leaving the property management to CGAH.

Group photo with the founders of Common Ground Against Homelessness.

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[17] Danny Dorling website: https://www.dannydorling.org/

CGAH's financing uses a mix of community shares, philanthropic donations and government funding. By leveraging on **community shares**,[18] CGAH pools resources by bringing together a community of ethical investors who understand that their money can do good, while earning a competitive interest rate. They use a platform called Ethex (https://www.ethex.org.uk/) for this purpose. The first project they funded this way was for a charity called Rowan Alba for its Peffermill residence. The model works this way: CGAH identifies a property and raises capital where investors buy shares. The shares are sold with a 5 per cent interest rate for Peffermill residents (which Helen indicated was a good return at the time). Local government pays the housing benefit accruing to the homeless to charities like Rowan Alba, which offers accommodation and services to the homeless. Rent charged to Rowan Alba are pegged to local housing allowances to ensure affordability. Rowan Alba then pays affordable plus 5 per cent to CGAH to lease their homes for 30 years. CGAH uses that money to pay off the bank loan and other operating costs (e.g., auditing expenses). The rest goes into a pot that is then used to pay investors for their principal and interest. Therefore, CGAH rental rates are "fair market rates" determined by the average cost of housing instead of inflated rates designed for profit, and they take on the role of an "ethical landlord".

According to Helen, housing associations are CGAH's "competitors" in this space but the former "do not do the real work of putting a roof on top people's head." In fact, housing associations commodify housing for profit and are antithetical to CGAH's mission.

Its first share offer closed with over £710,000 in investment. The rest of the project costs came from bank loans (£500,000) and grants (£200,000). When CGAH launched its community shares, the organisation was shocked at the amount of community support that came with the investment. It believes this is democratised giving, with 111 of 205 shareholders investing £1,000 or less, totalling £73,000. While it was legally an investment, some people who bought the shares treated it more as a donation, where those who invested did so out of solidarity and not returns.

Through this model, CGAH did not have to create all sorts of conditions and requirements for those facing complex homelessness to receive support. Instead, it acknowledged that some complex issues like addictions may be so intractable that they may never be overcome. Therefore, their stance to the homeless persons they help is this: "Come as you are, stay as long as you like." They provide tenants full tenancy for the rest of their lives and provide two live-in support staff. Some study trip participants reflected that this approach was inspiring to them because regardless of who the tenant is or what their needs are, they are first provided a home and not forced to improve their lot or have the charity "fix them". Instead of a "redemptive model" of change that is "desperate to move people on", it focuses on acceptance, care and respect where they acknowledge that people are all experts of themselves. According to Helen, the problem of homelessness is not complicated in that "we do not have enough homes". However, she also recognised that for complex homelessness, a housing-first policy and simply putting "a roof over people's heads is not enough" and a slew of support services are required.

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[18] "We Are Common Ground," published by commongropundagainsthomeless.org: https://communitysharesscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/P02S21-Common-Ground-Against-Homelessness.pdf

While the participants were inspired by the work, they also had mixed feelings about the cost. There was a huge investment outlay from the community and the government, plus bank loans to buy and refurbish buildings for just nine people. This sounds expensive, but CGAH's research also shows that when you got it right for homeless people who were cycling through the courts and social service system, you were saving the public purse £3 for every £1 invested in their programme.[19] The "impact statement" used by CGAH then became more compelling, but the participants still questioned its applicability in the Singapore context.

Helen also reflected that, "The homeless are not the problem; the way society treats them is the problem." She encouraged participants to pull themselves away from theory, accept that we are all experts in ourselves, listen to the people that we are trying to help, and trust that they are the experts in themselves too. She noted that too much of policy are produced by people in privilege, who may not understand the needs on the ground. "I've worked in policy and worked in practice," she said, "and you can only work on policy for so long before you start spouting kibble, because you're too far from the ground." She said too many people pontificate about the problem from afar and encouraged the participants to speak to tenants to understand their real needs. Francis Barkey, who sits on the CGAH board, used to be a property developer and reflected that "developers tend to build from the outside in" — due to commercial interest. Instead, "we need to build from the inside out," he noted, to understand clients' lifestyles and aspirations. For example, knowing that some of their residents will punch walls out of frustration helped determined the type of construction materials they would use.

