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Public participation in socioeconomic decision-making in the UK and Scotland: lessons for a 'democratic rejuvenation' to tackle health inequalities

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Public participation is of increasing interest to the health inequalities research community, particularly in the UK. Driven by a perceived 'policy stalemate' characterised by an observed gap between contemporary knowledge on what might reduce inequalities in health and the actual policy action taken by governments, theorists are now advocating for the potential role of the public in provoking more effective interventions. Indeed, qualitative research suggests that, although often considered to be resistant to more progressive policy reforms, 'the public' can hold perspectives on health inequalities that are nuanced and multi-layered, and that this is particularly true for people with lived experience of disadvantage. Alongside this, in recent decades, there has been an international participatory and deliberative wave sweeping across institutional decision-making, resulting in new or different opportunities and mechanisms for citizens to input into policymaking. Emerging from this trend are 'democratic innovations', which incorporate mini-publics, participatory budgeting, collaborative governance and referenda. Informed by the central ideals of deliberative democracy, it has been argued that these citizen-centred participatory-deliberative processes might provide a space for *rational-critical* debate on complicated issues like health inequalities, and as such potentially take aim at deep rooted inequalities in political voice whilst at the same time producing more egalitarian policy action. In short, a 'democratic rejuvenation'.

Recognising that public participation has long existed in the UK and beyond, this thesis aims to investigate the lessons that current participatory practice might hold for any anticipated 'democratic rejuvenation' to tackle health inequalities. It aims:

- To explore how public participation currently fits into socio-economic policymaking in the UK and Scotland, in particular the purpose it serves and the policy level at which it operates;

- To investigate and better understand how the design and delivery of public participation processes interacts with social and political inequalities.

In order to explore these aims, a Systematic Scoping Review of participatory-deliberative processes in policymaking related to income insecurity in the UK was conducted. The findings of this Review then informed the selection of two participatory-deliberative processes taking place in different socio-economic policy settings in Scotland as the subjects of a Dual Case Study. Multiple sources of qualitative data were collated for each case and then analysed to explore and understand the realities of embedding public participation in policymaking which connects to health inequalities. The analysis for both the studies presented in this thesis was underpinned by a conceptual framework specifically developed for both.

The findings presented here provide a sense check for those seeking to increase public participation in policymaking in the UK and Scotland, specifically for those who view it as a potential mechanism through which inequalities might be redressed. Both studies revealed a common gulf between the intended ambitions of the participatory-deliberative processes analysed and the reality of participatory policymaking in practice. These collective high expectations produced 'fantastical' notions of what public participation is and does, which were often characterised by segregation from policy settings and, crucially, from contemporary knowledge and evidence. This suggests that any 'democratic rejuvenation' must confront the challenges unearthed here, and *reimagine* participatory practice in more realistic, but as such, potentially more impactful, terms.

Confronting the challenges identified in this research requires better articulation of the purpose of public participation within policy settings, and how this connects to conceptualisations of representativeness – underpinned by explicit recognition of the limitations of both. Relatedly,

there appears to be work to be done to explore the tensions between different forms of participation and in particular around the notion of ‘lived experience’ and its different meanings and usage within policy and research spaces. In addition, it is necessary to properly locate public participation within the broader political and social systems in which it is taking place. This requires centring power and privilege and the many ways that socially advantaged individuals, groups and organisations exert (at times invisible) influence on policymaking. Theories of power as a fundamental cause of health inequalities and epistemic injustice appear particularly useful tools for this work, alongside the active search for stories of success, which may provide further lessons on how to overcome or mitigate some of these challenges and take steps towards a more fruitful ‘democratic rejuvenation’ to tackle health inequalities.

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Author’s declaration

“I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis, except where the assistance of others has been acknowledged. It has not been submitted in any form for another degree or professional qualification.”

Anna Baillie, 2026

Chapter 1: Introduction

Social inequalities in health are increasing in the UK and Scotland (Miall et al., 2022; Walsh & McCartney, 2024). Widely regarded to be driven by inequalities in socio-economic status (Mackenzie et al., 2025; Phelan et al., 2010), theorists argue we have entered a *crisis age*: 'a permanent time of crisis for most high income countries, with simultaneous instability across political, economic, environmental, and health systems' (Bambra et al., 2025, p. 12). This 'crisis age' in the UK is characterised by increased social stratification of health outcomes, with poorer areas witnessing 'people dying *younger* and in greater numbers than before… a tragedy on an enormous scale that did not need to happen' (Walsh & McCartney, 2024, p. 8). This juncture in history has provoked increasing calls from the health inequalities research community for urgent action to address the unfair distribution of wealth and power (McCartney et al., 2021). Indeed, viewed through a political economy lens of health inequalities, the role of policy in tackling the recent 'extraordinary, almost unprecedented, changes to life expectancy and mortality' (Walsh & McCartney, 2024, p. 8) amongst disadvantaged groups is considered pivotal (Bambra et al., 2025; Coburn, 2004; Navarro et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2016).

Policymaking is, however, complex and fractured (Cairney, 2020b), taking place across various spaces and levels (Vlahos, 2021) and influenced by many different factors. Indeed, policymaking in the context of tackling health inequalities in the UK presents a particular puzzle, where despite being considered a world leader in health inequalities research (Smith et al., 2016), resultant policy action which is cognisant of this learning is lacking (McHugh et al., 2023). In particular, 'lifestyle drift' (Katikireddi et al., 2013) appears prominent, characterised by individualised, behaviour-focused interventions (Mead et al., 2022), rather than policies which address the upstream determinants of health, particularly those related to wealth, power and income. This has led some to claim that we have

reached a ‘policy stalemate’ (Smith et al., 2022) in the UK where there is a persistent gulf between policy action and contemporary evidence.

As a suggested antidote to this ‘stalemate’, theorists are now calling for a rethink of how policy decisions are made, and particularly the role of the public within institutional decision-making. Indeed, there are increasing calls for a ‘democratic rejuvenation’ (Bambra et al., 2021), where ‘enhanced democratic participation’(Bambra et al., 2025) might play a crucial role in provoking macro-action on the drivers of inequality, with increased public participation in policymaking spaces often sitting at the heart of this (Smith et al., 2022). Alongside this, a growing qualitative literature repeatedly asserts the value and necessity of engaging with the experiential expertise of disadvantaged groups to understand the lived realities of inequality in order to better design required policy interventions (Fergie et al., 2025; Peacock et al., 2014; Smith & Stewart, 2024; Smith & Anderson, 2018).

Public participation is, of course, not a new idea in the UK or otherwise (Barnes et al., 2007). Indeed, in recent decades there has been an explosion of participatory-deliberative processes taking place in institutional settings across the world (OECD, 2020). This ‘deliberative turn’ (Dryzek, 2010) has led to new and different ways of engaging citizens in policy decision-making and the emergence of a new field of democratic theory: democratic innovations (Elstub et al., 2019; G. Smith, 2009). The field of democratic innovations is diverse (Escobar & Bua, 2025); often connected to *institutional* decision-making (G. Smith, 2009); and incorporating a wide variety of public participation processes, such as citizens’ juries or assemblies, participatory budgeting, collaborative governance or referenda (Elstub & Escobar, 2019). It is the exploration of public participation innovations like this which health inequalities theorists are calling for (Bambra et al., 2021). Despite its increasing prevalence, public participation in policymaking (and beyond) is not without critics (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Newman et al., 2009). Indeed, although often cited as a key mechanism through which inequality might

be redressed (Gaventa, 2016), as public participation has increased internationally so too has inequality in high income countries (Lee et al., 2015b). This means that investigating public participation processes, and particularly those that fall under the banner of democratic innovations, is an area of contemporary interest to health inequalities. It appears necessary, and vital, to understand current participatory policymaking in the UK. To this end, this thesis has the following aims:

- To explore how public participation currently fits into socio-economic policymaking in the UK and Scotland, in particular the purpose it serves and the policy level at which it operates;
- To investigate and better understand how the design and delivery of public participation processes interacts with social and political inequalities.

1.1 Precursor to the PhD: my own motivation

The idea to investigate the topics of this thesis was originally developed by two members of the supervisory team (GF & KS). At the time the opportunity was advertised, I was employed in the anti-poverty sector in Scotland, specifically as a supportive intermediary between local institutions working together to tackle child poverty. The role required me to work with representatives from across sectors including different departments within the Local Authority, NHS, and Health and Social Care Partnership as well as with key third sector organisations. Across these different settings, spaces (and divides), I often heard similar utterings: we have to involve people with lived experience. Often times, this was a whisper, spoken more as an afterthought (or more likely a perceived obligation on their part) but sometimes it was a shout, alongside a threat that if people with lived experience are not involved in decision-making, then the decisions made simply would not count. Almost always this was spoken into the abyss. My job largely involved supporting or attending large cross-sectoral meetings so whenever advocacy for involving ‘real’ people was voiced, it was, more often than not, to a group of people with

no collective resource, responsibility or available mechanisms through which this involvement might be facilitated. And yet, it was repeated, and repeated and repeated.

I found this both frustrating and interesting. My professional background up until that point had had a strong focus on understanding lived experience within particular contexts. I supported two groups of people with lived experience of food insecurity to contribute into a large, national project for nearly two years. I was a strong advocate for the convening of these groups and was instrumental in their design. Whilst I loved that role, the reality of connecting citizens into decision-making (even within one project) was challenging and complicated. Subsequent roles revealed similar tensions: wanting to involve people and actually involving people are not one and the same thing. Often, the time, resources, skills and knowledge required to enable citizen involvement just does not exist and whilst many people state the desire to involve citizens (and particularly people with lived experience of disadvantage), the reality of what that might entail is, in my experience, very rarely known or understood. For me, this made the repeated advocacy for involving people with lived experience in the meetings I was attending ring loudly hollow. I have studied community learning and development and previously I might have been one of those people shouting about involving people but gaining an understanding of what this (sometimes) looked like in practice was beginning to make me doubt whether transformative public participation, which actually influenced decision making and changed peoples' lives for the better was really possible.

This is why a PhD opportunity to investigate the role that public participation processes might play in tackling health inequalities was so appealing. It provided an opportunity to better understand and unpick participation, and some of the challenges (and what appeared to be contradictions) that I had encountered in practice. Indeed, I was fortunate enough that the topic area and original proposal was broad

enough for me to significantly shape and inform the eventual focus and study design of the thesis.

1.2 Research Questions

In order to meet the aims stated above, the following research questions were explored:

1. How and to what effect are participatory-deliberative processes applied in socioeconomic decision and policymaking in Scotland and the UK?

2. What is the *purpose* of participatory-deliberative processes within policymaking in Scotland and how is this characterised in policy and stakeholder accounts?

3. How are the democratic goods of inclusion, popular control, considered judgement and transparency conceptualised in participatory-deliberative processes?

    i. What types of publics are participating and why?
    ii. What is the role of evidence and expertise?
    iii. How do participatory-deliberative processes connect to and impact policy decisions?

4. What can we learn from existing/contemporary examples of participatory-deliberative processes about the opportunities and challenges of a 'democratic rejuvenation' to address health inequalities?

