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**Community Regeneration in Glasgow:**

**Perspectives of Poverty and Power**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of PhD

School of Social and Political Sciences

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## **Abstract**

### **Community Regeneration in Glasgow: Perspectives of Poverty and Power**

**Louise Lawson**

This thesis centres on a collection of published papers based on qualitative research carried out in social housing estates in Glasgow during 2007-2017. The basis for the research was the GoWell Research and Learning Programme of housing investment and area regeneration and its impacts on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. In 2003, Glasgow City Council transferred its entire stock of council housing to the newly created Glasgow Housing Association through a process of stock transfer which promised to deliver community ownership for Glasgow's tenants. Following the housing stock transfer, a strategy of 'transformational change' for eight housing estates across the city was agreed and community engagement was central to the processes of regeneration. The thesis questions whether substantial improvements to people's lives can be realistically achieved by regeneration within deprived urban neighbourhoods without policy decisions that address the fundamental characteristics of poverty, such as low income, employment and social security.

Poverty underpins my research, and the published papers focus primarily on the processes and outcomes of policies in the context of housing and neighbourhood regeneration. Lukes' theory of power was used to synthesise the works across the two themes of communities and people to discuss how power dynamics play out in the context of my work. Lukes' key contribution to power was the third-dimensional view which seeks to broaden the discussion of the concept of power, building on the first and second dimensions. Using the published papers, I discuss power dynamics in relation to the specific narratives, contexts and policies where the studies are situated, and identify different aspects of power relating to the nature of interests, acquiescence, and moral and political responsibility.

My main contribution to knowledge has been to assess how, in the context of poverty, power plays out in policies that are *routine and unconsidered* rather than those regarded as intentionally harmful, such as austerity policies. From the papers, I provide evidence of positive outcomes to people's lives through investment in social housing, including improvements for children and young people, and some degree of community empowerment. There is some mixed evidence of outcomes and improvements, and also evidence that appears to go against people's interests that includes the involvement of communities in regeneration planning that is not acted upon. I purport that claims about outcomes (positive, negative and mixed) are relative, and involve value judgements in relation to people's real interests. I conclude that my

work points to the naturalisation of policies designed to make a difference to people's lives in an unconsidered way: Lukes' third dimension is not limited to intentional acts of manipulation by the powerful, but can also be seen as self-producing social processes in which the thinking and behaviour of the powerful and the powerless alike are conditioned by social norms. It involves the internalised, often unconscious acceptance of dominant norms as natural and normal even if they appear to be against the interests of the status quo involved. Despite the renewed emphasis and momentum to 'tackle poverty', there still lacks a shared narrative and traction within policy and politics to enact change, so 'inegalitarian social constraints' that could be otherwise, continue to persist. Substantial improvements to people's lives cannot be realistically achieved by regeneration without addressing the fundamental characteristics of poverty, which are policy issues determined by political choices. Crucially, however, it is the perpetuation and reproduction of norms and values through the dynamics of power that hinder or influence change. This requires dealing directly with major ideas and narratives which inform, and are informed by, those in power.

**Table of Contents**

|                                                       |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Acknowledgments                                       | 2  |
| List of Accompanying Material: Published Papers       | 3  |
| Degree of PhD by Published Work: Author's Declaration | 4  |
| Introduction: Context and Background                  | 5  |
| Poverty and Powerlessness: Lukes' Theory              | 15 |
| Synthesis of Lukes' Theory to the Published Papers    | 24 |
| Conclusion                                            | 34 |
| List of References                                    | 36 |
| Published Papers (1-10)                               | 46 |

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I dedicate this thesis to my mum who died on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

## List of Accompanying Material: Published Papers

### Theme One (Communities)

Paper 1: Kearns, A. and **Lawson, L** (2008). Housing stock transfer in Glasgow - the first five years: a study of policy implementation. *Housing Studies*, 23, 6, 857- 878. (doi: 10.1080/02673030802416635)

Paper 2: Kearns, A. and **Lawson, L** (2009). (De)Constructing a policy 'failure': housing stock transfer in Glasgow. *Evidence and Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, 5, 4, 449-470. (doi: 10.1332/174426409X478789)

Paper 3: **Lawson, L.** and Kearns, A (2010). 'Community empowerment' in the context of the Glasgow housing stock transfer. *Urban Studies*, 47, 7, 1459-1478. (doi:10.1177/0042098009353619)

Paper 4: **Lawson, L.** and Kearns, A (2010). Community engagement in regeneration: are we getting the point? *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 25, 1, 19-36. (doi:10.1007/s10901-009-9168-7)

Paper 5: **Lawson, L.** and Kearns, A (2014). Rethinking the purpose of community empowerment in neighbourhood regeneration: the need for policy clarity. *Local Economy*, 29, 1-2, 65-81. (doi:10.1177/0269094213519307)

### Theme 2 (People)

Paper 6: **Lawson, L.**, Kearns, A., Egan, M. and Conway, E (2015). "You can't always get what you want..."? Prior-attitudes and post-experiences of relocation from restructured neighbourhoods. *Housing Studies*, 30, 6, 942-966. (doi:10.1080/02673037.2014.994199)

Paper 7: Egan, M., **Lawson, L.**, Kearns, A., Conway, E. and Neary, J (2015). Neighbourhood demolition, relocation and health: a qualitative longitudinal study of housing-led urban regeneration in Glasgow, UK. *Health and Place*, 33, 101-108. (doi:10.1016/j.healthplace.2015.02.006)

Paper 8: **Lawson, L.** and Kearns, A. (2016). 'Power to the (young) people'? Children and young people's empowerment in the relocation process associated with urban re-structuring. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 16, 3, 376-403. (doi:10.1080/14616718.2016.1143788)

Paper 9: **Lawson, L.** and Kearns, A (2018). Changing contexts, critical moments and transitions: interim outcomes for children and young people living through involuntary relocation. *Housing Studies*, 34, 4, 636-665. (doi:10.1080/02673037.2018.1468418)

Paper 10: **Lawson, L.** and Kearns, A (2021). Foodbanks as paradoxes of policy and society. *Voluntary Sector Review*, 12, 3, 439- 457. (doi: 10.1332/204080520X15926573026085)



# College of Social Sciences

Degree of PhD by Published Work

## Author Declaration

I, Louise Jane Lawson, declare that this is my own work and to my knowledge has not been submitted in any form for another degree or been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Information derived from the published and unpublished work of others has been acknowledged.

Signed

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# **Community Regeneration in Glasgow: Perspectives of Poverty and Power**

## **Explanatory Essay**

The explanatory essay is in three sections that cover (i) an introduction and background to the work (ii) Lukes' theory of power, and (iii) Lukes' theory as a synthesis to the published papers.

### **1. Introduction and Background**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis centres on a collection of published papers based on qualitative research carried out during 2007-2017 as part of the GoWell Research and Learning Programme (referred to as GoWell hereafter) in Urban Studies at the University of Glasgow. The papers are ordered chronologically and constitute two connected themes based on communities and people. Theme One (Papers 1-5; published between 2008 and 2014) takes a community perspective developing ideas from research on community empowerment and community engagement in the context of the Glasgow Housing Stock Transfer and its associated regeneration. Theme Two (Papers 6-10; published between 2015 and 2021) examines the experiences and outcomes of individuals and families living through neighbourhood regeneration and in the wider context of poverty in Glasgow. I use Lukes' theory of power as a means of synthesising the works across the two themes to discuss how power dynamics play out in poverty, and in the context of my work.

#### **1.2 Context: GoWell Study and Glasgow**

All the papers are based on qualitative research undertaken as part of the GoWell study (Egan et al, 2010). GoWell was a large, multi-faceted programme of housing investment and area regeneration across the city of Glasgow (Scotland). At an early stage in the regeneration planning process, regeneration planners and policymakers identified high level goals that included improvements in residents' health and health behaviours, and reduced health inequalities. This contributed to the development of the GoWell, study, a mixed methods longitudinal research and learning programme to investigate the impact of investment in housing and neighbourhood regeneration in Glasgow on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities (2005-2018). The longitudinal study design allowed a range of neighbourhood, housing and health-related factors to be examined before, during, and after housing and area changes took place and a comparison of the effects of different approaches to regeneration in different parts of the city in order to inform policy and practice in Scotland and beyond (Egan et al, 2010). One

component of the GoWell study was the programme of qualitative research which informed the development and publication of the papers that are the focus of this thesis.

Glasgow is renowned for being a city with a high concentration of people living in socioeconomic deprivation (based on various sources of data, including the Scottish Household Survey, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and Glasgow City Council). Socioeconomic deprivation is strongly linked to poorer health outcomes, including low life expectancy, increased rates of chronic diseases, and higher mortality rates (Walsh et al, 2020; ONS, 2022; McCartney et al, 2025). Glasgow has higher rates of mental ill health, in terms of the rate of prescriptions and psychiatric hospitalisations, compared with the whole of Scotland (Whyte et al, 2021). Constituencies in Scotland have the lowest average life expectancy at birth (79 years). There are also large inequalities between neighbouring constituencies. For example, while Glasgow North East has the lowest life expectancy (74.2 years) in the city, neighbouring constituency Mid Dunbartonshire has a life expectancy of 82.6 years, a difference of 8.4 years (The Health Foundation, 2025). The extensively reported and unprecedented stalling of improvements in life expectancy in Glasgow, and across the UK, over the last decade, has resulted in widening, unfair and avoidable health inequalities which have shortened lives (Walsh et al, 2022; Spence, 2024).