[19] Duncan Wallace, "'From the pits to the Ritz!' — External Evaluation of Thorntree," December 2019, https://rowanalba.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Thorntree-External-Evaluation-Report-in-full.pdf

BROADER INSIGHTS

1. Sharing power builds power.

When the authorities consider sharing power with the people, the assumption is that sharing power is a zero-sum game, i.e., if I share power, then I lose power. However, our academic and community hosts in Scotland have found that sharing power is a generative exercise that creates capacity and legitimacy that were not there before. It activates different parts of the community to tackle issues and develop initiatives that were not possible before, when people were not empowered or engaged. For example, participatory budgeting helped to create social capital ad trust amongst the community. The worry that this pits groups against others was unfounded. Community asset transfers also allowed community groups to take on figurative and literal ownership of spaces that they can repurpose for community use.

2. The community sector should be taken seriously as a site of serious economic activity.

The third sector is commonly regarded as a "cost centre" for a nation, where the state administrates the country, the markets make the money, and charities simply take donations. Angus Hardie of the Scottish Community Alliance described the community sector this way: "We are patronised, but we are not taken as a main game." Some of our Scottish hosts told us that after the enactment of the Community Empowerment Act, the whole community sector was taken more seriously and acquired a larger profile because community empowerment became a national priority.

As we have observed, community-owned enterprises like development trusts can engage in serious economic activity. The community that manages Bellfield told us they were nervous managing sums amounting to £1 million for a small community of their size. Other development trusts have partnered with energy companies to set up wind farms where proceeds go to community wealth-building, so the economic activity of these local development trusts can be significant.

3. Economic activity should be subservient to local community needs.

The economic activities engaged by these community groups are typically subservient to community needs. For example, once a wind farm is set up, the development trust does not go around the country trying to "scale up" wind farms. Instead, they focus on what else their local community might need, and may set up a library, provide social services or manage a community centre. Their focus is hyper local.

When economic activity is subsidiary to and in service of community needs, it only ever grows to an appropriate size. Increasingly, the government of Scotland and other like-minded nations are realising that their economic system should be designed in service of social well-being and community needs. Instead of focusing on economic growth first and then taxing corporations to address harms to people or planet that were a result of that economic activity, these nations think that the economic system should be designed to promote well-being in the first place — that is, get it right from the get-go. [20]

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[20] Wellbeing Economy Alliance website: https://weall.org/

PARTICIPANTS' INSIGHTS

1. Marie Yeo (Fei Yue Community Services)

Marie highlighted the transformation of facility spaces into community-building and development areas, stating, "We are opening up and re-designing space in some of our facilities to make it welcoming for the community." She noted a shift in perspective, explaining, "Where previously, we looked at space allocated to us in void decks as office spaces and counselling/training rooms solely for agency programmes, we now see them as an opportunity for community building and development." Inspired by Scottish models, the focus is on co-sharing spaces with residents for diverse purposes, such as community gardens and skill-sharing centres. Marie stressed an active shift towards participatory programming, stating, "We are actively creating greater participatory opportunities in our programming by openly inviting staff and residents to champion or co-create solutions to selected causes. For example, prevention of child abuse workgroup in [the] Bukit Batok, Bukit Panjang and Choa Chu Kang [communities]."

2. Paul Goh (Thye Hua Kwan [THK] Moral Charities)

Paul implemented the concept of "participation request" from the Scottish Community Empowerment Act, to engage stakeholders in parent support group meetings, stating, "Instead of a top-down approach, parent leaders were encouraged to suggest initiatives to spur parenting programme attendance." He observed positive outcomes, noting, "We observe that more schools are collaborating with us, and more parents are attending and benefiting from these programmes." Paul also highlighted the Playground Project, inspired by Scottish practices, focusing on using playgrounds to reach diverse families and enhance children's and parents' skills. He explained, "An incubation request was sent to the Future Ready Society @ SUTD. This THK-approved proposal draws on the convenience of playgrounds to reach out to diverse families, especially the vulnerable and multi-stressed." Paul emphasised the project's use of play elements to deliver experiential and fun activities for families, enhancing executive functioning skills for children and parenting skills for parents.