1.3 Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 provides a literature review related to both health inequalities and public participation. It details some of the key theories which underpin the existence of health inequalities, notably fundamental cause theory and a political economy framing. It then considers policymaking in the UK and Scotland, outlining the above 'policy stalemate' and contemporary arguments for exploring the role of the public within policy decision-making. It then focuses on public participation exploring some of the underlying arguments for participatory policymaking and the current, increasing focus on democratic innovations - of which a typology is detailed. This is followed by a discussion of public participation in the context of inequality, outlining some of the tensions in existing literature, as well as opportunities for developing understanding of the potential for increased public participation. The chapter concludes by providing an overview of the broad aims of the thesis

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the Conceptual Framework which informed the design of the study and the analysis of the data. It details three interlinked frameworks: Whitehead's typology of actions to tackle social inequalities in health (2007), Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' Approach (Bacchi, 2009), and Smith's categorisation of Democratic Goods (G. Smith, 2009). The chapter concludes by stating the research questions for the thesis in full.

Chapter 4 details the first stage of the study: a Systematic Scoping Review. This Review seeks to answer RQ1: How and to what effect are participatory-deliberative processes applied in socioeconomic decision and policymaking in Scotland and the UK? Using the vector of income insecurity, this Review searched for and analysed real -world examples of participatory-deliberative processes in socioeconomic policymaking in the

UK. This chapter details the study design, search methods, results and inclusion criteria, and then features a discussion of the findings in light of the Conceptual Framework and research question. An abridged account of this study was published in *Evidence and Policy* in 2022 (https://doi.org/10.1332/17442648Y2025D000000053). This chapter provides a fuller description and situates the study in the context of the wider thesis.

Chapter 5 provides detail and information on the methodology and methods for the main part of the study: a Dual Case Study. This chapter details the research paradigm, positionality and the chosen methodology. It then provides information on the case selection, including the convening of a Policy Stakeholder Panel to inform the study design. Subsequent decisions are then detailed related to the various data generation methods with reflections and justification provided on decisions around informed consent and anonymity. It ends by providing an overview of the analytic approach, including detail on how the Conceptual Framework was operationalised within this part of the study.

Chapter 6 focuses on RQ2: What is the *purpose* of participatory-deliberative processes within policymaking in Scotland and how is this characterised in policy and stakeholder accounts? Using Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' Approach (2009), the first part of this chapter details an in-depth analysis of the policy backdrop of both cases included in the Dual Case Study: Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero. It then moves on to consider how the purpose of public participation within policymaking is constructed within policy stakeholder accounts, picking up on similarities and differences across and between the cases and policy review.

Chapter 7 focuses on RQ3: How are the democratic goods of inclusion, popular control, considered judgement and transparency conceptualised in participatory-deliberative processes? This chapter uses Smith's categorisation of Democratic Goods (2009) to explore how the processes

in each case were designed, implemented and experienced. In particular, it includes sections on the types of publics participating, the role of evidence and expertise and how the participation processes connect to policy decision-making. In doing so, this chapter picks up on commonalities across both cases as well as specific findings related to each in isolation.

Chapter 8 focuses on RQ4: What can we learn from existing/contemporary examples of PDPs about the opportunities and challenges of a 'democratic rejuvenation' to address health inequalities? Having detailed the findings of both the Systematic Scoping Review and the Dual Case Study, this chapter considers these findings in light of health inequalities literature. In particular, it describes a proposed participatory 'fantasy paradigm' characterised by key challenges unearthed in preceding chapters. It concludes by discussing the potential opportunities for research and policy actors interested in participatory policymaking as a means to tackle health inequalities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Thesis Aims

2.1 Overview of chapter

This chapter provides a background literature review for the study. The review is split into two sections: one focused on health inequalities and one focused on public participation and democratic innovations. Each section aims to provide an overview of contemporary thought as well as identify where knowledge and understanding on health inequalities and public participation is converging, with a particular focus on the UK and Scotland. The chapter concludes by providing an overview of the broad aims of the thesis.

2.2 Health inequalities: persistent, prevalent, preventable

It is well-known that some people live longer and healthier lives whilst others have higher likelihood of experiencing disease and ill health or dying young (Marmot, 2015). We can probably accept that health variation is likely across different groups, a young person is likely to have better health than someone nearing the end of their life, certain physical characteristics or genetic backgrounds might leave you more vulnerable to certain diseases and simple luck of the draw might determine your exposure to health damaging environments (Whitehead & Dahlgren, 2006). However, longstanding variations in health outcomes for different social groups are not random or individual experiences but instead occur in repeated patterns within and between countries across the world (Link & Phelan, 1995; Phelan et al., 2010), otherwise known as health inequalities. *Health inequalities* are commonly defined as 'systematic differences in the health of groups and communities occupying unequal

positions in society' (Graham, 2004, p. 101). Sometimes described synonymously as 'health disparities' or 'health inequities' (Graham, 2004; McCartney et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016; Whitehead & Dahlgren, 2006), health inequalities are broadly considered to be systematic in nature, socially produced and fundamentally unjust (Carlisle, 2001; Graham, 2000; Smith et al., 2016; Whitehead & Dahlgren, 2006). And, thanks to a wide-ranging and robust literature (McCartney et al., 2019), it is now widely recognised that health is powerfully shaped by the socioeconomic, environmental and cultural conditions in which we live (Whitehead & Popay, 2010) as well as the social position we occupy within society (Graham, 2007; Marmot, 2015).

Indeed, it is well documented that our social position is deeply intertwined with our health outcomes (Diderichsen et al., 2019; Graham, 2007; McCartney et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016). It is often the gateway to exposure to health damaging environments or conversely the entry point for health protecting resources (Graham, 2004; Phelan et al., 2010). Although not easily measured (Smith et al., 2016), in health inequalities discourse, indicators such as income, occupation and education are often employed to signify a person's place in the social hierarchy (Galobardes et al., 2006; Graham, 2000). As such, social position is often viewed through a socio-economic lens (Graham, 2004), and is closely related to our health outcomes as well as how much or how little structural, social, and economic forces impact our lives:

> Everyone is exposed to these [social] structures; people can reduce but not remove, their pervasive effects. Whether willingly or not, everyone is therefore socially positioned: everyone is slotted into a place on the social pecking order. Their place, in turn, allots them more or less resources – material or social – needed to do well and stay well in the societies of which they are part. (Graham, 2007, p. 40)

For many, it is the socio-economic aspects of social position which matter most in the context of health inequalities, often referred to as socio-economic status (SES) (Graham, 2000, 2007; Mackenbach, 2019; McCartney et al., 2019; Phelan et al., 2010). Socio-economic status is

defined by Link & Phelan (2010) as embodying ‘an array of resources, such as money, knowledge, prestige, power and beneficial social connections’ (p. 528). These resources, available to people in differential measures depending on their social position, have been found to ‘protect health no matter what mechanisms are relevant in a given time’ (p. 528). If you occupy a higher socio-economic position, i.e., have sufficient access to the above resources, you are more likely to be able to avoid, protect yourself from, or mitigate health damage, irrespective of time and place (Link & Phelan, 1995; Phelan et al., 2010). In short, inequality in socio-economic status is considered to be a *fundamental cause* of health inequalities. Fundamental cause theory unpicks and identifies ‘exposures which are unequally experienced across populations and which continue to determine health despite improving average health outcomes’ (McCartney et al., 2021, p. 21). What this means is that whilst the risks, diseases and protective resources needed to be well all change with time, the graded relationship between socio-economic status and health remains (Mackenzie et al., 2025; Phelan et al., 2010). Closely related to this is the concept of a ‘social’ or ‘class’ gradient, popularised by Marmot’s study of civil servants in Whitehall which revealed stark differences in health outcomes between socio-economic groups, even at the higher end of the social spectrum (Marmot et al., 1991). This finding was pivotal as it demonstrated that health inequalities are not simply a matter of rich vs poor but can be seen as ‘a continual social gradient, rather than ‘health gaps’ which result from ‘health deprivation’ in communities’ (Smith et al., 2016, p. 4). Rather it is a phenomenon which persists across whole populations, with any gap between positions on the social gradient demarcating differential distribution of ‘healthy’ social conditions and access to the health protecting resources described by Link and Phelan (2010).

Given their prevalence - persisting, and in some cases increasing (Miall et al., 2022), across different socio-political contexts (Mackenbach, 2019) - detailing the complexity and extent of health inequalities has been

compared to ‘falling down the rabbit hole’ (Kelly-Irving et al., 2022). However, we have a (relatively) recent shared experience which clearly exposed the harsh realities of deeply entrenched inequalities in health: the COVID-19 pandemic. Analysis of the mortality rate amongst different population groups revealed stark differences in outcomes. Rates of hospitalisation or death were disproportionately high among certain groups, such as people from minority ethnic backgrounds, people with a disability or people who worked in frontline (and often low paying) roles (Bambra et al., 2020; Katikireddi et al., 2021). In addition, the long-term mental health impacts of subsequent lockdowns were felt most keenly by women, younger people and those facing economic disadvantage (Suleman et al., 2021). In Scotland, the death rates in areas with the highest levels of deprivation were, on average, 2.4 times higher than those with the least deprivation (Scottish Government, 2021a). And, evidence shows that previously disadvantaged groups in the UK experienced greater exposure to the virus, followed by greater vulnerability to severity of disease, further compounded by heavier social and economic consequences on those groups (Dahlgren & Whitehead, 2021).

Although not the focus of this thesis, just scraping the surface of COVID-19 brings into sharp focus the ways in which our living and working conditions can powerfully determine our health and mortality. It also very clearly demonstrates the need to think about socio-economic status as encompassing much more than the typical nexus of income, occupation and education to include other, equally important, dimensions of inequality such as gender (Lorimer et al., 2018), ethnicity (Katikireddi et al., 2021) and place (Davidson et al., 2008), as well as considering how these characteristics intersect with one another (Kapilashrami et al., 2015). As Graham (2000) asserts:

> Lives and lifestyles are mediated by other dimensions of inequality, including ethnicity and gender. Again, these are typically treated as personal attributes (Asian man; White woman), an approach which obscures the structures of disadvantage and discrimination which make them important influences on health. (p. 4)

Bambra et al. (2025) argue social inequalities in health 'may occur across a variety of social divides including class, race or ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or disability' (p. 3) whilst also highlighting the necessity of '[recognising] the cumulative, additive, and integrated nature of health inequalities and the converging processes associated with different, intersecting categories of disadvantage' (p. 3). Indeed there is now consensus that it is important to investigate the inequalities which *drive* the socio-economic gradient in health (for example exploring the role of stigma or racism, Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013; Phelan & Link, 2015), including how they operate in different spaces (Mackenzie et al., 2025), rather than simply evidence that this gradient exists, as McCartney et al (2021) asks: 'Better placed groups have better access to the means of avoidance or treatment, but how so?' (p. 22).