Scotland's most deprived areas are characterised by high concentrations of social rented housing: in the most deprived areas, three out of five households are social renters (Scottish Government, 2015). Glasgow has far higher rates of social and private renting than Scotland overall (52.6% vs 35.2%) and a far lower percentage of owner occupiers (46.9% vs 64.4%) (Glasgow City Council, 2024). At the time of the study, Glasgow had relatively bad social housing conditions, particular problems of dampness and condensation, low-income dependency among tenants, high vacancy rates in certain areas, major backlogs of disrepair, and homelessness (Glasgow City Council, 1998). The neighbourhoods in Glasgow where the research was conducted were social housing estates and were among the most income-deprived areas in Scotland. They had low male life expectancy, very high rates of mortality due to lung cancer, and significantly increased morbidity and mortality related to alcohol and drug use. They were reported to be in a worse state of overall health and wellbeing than Glasgow City as a whole, and in considerably poorer health than Scotland (Walsh et al, 2008). Additionally, GoWell found a complex picture of mental health, with mental health worsening in some of the study areas over time, which may have been related to the worse poverty and deprivation in those areas, as well as the disruption and inconvenience caused by regeneration activity (GoWell, 2010).

In 2003, the City Council transferred its entire stock of council housing (circa 80,000 houses) to the newly created Glasgow Housing Association (Kearns and Lawson, 2008). Housing transfer is the sale of all or part of a public body's housing stock to an alternative, not-for-profit landlord. Between 1998 and 2004, some 103,000 council homes transferred to new landlords, mostly in three large transfers completed in 2003 (Audit Scotland, 2006). The transfer promised to deliver community ownership for Glasgow's tenants (Gibb, 2003). This was to be achieved by an interim phase of devolved housing management to a network of Local Housing Organisations, with promises made to deliver 'full' community ownership through smaller second stage transfers so that these local organisations could break away and become stand-alone housing associations in their own right. Central to community ownership was an explicit commitment to transform housing governance by devolving ownership and control of the housing to local residents, to support them to become more involved in key decisions relating to their housing (McKee, 2009).

In a UK context, this 'community' focus is a distinctive feature of the housing association movement in Scotland. The model is a constitutional model in which the housing organisation is locally focused, being based within the community that it serves, with a key role accorded to tenants in its governance. (McKee, 2010). An extract from the framework document for the Glasgow transfer, 'Better Homes, Stronger Communities' (Glasgow Housing Partnership Steering Group, 2000) shows, in addition to tackling housing debt and securing investment in the housing stock, a wide range of broader objectives included: creating a more effective housing system; promoting community empowerment, community control and community ownership; contributing to area and community regeneration; and contributing to social inclusion.

Following the housing stock transfer in Glasgow, in 2003 the Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) and Glasgow City Council (GCC) agreed a strategy of 'transformational change' for eight housing estates across the city. These were inner-city mass social housing estates built in the 1960s comprising predominantly high-rise flats. The estates had been negatively portrayed and had gained notoriety in terms of their poor environmental and living conditions, crime and violence, alcohol and drug problems, and issues around asylum seekers and racism (Kearns et al, 2016). Major investment was planned over 10-15 years, involving a substantial amount of demolition and rebuilding, as well as significant disruption for the residents. Whilst community engagement was central to the processes of regeneration, certain decisions regarding the reshaping of the new neighbourhoods had already been taken:

"The transformation areas are to be radically changed in physical and social terms. Multi-storey flats, which currently make up around 80% of the GHA housing stock in the areas, are largely to be

demolished to be replaced mostly by houses and modern tenement flats. There will also be a significant reduction in the amount of social housing within the eight areas, so that from being predominantly social rented housing areas (or council housing estates as they were), they will become mixed tenure neighbourhoods with private housing in the majority. Significant investments will also take place to provide new or improved amenities within the areas, including in some cases new schools, community centres and shopping centres, together with higher quality green space” (GoWell, 2007: 13)

In the Glasgow context, regeneration refers to a set of policy responses to the adverse outcomes arising from area decline and concentrations of poverty and poor health (Ellaway, et al 2012; Kearns et al, 2012). Poor health is associated with poorer living circumstances and there is an expectation that housing improvements and area regeneration in disadvantaged urban areas will improve health and reduce social inequalities in health (Kearns et al., 2009; Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008). Whilst improving health was never an explicit objective of area-based regeneration policies, there is an implicit assumption in policy documents that regeneration will lead to better and healthier lives and communities that may impact on the lives of people in poorer communities (Beck et al., 2010). Regeneration may enable these outcomes through various pathways such as improvements to the quality of local services, the presence of amenities that may encourage healthy behaviours, and better housing. This thesis questions whether substantial improvements to people’s lives—and their health and wellbeing—can be realistically achieved by regeneration within deprived neighbourhoods without first, or at least concurrently, engaging in what is termed ‘social regeneration’, that is addressing the fundamental characteristics of deprivation, such as low income, low-paid employment and social security (Thomson et al, 2013; Egan et al, 2013) which are policy issues determined by political choices.

### **1.3 Theoretical and Methodological Underpinnings**

All my papers are based on qualitative research methodology drawing on a range of methods, including longitudinal and participatory methods, as well as documentary analyses of policies and media commentaries. This approach aligns with my ontological position as a qualitative researcher who views knowledge as socially constructed and subjective rather than a singular, objective truth. My work focuses on understanding the lived experiences, perceptions and meanings that people make of their world, and which are valid and important sources of knowledge. The nature of my work has involved a range of theoretical approaches guided by the various fields of study. I adopted aspects of Grounded Theory by means of an inductive methodology that involves the discovery of theory through the analysis of data

(Glaser, 1992; Strauss and Corbin, 1997). I am also influenced by, and have applied, the theory of Critical Moments to enable analysis of personal accounts, and their relationships with social structures and processes and how people experience the world (Thomson et al, 2002). Theories of participatory research and the power relationships within communities have also influenced my approach to research (e.g. Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995; Power and Patrick, 2024). The papers presented in this thesis are organized to reflect the two inter-connected, themes around communities and people, drawing on specific subject theories.

Theme One (Papers 1-5) is focused on the policies and role of communities in the processes of regeneration. Papers 1 and 2 are about the policy implementation and evaluation of the housing stock transfer in Glasgow. Paper 1 uses a framework developed from implementation studies (e.g. Barrett, 2004; Hogwood and Gunn, 1982; Hill and Hupe, 2002) to analyse why the housing stock transfer policy has been susceptible to difficulties, reflecting upon the important elements of a revised analytical model (Schofield and Sausman, 2004). Paper 2 evaluates the claims of ‘failure’ by applying a theoretical framework for evaluating policy outcomes that shape people’s judgements about policies (Bovens and t’Hart, 1996). Papers 3, 4 and 5 each take different perspectives in relation to their focus on ‘community’. Paper 3 develops and applies a model for community empowerment building on the academic and policy literatures of community empowerment (e.g. Wallerstein, 2002; Clegg, 1989, Somerville, 1998). Paper 4 identifies the intended benefits of community engagement in regeneration according to policy theory (e.g. Barnes, et al 2003; Dinham, 2006) and applies this empirically. Paper 5 questions the purpose of community empowerment using a case study of the regeneration of one specific area (e.g. Jones, 2003; Raco, 2003; Somerville, 2011).

A wide range of data collection and analysis methods were involved in the preparation and conceptualisation of these papers between 2006 and 2010:

- Analysis of policy documents, academic articles and media commentaries 1999-2007 [Papers 1 & 2]
- Interviews with policymakers and practitioners at national and city level, and with opponents involved in campaigns against the transfer (n=20) [Paper 1]
- Focus groups with Local Housing Organisation (LHO) management committees (n=9). The LHOs included three types: forum, community-based housing association-linked, and one former tenant managed co-operative [Paper 3]
- Discussions with Community Groups (to develop regeneration plans) in each of the areas (n=3) [Paper 4]

- Resident focus groups in three transformation areas (two in each area; n=6) [Papers 4 & 5]
- Interviews with consultants and staff with remit for community engagement and regeneration (n=7) [Paper 4]
- Documentary review in one area comprising local surveys, committee reports and minutes, written communication, strategies and reports [Paper 5]

Theme Two (Papers 6-10) is focused on the experiences and outcomes of individuals and families living through neighbourhood regeneration in the context of their poverty. The papers in this theme are predominantly based on the Lived Realities study, which was a longitudinal qualitative study of residents' lived experience of involuntary relocation embedded within the GoWell study. The Lived Realities study aimed to capture a rich textured description of the everyday, over time, through focusing on the experiences, perceptions, expectations and aspirations of residents as they moved from one type of housing and neighbourhood to another. I conceptualised 'Lived Realities' in 2009 as a response to: (i) the absence of lived experience about relocation in the GoWell study; and (ii) the call for more in-depth qualitative research to understand what "displaced families go through in the relocation process...to obtain a deep and contextual understanding of the experiences of relocatees' (Goetz 2013; 236). Writing in 2013, Goetz contended that there was little about the *experience* of relocation and very little longitudinal qualitative research available (with the exception of their study based on a sample of four households).