3. Charles Tan (The Majurity Trust)

Charles discussed the Thriving Communities Initiative (TCI), a place-based philanthropic approach inspired by Scottish community-centric methods. He highlighted the initiative's aim to focus charitable resources on specific neighbourhoods for transformative impact, emphasising the role of a facilitator to connect resources and empower community members. Charles expressed, "Inspired by the community-centric approaches in Scotland, we hope to complement our existing giving approach by exploring a different philanthropic strategy focused on place-based giving." He explained, "This involves us going deeply with a few specific neighbourhoods in Singapore, to focus our charitable resources and make a transformative impact." As a private philanthropic organisation, The Majurity Trust's intention is to seed ground-up ideas and projects dynamically, enhancing community well-being in each neighbourhood while providing a platform for local donors to contribute meaningfully to these solutions.

4. Siok Koon Lee (ToteBoard)

The study trip provided invaluable insights into citizen-driven initiatives like participatory budgeting and development trusts in Scotland. Siok Koon from ToteBoard emphasised, "The trip gave us an invaluable opportunity to hear first-hand and understand the challenges and triumphs of the various citizen-driven initiatives." She highlighted a paradigm shift, stating, "To me, it represented a key paradigm shift from 'accountability to the funders' towards 'accountability to the community and beneficiaries.'" Reflecting on this, Siok Koon stressed the role of funding in catalysing community growth and trust. She expressed enthusiasm for exploring participatory budgeting in Singapore, noting, "I am glad that the IPS-LKYCIC-TB team behind the Future-Ready Society Impact Fund and Knowledge Partnership is already exploring the idea of Participatory Budgeting with one of the GRCs in Singapore." Siok Koon reiterated the importance of openness to integrating accountability mechanisms tailored to the needs of the community and beneficiaries.

5. Xin Yu Chua (ToteBoard)

Xin Yu from ToteBoard shared insights from the visit to Edinburgh Futures Institute, where they learned about Scotland's ambition to become the "Data Capital of Europe". Xin Yu emphasised the need for a trusted 3P partnership involving hospitals, universities, schools, government and professional services. As a broad-based funder across sectors, ToteBoard has access to partners across various fields. Xin Yu noted that "TB is exploring whether we can play a role in supporting data-driven innovation and impact measurement across the non-profit ecosystem." Recognising unevenness across sectors in capabilities and resources, ToteBoard is exploring initiatives such as setting up a common knowledge platform, building sector-specific capabilities, and developing common benchmarks for impact measurement. Xin Yu noted that these ideas are still in the exploratory stage and will be shared when they are ready.

IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Community Planning Partnerships and Participation Requests

Public agencies can work together with local communities to design and deliver better services. Community planning partnerships are locality-focused, and there are 32 such partnerships across Scotland for each council area. These partnerships are responsible for producing local outcome improvement plans that cover whole districts and smaller locality plans for smaller areas. Proper community participation lies at the heart of this process and the recognition is that consultation is no longer enough.

Participation requests can also complement a more planned process by allowing citizens and groups to submit requests to public agencies, so that they can co-create better services. Groups making such requests should demonstrate that they have some support for their community, and also allow other groups with similar interests to join in the process.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting, or PB, is a process where a community decides how to spend a part of some public budget.[21] The process can be productive at a locality level, for example, when used by a town council in Singapore to engage its residents in developing ideas, deliberating on them and voting on how the budget is used. A portion of the discretionary budget for estate improvement can be earmarked for this purpose as a social experiment.

Within the locality, the town council could carve out areas where residents can come together to make decisions about common property and amenities — such as playgrounds, fitness corners or community gardens. PB can also be applied for selected projects for which the town council already has plans. We can start with a specific set of blocks or HDB estate within a town council if we can secure the support of a sponsoring Member of Parliament.

Illustrative exemplars: Seniors may propose installing park benches or chairs at void decks or in areas where they often congregate. A student group may suggest having Wi-Fi connection at the void deck where they use as a study area. Sustainability-conscious residents may propose that a rooftop garden be transformed into a food forest that allows foraging. A tech-savvy resident may want to create a digital timebank for neighbourhood use. The process should also include ideas that do not require any *allocation* of the public budget, but simply *permission* to be implemented (toy swops, garage sales, potlucks, volunteer estate clean-ups, etc.), so that residents participate in the design of the communal life in their neighbourhoods.

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[21] The National Youth Council in their Youth Action Plan includes youth representatives on a panel to disburse additional funds above and beyond what the main panel has decided. It considers this "participatory budgeting" although it is closer to participatory grant-making. Participate in Design has also facilitated PB projects in Singapore.