A prominent thesis in considering this question is the role of policy and politics, otherwise known as the 'political economy approach to health inequalities' (Bambra et al., 2025, p. 5). This explanation for the persistence of social inequalities in health centres on 'how policy decisions create the *context* for these inequalities' (emphasis added, Smith & Stewart, 2024, p. 6). In this account, social positions and gradients are all shaped and defined by political and policy choices, which are in turn determined by 'where the power lies and in whose interests that power is exercised' (Bambra et al., 2025, p. 6), as Smith et al. (2016) helpfully outline:

> Politics, and the balance of power between political actors/groups, determine whether, for example, states provide collective interventions to reduce inequalities (as would be expected in a strong welfare state) and whether policy interventions are individually, environmentally or socially focused. (p. 11)

Indeed, power itself has been put forward as '*the essential* element in maintaining, increasing or reducing social and economic inequalities' (McCartney et al., 2021, p. 21), with the 'identification of sources, spaces, positions and forms of power prevailing in particular every day

contexts' (McCartney et al., 2021, p. 35) suggested as a necessary first step in tackling the various inequalities which arise from differential power dynamics within the political decision-making sphere and beyond. Furthermore, central to political economy understandings of health inequalities is explicit recognition of the 'macro-political trends' (Peacock et al., 2014, p. 175) which drive and shape health – and in particular the role which, it is argued, neoliberalism has played in steep increases in health inequalities in recent decades worldwide (Bambra et al., 2025; Coburn, 2004). Neoliberalism, 'broadly speaking' denotes 'a preference to (1) encourage individual and market rather than state solutions, and (2) prioritise economic growth over other policy aims' (Cairney & Kippen, 2024, p. 9). In policy terms, neoliberalism was (is) often operationalised via 'reforms', which are:

> ... characterised by the privatisation and marketisation of state services and industries; the retrenchment of social security benefits and social housing; modified taxation arrangements that shifted the burden away from businesses; restriction on labour organising; and the abandonment of the state's role in promoting full employment. (Bambra et al., 2025, p. 12)

Indeed, there is now widespread recognition that these policy 'reforms' can have unequal consequences across populations (Walsh & McCartney, 2024), ultimately resulting in 'the reality that more and more people are dealing with the premature loss of loved family members and friends, and these losses are disproportionately experienced by people living in more marginalised and disadvantaged circumstances' (Bambra et al., 2025, p. 1). For many years, the health inequalities research community have been calling for different policy reforms which move away from state *retrenchment* and instead focus on *redistribution* (Smith et al., 2016). There is a now vast literature detailing the ways and means that health inequalities might be 'levelled' (Bambra et al., 2025) to ensure more equal access to the resources, assets and power that keep us well. The following section considers in more detail the case of the UK and Scotland, charting contemporary thinking on how the socio-economic

roots causes of health inequalities might be redressed and the role of policymaking within this.

2.2.1 Health inequalities in the UK and Scotland

Social inequalities in health are both pervasive and complex in the context of the UK and Scotland (McCartney et al., 2022; Miall et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2016). Indeed, both countries present a particular puzzle when it comes to health inequalities.

On the one hand, both the UK and Scottish governments have, in varying degrees, designated specific policy attention to addressing health inequalities, in both rhetoric (McHugh et al., 2023) and action (Mackenbach, 2010, 2011). The UK Government in particular has a, now longstanding, history in trying to understand how best to tackle inequalities in health via the commissioning of multiple investigations, such as the Black Report in 1980 (Macintyre, 1997), the Acheson Inquiry in 1998 (Bambra et al., 2011) and the Marmot Review in 2010 (Marmot, 2010). Indeed, despite spanning several decades, the consecutive reviews commissioned by the UK Government share many similarities and each call for macro policy action to tackle the social and economic drivers which lead to stark differences in health across socio-economic groups (Bambra et al., 2011). Alongside this, the UK is considered a world-leader in health inequalities research and policy (McHugh et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2016). For the past four decades there has been an intense and sustained research focus on understanding the causes of and potential solutions to health inequalities (Carlisle, 2001; McCartney et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2016). This means that we now have a diverse and well-established evidence base, particularly related to the pivotal role of socio-economic circumstances in determining the health of different social groups.

On the other hand, despite this wealth of knowledge and expertise around the nature and genesis of social inequalities, significant health divides between different social groups not only persist but are deepening

(McCartney et al., 2023; Miall et al., 2022; Seaman et al., 2024; Walsh, Dundas, et al., 2022). Current UK and Scottish evidence paints a grim picture. Studies demonstrate that there are increasing numbers of people dying from suicide, alcohol- or drug-related harms, otherwise known as 'diseases of despair', deaths which have been found to be 'profoundly socioeconomically patterned' (Walsh et al., 2021, p. 1200). Alongside this, recent analyses tell us that life expectancy in the UK has stalled across the whole population with inequalities in mortality rates widening, particularly for people in low paid roles and those from ethnic minority backgrounds (McCartney et al., 2022) or living in an area with high levels of deprivation (Walsh, Dundas, et al., 2022). Whilst mortality rates alone are an admittedly thin measure of the extent of health inequalities (McCartney et al., 2022), what these studies demonstrate is that 'there is incongruity between research and policy and instead of knowledge leading to action that narrows the health divide, it is widening' (McHugh et al., 2023, p. 2). And herein lies the puzzle: the UK is at once considered a 'global leader in health inequalities research and policy' (Smith et al., 2016, p. xii), whilst at the same time failing to tackle, or indeed prevent the increase of, deeply entrenched and unequal health outcomes across different groups.

Reflecting 'political economy' approaches to health inequalities, this apparent gulf between knowledge and action in the UK is often considered a problem of poor policymaking:

> In terms of health, our political choices result in certain economic, and social policies being pursued. These policies can be either salutogenic (health-promoting) or pathogenic (health-harming) to the people and places they touch. (Bambra et al., 2025, p. 5)

Indeed, there is a general research consensus that the failure to adequately address health inequalities is thanks to a distinct lack of *policy* action related to wealth (re)distribution, taxation, strengthening social protection systems (including public services and social security) and employment (Mackenbach, 2011; McCartney et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2016). This lack of 'upstream' policy focus (Smith et al., 2016;

Whitehead & Popay, 2010) is thought to be driven by a range of factors: i.) a general lack of political appetite for redistributive policies (Navarro et al., 2006; Smith, 2015); ii.) complex and plural explanations of health inequalities from the research community leading to a confusing array of options for policymakers (Douglas, 2016; Kelly-Irving et al., 2022; Smith & Eltanani, 2015); and, iii.) a potential failure on the part of academia to get governments to do anything other than recognise health inequalities' existence (Bambra et al., 2011). Underpinning this is the phenomenon of *lifestyle drift* (Katikireddi et al., 2013), whereby individualised notions of health (Mead et al., 2022) permeate policy programmes (including those with upstream ambitions) (Mackenzie et al., 2020), shifting them 'towards clinical and behavioural risk factors in individuals living in disadvantaged communities' (Douglas, 2016, p. 111), whilst largely ignoring the structural, socio-economic and environmental influences which significantly shape all of our lives (Whitehead & Dahlgren, 2006). This tendency for policy to stray downstream has been particularly pervasive in the UK, resulting in suites of policy responses 'which aim to reduce health inequalities by changing people's lifestyle behaviours (without also changing the contexts in which they live and /or work)' (Smith et al., 2016, p. 12).

The instances of *lifestyle drift* identified across UK policymaking are numerous (see for example, Carlisle, 2001; Katikireddi et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2016; Whitehead & Popay, 2010). Indeed, theorists have argued that policymaking to tackle health inequalities in the UK operates in a 'fantasy paradigm' (Scott-Samuel & Smith, 2015), seeking to realise an:

> …impossible dream in which the long-established social gradient in health is gradually flattened via a series of downstream interventions and policies which, for the most part, focus on trying to change the behaviours that affect health outcomes, particularly in poorer communities, rather than trying to change the social and economic environments which inform people's circumstances and decision-making. (Scott-Samuel & Smith, 2015, p. 430)

Part of the reason provided for this seemingly immutable commitment to downstream policy responses in the UK is that there is a larger evidence

base related to their practical application (Douglas, 2016). Whilst macro policies focused on the redistribution of wealth and power, founded on generous social protection systems, are often cited as key to resolving health inequalities (McCartney et al., 2013), the evidence base for *how* exactly these policies should be implemented (Korpi & Palme, 1998) and the direct impact they have on specific health outcomes is limited (Bambra et al., 2010; Hillier-Brown et al., 2019). However, others argue that we now have a growing body of evidence which demonstrates what happens when the socio-economic differences between different groups are allowed to widen whilst social protection systems are dismantled and weakened (Bambra et al., 2025; Friedli, 2016): inequalities increase and the resultant health consequences for some groups are catastrophic (McCartney et al., 2023; Seaman et al., 2024; Walsh, Dundas, et al., 2022). For some we have moved far beyond *lifestyle drift* to much darker policy territory (Walsh & McCartney, 2024). Jones and McCormack argue that in the UK, since the financial crash of 2008, we have witnessed an intensified assault on lower socio-economic groups, both in terms of support available and their characterisation:

> The drone attacks of welfare 'reforms' and the 'austerity' cuts have not only been directed towards the most vulnerable groups in society… but have also been accompanied by a propaganda war that demonises them. Vulnerable groups of people have been re-cast as 'scroungers' who constitute a drain on the country's resources. (Jones & McCormack, 2016, p. 243)

Indeed, the UK's austerity regime of the past 14 years, which saw significant reductions in social security entitlements and a steady removal of funding towards vital public services, has been repeatedly linked to the recent increase in mortality rates and unequal health outcomes for people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage (McCartney et al., 2023; McCartney et al., 2022; Seaman et al., 2024; Walsh & McCartney, 2024; Walsh et al., 2021). This has led health inequalities theorists to sound the alarm on the ever more pressing need to take action at a macro-UK policy level to address the socio-economic root causes of inequality:

> Unless we deal with the inability of people to meet their basic needs, by adequate income and services, we are in danger of inflicting a humanitarian calamity in one of the richest countries in the world. (Marmot, 2022)

2.2.2 A policy stalemate, the public and a 'democratic rejuvenation'?

So why then, in the face of significant consensus on the necessity of upstream, macro policy action to improve living and working conditions (as well as increasing understanding of the detrimental consequences of *not* doing so), does this action continue to prove elusive? There are a myriad of theories for the various policy responses to health inequalities, which include the dominance of political ideologies which support state retrenchment (such as neoliberalism, detailed above, Coburn, 2004; Navarro et al., 2006; Scott-Samuel & Smith, 2015); the role and nature of power inequalities (McCartney et al., 2021; Smith, 2015); alongside deeply ingrained, problematic discourses about people who experience socio-economic disadvantage (Carlisle, 2001; Crawford, 1977; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013; Levitas, 1998), which can powerfully shape the nature and level of policy focus (Bacchi, 2016; Whitehead, 2007).