The main Lived Realities study comprised two waves of in-depth interviews in 2011 and 2012, with a third wave conducted in 2014 for Paper 9. Twenty-three households were recruited to wave 1 (2011), of which 20 were described as 'family households', defined as comprising at least one adult (18 + years) and one child/young person (< 18 years). The remaining three households comprised residents who were single or lived alone. At wave 1, all households were interviewed on more than one occasion, which was considered essential to get to know families and to develop trust and rapport. Twelve 'family households' were re-interviewed at wave 2 (2012) and 13 'family households', including the 12 from wave 2 and one participant from wave 1, were re-interviewed at wave 3 (2014). Interviews were primarily carried out with a female adult household member, with the exception of interviews that involved one male lone parent and both parents (in two families). Other family members were sometimes present and contributed.

The Lived Realities papers each have their own focus and theoretical framework. Paper 6 draws on housing and relocation theories (e.g. Kearns and Mason, 2013; Ruel et al, 2013) to examine residents' prior attitudes towards and post-experiences of relocation. Paper 7 theorises pathways from relocation to health

improvements and identifies the mechanisms by which neighbourhood demolition may differentially impact residents' health and wellbeing (e.g. Thomson et al, 2013; Egan et al, 2013). Papers 8 and 9 focus on children's and young people's experiences of, and outcomes from, the relocation process. Paper 8 develops a framework for young people's empowerment, citing a range of diverse literatures (e.g. Checkoway, 1998, 2011; Fauth et al, 2007), and Paper 9 combines residential contexts literature from urban studies with critical moments and transitions literature from youth studies to understand how involuntary relocation affects children and young people's interim outcomes (e.g. Thomson et al, 2002; Furlong, 2002; Visser et al, 2013).

Paper 10 builds on the Lived Realities study in its contribution to understanding how poverty is experienced for people living through regeneration and relocation. Specifically, it explores the experiences of foodbank users living in the GoWell study areas to determine the informal relationship between foodbanks and the state during the period of welfare reform. The paper builds on previous literature on discourse, policy and lived experience around welfare reform and foodbank use (e.g. Wright, 2016; Patrick, 2014). Twenty-three participants who had used a foodbank on at least one occasion between 2012 and 2017 were recruited using the GoWell dataset and were interviewed on one occasion.

I completed all the data collection and analysis for Theme One, was lead author on three of the papers (Paper 3, 4 and 5), and made a substantial contribution to the data analysis and writing of Papers 1 and 2. I completed all the data collection and analysis for Theme Two, was lead author on Papers 6, 8, 9 and 10, and made a substantial contribution to the data analysis and writing of Paper 7.

#### **1.4 Research Trajectory and Positionality**

My work and reflections span a career of over 20 years working in the field of poverty and inequalities. I began my career by working in community development in areas of socioeconomic deprivation on projects concerned with food poverty and community health. I joined the Govan Healthy Eating Project (third sector) as a researcher in 1997 to evaluate a fruit game initiative, 'Pampam's Fruit Game', for pre-school children. I then moved to the Cambuslang Health and Food Project (third sector) in 1998 to a research post to examine food poverty in the area. With members of the local community, we developed a resource called Cambuslang Foodscape. In 1999, I joined a research project that was a partnership between the University of Edinburgh, West Lothian Council and a low-income ex-mining community (Addiewell) to implement a participatory process in developing a set of community-based health indicators. For this project, I recruited

and worked alongside a community research team, and we produced a project report and a series of learning events for local people and practitioners.

I joined the University of Glasgow in 2000 as a Research Associate to work on evaluations of two major initiatives to tackle health inequalities (the National Evaluation of Health Action Zones in England and the Evaluation of Have a Heart Paisley in Scotland), as well as on evaluations of a series of programmes designed to reduce smoking and promote smoking cessation services in areas of socioeconomic deprivation in Glasgow. I also completed an MSc in Food Policy online from City University (graduating 2006) and wrote my dissertation on food insecurity in Scotland.

In 2006 I joined the GoWell study team as a Research Fellow with responsibility for the design and implementation of the programme's qualitative research components. I was given the opportunity to work independently to develop the longitudinal Lived Realities study (2009-2015) that enabled me to work closely with individuals and families within their situated contexts. During this time, I gained experience and knowledge of qualitative longitudinal research and analysis, which heightened my interest in methodology and in the theory of critical moments. During this time (2010/11), I established a Qualitative Researchers' Network at the University of Glasgow with Adam Smith Research Foundation Seedcorn funding to bring together researchers with an interest in empirical, methodological and theoretical aspects of qualitative research.

My work on the Lived Realities study and foodbank users motivated me to look at women's working lives in more detail. Lived Realities involved getting to know participants through in-depth and repeated interviews over time. Whilst the focus of the study was the family in most circumstances, it was mostly women who participated in the interviews. It was through these stories that I became increasingly interested in 'women's work', which included paid work alongside unpaid work and other competing demands, in the context of their often-constrained lives. My research on foodbank users' experiences provided further evidence of the lived experience of poverty. I became particularly interested in how such poverty and hardship shaped women's lives, which led to my growing interest in the politics of gender and women's work.

In 2019 I wrote a successful grant application, as Principal Investigator, to the Nuffield Foundation and was awarded a 3.5-year project entitled 'Women in Multiple Low-paid Employment: Pathways between Work,



Care and Health’ (2020-2024), to the value of £329k. This was the first research study in the UK to examine this phenomenon. As well as overseeing the study, I undertook the qualitative research and analysis, which involved recruiting and interviewing over 100 women who worked multiple low-paid jobs. The project had a participatory element, and I worked alongside a group of women participants in impact activities. Through a collaboration with Glasgow Women’s Library, the women created artworks (‘Pouring Out, Pouring In’<sup>1</sup>) illustrating their paid and unpaid roles (2023), took part in video testimonials for an exhibition ‘Women’s Work: The Juggling Act of Multiple Jobs’ at the University of Glasgow (2024), made possible by ESRC Impact Acceleration Funding I was awarded (c.£16k), and participated in an event at the Scottish Parliament alongside MSPs and other project stakeholders (2024). This project culminated in the publication of a monograph<sup>2</sup> (Lawson et al, 2024), a series of resources, including an online exhibition<sup>3</sup>, and companion research with a colleague in Modern History on the historical perspective of women’s multiple low paid work. During this period, I was awarded a permanent Lectureship at the University of Glasgow.

I am currently leading on the preparation of a new research proposal (to the Nuffield Foundation, 2025) on women’s paid work and unpaid caring in collaboration with colleagues from Glasgow Caledonian University, and the Work Foundation which is the leading UK think-tank for improving working lives. The decision to focus on unpaid caring arose from the findings from my previous research yet also resonates with my own lived experience, and reflects entrenched and unjust social norms (Taylor, 2025). Women’s unpaid caring is a salient issue in the context of the social care crisis, women’s work and poverty. Despite support from the third sector, advocacy and campaigning groups, politicians and academics, women’s unpaid caring is an issue that remains sidelined and taken for granted within policy and politics. As such, the project aims to shape public discourse, and has the potential to influence care and employment policy and practice.

I am intensely aware of my privileged position in accessing the voices and experiences of those living in more precarious and disadvantaged circumstances than me. Through my own life circumstances and experiences, I am sensitive to the social injustices and inequalities faced by many people. It is for this reason that I focus my research efforts on poverty and inequalities, and more recently on the inequalities faced by many women in relation to their paid and unpaid labour, and caring responsibilities. I am mindful of the

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<sup>1</sup> [POURING OUT POURING IN Pdf Download.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Lawson, L., Kearns, A., Mackenzie, M. and Wilson, T. \(2024\) Women in Multiple Low-paid Employment: Pathways Between Work, Care and Health. Final Report. Project Report. University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK. \(doi: \[10.36399/gla.pubs.326795\]\(#\)\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> [University of Glasgow - Explore - Glasgow Social Sciences Hub - Resources - All resources - Women in multiple low-paid employment: pathways between work, care and health](#)

expectation for reflexivity and self-reflection within qualitative research. Early in my academic career it was usual to view participants as ‘research subjects’ and to take a neutral and objective stance. Over time, and with experience, I have realised the value and importance of developing trusting relationships and getting to know research participants with a view to breaking down barriers. With my early career background in community development, I am interested in participatory and inclusive methods and have been able to develop this approach and adopt participatory methods in academic settings. This is evidenced through both the Lived Realities study, my recent study of women in multiple low-paid employment and my planned design of future research on women’s paid work and unpaid caring. I do not claim to be an ‘insider’: as my background and experience differs in many respects from those being studied, I recognise that research is a relational practice that is often motivated by the fact that we care about things. It involves understanding and relationships amongst people whose experiences may initially be different, but enduring relationships can enable commonality that crosses differences as well as amongst our shared experiences.