Community-Led Centres

In Singapore, we have functionally segregated our community spaces so that recreational activities are held in community centres and professional social services are operated by social service agencies (SSAs). An unintended consequence is that spaces occupied by SSAs are stigmatised as places where vulnerable people enter to receive professional services or aid. At an SSA, the community is not there except for volunteers invited in for very specific purposes to contribute. What is lost is the community's ability to engage in purposeful and meaningful mutual support when given an opportunity to care about one another's problems.

In the Heart of New Haven, the local community was salvaging old fishing nets, cutting up and dyeing old pieces of clothing in green, then tying them to the nets to make camouflage nets to be sent back to Ukraine so that the refugees among them can literally save lives. In another example, a Ukrainian refugee might be doing some community gardening, and when the locals realise the refugee needs financial or employment support, the person is referred to "this guy at the other end of the building that can help." Such a community centre integrates social services and community life in an organic way and offers opportunities for community to participate in one another's lives meaningfully and purposefully when needed. It may be interesting to see if a community-led centre that combines social service with recreational spaces can better hold all of a communities' joys and sorrows.

Community Development Trusts

In Singapore, we are familiar with social enterprises, which typically specialise in a product or service and will try to grow or move operations to where there is economic opportunity. Community development trusts (CDT) are place-based social enterprises run by the local community to respond to local needs. They are rooted to a locality and the economic activity is more likely to grow only to an appropriate size. In Singapore, these can be registered as a society or a company limited by guarantee, or CLG.

What if we form micro-CDTs that are owned and led by residents of a neighbourhood? Singapore's Community Development Councils are regionally focused and have the mandate to connect and build capacity of communities across five districts. What if the Community Development Council were to start supporting local CDTs to invest in services, programmes or businesses that meet micro-level needs? Local CDTs can even pool resources by raising funds through community shares, which bring us to the next idea.

Community Shares / Social Stock Exchange

A social stock exchange is a platform that lists ready-to-implement solutions so that pathways are built to multiple types of funders to pool support including institutional funders, high-net-worth individuals, crowd funding, etc. It can be structured in terms of loans, grants or shares. Local communities can invest small amounts in a community-owned business, e.g. a parent-led after-school care centre or community development trusts serving their neighbourhood.

This platform can also be developed to encourage more research-practice collaborations or include entities engaged in public service or grassroots innovation. Research centres can be

partnered to curate a wide range of evidence-based or innovative ideas and then incubate them with community partners or public agencies.

Community Learning Exchange and Placed-Based Networks

A fund can be created to encourage mutual learning in the third sector. Small pockets of accessible funding around $1,000 to $3,000 can be made available to SSAs, non-profit organisations and community groups so that they can organise learning journeys or seminars to share knowledge with one another. This can pay the honorarium of an overseas expert to share some insights at virtual seminar on a solution they are thinking about implementing. It can also pay for hosting, venue and refreshments for a local site visit. The administrator of the Scottish Community Learning Exchange impressed upon us the great value of such peer learning, mutual exchange and relationships that were cultivated through very small sums of money.

While there are many issue-based networks focused on issues such as disability, ex-offenders and homelessness, placed-based networks that are based in Yishun, Queenstown, for instance, can be a useful in generating local responses to local issues faced by communities.

See also a presentation of some of these possibilities for community empowerment at the Future-Ready Society Conference in 2023: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tOJJmXuixo

Annex A — Study Trip Participants

S/N	Name	Organisation	Designation	Bio
1	Justin Lee	Institute of Policy Studies	Senior Research Fellow, Head of Policy Lab	Justin is in a policy innovation unit that co-creates solutions with the community; solutions that hopefully have a seed of systemic change in them.
2	Cai Dewei	Institute of Policy Studies	Senior Executive (Public Affairs)	Cai Dewei is Senior Executive at the Institute of Policy Studies, where he assists with events organised by the institute and public affairs matters.
3	King Yu Yen	Institute of Policy Studies	Research Assistant	Yu Yen has been working at IPS Policy Lab for two years, where she has been involved with events in partnership with the Tote Board and pilot projects with community organisations.
4	Samuel Chng	Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University of Technology and Design	Research Fellow	Samuel is Research Fellow and heads the Urban Psychology Lab in the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities (LKYCIC) at the Singapore University of Technology and Design. He is an applied social psychologist, and his research focuses on human behaviour and decisions in cities across a range of areas including mobility, sustainability and well-being (human adaptability and resilience). His work is multidisciplinary and applied in nature, focusing on delivering practical and policy impacts.
5	Suhaila Zainal Shah	Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University of Technology and Design	Research Fellow	Suhaila is Research Fellow at LKYCIC with a strong interest in interdisciplinary and applied social research on technology and society, work and family, social stratification, gender issues,