Alongside this, in studies which sought to understand the apparent gulf between evidence and policy action related to health inequalities, another prominent thesis has emerged for the lack of upstream, macro-level policy work in the UK: a pervasive belief amongst policy actors and researchers that there is simply not a public mandate for more egalitarian and progressive socio-economic policies to tackle the drivers of inequalities (Mackenbach, 2011; McHugh et al., 2023; Smith, 2015; Smith & Eltanani, 2015; Smith et al., 2022; Whitehead & Popay, 2010). Indeed, in one qualitative study with researchers and policymakers (Smith, 2013) the non-support of 'the public' for upstream policies was routinely cited as a key barrier to macro-policy action:

> This, then, was a powerful belief which worked to undermine and 'filter out' the research formed ideas that pointed to the need for more egalitarian policy responses to inequalities in wealth, housing, education etc. In effect, 'the public' were repeatedly implicated across interviews as political actors resistant to the kinds of policy proposals supported by the health inequalities research community. (Smith et al., 2022, p. 131)

This is not a unique finding; other more recent work with policymakers revealed similar accounts of public opinion (McHugh et al., 2023), whilst studies which investigated the perceived failure of past policy responses have cited similar notions (Mackenbach, 2011; Whitehead & Popay, 2010). What is interesting is that, although pervasive, this perspective of public opinion and (lack of) public support for policy action is often *assumed* (Baker et al., 2021; Smith, 2013), particularly with regards to income / redistributive policies (Smith, 2015), with often little clarity of the evidence base for this belief (Smith et al., 2022). In addition, sitting, somewhat paradoxically, alongside this, is the view that public awareness and knowledge is at the same time limited (Blaxter, 1997; McHugh et al., 2023), often characterised as apathetic towards the issue of health inequalities (Smith, 2015; Smith & Anderson, 2018) despite unclear mechanisms for how the public's knowledge base is assessed.

Assumptions aside, there is a small body of literature which has sought to understand public perspectives on the drivers of and solutions to health inequalities (Smith & Stewart, 2024; Smith & Anderson, 2018). And it is indeed notably small in comparison to the vast array of empirical work undertaken to wrangle with questions related to policy and research understandings of health inequalities (Garthwaite & Bambra, 2017; Popay et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2021). The work to date has been largely qualitative in nature (Smith & Stewart, 2024; Smith et al., 2021) and can be broadly placed into two camps: studies which seek to understand public understanding and discourse around the *causes* of health inequalities (see for example, Blaxter, 1997; Davidson et al., 2006; Garthwaite & Bambra, 2017; Macintyre et al., 2005; Mackenzie et al., 2017; Popay et al., 2003) and a much smaller, albeit growing, cohort which seek to understand public perceptions on the best policy *solutions*

(Fergie et al., 2025; McHugh et al., 2019; McHugh et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2021). This combined body of work, although small, directly challenges the notion that: i.) the public are ignorant on the subject of health inequalities (Smith & Anderson, 2018); ii.) or that, the public wholesale reject the idea of redistributive/ egalitarian policies (Smith et al., 2022). Instead, this literature demonstrates that public understandings of health inequalities are complicated, nuanced and, often, sophisticated (Smith & Anderson, 2018). This is particularly true for populations who experience socio-economic disadvantage who, across the studies, are often able to detail the complex and 'cyclical' ways that socio-economic circumstances interact with and influence health (Smith & Stewart, 2024). This includes widespread recognition of the role of material-structural factors such as employment and income security (Smith & Stewart, 2024; Smith et al., 2022) alongside multi-dimensional accounts of the various psychosocial pathways related to social status (Marmot, 2015), such as fatalism, shame and stigma (Smith et al., 2022) which can powerfully impact health as well as the 'ripple effects' of longstanding inequalities on disadvantaged communities and the environments they inhabit (Smith & Stewart, 2024). This suggests that public understanding is not as limited as believed and can instead align closely with contemporary research understandings (Smith et al., 2022). Furthermore, some studies have shown that lay understandings of inequality can also be brought into conversation with dominant cultural and political discourse, for example meritocracy (Fergie et al., 2025) or neoliberalism (Peacock et al., 2014), providing insight into how these pervasive rhetorics might trouble or challenge research accounts. Whilst other reviews of qualitative work to understand public perspectives on health inequalities argue that lay perspectives can, not only align with but, in fact, enhance and evolve longstanding research frameworks commonly applied to explain and define their social determinants (Smith & Stewart, 2024).

In addition, in the studies which sought to understand public perceptions of potential solutions to health inequalities in the UK, there is no outright

rejection of upstream policies – a finding reflected in studies in other countries (see for example, Pesce et al., 2011; Subica & Brown, 2020). Whilst there is support for the long-standing, individualised and lifestyle-based interventions of old (McHugh et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2021), there is also 'evident support for more upstream policy responses that aim to improve living and working conditions and to tackle poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth' (Smith et al., 2022, p. 146). Indeed, although one study found no support amongst its participants for 'redistribution' as a solution to health inequalities (McHugh et al., 2019), it did find public consensus on financial security as an important determinant of health:

> There is consensus that unpredictability of finances [..] and job security [..] lead to worse health and that welfare benefits should not be cut as a way to improve health [..]. Moreover, the importance of making sure people have enough money for their basic needs [..] as a way to improve health was important for all accounts. (McHugh et al., 2019, p. 11)

This suggests that the broad characterisation of 'the public' as non-supportive of macro-level, upstream policy action to tackle health inequalities is founded on shaky ground. Instead, whilst empirical work to understand public perspectives on potential solutions to health inequalities is admittedly limited, the evidence we do have tells us that public opinion is varied, multi-layered and open to policy proposals which address socio-economic root causes (Smith et al., 2022).

It is perhaps for this reason that health inequalities theorists are now increasingly considering the potential role of 'the public' in overcoming the 'policy stalemate' (Smith et al., 2022) between knowledge and action, which we appear to have reached in the UK. Recent reflections on how we might move past this policy impasse have identified the need to rethink not just the decisions which are being made by policymaking institutions but *how* that decision-making takes place and, importantly, *who* is involved (Bambra et al., 2021; Bambra et al., 2025; McCartney et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2022). Theorists are now advocating for a

‘*democratic rejuvenation’* (Bambra et al., 2021) as a means to stimulate socio-economic policy action to tackle social inequalities, with ‘enhanced democratic participation’ cited as a key potential ‘leveller’ of health inequalities (Bambra et al., 2025). Sitting at the centre of this anticipated *rejuvenation* is the suggestion to move beyond current democratic practice towards increased and in-depth *public* participation in political and policy decision-making (Bambra et al., 2021; McCartney et al., 2021; McCartney et al., 2025; Reeves & Mackenbach, 2019). Internationally there is growing usage of, and interest in, novel, participatory processes within policymaking institutions, in particular participatory-deliberative approaches (OECD, 2020), including techniques such as citizens’ juries, panels and assemblies, participatory budgeting and collaborative governance (Elstub & Escobar, 2019; Fung, 2006). These participatory-deliberative decision-making processes are increasingly defined as ‘democratic innovations’ (Elstub et al., 2019; G. Smith, 2009) and it is the investigation of these innovative participatory approaches which health inequalities and democratic theorists alike are seeking (Bambra et al., 2021; Escobar & Bua, 2025; McCartney et al., 2021; Scott-Samuel & Smith, 2015; Smith et al., 2022; Vlahos et al., 2022). Indeed, it has been suggested that deliberative fora in particular could provide ‘constructive discursive spaces’ (Smith et al., 2022) through which policymakers and researchers could better understand actual public opinion on potential policy solutions to health inequalities (McHugh et al., 2023; Smith & Anderson, 2018; Smith et al., 2022). These spaces are thought to provide settings where citizens could, ‘via exposure to evidence, expert testimony and discussions’ with other participants, become more informed and reach potentially different conclusions than the ‘more spur of the moment responses that opinion polls generate’ (Smith et al., 2022, p. 147). This in turn, it is argued, could provide the perceived missing public mandate for more progressive policy action (Bambra et al., 2021; McHugh et al., 2023):

> [Deliberative forums] may be a promising means of identifying potential routes to get beyond a stalemate situation for issues in

> which there is a perceived gap between research-informed policy proposals and public preferences. (Smith et al., 2022, p. 148)

These suggestions are not without precedent. Participatory and deliberative democracy has been gaining increasing prominence in advanced industrial democracies such as the UK and its European and international neighbours (G. Smith, 2009; OECD, 2020; Pateman, 2012). Part of the appeal is the belief that citizen participatory spaces can provide a space for *rational-critical* debate of contemporary evidence and expertise (Bächtiger et al., 2018), which could lead to more informed policy decision-making through the pooling of multiple perspectives (Fung, 2015), and ultimately a more informed public (Fishkin, 2018). Recent work in Ireland is oft cited (Bambra et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2022) as an example of how policy issues, previously considered too politically and publicly sensitive to broach (such as abortion, Carolan, 2020), can be tackled via a participatory-deliberative forum and eventually lead to progressive, publicly supported reforms (Farrell et al., 2019). This has led health inequalities theorists to wonder if the same approach could be taken in the context of socio-economic policy:

> Although these kinds of democratic innovation, which prioritise dialogue rather than opinion change, are certainly no democratic panacea, they do offer a means of bringing together publics, experts, and decision-makers, 'strengthening the science, society and democracy nexus' rebuilding public engagement and countering some of the unequal power relations inherent within democratic systems. (Bambra et al., 2021, p. 116)

Indeed, with the backdrop of starkly increasing inequalities, in the face of limited, or failing, policy action to improve living and working conditions, alongside what appears to be widespread misconceptions on public perspectives, democratising decision-making related to socio-economic policy is now a pertinent question in health inequalities discourse. Of course, the involvement of publics within health systems and political decision-making is by no means a wholly new idea in the UK or otherwise (see for example, Kapilashrami et al., 2025; Stewart, 2016). It is helpful

then to now consider current literature related to public involvement and participation in policy decision-making in the UK and beyond.

2.3 Involving the public: public participation and democratic innovations

In considering the role of democratic innovations in the context of increasing inequalities, it is first necessary to acknowledge the current state of democratic systems worldwide. Internationally, there are increasing signs that we are in the midst of a 'democratic recession' (Escobar & Elstub, 2019) or a 'crisis of democracy' (Bächtiger & Dryzek, 2024) characterised by sharply diminishing levels of trust in and satisfaction with public institutions (OECD, 2024) alongside the actual dismantling of some existing democratic systems (Bächtiger & Dryzek, 2024). This crisis is considered to be multi-faceted but ultimately driven by an endemic erosion of faith in democratic institutions and their capacity to respond to the needs of citizens: 'Many democratic states are rife with citizen disenchantment, not just with particular governments but sometimes with the very idea of democracy' (Bächtiger & Dryzek, 2024, p. 1). Indeed, Carnegie's recent index of collective wellbeing in the UK, found that democratic wellbeing fell far behind social, economic and environmental wellbeing scales (Paylor, 2024), with nearly two thirds of respondents stating they did not feel they could influence decisions which affect the UK as a whole. Similarly, the United States of America has, at the time of writing, just re-elected a president who has explicitly stated an intention 'to discard the rules of democracy if it is in [his] own short term advantage to do so' (Bächtiger & Dryzek, 2024, p. 1). This global threat to democracy comes alongside a polycrisis of war, climate change, and what appears to be deep rooted social and political unrest (Bambra et al., 2025; Escobar & Bua, 2025), leading many to doubt whether our democratic institutions have the ability to cope and function as we face this 'tangle of looming threats and realized miseries', such as,

> … crushing debt, precarious work, and besieged livelihoods; dwindling services, crumbling infrastructures, and hardened borders; racialized violence, deadly pandemics and extreme weather - all overarched by political dysfunctions that block our ability to envision and implement solutions. (Fraser, 2022, p. xiii).