Since the start of my career working in the field of poverty and inequality, there remains evidence of growing inequalities for the most disadvantaged in society, with harsh and punitive measures applied to certain groups. I argue that that there has been a normalization of poverty and the silencing of voices to enact change, and greater divisions between ‘us and them’. It is in this context that I chose to use Lukes’ theory to provide a framework to synthesise the original contribution to knowledge made to date. It introduces some complex, yet interesting and relevant, ideas to the work as a whole, with particular emphasis on the concepts of real interests and acquiescence. Lukes’ theory is by no means definitive nor precise, but it offers an intelligent way of thinking and reflecting, particularly with regard to where moral and political responsibilities lie in addressing poverty and inequality, as I go on to reflect at the end of the following section.

## **2. Poverty and Powerlessness: Lukes' Theory**

### **2.1 Introduction**

“The dominated, the oppressed, the relatively powerless... are the proper concern of those who study power, because what they can do and what they can be is limited, and significantly so, by social constraints that might be otherwise” (Hayward and Lukes, 2008: 17)

Lukes argues that the power debate is driven by a commitment to human freedom and political equality: to the idea that people should have a roughly equal hand in helping shape the terms that govern their existence (Lukes, 2021). My interest is in how social systems and policies have the potential to give people the freedom to meet their needs in order to fulfil their interests and bring about change (Morriss, 2002). My papers are diverse in terms of their theoretical approaches, yet their commonality is the emphasis on policies in the context of ‘poor’ neighbourhoods. The focus on power is not explicit in my papers except in the context of empowerment where Lukes was referenced (Paper 3). Nevertheless, Lukes’ theory of power (Lukes, 1974; 2005; 2021) provides a useful lens through which to synthesise my published papers in relation to poverty and policy, not only in decision-making in the public arena, but in all areas of social and political life.

### **2.2 Power and Poverty**

Poverty underpins my research, and the published papers focus on the policies designed to further the interests of people and communities living through housing and regeneration in low-income neighbourhoods. A way of conceptualising UK poverty as “a state of powerlessness in which people are unable to exercise their basic human rights or control virtually any aspect of their lives” (Hocking 2003: 236) underpins the notion of “social constraints that might be otherwise” (Hayward and Lukes, 2008: 17). Thus, the actions of those who are powerful can, in principle make a difference to social policies aimed at ‘helping the poor’. Lukes differentiates between moral and political responsibility. Moral responsibility can be understood as liability, or worthiness of blame (or of praise) (Morriss, 2002). The principal purpose of identifying political responsibility is to enable and motivate change without anyone necessarily being ‘at fault.’ (Young, 2004). In general, in moral contexts, we tend to employ a backward-looking notion of responsibility, whereas in political contexts we tend to be both backward- and forward-looking: we are concerned with both punishing and rewarding past actions, and with making a difference in the future (Morriss, 2002; 2006). Lukes views power as held and exercised by agents (individual and collective) within structures. In relation to responsibility, he argues that the powerful include those who contribute to

and are in a position to reduce or remedy others' powerlessness: where this is not feasible then there are structural limits to power (Lukes, 2021: 73). The powerful, by this view, are those actors who can reasonably be held responsible for limits imposed on the freedom of other actors (Hayward and Lukes, 2008).

To demonstrate his attention to agency and responsibility (moral and political), Lukes uses the example of housing markets in large US cities, whereby ordinary non-affluent people lack access to decent, affordable housing (Lukes, 2021:72). Whilst this can be seen as a *structural* problem, he argues that individuals or groups lack access because of the actions or inactions of identifiable individuals or groups, who by acting otherwise could make a difference. Lukes suggests that power is at work if, and to the extent that, an inegalitarian social constraint is created and/or maintained by agents strategically situated in such a way that they could eradicate it. Thus, the actions of the powerful can have significant, predictable constraining effects on the actions of others, and they could, in principle, act differently. In the UK there is evidence of political decisions that have, or can, make a difference to social policies aimed at those living in poverty. The Sure Start initiative introduced by the Labour Government in 1999, that provided holistic support to families with children under the age of five in England, showed positive effects from those in the poorer backgrounds (see Bamba, 2021; Carneiro et al, 2025). The temporary increase in Universal Credit during the covid-19 pandemic bolstered the incomes of low-income households and lifted children out of poverty (Action for Children, 2023; Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2023). There is evidence that abolishing the benefit cap is the most cost-effective thing that the government could do to lift children and families out of poverty (Andersen et al, 2024) but a political decision has not been taken not to do this. The Politics of Poverty, which I return to at the end of this section, is premised on the belief that people in poverty count as much as anyone, identifying the need to ground such conceptualisation in people's lived experience and acknowledging agency within structural constraints. It asks who is excluding whom and draws attention to political decision-making in creating and reinforcing poverty and exclusion (Lister, 2002; 2015).

### **2.3 The Three Dimensions of Power**

'Power: A Radical View' was first published in 1974 (Lukes, 1974) and reissued in 2005 and 2021. Its central claim is that exercising power can be a matter of, not only prevailing in conflict (what Lukes calls the one-dimensional view) and suppressing conflict and controlling the agenda (the two-dimensional view), but also by shaping people's wants and desires, their beliefs and perceptions in the absence of conflict (three-dimensional view). Lukes' key contribution to power was the third-dimensional view which seeks to broaden the discussion of the concept of power. It is "the supreme exercise of power", Lukes argues "to

get another or others to have the desires you want them to have... to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires” (Lukes, 2005: 27). While the three dimensions of power are presented separately, in practice they are inter-related.

The one-dimensional view of power (Dahl, 1957; 1968) focused on the empirical identification of actors who participated in political decision-making where influence over others could be readily discerned (Lukes, 2021: 21-24; Swartz, 2007). In this approach, power is pluralistic and understood as a product of actual and observable conflicts between actors to determine who wins and who loses on key, clearly recognised issues, in a relatively open system in which there are established decision-making arenas. Little attention is paid in this view to whose voices or whose knowledges are represented in the decision-making process nor to how forms of power affect the ways in which certain problems come to be framed (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2000).

The two-dimensional view of power, with its origins in the work of Bachrach and Baratz (1970), is a critique of the one-dimensional pluralist view and includes consideration of who decides what gets decided and who controls the agenda (Lukes, 2021: 24-29). The two-dimensional view acknowledges the observable power of Dahl’s theory (one-dimensional) but asserts that power is exercised when issues are arranged specifically so that some are not discussed (Lukes, 2021: 16). It consists of observable decision making and more subtle non-decision making (behind the scenes). In effect, Bachrach and Baratz distinguish between potential and actual political issues, thereby drawing a distinct difference from the pluralist view that only looks at the ‘key’ issues that are actually in the discourse. That is, a group has power if it can limit the scope of what is debated, thereby confining decision-making to issues they deem safe. In this view, knowledge and the processes of its production contribute strongly to the mobilisation of bias: the knowledge of some groups is considered more valid than others (see Hathaway, 2015; Lukes, 2021).

According to Lukes, the two-dimensional view of power is inadequate because of its insistence that non-decision-making power only exists where there are grievances that are denied entry into the political process in the form of issues. If the observer can uncover no grievances, then it is assumed there is a ‘genuine’ consensus on the prevailing allocation of values (Lukes, 2021: 33). Lukes draws on Bourdieu (1986) to help with understanding how power as domination is internalised as part of the habitus. The concept of ‘habitus’ explains how individuals self-regulate their own behaviour to fit social expectations; an internal sense of how to behave. In this sense Bourdieu claims that the effectiveness of power as domination is

enhanced by its ‘naturalisation’, whereby what is arbitrary and unequal appears to actors as natural and objective, and by the “misrecognition” of its origins and modes of operation” (Swartz, 2007: 107).

The third dimension of power involves the internalised, often unconscious acceptance of dominant norms, institutions, languages and behaviours as natural and normal, even if they appear to be against the interests of those involved. Drawing on Bourdieu (1986), I have identified certain societal issues such as low paid work, women’s roles as carers, or the normalisation of foodbanks, that are internalised, or taken for granted and go unquestioned (by society). This aspect of power can help explain how certain matters are, for long period of time and in many places, not on the agenda for discussion and unchanged, because they are naturalised and unnoticed. It shows how internalised normalisation of a status quo can be damaging and result in inequalities and injustices sustaining acceptance among the powerful and powerless alike. It points to the power of normality to make invisible inequalities that exclude large numbers of people from universally accepted rights (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2009). The third dimension of power is usually hidden from direct observation; it has to be inferred via the postulation of relevant counterfactuals, to the effect that but for the exercise of the power in question those subject to it would have thought and acted otherwise, in accordance with their ‘real’ interests (Hayward and Lukes, 2008).

## **2.4 Real Interests**

One of the most problematic and contested assumptions about third dimension power is that it suggests that people submit to power against their interests. Concepts of interests vary and have different moral and political positions (Lukes, 2021: 42) which involves value judgements (for example, I might take the position that something is good for someone who may disagree). There is an objective element to identifying interests when they are not preference dependent (Lukes, 2021: 86). These include conditions of human welfare such as health, shelter, and unpolluted environments, and the social rights underpinning conceptions of ‘wellbeing’ that relate to livelihood, health care, education and cultural participation, housing and a safe environment and which are the basis of social policies (Dean, 2015). The main issue concerning the determination of real interests, as distinct from objective or surface interests (Hathaway 2015) is that there are “situations in which a person does not know his own interests” and “there are countless way in which human interests might be classified” (Lukes, 2011: 24). Our interests develop and may change over time and people may not always be aware what their interests are since they “may not realise what is necessary to bring about their desire” (Lukes and Hagland, 2005: 63). In situations of constrained choice real interests can mean ‘best interests’ but which may work against people’s real interests

(Dowding, 2019) Furthermore, the term ‘real interests’ questions whether there is such a thing as “objective truth” (Lukes, 2011: 19).