				intersectional inequalities, and well-being.
6	Lee Siok Koon	Tote Board	Assistant Director (Partnerships and Engagement — Futures)	Siok Koon and Xin Yu are from the Partnerships and Engagement (Futures) team at Tote Board. Tote Board is a grant-making agency that provides resources to the non-profit sector and the community to build a caring and resilient Singapore.
7	Chua Xin Yu	Tote Board	Manager (Partnerships and Engagement — Futures)	Siok Koon and Xin Yu are from the Partnerships and Engagement (Futures) team at Tote Board. Tote Board is a grant-making agency that provides resources to the non-profit sector and the community to build a caring and resilient Singapore.
8	Tan Bee Keow	Singapore Children's Society	Senior Director, Children and Youth Support	Singapore Children's Society is a charitable organisation that protect and nurture children, youth and families in need. Bee Keow is the Lead for Children and Youth Service Group and Youth Development Group of Singapore Children's Society. Bee Keow is also Senior Director for Children and Youth Support and was previously the Senior Director in Youth Service @ Children's Society and Roundbox @ Children's Society. She has more than 15 years of experience working with children and young persons whose social and emotional functioning have been affected due to mental health issues and/or anti-social and offending behaviour. Currently, her focus is on enabling young persons to thrive and achieve their

				potential through positive youth development.
9	Marie Yeo	Fei Yue Community Services	Division Head, Strengthening Families	Fei Yue Community Services is a multi-service social and healthcare agency that aims to effect life transformation for its clients and community. Marie leads its Strengthening Families Division that runs a suite of programmes and services aimed at equipping couples, parents, families to build resilient and thriving relationships.
10	Helen Sim	Fei Yue Community Services	Deputy Director (Strategic Planning & Research)	Helen is a social worker at Fei Yue Community Services, a multi-service non-profit organisation in Singapore. She works closely with the senior management to chart strategic directions for causes championed by the organisation and drives initiatives that promote the use of data in planning and practice.
11	Chester Matthias Tan	Singapore Heritage Society (website under renovation) Heritage Business Foundation	Executive Committee Member (Singapore Heritage Society) Founding Director (Heritage Business Foundation)	Chester leads various heritage sector non-profits. He serves on the executive committee of the Singapore Heritage Society, an independent voice for heritage conservation. He also founded the Heritage Business Foundation to support the sustainability of traditional trades and their practitioners. Chester recently secured six figures in public funding for a community-driven heritage project in central Singapore. Outside of non-profit work, Chester practises as a lawyer and consults for other charities.
12	Charles Tan	The Majurity Trust	Senior Director, Philanthropy	Charles is the Senior Director of Philanthropy at The Majurity Trust (TMT), a philanthropic organisation that works with donors, social impact agencies

				and partners to build a thriving community for all. TMT focuses on addressing unseen needs in Singapore that are less supported such as children mental health, migrant workers and dementia. He oversees fundraising, grant stewardship, research and TMT Labs.
13	Benjamin Seow	Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth	Senior Manager (SG Partnerships Office)	Benjamin is from the Singapore Government Partnerships Office at the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. The office spearheads the Singapore Together movement, which is the government's commitment to deepen partnership with Singaporeans. It catalyses partnerships at a national level and provide support for citizen-led action.
14	Lenard Pattiselanno	National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre	Director, Community Leadership and Partnerships	Lenard is Director, Community Leadership and Partnerships, and interim Head of the Centre for Non-Profit Leadership at the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC). NVPC is the steward of the City of Good vision for Singapore, where individuals, organisations and leaders come together to give their best for others. Lenard's portfolio focuses on collective and collaborative leadership, as well as resources, networks, partnerships and projects to enhance the non-profit sector in Singapore.
15	Dennis Kwek	National Institute of Education (NIE), Centre for Research in Pedagogy & Practice (CRPP)	Centre Director & Senior Research Scientist, Centre for Research in Pedagogy & Practice (CRPP), National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore	Dennis is Centre Director (CRPP), Associate Dean and Senior Research Scientist, NIE, with research interests in system studies, policy research, classroom pedagogies, sociology and philosophy of education. He is currently leading NIE's flagship classroom research programme and is keen to develop new