As the pandemic exposed the differential health outcomes across different groups, the current global and political volatility is exposing the poor health of our current democratic systems, deeply underscored by increasing inequalities in wealth, power and income. In short, considering how citizens are involved in political decision-making (or not) is a crucial and hyper-current question which theorists across the political and social sciences spectrum are turning attention to.

The following sections explore literature related to involving the public in policy decision-making. It explores the often-common arguments provided for increasing the role of the public within political and policy decision-making and the concept of democratic innovations. Finally, it considers public participation in the context of increasing inequality and some of the critiques of current and past practice in the field.

2.3.1 Public participation and democratic innovations

Meaningful public participation has long been regarded as a desired (and indeed necessary) component of effective policymaking and subsequent outcomes (Barnes et al., 2007; Ganuza, 2017). Sometimes framed as a potential antidote to waning numbers casting votes and a general perception of 'public disillusionment with the institutions of advanced industrial democracies' (G. Smith, 2009, p. 4), citizen participation in policymaking is often presented as the holy grail, which will enable policymakers to solve persistent and wicked problems such as inequality and poverty, whilst at the same time restoring faith in the democratic legitimacy of their decisions. Alongside this, the battle cry of 'Nothing About Us, Without Us' first heard in relation to the disability rights movement in South Africa (Charlton, 1998), has, for advocates of public participation, become synonymous with the critical role which citizens

can play in ensuring that policies are designed in ways which meet the broad spectrum of needs of communities and their members (Mathews, 2021). Indeed, since the 1960s, public participation has been a policy goal (on some level) of UK Governments, with many iterations and experiments badged as 'public participation' in policymaking emerging (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2004). Often driven by different political impulses (Newman et al., 2009), public participation can take seemingly innumerable forms including focus groups, tenant participation panels, area-based community partnerships, market research surveys and public consultation exercises to name a few (Barnes et al., 2007).

There are lots of compelling arguments for increasing public participation in the policy decision-making of institutions. Advocates assert that it can increase the *reflexivity* of governments (Bua, 2019), directly challenging the 'expertocracy' (Lightbody & Roberts, 2019) of typical decision-making spaces via the pooling of multiple perspectives and experiences (Fung, 2015). Closely linked to this, public participation is considered to increase the *responsiveness* of governments to the actual needs and wants of citizens (Bua, 2019), which in turn is thought to increase the *legitimacy* of decision-making within institutions (Fung, 2015), underscored by a normative belief that citizens can and should be meaningfully involved in decision-making which shapes their lives (Dean, 2017, 2019). All of this is thought to (re)build trust in institutional decision-making (Bächtiger & Dryzek, 2024; Fung, 2015), and ultimately produce better, more informed policy decisions as a result (Beresford, 2021; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Indeed, the idea of better or more informed policy is often intertwined with values of social justice (Bussu, Golan, et al., 2022; Fung, 2015), linked to the theory that *more equitable* outcomes will be produced if all those who will be affected by a policy are meaningfully involved in the process of policy development (Dean, 2019; Young, 2000). With these potential outcomes on the table, it is not surprising that governments worldwide are increasingly interested in and experimenting with the role of public participation (OECD, 2020, 2022), or that health

inequalities theorists might now consider it a potentially useful tool in overcoming the 'policy stalemate' (Smith et al., 2022) in the UK.

This call for increased public participation processes tends to be underpinned by two key literatures: participatory and deliberative democracy. Our current representative democratic systems are at once celebrated and valued, whilst at the same time considered inherently flawed (Escobar & Elstub, 2019):

> Because interests often conflict in the modern nation-state… equally weighted votes and majority rule is probably the safest way of managing these competing interests. Yet safety and practicality do not make this kind of democracy morally satisfying. (Mansbridge, 1983, p. 18)

Common critiques include: i) the vulnerability of the electorate to manipulation and persuasion – often by those in positions of privilege and wealth (Fishkin, 2018); (ii) that the competition for numbers of votes creates a marketplace of politics, offering only the ballot box as a mechanism to hold officials to account (Mansbridge, 1983; Young, 2000); (iii) and that, importantly, representative systems do not result in equal participation and, therefore, equal influence across socio-economic groups (Young, 2000), thus leaving some 'politically rich' and others 'politically poor' (Dalton, 2017). Advocates of participatory and deliberative democracy argue that increased public participation provides an antidote to some of these flaws, based on the premise that devolution of decision making to citizens serves as a direct challenge to uneven and unequal power structures (Pateman, 1970) as well as opening the door to other forms of knowledge and expertise (Fung, 2015; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Its ultimate aim, it is argued, is to '[make] democracy more democratic' (Pearce, 2013, p. 59), and as interest in participatory and deliberative democracy has increased worldwide, so too have the 'the more or less unquestioned positive associations' (Walker et al., 2015, p. 9) commonly attached to increasing public participation in institutional decision-making (Dean, 2017).

It is important to note that whilst it is now common to consider participatory and deliberative democracy as deeply interconnected literatures, they are born of different schools of thought and as such not always considered synonymous with one another (Elstub & Escobar, 2019; Escobar & Bua, 2025; Mutz, 2006; Pateman, 2012). Participatory democracy emerged in the 1960s as a challenge to perceived inadequacies in democratic systems (Pateman, 1970), which relied solely on representative voting in elections to fulfil democratic ideals (Elstub & Escobar, 2019; Pearce, 2013). It advocated for fundamental changes to 'undemocratic authority structures' which would:

> …make our own social and political life more democratic, that [would] provide opportunities for individuals to participate in decision-making in their every day lives as well as in the wider political system. (Pateman, 2012, p. 10)

For Pateman, this involved significant and extensive reform of democratic, social and political systems from the workplace to policymaking institutions (Pateman, 1970, 2012). Often the 'every day' is considered deeply political in this rhetoric (Freire, 1972; Ledwith, 2005) with public participation conceptualised as an opportunity for communities (often those who experience disadvantage) to become 'empowered' (Ledwith, 2005) via critical reflection on (alongside the rethinking of) oppressive structures and institutions (Freire, 1972). Deliberative democracy on the other hand, emerged as a distinct theory in the 1980s (Bohman, 1998) and is thought to be more *dialogical* in approach with a focus on improved 'communicative interaction' (Mutz, 2006) *between* citizens and institutions. It is commonly underpinned by deliberative ideals (Bächtiger et al., 2018), such as 'inclusion, diversity, respect, scrutiny and reciprocity' (Bua & Escobar, 2018, p. 130) and often has a key aim of providing a participatory space where citizens can engage in 'facilitated talk' (McCoy & Scully, 2002) with one another over common issues (Fishkin, 2018; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). As a theory, some have argued, it tends to focus more on the *process* of citizen participation rather than on the political and social structures in which

the deliberative interaction is taking place (Mutz, 2006; Pateman, 2012). Indeed, the advent of deliberative democracy from the 1990s onwards, often coined a 'deliberative wave' (OECD, 2020) or 'deliberative turn' (Dryzek, 2010), has coincided with an increase in what Warren describes as 'governance driven democratisation' (2009), i.e., citizen participation processes which are state- or elite-led, often taking place in 'invited' spaces (Cornwall, 2008) determined by public administrations and policymaking institutions:

> Typically, these processes use the languages of participation and deliberation; they are designed for particular policy problems; they bypass the formal institutions of democracy, and they do not involve protest, lobbying, or obstruction. (Warren, 2009, p. 6)

For this reason, deliberative democracy, as a theory, is thought (by some) to depart from the more radical aspirations of participatory democracy (Escobar & Bua, 2025; Pateman, 2012), instead focusing on more institutionalised and controlled forms of citizen participation which work in synergy with existing political systems rather than seeking to wholesale challenge and reform those systems (Mutz, 2006; Pateman, 2012). Indeed, whilst some theorists insist that participatory and deliberative democracy share 'complimentary orientations' (Escobar & Bua, 2025), there have also been concerns raised that the 'deliberative wave' has now evolved into 'deliberative hegemony' (Smith, 2019), with somewhat narrow conceptualisations of what the fields of participatory and deliberative democratic theory have to offer (Escobar & Bua, 2025). Democratic *theories*, of course, can only tell one part of the story. Whilst participatory and deliberative democrats wrangle with what constitutes participatory or deliberative democracy, the field of *practice* is increasing exponentially (Lee et al., 2015b), with sometimes unclear articulations of which camp particular participation processes fall into, or indeed whether it is necessary to make the distinction. Indeed, researching *participation* means entering a 'confused discursive terrain' (Lewis et al., 2019, p. 200) where a multiplicity of understandings and applications of processes often co-exist: 'participation is not a singular thing: not one process, practice,

technology, or institutional arrangement. Rather it is politically ambiguous, both in its conception and practices' (Newman et al., 2009, p. 134). Given this 'bewildering variety of perspectives and prescriptions' (Parkinson, 2006, p. 3), it is now common for the term *citizen or public participation* to be used broadly to describe a wide range of participatory and deliberative activity (Fung, 2006).

Under this umbrella term, and flurry of activity, a new concept has emerged: democratic innovations (Elstub et al., 2019; G. Smith, 2009; Geissel & Newton, 2012). As the field of practice and theory has diversified, new frameworks for understanding experiments in public participation have become necessary:

> Democratic innovations represent a compromise between the aspirations of participatory democracy of the 1960s… and a revived pragmatism regarding current challenges in public governance and the need for new modes of collective action. (Elstub & Escobar, 2019, p. 18)

Democratic innovations are arguably born of 'governance driven democratisation' (Warren, 2009) and whilst now considered a 'buzzword' (Elstub & Escobar, 2019) in democratic theory, they are still a relatively new concept, indeed it is only recently that a clear typology has been developed (Elstub & Escobar, 2019). First popularised by Smith (2009), democratic innovations were characterised in his seminal work by their *institutional* design: ''[Democratic] innovations': *institutions that have been specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision making process'* (G. Smith, 2009, p. 1). This definition, whilst helpful, is rather broad and as the concept has increased in usage and application, particularly over the past decade (Elstub & Escobar, 2019), theorists have sought a deeper understanding of what is meant by democratic innovations in both theory and practice (Escobar & Bua, 2025). To this end, Elstub and Escobar (2019) conducted a scoping review of how the term was used and consequently developed a new definition, building on Smith's, as well as an accompanying typology of democratic innovations in practice:

> Democratic innovations are processes or institutions that are new to a policy issue, policy role, or level of governance, and developed to reimagine and deepen the role of citizens in governance processes by increasing opportunities for participation, deliberation and influence. (Elstub & Escobar, 2019, p. 11)

Indeed, a defining feature of democratic innovations is often (although not always) their connection to policymaking institutions and public administrations as well as a consistent focus on 'reimagining' the role of citizens 'by recasting the parameters of participation and influence' (Elstub & Escobar, 2019, p. 15) thus providing a 'meeting point for actors, ideas, disciplines and methodologies' (Escobar & Bua, 2025, p. 4). Hence, it is these innovations which are of most interest for health inequalities theorists seeking to overcome the 'policy stalemate' (Smith et al., 2022).