From an objective perspective, Lukes noted that for people to judge well, that is to assess rightly what policies or programmes are in their interests, they need an adequate understanding of the status quo, to have an understanding what is (counterfactually) feasible, and to be able to judge whether the costs of transition to what might be a better situation are worth making (Lukes, 2011). Similarly, Connolly had noted that if “policy x is more in A’s interest than policy y” then if A were to experience the results of both x and y they would choose x as the result they would rather have for themselves (Connolly, 1972: 472). The difficulty with such propositions is that those who are ‘poor’ or constrained do not have the opportunity to make such choices from a set of options or to be rational in their calculations. The choices that are imposed on them can be restricted or ill thought out, intentionally or not.

Social policy can be viewed as a means to promote social welfare and improve people's lives, and I believe is crucial to both protect those at risk of poverty, and support those already living in poverty. The reality of policymaking and its outcomes mean that social policies do not necessarily further people’s interests and can have detrimental effects. As I discussed in the first section of this thesis, poverty and poor health have become deeply ingrained and there is little evidence of poverty declining in the UK. Furthermore, there remains stark evidence of health inequalities (Marmot, 2020; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2006) and of deaths of despair (Walsh et al, 2021; Camacho et al, 2024), related to poverty. Part of this explanation concerns ideology and political influence as a deliberate way of shaping policy against people’s interests (Patrick and Reeves, 2020; Maggetti and Trein, 2021). In the UK, austerity policies since 2010 were viewed by many as deliberate and part of a broader ideological project, one not supported by evidence of public benefit, and which went against people’s interests in terms of harming health and pushing people into poverty (Pantazis, 2016; Walsh and McCartney, 2024). Austerity has been criticised by ‘inflicting gross misery’ on the population through its ‘punitive, mean spirited, and often callous’ policies (Booth and Butler, 2018), and for creating the conditions for ill health by denying minimum income for a healthy life (Marmot et al, 2020). Subsequent welfare reforms, including the benefit cap, conditionality and sanctioning, have been described as a “criminalisation strategy” (Fletcher & Wright, 2020: 12). Similarly, decisions to cut disability benefits were regarded as threatening the ‘most vulnerable’ yet the Labour government in 2025 argued a ‘moral’ case for the cuts as means of increasing economic activity despite any supporting evidence (McCartney, 2025). Whilst there is increasing evidence of poverty and harm, this is met by many with apathy (Hiam and Dorling, 2023).

Lukes contends that third dimension power need not be deliberate, however, as it can be at its most effective when it is “routine and unconsidered”, through the everyday enactment and self-producing processes of norms and practices, rules and roles that engender and sustain subordination, dependence and powerlessness. (Lukes, 2021:160). This then relates to the nature of policymaking and the policy cycle (which is complex and bound by timescales, targets, funding and resource issues) which can be seen as detached from the realities of the social groups that are represented. The middle-classification of policy work has been used to denote the unintentional design of policies that fail to meet the needs of groups or people different to the worldview of those making them (Weng Wai, 2021). Other examples of routine and unconsidered power are when bureaucrats and policymakers make decisions following some acknowledged procedure or policy, and can be ignorant, or lack awareness, of the effects of their actions or inactions meaning that they did not intend them (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002). Therefore, even the actions of those making decisions, who may seem intuitively to be the most powerful, are never fully free in the sense of being independent or authentic and can be held responsible for the significant inequalities they help create (Hayward, 2006). Some of the issues concerned with unintentional power are discussed in Section 3 of the thesis when I question whether policies that oblige people to engage in processes of neighbourhood regeneration that do not come to fruition, or to move families from one deprived estate to another are in their real—or best—interests.

## 2.5 Acquiescence

Lukes uses the terminology of acquiescence to address the question how the powerful secure the compliance of those they dominate in shaping their beliefs, desires and actions (Lukes, 2021: 118). In this regard acquiescence is a form of compliance that challenges the freely given consent of those subject to it. It implies a more profound and tacit acceptance of one's own subjection to a power structure, even if that structure is considered illegitimate by an observer. (Lukes, 2021: 160). People may comply with systems or regimes that oppress or suppress them out of the consequences of non-compliance (e.g. the fear of sanctions in the social security system). In relation to ‘willing’ compliance, Scott (1990) suggests that acquiescence may happen in both a thick and a thin sense: the thick sense where people actively believe the narrative and policy outcomes which oppress them (consent) and the thin sense where they are merely resigned to them (resignation). Scott argues that while the dominated may outwardly appear to acquiesce to their domination, they often harbour a hidden discourse that challenges it using concepts of ‘public transcripts’ (what is outwardly expressed) and ‘hidden transcripts’ (what is whispered or done in private) to illustrate this point. Scott's work emphasizes that even in the face of seemingly willing acceptance, the dominated are not passively accepting their fate but are engaged in subtle forms of resistance. He uses an epigraph to his book from an Ethiopian proverb: “when the great lord passes, the wise peasant bows deeply



and silently farts”. Lukes agrees that both occur, yet critiques Scott’s account for taking for granted that the dominated are acting a mask of compliant behaviour, and suggests variations of acquiescence (see Dowding, 2006).

A way of interpreting acquiescence is through the lack of alternatives, which can refer to the lack of awareness that there can be alternatives (subjective), or to actual or real alternatives (objective). At the subjective level, people may imagine no alternative or have no awareness that there can be alternatives (Lukes, 2011: 22). In this form of power, people may be unaware of their rights, their ability to speak out, and may come to see various forms of power or domination over them as ‘natural’, or at least unchangeable, and therefore unquestioned. In the context of poverty, some people may accept their circumstance as the status quo even in the face of inequalities around them, internalizing dominant explanations of poverty that tell them poverty is ‘their fault’ rather than a systemic problem. Freire referred to this as the ‘culture of silence’, resulting from the internalization of oppression (see Johnson-Mardones, 2014). People can be trapped in a set of beliefs that sanctifies the inevitability of existing inequalities and be persuaded to lower their expectations and adapt their preferences to what they believe to be the only feasible option, hence the term ‘adaptive preferences’, commonly presented as unconscious adaptations (Elster, 1983; Walsh, 2015) or the trimming of desires to circumstances. As Sen (1984: 309) put it over four decades ago “the underdog learns to bear the burden so well that he or she overlooks the burden itself.”

From an objective perspective, the preference, choice or optimal outcome can be outside people’s feasible choice set or not an option at all (Shapiro, 2006:147). People can consent to power yet still be conscious of, and resent the mode of, its exercise (Lukes, 2021: 155). Similarly, people may not be misled, they will be aware what their interests are but lack the means to achieve them. In the context of poverty, many people can have no or few alternatives, for example the only jobs available to them are in the low-paid sector, and the only housing available on ‘deprived estates’. The increased cost of essential goods and services, rising housing costs, and an unsupportive social security system does not allow for people to act in their best interests (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024; McBride & Smith, 2021). There may be no means of mobilisation or resistance, for instance lack of trade union membership or movements for ‘everyday issues’ (compared to say social movements on gender or the environment). In relation to organisation, Hardin states that people acquiesce “because it would be very difficult to organize what would de facto have to be a collective action to topple an ongoing convention or to organize a new one” (Hardin, 2005: 13).

## 2.6 Agency

Although Lukes theory, particularly the third dimension of power, is useful in interpreting how power plays out, the focus on poverty as an element of powerlessness can present people and communities living in poverty as ‘subordinate’, duped or helpless. It perpetuates the myth that people living in poverty have no agency and are unaware of what is best for them (see Hewlett et al, 2021), responding to the hegemonic idea that poverty is something people are responsible for themselves (Green, 2011).

Those living in poverty can be labelled as passive and resigned to their powerlessness as scroungers, welfare-dependant or helpless victims (Patrick, 2016). These narratives contribute to processes of misrecognition and disrespect, which form part of the relational harm that those experiencing poverty face that centre on their assumed failings (Lister, 2015). The concept of othering describes how the ‘non-poor’ treat ‘the poor’ as different which draws a line between ‘us’ and ‘them’, in order to maintain and justify social distance, intentionally or not (Lister, 2015). Othering typically necessitates the distillation of social identities into distinct classifications: the majority ingroup who embody hegemonic normativity and minority outgroups who may personify alien (and thus potentially insubordinate) identities and who are treated different differently. (Bhugra et al, 2023). As a counter narrative, the literature on the recognition of the agency of people living in poverty—of their capacity to act—challenges the characterisation of ‘the poor’ as passive objects. This work contextualises agency within existing power relations in terms of the “politics of redistribution and of recognition and respect” (Lister, 2004:187). Lister proposed a typology of agency based on two continua from the more ‘everyday’ to the more ‘strategic’, reflecting the more consequential strategic significance for people’s lives of the choices they make and from the more personal to the more political (Lister, 2015: 146). Similarly, Patrick has documented how individuals navigate and respond to their hardship (Patrick and Simpson, 2020; Patrick, 2024). Her analysis emphasises the active agency of, and intensive work undertaken by, individuals experiencing poverty – they are already active ‘beings’, not the ‘becomings’ in need of corrective policy intervention that the political framing routinely suggests (Wright, 2012). An important element of this powerlessness is lack of voice; not being heard as well as not being seen. A Politics of Poverty that goes ‘beyond the statistics’ is premised on the belief that people in poverty count as much as anyone and identifies the need to ground such conceptualisation in people’s lived experience (Lister, 2002, 2015; Fraser, 2000).