				research partnerships and place/community-based approaches to improving low-income children's learning and engagement.
16	Teng Siao See	National Institute of Education (NIE), Centre for Research in Pedagogy & Practice (CRPP)	Research Scientist	Trained in Sociology, Siao See is Assistant Dean at the National Institute of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, and a researcher working at the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice (CRPP). She has helmed research studies on parental involvement of low-income families with migrant mothers, school-to-work transitions of vocational students, and youths' lived experiences of multiculturalism. She is interested to explore how newer configurations of the social compact in terms of school-community-family partnerships could be developed to bring about social and educational changes for the benefit of disadvantaged students and their families and also for the wider society.
17	Lewin Low	Solve n+1	Project Consultant	Lewin is a consultant with Solve n+1, a community-based management consultancy firm. He partners with corporates, government ministries, non-profits organisations and individuals seeking to co-create impact with communities including the lower income, people with disabilities and migrant workers.
18	Lim Mui Ping	Participate In Design	Assistant Director	Mui Ping is a social designer and illustrator. Her passion for community design and arts saw her leading several key participatory-based works over the years, working alongside grassroot organisations, public agencies and communities, in co-creating design solutions to improve the lives of people.

| 19 | Paul Goh Choon Yong | Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities | Senior Counsellor | Paul uses his counselling and coaching background to deliver evidence-based parenting programmes. He also has more than 20 years of facilitation experience and has conducted youth and other parenting programmes in many schools in Singapore. Paul is always curious to explore innovative ways to empower the people he works with so that they can lead more fulfilling lives. |

Annex B — Video Recording

Pre-Trip Conversation with Oliver Escobar About Community Empowerment, Participatory Budgeting and What Works Centres in Scotland

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrFIzfCx2qQ

In this video, Oliver Escobar of the University of Edinburgh shared about the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, Participatory Budgeting, What Works Centres, and his view on striking the right balance to develop a space for collaboration between the government and the people.

Overview of the Scotland Study Trip 2023

https://youtu.be/RFOIqj5LQX0

In this video, the participants visited the Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS), which is an independent charitable incorporated organisation comprising over 350 community-owned and led organisations, as well as some of the DTAS member organisations like Granton Community Gardeners, The Heart of Newhaven and SWAMP. These organisations shared their experience on community asset ownership and their creative approaches to community-led development, as well as how DTAS provides support and facilitation for community-led problem-solving and decision-making.

Participation Requests

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7oAqGUIPxY

Andrew Paterson from the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) explained participation requests — its core framework and who can raise one. Laura MacDonald also presented on how SCDC designed a participation request resource package to help communities understand the process.

Participatory Budgeting

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXrg7Y95SNU

David Allan of Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) explained what participatory budgeting (PB) is, how to design a good one, and the role of SCDC in supporting PB in Scotland.

History of Scottish Educational System: Importance of Place and People

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMvkyYL5UG4

Prof Bob Davis of the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change presented on the history of Robert Owen's support of youth education and the rise of progressive education for the people in Scotland.

Research-Practice Collaborations

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rp2QG2mzCOk

Magriet Cruywagen explained the whole system approach, the Christie Principles, and the no-wrong-door model; and how these approaches undertaken by the Child Poverty Pathfinder project made a meaningful, evaluable contribution to tackle child poverty in Glasgow.

Lessons and Learning from Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland: Putting Poverty in its "Place".

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z66d5hSMdKc

Prof Chris Chapman shared how the Children's Neighbourhood Scotland creates equal opportunities for disadvantaged young people, reducing poverty and increasing participation and capacity within the community. He also discussed the importance of data sharing and transparency, and how Children's Neighbourhood Scotland uses a collective impact approach to work with local people and organisations in the communities in which they live in.

Post-Trip Sharing of Insights by Participants

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaTuxqy7SBc

Some participants of the study trip shared their reflections at the Future-Ready Society Conference in 2023.

Post-Trip Sharing of Ideas for Community Empowerment

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tOJJmXuixo

Justin Lee of IPS shared some possibilities for community empowerment at the Future-Ready Society Conference in 2023.

Justin Lee is Senior Research Fellow and heads the Policy Lab at the Institute of Policy Studies.

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If you have comments or feedback, please email futureready@sutd.edu.sg. Additionally, to stay updated on the latest development of our project, we invite you to visit our website at https://futurereadysociety.sg/ and sign up for our mailing list.