In their typology of different modes of participation Elstub and Escobar (2019) are keen to emphasise the heterogeneity of approaches which might fall under the umbrella of democratic innovations. They identify four *families* of democratic innovations, whilst at the same time recognising the increasing prevalence of 'hybrid' models, i.e., public participation processes which incorporate and combine features from across the typology:

Mini-publics

This family of democratic innovations concerns public participation processes which use sortition methods (i.e., random selection, Pow, 2021) to recruit a cross-section of a particular population to deliberate upon a particular issue. The aim is often to ensure that the deliberating cohort are in some way representative of the geographic area in which the process is taking place. Citizens' assemblies and citizens' juries are the most commonly recognised version of mini-publics. The key difference between the two tends to be the number of citizens involved, with citizens' juries typically aiming for a smaller group compared to assemblies. Citizens' juries gained particular currency in the UK in the 1990s (Parkinson, 2006) and citizens' assemblies internationally are becoming increasingly popular, particularly in the realms of climate

policymaking (Smith, 2024). They have been used across a broad array of policy problems and at multiple levels of decision-making (Fung et al., 2003; OECD, 2020), from local to national, and even trans-national contexts (Elstub & Escobar, 2019).

Participatory Budgeting (PB)

This category of democratic innovations involves citizens in the allocation of budgets or the public expenditure of a particular public administration, often at a local or municipal level. Hailing from the original, and much celebrated, version in Porto Alegre in Brazil (Cabannes, 2004), participatory budgeting exercises have now been exported around the world (Pateman, 2012). Recruitment of citizens is often based on self-selection, with processes open to everyone, however elections and purposive selection are also used (Elstub & Escobar, 2019). Aggregation of preferences is often the main way which decisions are made. PB exercises tend to give direct authority to citizens as decision-makers, however the size of the budget available and its usage are, very often, pre-determined and controlled by the administration (Pateman, 2012).

Referenda and Citizen's Initiatives

This type of democratic innovations are considered 'direct democratic instruments' (Jaske & Setälä, 2019) and are characterised by self-selection and voting. Referenda are often focused on single-issue votes and it is this which differentiates this family of processes from typical representative voting in elections (Jaske & Setälä, 2019). They tend to come at the endpoint of policymaking or on 'issues of national import' (Elstub & Escobar, 2019, p. 27), such as Brexit in the UK (Close & Núñez, 2016) or abortion in Ireland (Carolan, 2020). In addition, a small number of countries allow 'citizen initiatives' to instigate a referendum or determine 'ballot initiatives before they are submitted to a popular vote' p.99 (Jaske & Setälä, 2019, p. 99), similarly referenda are sometimes used in conjunction with other categories in the typology, for example citizens' assemblies or juries (Farrell et al., 2019; Jaske & Setälä, 2019).

Collaborative Governance

This group of democratic innovations are arguably the most diverse (Elstub & Escobar, 2019), incorporating a variety of modes of participation where citizens can collaborate or work in partnership with institutional representatives and wider civil society stakeholders (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Bussu, 2019). Self-selection or purposive recruitment of citizens are key features and often participation is focused on reaching consensus in a partnership setting via negotiation, bargaining and deliberation (Elstub & Escobar, 2019). This form of public participation is particularly popular in the UK (Bussu, 2019), and is common across a wide variety of policy areas and levels of decision-making (Elstub & Escobar, 2019). Illustrative examples include citizen representation on decision-making boards, such as Community Planning Partnerships in Scotland (Sinclair, 2011) or 'involving people with lived experience' in the development of policy (Lister, 2002) alongside other key non-state actors (Ansell & Gash, 2007).

This typology is useful in terms of identifying the key features of democratic innovations and the *types* of public participation processes which are typically applied in this emerging field of democratic theory and practice. Elstub and Escobar (2019), along with others (Bussu, Bua, et al., 2022; Bussu, Golan, et al., 2022; G. Smith, 2009), are keen to emphasise the importance of *context*: social, political and cultural, in understanding democratic innovations and wider public participation processes. Indeed, whilst this typology provides a helpful blueprint of the common design elements which constitute democratic innovations, in and of itself it provides no commentary on how these innovations play out in practice. It is helpful to now turn attention to some of the critiques of public participation and democratic innovations, considering more specifically some of the known challenges of increasing participation against a backdrop of increasing inequality.

2.3.2 Involving the public in the context of inequality

Public participation and inequality have a multi-faceted relationship. Political inequality, i.e., differences in political participation, and therefore influence, across the socio-economic spectrum is thought to be deeply interconnected with wider social inequalities (Dalton, 2017; Lijphart, 1997; McCartney et al., 2021; Reeves & Mackenbach, 2019). Indeed, wealth in terms of assets and income is often accompanied with a higher social status and consequently, at times significant, 'political' wealth and influence (Kerr, 2023, 2024). In his cross-country investigation of political participation rates of different socio-economic groups, Dalton (2017) found a persistent 'social-status participation gap', most commonly related to education, income and occupation: 'the politically rich are getting richer and the politically poor are getting poorer in contemporary democracies' (Dalton, 2017, p. 218). Indeed, it is a long-established fact that political participation, in any form of democracy, is highly unequal:

> Political scientists have known for a long time, the inequality of representation and influence are not randomly distributed but systematically biased in favour of more privileged citizens – those with higher incomes, greater wealth and better education – and against less advantaged citizens. (Lijphart, 1997, p. 1)

This appears to apply across multiple forms of political participation from voting in elections to campaigning and participating in wider public participation processes (Dalton, 2017; Lijphart, 1997). As Lijphart argues, unequal participation translates into unequal influence and 'this systematic class bias applies with special force to the more intensive and time-consuming forms of participation' (Lijphart, 1997, p. 1).

For some theorists this 'democracy in unequal terms' (Dalton, 2017) is *driven by* increasing social inequalities, which prevents or inhibits the participation of disadvantaged and marginalised groups (Gaventa, 2016). It is true that public participation, whatever form it takes, requires time,

resource and motivation, something which the realities of daily life often leave in short supply: ‘For most citizens – in particular those from marginalised communities – the perceived costs of participation far outweigh any perceived benefits, and thus there is little or no motivation to engage’ (G. Smith, 2009, p. 18). Furthermore, aside from motivation, there are many recognised practical and psychological barriers which prevent marginalised groups from political participation (Lightbody & Escobar, 2021): ‘The harms of poverty, or exploitative overwork, or domestic violence, or racial prejudice often inhibit the political participation of some citizens’ (Young, 2000, p. 34).

Young’s (2000) considerable work investigating how inclusion (and therefore exclusion) manifests itself in democratic processes outlines some crucial components which are necessary to tackle inequalities in participation. Young (2000) asserts that a legitimate democratic process necessitates inclusion: ‘a democratic decision is normatively legitimate only if all those affected by it are included in the process of discussion and decision-making’ (p. 23) alongside political equality, meaning that citizens are included on ‘equal terms’ with ‘free and equal opportunity to speak’. Similarly, for Smith (2009) in his exploration of democratic innovations, he identifies inclusiveness as a core ‘democratic good’ through which democratic functions should be assessed. For both these theorists, and many others, ensuring equal heterogeneity in representation (Dalton, 2017; Reeves & Mackenbach, 2019) and communication (Kerr, 2024; McCoy & Scully, 2002) is a necessary antidote to a political system dominated by privilege and unequal power dynamics.

Which brings us to another facet of the relationship between political participation and inequality: increased public participation is thought to provide a potential *solution to* increasing social inequalities. Indeed, this is arguably part of the hope of theorists who are now advocating for the deepening of citizen participation in political systems (McCartney et al., 2021; McCartney et al., 2025; Reeves & Mackenbach, 2019; Smith et al., 2022). It is not however an uncommon aspiration. Increased citizen

participation, particularly of marginalised and disadvantaged groups, is often posited as a key mechanism through which social inequalities might be tackled (Lightbody & Escobar, 2021). As Gaventa (2016) states:

> …the very same reports that argue that inequality limits the possibilities of participation also argue that the solution lies in greater participation. The problem is also the remedy; the disease is also the cure. (p. 4)

Indeed, the increased involvement of disadvantaged or marginalised citizens in political and policy decision-making is thought to counter their 'silencing and misrepresentation' (Patrick, 2020), and as such produce better, fairer and more informed policies as a result (Lister, 2002, 2015; Walker et al., 2015). This links into the social justice values that often underpin participatory aspirations (Bussu, Golan, et al., 2022): the unequal outcomes produced by unequal political systems can be remedied if the unequal influence of different groups is redressed (Kerr, 2024; Reeves & Mackenbach, 2019), or so the theory goes. The relationship then between political participation and inequality is presented as a vicious circle (Gaventa, 2016), where inequalities in participation are thought to fuel increasing social inequalities via the disproportionate influence or ignorance of different social groups, which in turn perpetuates socially patterned political participation (detailed in Figure 1, author's own interpretation).

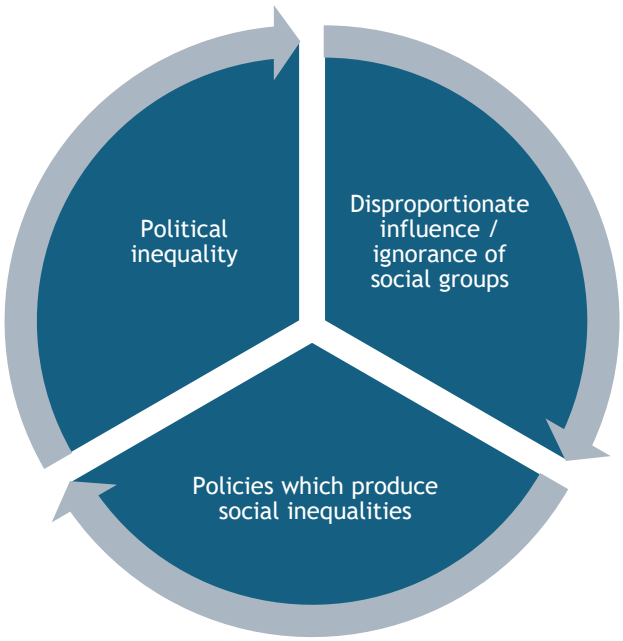


Figure 1: Vicious circle of social and political inequalities

Indeed, increased public participation in policy decision-making (and, as such, democratic innovations), it is theorised, can provide a potential mechanism to disrupt this cycle through the inversion of typical political participation rates and consequently the production of fairer political systems:

> Participation is held up as a means of placing power in the hands of everyday citizens, a device for creating new forms of self-governance intended to put citizens in the role of collaborators in making major institutional decisions, and, importantly, for breaking down rigid hierarchies and entrenched inequalities within state, corporate, educational, health care and other institutions in society. (Walker et al., 2015, p. 7)