## Reflection on Lukes’ Theory

My ontological position, as a qualitative researcher, views knowledge as socially constructed and subjective rather than a singular, objective truth, recognising the importance of lived experience and the perceptions

and meanings that people make of their world, through participatory methods and dialogue based on trust and respect. Social constructivism, as an ontological position, can be regarded as clashing with Lukes' theory which has 'real interests' at its core and is argued by some as paternalistic and presumptuous in that what people believe they want (subjective interests) might not align with their objective interests, yet that there is often no way of ascertaining real or objective interests (for poor and non-poor) because it is a value laden term (which Lukes acknowledges). I have been careful in articulating that the way I apply Lukes' theory is not definitive, and have been selective in emphasising certain aspects of his theory that resonate with my work and ideas, especially the unconscious acceptance and perpetuation of dominant norms and bias as natural, the suppression of grievances, and political systems that prevent demands from becoming political issues or even from being made. Lukes cares about the plight of the powerless, with regard to moral and political responsibility, in that people are kept powerless (and poor) by the policies and activities of others, viewing powerlessness as an injustice because there are those able to reduce or remedy it. I agree with Lukes' attention to ascertaining responsibility for 'inegalitarian social constraints' that could be otherwise, although his focus on agency is on the powerful rather than the powerless, hence my decision to write a section on Agency to acknowledge the capacity of people living in poverty. Using Lukes' theory in relation to my ontology enabled me to challenge dominant discourses and question the relevance of real interests, whilst valuing people's agency, foregrounding the voices of people living in poverty, recognising that they are experts of their experience within a politics of recognition and respect.

### 3. Synthesis of Lukes' Theory to the Published Papers

#### 3.1 Introduction

In this section I use Lukes' theory to synthesise my papers using the two themes of communities and people. I discuss perspectives on power in relation to the specific narratives, contexts and policies where the studies are situated, and identify different aspects of power relating to the nature of interests, acquiescence, and responsibility. Theme One focuses on the papers about the Glasgow Housing Stock Transfer and community ownership policy (Example 1) and community engagement in regeneration (Example 2). Theme Two concerns the papers on the experiences and outcomes of individuals and families living through neighbourhood regeneration, and in the wider context of poverty, by looking at involuntary relocation (Example 3) and foodbank use (Example 4).

#### 3.2 Communities, Housing and Regeneration (Theme One)

##### *Example 1: Glasgow Housing Stock Transfer (Papers 1-3)*

The Glasgow Housing Stock Transfer was an opportunity to inject major investment and change Glasgow's social housing radically. It was, however, a complex policy facing many risks and challenges. Prior to the transfer many tenants were living in substandard accommodation, homes badly in need of modernisation and repair (Glasgow City Council, 1998). The premise of stock transfer, based on a community ownership model, was presented as the only option of being able to modernise council housing through giving tenants and communities' control and a say (Paper 1: 858; Gibb, 2003). In 2002 fifty-eight per cent of tenants in Glasgow voted in favour of the stock transfer in a ballot. This is an example of first dimension power: an overt process in a relatively open system in an established decision-making arena. Yet there was a lot of behind-the-scenes conflict and opposition to the yes vote as I go on to demonstrate (second dimension power). Stock transfer was regarded as the right decision for many in the light of there being no alternative on offer; if stock transfer was rejected, then poor quality housing, low levels of service, and no investment in municipal housing was the 'alternative'. Due to tenants' economic circumstances, most were not in a situation to be able to choose an alternative housing provider or mobilise a resistance.

The example of the stock transfer demonstrates the complexity of policymaking and multiple policy objectives, which can prove challenging in determining interests. Paper 1 discusses Glasgow's 'unique

stock transfer’ in terms of its size, stock condition, debt and required investment, and the transfer model. An analysis of housing policy development in the early years of the Scottish Parliament led Kintrea (2005) to the conclusion that there “is one dominant method designed to simultaneously achieve all of these [high level] goals [of social justice, social cohesion, economic competitiveness and empowerment] – stock transfer or community ownership” (Paper 1: 891). The Glasgow case was described as “absolutely pertinent” and of “political importance” (p891) more so since the adoption of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (Scottish Government, 2004) to be achieved by 2015. The Scottish Housing Quality Standard was introduced as a way of measuring housing quality in Scotland in terms of energy efficiency, safety and security, no serious damage, and kitchens and bathrooms in good condition, to ensure that no property falls below this level and there is some evidence of housing improvements (Paper 2: 455). In terms of furthering tenants’ interests, the policy goals are indisputable, yet it is the means to reach these that is contested.

The emphasis on community empowerment, through its community ownership policy was a mechanism to further tenants’ interests as per the narrative (Paper 1: 864-865). However, the link between ownership and empowerment was poorly specified, with confusion as to whether community ownership was a means or an end in itself. This led several commentators (politicians, journalists, housing practitioners, campaigners) to make the claim that the transfer had been a failure. This was the focus of Paper 2 where we identified the failure claims (p451-454) and then went on to evaluate claims in light of the available evidence (p454-459). In its conclusion we report that, rather than depicting the stock transfer as a failure, it might be termed a “policy fiasco, in that it is highly politicised, avoidable, and could be said to involve some blameworthy failures by policymakers, but it has not imposed ‘significant social damage’ on citizens” (p467).

Ideology played a key role in the Glasgow situation. The dominant housing culture in Glasgow was municipal and it was “difficult to underestimate the role that council housing plays in the fabric of Glasgow life, in its recent social history and....in its politics” (Paper 1: 860, and see Mooney and Poole, 2005: 30). Opponents saw the transfer of the city’s housing to GHA as an attack on a major pillar of the social contract in that the state should be responsible for social housing (Living Rent, 2019). There was a vocal opposition in the form of a Vote No campaign and a Defend Council Housing Campaign. The trade unions claimed that they and tenants had been excluded from all discussions on the development of proposals (second dimension power). Furthermore, the community-based housing associations argued that they could achieve greater empowerment if they were permitted ownership of the housing at an earlier stage: we suggest that this is a “plausible argument that would merit closer scrutiny through research ... rather than simply believing the rhetoric about involvement” (Paper 2: 463).

I go on to illustrate how outcomes—and therefore potential means of furthering interests—do not play out in a uniform way. The complex arrangement for community ownership through the local housing network of around 60 local communities, offering different quality and types of housing and facing different local issues, could never have all been realistically expected to choose local independent ownership (Paper 2: 457). Community empowerment can be both liberatory and regulatory at the same time, with committee members having different experience of power and control, as illustrated this study and others (Paper 1: 455; McKee and Cooper, 2008). As discussed in Paper 2, and evidenced in Paper 3, offering power to communities is much more subtle than the simple question of ultimate control. Through the study of nine committees (Paper 3) we identified different versions of how much power and control they experienced. Committees were categorised as ‘Confident’ (“*we have the option to speak up and say what we think, and sometimes it can be changed and other times we see their point of view*” p1468); ‘Maturing’ (“*I’ve gained a lot of knowledge about housing*” p1469), ‘Responsive’ (“*we’ll never have a good say as long as the GHA’s at the top of the house*” p1471); and ‘Powerless’ (“*we all feel our hands are tied*” p1473).

In the case of the Glasgow Housing Stock Transfer, there is no certainty that decisions made by the policy (powerful) were in tenants’ real interests. This was a complex policy with multiple goals that did not deliver in a uniform way (with specific reference to Paper 3). Positive outcomes were seen such as housing improvements for many tenants, and the experience of community empowerment for some. It is debatable as to whether this justifies meeting the interests of people and communities, and if the assertion that there was no ‘significant social damage’ for citizens is good enough.

### ***Example 2: Neighbourhood Regeneration (Papers 4 and 5)***

This example discusses the role of narrative in policy formulation, demonstrating how it failed to deliver to the detriment of the community. The language of community engagement permeated into regeneration policies for disadvantaged communities, requiring the participation of local communities as a prerequisite for the success of the regeneration process (Mayo, 2004). This notion has been largely subscribed to by policymakers, service providers, and implementation agencies (Raco, 2003). Community engagement was central to Glasgow’s city regeneration strategy in accord with national regeneration policy guidelines (Scottish Executive, 2006), and was required by GHA’s tenant participation strategy and its statements on community engagement in regeneration (GHA, 2006, 2007): “*we believe that the community must be at the heart of the study if it is to deliver a successful and sustainable neighbourhood*” (local report; see Paper 4: 23).

Paper 4 sets out the aims and intended benefits of community engagement in regeneration as: good governance; community empowerment within and beyond regeneration planning; sustainable communities; cohesive communities; effective implementation; and wellbeing (Paper 4: Table 1 p22). It discusses what the ‘point’ is of community engagement, claiming that whilst there can be a common-sense case made for it (Rogers and Robinson, 2004), others see it as the ‘responsibilisation of communities’ which refers to a process in which responsibilities shift from the state to individuals or communities (Dinham, 2006; Flint, 2003). As I go on to demonstrate, in policy there is a vagueness regarding how community engagement plays out, and the term can be used uncritically and as a catch-all to further or legitimate policy. Fuller and Geddes (2008) suggest a tick-box control mechanism to enmesh communities into a large pre-ordained state-driven governance process (see McGuinness et al, 2012). Inequities in engagement stem from the fact that approaches are mostly based on the interests, needs and norms of those designing the approaches and that ‘engagement environments’ are often built for efficiency in terms of time, money and tighter budgets, whilst in the name of empowerment (De Weger et al, 2022).

All parties subscribed to community engagement as a key process in the development of local regeneration plans. During 2006, GHA in partnership with the local housing organisations appointed consultants to undertake development studies of the transformational regeneration areas. In the three areas, consultants recruited residents to form community groups to develop local regeneration plans, each with differing levels of community representation: one group comprised a cross-section of residents not ordinarily actively in local issues, another comprised activists or ‘usual suspects’, and the third utilised an established and already constituted forum (Paper 4: 24). There were also opportunities for the wider community to be involved, and the proposed plans were put on display at a local carnival in one area (Paper 4: 31). I examined the processes and outcomes in the three transformation areas based on a qualitative study of residents’ experiences of area regeneration (Paper 4), and a case study examination in one area examining the policy from three ‘actor’ perspectives (Paper 5). There was some evidence of a relatively open system in which there were established decision-making arenas (first dimension of power). In one area in particular there was evidence of the exclusion of certain voices and notable conflict (second dimension of power), especially through the exclusion of the Save our Homes group who “felt their voice did not count and that decisions were being taken for them in an unrepresentative and non-inclusive way” (Paper 4: 28). We later report that the exclusion of this group mobilised them to become more active (Paper 5: 75).

In this example we see various types of acquiescence illustrating how power plays out differently. Some participants had initial belief in their engagement. They saw it as an opportunity to improve their neighbourhoods and felt they would have some real input: *“They listened to everything we said”* (Paper 4: 27). Over time, for some participants belief turned to misbelief and the realisation that the plans and ideas would not become a reality: *“they were maybe going to build a hotel or something...we don’t know, somebody told us that was a load of crap”* (Paper 5: 77) and *“none of us is under any illusion you know that it’s gonna happen”* (Paper 5: 76). Others recognised their limitations in that they did not always have the capacity to make complex decisions about neighbourhood regeneration: *“we’re mere mortals, we just live in a house. We’re not European bureaucrats, you know”* (Paper 4: 33). Someone felt they had little influence in making final decisions as these would be taken by other agencies: *“... every time somebody makes a decision, there’s always somebody else to make a decision ... and you do get the feeling that the more we talk and the more decisions [we make] we will always be subject to somebody saying, oh, no, you can’t do that...whatever we decide, could very well be overruled because, you know, this is wrong and that’s wrong and so on”* (Paper 4: 26).

This example illustrates an overlap between the second and third dimensions of power. There is obvious conflict and mobilisation of bias (second dimension of power) within the context of an accepted narrative that this is the way things are done, hence normalised (third dimension of power). The result of this exercise was that community engagement did not lead to the preferred actions in any of the three areas, and none of the plans developed by the groups came to fruition. The processes in one area are documented in Paper 5 which reveals the various perspectives of the key actors and the ongoing battle between keeping or saving the high-rise flats and the type of evidence collected and used. The decision to demolish all the high-rise flats that was the preferred option of the wider community, but went against the view of the campaign group, was eventually over-turned in favour of protecting some of the flats which was based on limited supporting evidence and community consultation (Paper 5: 75). The City Council felt retention of the flats “might undermine the attraction of the private sector to the area” (Paper 5: 75). Ultimately the transformation of this area was brought forward when the City Council announced that it was in a bid to host the Youth Olympics which involved demolition of all the flats: “the estate’s redevelopment has gone from total demolition to partial demolition, to total demolition once again” (Paper 5: 75). At the time of the study all the estates were still awaiting redevelopment, and no new housing nor any of the proposed additional amenities such as parks, nurseries or shops had been built. There was no delivery mechanism in place for implementing the plans and no evidence that anyone had signed up to the proposals. As one member of a community group said: *“there’s plans, drawing, mock ups...that’s all it is”* (Paper 4: 32).



It can be argued that this did not further the interests of the communities involved, either in terms of process or outcome. This example also reflects unintentional power whereby self-producing social processes of the powerful and the powerless alike are conditioned by an established narrative i.e. community engagement as a pre-requisite. GHA's lack of information and feedback to the community over long periods of time contravened its own policy statements on engagement: "So whilst the language of community empowerment is used in policy, the processes instituted in its name do not offer power or control to the community" (Paper 5: 78). This example also raises ethical concerns in that communities can be misled, let down, and have no opportunity to return to their origin neighbourhood, yet there is no place for them to seek redress.

### **3.3 People and Families: Relocation and Poverty (Theme Two)**

#### ***Example 3: Involuntary Relocation (Papers 6-9)***

In the Lived Realities study (Papers 6-9), all participants were in the process of relocating mainly from high-rise flats to different types of housing in other neighbourhoods: a process referred to as involuntary relocation. Tenants were offered choices through a 'clearance process' where there was a legal requirement to offer 'suitable alternative accommodation' which comprised three offers 'within a reasonable timescale' before considering any court action to remove them from the property to be cleared (Paper 8: 383). Evidence shows that if people feel they have exercised some choice about where or when they relocate, they may be less inclined to feel that they have been the 'victim' of regeneration (Kearns & Mason, 2013).

The counter narrative to the policy position that involuntary relocation is necessary and appropriate (summarised in Papers 6, 8 and 9), is that the forcible movement of people out of their neighbourhoods goes against their interests. Involuntary relocation, as part of a process of area regeneration, is rarely considered a neutral intervention: the terminology of 'forced relocation', 'social cleansing of council estates', and 'displacement' has been used (see Lees and Ley, 2008; Slater, 2006). There are criticisms that regeneration destabilizes working-class communities and networks, destroys neighbourhoods and abandons and displaces many families, (see Lees and Ley, 2008; Atkinson, 2004; Power, 2007). In my research (Papers 4 and 5) many participants were concerned about displacement and raised concerns about being rehoused to areas they did not know and leaving behind friends, neighbours, homes and communities, and that once you had left your community to be rehoused you may never get the chance to return to it: "*I want*

*to stay here, I want the houses done up. I like the view, I like my neighbours. I like my church, I like Tesco's, I'm happy here. I don't want to move out because If I move out I won't get back"* (Paper 4: 31).

In the absence of any observable conflict, this example constitutes third dimension power. Participants in the Lived Realities study had no choice to stay in their origin neighbourhood, and no guarantee that they could return once they had moved, thus everyone relocated including those who did not want to. Some welcomed relocation and viewed it as beneficial, whereas others did not want to move and some worried about not getting the chance to return to their origin neighbourhood. No-one in this study resisted relocation and this may have been because they did not have the means to refuse or enact a resistance, hence their options were limited if their preferences lay elsewhere.

Participants in the study had different expectations and experiences of involuntary relocation. In Paper 6, participants were categorised according to their expectations of relocating as either 'stayers', 'transitioners' or 'upgraders' (p951). Stayers were defined as "participants who were against moving at the pre-location interview or were very anxious about moving" (p951). They were said to be able to withstand their poor living conditions and had very little expectation that a move to a better house would change their lives. After the move 'stayers' looked back in the light of their experience in their new location and wondered why they had put up with such poor conditions for so long and wished they had been able to move sooner (p954). Post move, the main change in attitudes observed was the retrospective reassessment of prior attitudes. In terms of their acquiescence, the 'stayers' provide an example of an adaptive preference and the lack of belief that there can be alternatives. One of the 'stayers' reminisced after her move: *"I'm happier here than [before]...it's only when I left that I've thought to myself, I'm stuck in them flats for years...but I just kinda got on with it"* (Paper 6: 955).

The longitudinal nature of the study enabled us to measure some of the outcomes after relocation. Using this evidence, we can question the nature of real (or best) interests and whether relocation was a means to achieve these. Most participants were happier and more satisfied post move with their new arrangements. This was partly because the moves were local, and homes were usually in better condition. Improved safety and antisocial behaviour in lifts and common areas were themes as they removed a source of fear and isolation (Paper 7: 107). There is evidence of improved lives for children and young people, better outdoor space and being closer to friends (Paper 8: 391 and Paper 9: 652), and less stigma and shame (Paper 8: 390), although the social impacts were less clear for migrants (Paper 7: 106). There is mixed evidence regarding health outcomes (Paper 7) with relocatees reporting a mixture of experiences including benefits to health,

little change to health, and further health problems. This is corroborated in Paper 6 where some participants felt their health had improved yet others were resigned to their poor health problems post relocation, mental health especially (p962).