These are indeed some big aspirations. And public participation is, of course, not without critics. Public policy and decision-making landscapes are complex (Cairney, 2020b; Vlahos, 2022) and the populations they serve are diverse. Despite much promotion and celebration, public participation in decision-making is by no means a simple endeavour: 'Participation is an idea and term that has its own lengthy history, its own ideological relations and it lays many traps for those who don't treat it with care' (Beresford, 2021, p. 21). There is a wealth of literature detailing the pitfalls of participation, both for the public who participate

and the policymakers inviting them to do so. Criticisms include claims of tokenism coupled with doubt over the extent to which the public can exert any real influence over policy decisions (Fung, 2015; Rolfe, 2018; White, 1996). Closely linked is the apparent rigidity of institutions to adequately respond to and incorporate citizen views, which can be at once wide ranging and challenging (Adamson & Bromiley, 2013; Font et al., 2018). This is often reinforced by participation mechanisms which reflect the formal bureaucratic ways of working of institutions rather than the communication modes of the citizens they seek to engage (McCoy & Scully, 2002; Sinclair, 2011; Taylor, 2006). This rigidity is also often reflected in the interaction or potential conflict between traditional democratic mechanisms such as decision making by elected members and decision making informed by broader participatory functions (Elliott et al., 2019), with a persistent lack of clarity, skills and knowledge over when and how citizen's contributions should be considered (Langkjaer & Smith, 2023; Taylor & Wilson, 2006). Furthermore, decades of development in public participation have revealed a cohort of 'usual suspects' i.e. people from wealthier, more privileged backgrounds who are more likely to participate (Hastings & Matthews, 2011), thus reproducing rather than addressing political inequality, with many iterations of public participation criticised for failing to ensure that citizens from typically marginalised groups are able not only to attend but also be heard in participatory forums (G. Smith, 2009; Young, 2000). These pitfalls and persistent 'stories of failure' (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006) have led some to believe that the promise of public participation is very difficult to realise in institutional settings, leading to cynicism and doubt over the practice:

> Frustration, cynicism, or apathy can be the results of a poorly designed public engagement process in which participants' hopes for learning, working, or accomplishing some goal are disappointed by a process which is futile, in which the relevant decisions have been made elsewhere by someone else, or in which the choices and stakes are trivial. (Fung, 2015, p. 513)

Indeed, there are specific critiques of public participation in policymaking in the context of inequality. Some argue that examples of 'governance driven democratisation' (Warren, 2009), such as participation processes or democratic innovations which are 'elite-facilitated' (Walker et al., 2015), support the legitimation of existing institutional decision-making rather than its diversification and reform (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Newman et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2015; White, 1996). Seen in a pessimistic light, institutionalised participation processes instead uphold and perpetuate the authority and rule of unequal systems through the co-option of citizens within those systems (Newman et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2015). This has been (somewhat severely) described as 'inverted totalitarianism', which works to surreptitiously 'depoliticise its citizenry' (Wolin, 2016, p. 592) through democratic smokescreens, whilst providing participating citizens with little to no influence over the eventual policy outcomes or wider decision-making. It has been argued that it is necessary to locate the increased interest in participatory and deliberative democracy within the wider political context in which it has found currency (Cairney, 2023; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Papadopoulos, 2012; Walker et al., 2015). Critics argue that this:

> …participatory revival also coincides with the neoliberal turn in policymaking. The role of markets in determining life chances is being valorized at the same time that state interventions to mitigate inequality are being dismantled. (Walker et al., 2015, p. 15)

Certainly, it is an unavoidable fact that as public participation processes have increased across the world, so too have the cleavages between the life circumstances of different groups widened (Lee et al., 2015b), leading some to suggest that 'participation may be *consistent* with expanded inequalities rather than a challenge to them' (Walker et al., 2015, p. 17).

For some, however, the suggestion that public participation processes serve *only* as a veneer for inequality is too severe a critique (Lee et al., 2015a; Newman et al., 2009). As Fung recognises: 'we often find ourselves

in sociopolitical circumstances that mock our espoused commitments to democracy and equality' (2005, p. 416). Indeed, advocates of increased public participation have long recognised some of its downfalls (Fraser, 1990; Mansbridge, 2012), particularly in the realms of inequality (Fung, 2005; G. Smith, 2009; Young, 2000). There has been a recent shift in focus of some participatory and deliberative democrats towards considering, in more depth, how public participation processes can increase their *impact* on the policy decision-making which takes place across institutional settings (Bussu, Bua, et al., 2022; Bussu, Golan, et al., 2022; Demski & Capstick, 2022; Russell, 2017), and as such realise their democratic and social justice potential. This shift more explicitly recognises the social and political system in which public participation processes are taking place and argues for greater *embeddedness* within that system in order to affect change:

> Embedded participation is characterized by a productive interaction with the other actors and institutions within the governance context, and a rootedness of participatory processes and culture in the political or policy system. (Bussu, Bua, et al., 2022, p. 141)

This brings us back to an earlier point: the importance of *context* in the analysis and understanding of public participation (Elstub & Escobar, 2019). Certainly, given the heterogeneity of the field, in terms of both practice and theory, it seems a rather thin assessment to either blindly celebrate or wholesale reject the promise of public participation: 'public participation is a condensate in which different political projects may be uneasily combined, thereby producing spaces that are ambiguous' (Newman et al., 2009, p. 139). Indeed, in their investigation of public participation processes in the context of inequality, Lee et al., (2015b) suggest they are neither a 'democratic panacea' (Bambra et al., 2021) nor simple instruments of inequality (Lee et al., 2015b). Instead they advocate for gaining a 'more grounded sense of the opportunities and unintended consequences that participation might enable in a contemporary context of severe structural inequalities' (Lee et al., 2015a, p. 247) via 'a more nuanced analysis of how different kinds of

equality are related to different kinds of participation in diverse settings' (Walker et al., 2015, p. 18). In the current global and domestic context of permacrises, increasing and persistent political and social inequalities, coupled with declining trust in democratic institutions, this seems a crucial and vital area of study.

2.4 Chapter summary and thesis aims

This literature review has so far demonstrated some key, inter-connected themes. First, that social inequalities in health are increasing in the UK and Scotland (Miall et al., 2022; Seaman et al., 2024). Second, there is a wealth of knowledge and evidence which tells us that upstream policy action is necessary to tackle socio-economic determinants of health inequalities (McCartney et al., 2013; Whitehead & Popay, 2010). However, action in the UK and Scotland continues to be driven by *lifestyle drift* policies which disproportionately target intervention at the individual or community level (Katikireddi et al., 2013; Mead et al., 2022). This apparent gulf between evidence and action has been described as a 'policy stalemate' (Smith et al., 2022), characterised by actions which routinely fail to address the drivers of inequality related to wealth, power and social protection systems (McCartney et al., 2013). Third, 'the public' are often invoked as a key barrier to implementing upstream policy changes (Mackenbach, 2011; Smith, 2015; Whitehead & Popay, 2010), despite (albeit limited) evidence suggesting that public perspectives on the causes of and solutions to health inequalities can be sophisticated, nuanced and often in line with contemporary health inequalities research (Smith et al., 2022). Fourth, as inequalities have increased so too has interest in public participation processes worldwide (OECD, 2020, 2022). Underpinned by socially patterned democratic deficits (Dalton, 2017; Lijphart, 1997), advocates of participatory and deliberative democracy argue that increased citizen participation could provide an antidote to unequal political systems and, as such, their unequal outcomes (Fishkin,

2018; Fung, 2015; Pearce, 2013; Young, 2000). Fifth, despite this increasing interest, particularly in democratic innovations (Escobar & Bua, 2025; G. Smith, 2009; Geissel & Newton, 2012), public participation has a complicated relationship with social inequality (Lee et al., 2015b), with some iterations accused of reproducing and reinforcing rather than challenging unequal and unfair decision-making processes (Newman et al., 2009).

Whilst there are some evident challenges in the realms of social inequalities and public participation, none less so than the increasingly volatile global context (Bächtiger & Dryzek, 2024), there are also some clear areas which are ripe for further investigation:

> In order to leverage opportunities created by unfolding fiscal and political crises for challenging inequalities, we must understand new public participation in broader macroeconomic and political terms. (Lee et al., 2015a, p. 249)

It is for this reason that, despite the inherent complexity, democratising socio-economic decision-making is of increasing interest across the social and political sciences (Bambra et al., 2021; Cumbers, 2020; Smith et al., 2022; Vlahos et al., 2022). It is this topic which this thesis is primarily concerned with. Whilst calls for a 'democratic rejuvenation' (Bambra et al., 2021) to tackle the socio-economic drivers of health inequalities are relatively recent, participatory practice in the UK has a long, and diverse history (Barnes et al., 2007). Indeed, although the broad idea of public participation in policymaking is well-established, understanding how to build robust reciprocal relationships between citizens and decision makers which overcome long-standing challenges remains an open question. Any 'democratic rejuvenation' which seeks to democratise decision-making related to socio-economic policy must first learn lessons from recent history. As such, this thesis has two broad aims:

- To explore how public participation currently fits into socio-economic policymaking in the UK and Scotland, in particular the purpose it serves and the policy level at which it operates;

- To investigate and better understand how the design and delivery of public participation processes interacts with social and political inequalities.

The following chapter details the conceptual framework and subsequent research questions which were developed to realise these aims.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter details the conceptual framework which informed the design and analysis of the study, and crucially, the research questions. The first section provides some clarity on terminology, followed by a detailed description of the underpinning theories which have guided the study's realisation. For ease, the conceptual framework has been split into two sections, according to the two broad thesis aims stated in the preceding chapter. The chapter concludes by stating the research questions for the thesis in full.

3.2 A note on terminology

Before embarking on a discussion and explanation of the conceptual framework for the study, it is necessary to first provide some clarity on the terminology which will be used in both the research questions and in the thesis moving forward. We have already established that participatory and deliberative democracy is a diverse field, and that practice related to public participation and democratic innovations is inherently heterogenous. This necessitates a relatively flexible term to encompass the breadth of activity taking place in the UK. For the purposes of this thesis the term 'participatory-deliberative processes' (Bua & Escobar, 2018) is used and is purposefully broad to reflect the 'range of institutional possibilities for public participation' (Fung, 2006, p. 66) as well as the increasing application of, or focus on, deliberation as a participatory function (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; OECD, 2020). Participatory-deliberative processes (PDPs) will henceforth be employed to describe the focus of investigation for this thesis, with a recognition that it is particularly interested in processes which fall under the

umbrella of democratic innovations (Elstub & Escobar, 2019; G. Smith, 2009).

3.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework consists of three separate but interlinked theories: Whitehead's typology of interventions to tackle social inequalities in health (Whitehead, 2007), Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (Bacchi, 2009), and Smith's categorisation of democratic goods (G. Smith, 2009). Each will now be discussed in turn, citing wider, connected theories and theses which informed their selection and how this study pulls them together.