Participants had generally opted for localised relocation outcomes so had moved from one deprived neighbourhood to another that were close by: “The majority of families only moved a mile or less, the furthest move was eight miles and the average move was approximately two miles” (Paper 9: 652). Paper 9 (p961) summarises the literature on localised moves and whether or not these provide improved outcomes or interests in the context of disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Kleinhans and Varady, 2011; Posthumus et al, 2013; Visser et al, 2013). In the Lived Realities study, the opportunity structure for children and young people did not alter much, which differs from some mobility programmes which seek to move families to ‘higher opportunity neighbourhoods’ (Paper 8: 399; e.g. Sard & Rice, 2014). However, moves to nearby similar neighbourhoods offered stability and security which may be a protective factor (Paper 9: 659), but if the aim is to improve outcomes, then it might prove ineffective in the medium to long term.

Overall, whilst there is greater satisfaction post move, there is mixed evidence of health improvement and little evidence of new opportunity structures for young people. I return to the question as to whether the policy of relocation is in people’s *real* interests in the absence of alternatives or counterfactuals, or if it is reflects a policy perpetuating the status quo, whilst also being an example of unintentional power.

#### ***Example 4: Poverty and Foodbanks (Paper 10)***

The final example differs from the others in that foodbanks, which are charitable initiatives, are the result of policy failures as opposed to being a specific policy. Evidence suggests that the rapid rise of foodbank use since 2011 are the cumulative outcome of the many (negative) changes to the welfare state over this period, largely on ideological grounds (Loopstra et al, 2018; see p441). Foodbanks have become an established, informal part of the welfare system for those who are vulnerable, poor and powerless (Garthwaite, 2016; Purdam, et al, 2016). Paper 10 frames foodbanks as paradoxes of policy and society: people who are let down by the government policies are referred by frontline staff in public and third sector agencies to foodbanks that are predominantly charitable enterprises to meet a state responsibility (p441). The paradoxes identified “illustrate the opaque and complicated connection between foodbanks, the state and the voluntary sector” (p441).

Foodbanks have become normalised as a response to poverty and hardship “*A generation is growing up believing that it’s normal to see a foodbank in every community. This is not right.*” (Trussell Trust, 2023).

In Paper 10 I assert that:

“Although the government and the third sector declare they would rather foodbanks did not exist and were not an integral part of the welfare state, there is no desire or expectation that foodbanks will disappear anytime soon. There is an implicit assumption on the part of the state and the voluntary sector that foodbanks will continue to serve people living in poverty” (Lawson and Kearns, 2021:441)

Whilst foodbanks are an example of a response towards *intentional* consequences of social security and other policies, they are also an example of *unintended* power and social processes in that frontline staff from public agencies who refer people to foodbanks, and volunteers who run foodbanks, are complicit in the process. Third dimension power involves the internalised, often unconscious, acceptance of dominant norms as natural and normal, even if they perpetuate an unjust status quo. This aspect of power can help explain how certain matters remain on the agenda for discussion and go unchanged because they become entrenched in society.

In terms of acquiescence, foodbank users have no alternative means of support at the time of their usage so there is resignation—and frequently resentment—at their necessity. Most foodbanks users in the study were facing an acute financial crisis or a reduction in their income, often associated with delays in benefit payments (p445). Many participants had never expected themselves to be in such situations, but through events such as marriage breakdown, losing a job, or becoming homeless, there was no alternative because of the lack of a social and economic safety net (p446). Foodbank users “*frequently had complex and difficult lives, including multiple physical and mental health issues, dealing with unexpected bereavements, family crises and hostile communities*” (p446). Foodbanks evidently go against people’s real interests. Participants did not like using foodbanks: they felt embarrassed and ashamed both at the circumstances they found themselves in - “*People look at you coming out of there, they start to look at you as if you were less than a dog*” (p448) - but also for resorting to use a foodbank: “*for a country like this, for people to resort to the foodbank is not nice. But thank God it is there...*” (p450). One participant explained that using a foodbank “*really badly affected me at the time psychologically and emotionally*” and another participant felt ashamed as “*having nothing and having to go and get food from someone*” (p447). The charitable nature of foodbanks caused users to feel less entitled than others to such help, and there was little expectation that the experience would be a good one, as one participant said: “*I just pray and hope I don’t need to go through it again*” (p450).

Foodbanks users are aware of their interests (in relation to their fundamental needs including food and other essential items) so comply with the system because they are powerless to do otherwise in the absence of economic or other supports. Objectively, due to government failure in supporting people who are 'poor' and 'vulnerable', foodbanks are not in people's real interests because of the 'shameful' process through which they have to access foodbanks and how they make people feel in terms of their self-worth. There is, however, a contradiction in that, for some participants, foodbanks filled a gap in terms of social support (from volunteers), provided therapeutic support (a 'listening ear') and suggested directions to new social and volunteering opportunities that may be important for quality of life (p452): "*They don't look down on you...they make you feel welcome all the way*" (p449). Paradoxically, the case of foodbanks has "given citizens the dignity, respect and emotional and practical support that have been lacking from or eroded by the state" (p451).

## Conclusions

My published papers, based on research set in social housing estates in low-income neighbourhoods in Glasgow, have made specific contributions to knowledge in the fields of housing stock transfer, community ownership and empowerment, neighbourhood regeneration and involuntary relocation, and state and voluntary sector relationships in the case of foodbanks. Using Lukes' theory as a synthesis has enabled me to consider the papers as a whole and their contribution to knowledge, framing them as a poverty issue, and in the context of inegalitarian "social constraints that might be otherwise" (Hayward and Lukes, 2008: 17).

My main contribution to knowledge has been to assess how power plays out in policies that are *routine and unconsidered*. The power debate in social policy has largely focused on intentional policies to 'harm' people in poverty such as those related to austerity and punitive social security measures, illustrated in my paper on foodbanks. However, my work has predominantly looked at routine policies intended to further the interests of people and communities in relation to their homes and communities. I provide evidence of positive outcomes to people's lives through investment in social housing, including improvements for children and young people, and some degree of community empowerment. There is mixed evidence of health improvements and little evidence of new opportunity structures for young people. In relation to policies that *might* go against people's real interests, but which are in their best interests at the time, I provide evidence of 'constrained choices' regarding involvement on local housing organisation committees with varying levels of control, choices regarding relocation from one neighbourhood to another, and having a say about neighbourhood regeneration. The feeling of being 'powerless' for some on local housing committees, the involuntary relocation of families between 'deprived estates', and the involvement of communities in regeneration activities which are not always acted on or implemented, might be considered as examples that go against real interests. Furthermore, I consider whether the assertion (in Paper 2) that the housing stock transfer did not impose 'significant social damage' is good enough. The claims about outcomes (positive, negative and mixed), however, are relative, and involve value judgements in relation to people's real interests.

I conclude that my work points to the naturalisation of poverty through the operation of policy and narrative. What is arbitrary and unequal appears to actors—the powerful and powerless—as natural and objective, and by the 'misrecognition' of its origins and modes of operation. It reflects the process of othering whereby 'poor communities' can be treated differently to the rest of society in terms of their interests and aspirations which is reflected in the policies ascribed to them. Lukes' third dimension is not limited to intentional acts

of manipulation by the powerful but can also be seen as self-producing social processes in which the thinking and behaviour of the powerful and the powerless alike are conditioned by social norms. It involves the internalised, often unconscious acceptance of dominant norms as natural and normal even if they appear to be against people's interests.

The lack of progress in reducing poverty over the last 20 years reflects the political decisions and policies—intentional and unintentional—that have negatively affected the health and lives of many people and communities. In writing this thesis I have looked backwards and forwards in my career and aimed to situate the papers in the wider context of my work in this field. Throughout my career, which started in community development and then moved to academic projects and evaluations aimed to reduce health inequalities and address poverty, I have witnessed intractable poverty and the repeated initiatives and policies to alleviate it which have reproduced and maintained the status quo. Similarly, my current and planned research on women's low-paid work and unpaid caring reflects the perpetuation of social norms, gender roles, and the under-valuation of women's roles in society.

The problematisation of, and intention to reduce, poverty has been on the agenda of political discussion for years by interest groups, campaigners and academics. Whilst there are calls for the voices of the marginalised to be heard in policymaking, and there is a renewed focus on lived experience, there remains little evidence of voice or resistance as evidenced in my work. Lukes' theory has been useful in consolidating the evidence from my ongoing and current work and where to take this. Despite the renewed emphasis and momentum to 'tackle poverty', there still lacks a shared narrative and traction within policy and politics, to enact change so 'inegalitarian social constraints' that could be otherwise, continue to persist. The question remains as to whether substantial improvements to people's lives can be realistically achieved by regeneration within low-income neighbourhoods without first, or at least concurrently, addressing the fundamental characteristics of poverty, such as low income, low-paid employment, and social security which are policy issues determined by political choices. Crucially, however, it is the perpetuation and reproduction of norms and values through the dynamics of power that hinder or influence change. This requires dealing directly with major ideas and narratives which inform, and are informed by, those in power.

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