3.3.1 Exploring how public participation currently fits into socio-economic policymaking in the UK and Scotland

As established, one of the key arguments for exploring the use of public participation and or democratic innovations in policymaking is that it could provide a tool through which to overcome the 'policy stalemate' (Smith et al., 2022) and potentially provoke or instigate more upstream action to tackle health inequalities at their socio-economic roots (Bambra et al., 2021). In addition, as discussed, there is a longstanding phenomenon of *lifestyle drift* in policymaking addressing health inequalities in the UK, meaning it was necessary to have a synthesis which provided insights on both the policy problems being tackled via PDPs as well as the purpose of PDPs within policymaking. Here, Whitehead's typology of interventions to tackle social inequalities in health (Whitehead, 2007) and Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (Bacchi, 2009) provide complimentary frameworks for understanding and investigating how PDPs function in policymaking spaces.

Whitehead's typology (2007) provides a helpful theoretical tool for understanding the often-common foci for policy action to tackle health

inequalities. Consisting of four categories of intervention, this typology is underpinned by a schematic logic model (2007), describing how interventions to tackle health inequalities are commonly formulated (emphasis added):

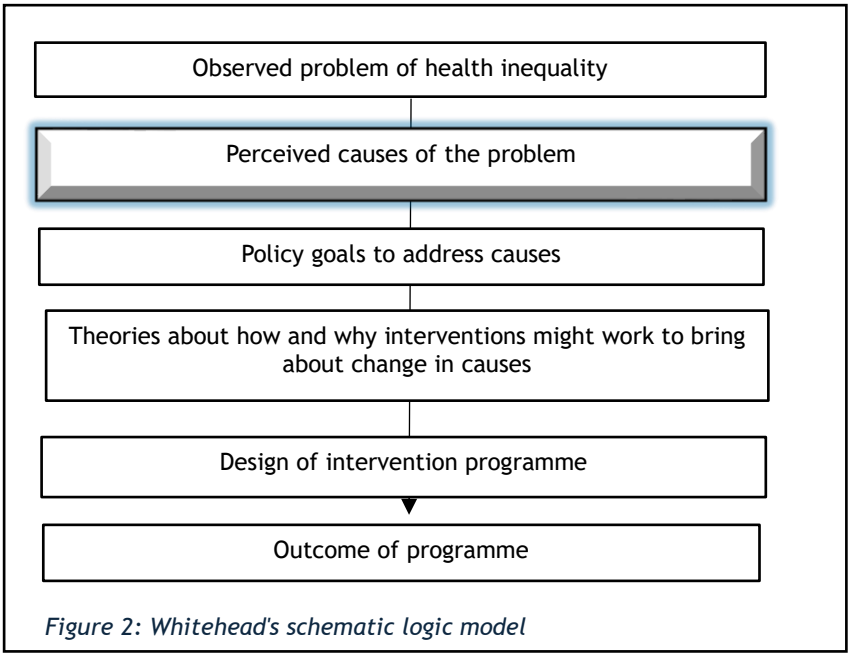


Figure 2: Whitehead's schematic logic model

Informed by the understanding that the type of policy action taken by governments is undoubtedly shaped by dominant political and public discourses (Carlisle, 2001; Levitas, 1998), Whitehead argues that '[w]hen the decision is taken that 'something must be done' about the problem, the nature of the proposed actions will depend on the prevailing notions of what is causing that problem' (2007, p. 473). Indeed, the key component here is the second stage: *perceived causes of the problem*. For Whitehead, the four categories of action at which policy interventions are targeted reveals much about how health inequalities are thought about and understood, as well as revealing the pervasiveness of problematic discourses related to lower socio-economic groups:

Category 1: Strengthening Individuals

A *strengthening individuals* intervention is seeking to resolve a personal deficit in knowledge, skills, behaviour or self-confidence (Whitehead, 2007). Arguably the epitome of *lifestyle drift*, examples of this might include health promotion campaigns such as smoking cessation or skills-

based classes like budgeting or cooking plus general educative programmes which are targeted at lower socio-economic groups, predicated on the assumption that those groups lack the basic life skills needed to be well. This type of intervention is strongly associated with what Levitas terms 'moral underclass discourse' (or MUD) (Carlisle, 2001; Levitas, 1998), which posits delinquent or irresponsible behaviour as the 'perceived cause of the problem' (Whitehead, 2007) and, some argue, perpetuates stigmatising, but pervasive, notions of deserving and undeserving poor, or 'strivers vs skivers' rhetoric (Peacock et al., 2014; Valentine & Harris, 2014), exacerbated by an austerity-driven political and media 'propaganda war that demonises [vulnerable groups]' (Jones & McCormack, 2016, p. 243).

Category 2: Strengthening Communities

This category of intervention focuses primarily on social cohesion, founded on the belief that inequality ultimately excludes disadvantaged communities from wholly participating in society (Levitas, 1998), resulting in negative health impacts. Whitehead (2007) argues that there are two versions of *strengthening communities* interventions: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal interventions focus on community relationships and dynamics and include things like community development initiatives (for example, social or issue focused groups) aimed at developing community infrastructure to identify and respond to local needs. Vertical interventions however focus on society-wide relationships across the socio-economic spectrum. Initiatives might include projects to ensure inclusivity and accessibility of social security systems or various participatory forums and mechanisms aimed at increasing political participation. These types of interventions tend to give prominence to ideas such as social cohesion and social capital (Levitas, 2004), which resonate with psychosocial interpretations of health inequalities (Carlisle, 2001; Marmot, 2006). The broad idea is that the more solidarity there is across social groups, the less of a gap there is between them (Whitehead, 2007) although these interventions often ignore structural and economic

issues like experiences of in-work poverty, low wages or an inadequate social security system (Levitas, 2004).

Category 3: Improving Living and Working Conditions

The interventions which fall into this category aim to reduce the exposure to health damaging environments which might be experienced where we work and live. Interventions will typically resemble population wide public health measures such as universal access to clean water, national minimum wage, adequate housing or childcare and the provision of accessible health and social care services, with the assumption that these population-wide measures will have a bigger, positive, impact on lower socio-economic groups (Whitehead, 2007). However, these interventions differ from categories 1 and 2, as the primary locus for change is not disadvantaged individuals or communities but instead whole populations.

Category 4: Promoting Healthy Macro-Policies

These interventions aim to alter 'the macroeconomic or cultural environment to reduce poverty and the wider adverse *effects* of inequality in society' (Whitehead, 2007, p. 475, emphasis added). Measures in this category will incorporate national and international policymaking in and around legal and human rights as well levers which impact upon a spectrum of policy domains such as taxation and welfare provision (Whitehead, 2007). Key to this category is that interventions are likely to involve policy domains which might not organically align themselves with health outcomes (Ollila, 2011) and there is strong support for interventions of this type within the research community (Smith & Eltanani, 2015), with concerted and sustained calls for more policy action which is located at the macro socio-economic level (Bambra et al., 2021; Katikireddi et al., 2013; McCartney et al., 2013).

Given this thesis is located within a political economy framing of health inequalities, which views the role of politics and policy as crucial (Bambra et al., 2025), use of this typology is helpful in unpicking and

understanding how participatory-deliberative processes *operate within* policymaking spaces, and crucially, the suggested policy interventions they produce. Whilst it is arguably simple, its focus on the 'perceived causes of the problem' (Whitehead, 2007) allows for critical reflection on the underlying discourses and schools of thought which might underpin certain types of policy interventions. Given there is a clear focus on achieving upstream policy action (Bambra et al., 2021; McCartney et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2016; Whitehead & Popay, 2010), this is helpful in discerning how participatory-deliberative processes are currently functioning, and therefore the role they might play in future policy action to tackle the socio-economic determinants of health inequalities.

The second facet of the conceptual framework concerning the policy context focuses on the *purpose* participatory-deliberative processes serve within policy and decision-making spaces. As we saw in the discussion of public participation's relationship with inequality, conceptualisations of how participatory-deliberative processes interact with the broader policymaking systems in which they are taking place can vary significantly. This is what Dean refers to as 'the competing logics of public participation in policy decisions' (2017, p. 1). Public participation, he argues, is 'advocated for by everyone from the radicals of the Occupy Movement to the econocrats at the World Bank' (Dean, 2017, p. 2), but that does not necessarily mean that everyone holds the same expectations and hopes for what these types of processes can achieve in policymaking spaces. Indeed, participatory-deliberative processes are often expected to achieve a multitude of, often incompatible, aims:

> Democratic innovations are expected to fulfil a wide variety of hopes, some of them contradictory. Actors involved expect participatory innovations to solve a mixture of problems, such as enhancing citizens' competence, cutting back the budget of a municipality or providing more redistributive and sustainable policies. (Geissel, 2012, p. 209)

Theorists advocate for better understanding of the various political and social ideologies or impulses which precipitate the incorporation of public participation within policy decision-making (Barnes et al., 2007; Dean,

2017), and therefore determine how it functions within those spaces. This involves interrogation of the *purpose* public participation is serving within policy decision-making, a focus considered missing from much contemporary analysis: '[w]ork on democratic innovations rarely concerns itself with bureaucracies, governance networks or policy work' (Escobar & Bua, 2025, p. 10). Whitehead's typology does not suffice for this level of investigation, instead it is necessary to bring in a more in-depth analytic tool, specifically designed for policy synthesis: Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) (2009).

A WPR approach works backwards from *policy proposals* to uncover the policy 'problem' this intended action is aiming to solve: 'your specific policy proposal reflects (and hence reveals) how you understand the 'problem' (Bacchi, 2009, p. xiv). The WPR approach to policy analysis views policy 'problems' as *socially constructed*, with no universal or absolute definition (Bacchi, 2009). Instead, *representations* of problems are continuously produced and re-produced by the social, historical and cultural context in which they emerge. It is the job of a WPR analysis to deconstruct and decode 'taken for granted truths' (Bacchi, 2009) present in how public policy *constitutes* problems and all of the ramifications which flow from thinking about the issue(s) in this way (Bacchi et al., 2016; Bacchi, 2009). The approach consists of six overlapping questions, which aim to disrupt the idea that policy proposals 'solve' problems and instead position the policy itself as a *problem representation*:

1. What's the problem represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?

6. How/ where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced? (adapted from Bacchi, 2009, p. xii)

In the case of this thesis, the problem representation under scrutiny here is related to public participation – what problem is public participation purporting to solve in different policy contexts? This systematic questioning of the *purpose* of PDPs within policymaking opens the door to considering the different modes participation can play in different policy settings (Dean, 2017) as well as interrogating the different roles assigned to citizens (Escobar, 2017) within those spaces:

> The goal is to probe the premises that underpin particular problem representations. Put simply, it is essential to think deeply about the assumptions and presuppositions that lie behind and shape selected policies. It is also essential to consider the implications that flow from these presuppositions and how particular forms of rule have come to be. (Bacchi, 2009, p. xiv)

This is particularly useful in the context of public participation in policymaking. It provides a framework through which to interrogate the policy conceptualisations of public participation.

Understanding how public participation and democratic innovations fit into socio-economic policymaking in the UK and Scotland is then being investigated in two different, but complimentary, ways. Whitehead's typology of interventions provides a helpful tool through which to understand the *types* of policy problems tackled via PDPs, which, although simple, can tell us a lot about the underpinning discourses and ideologies which shape policymaking. Second, Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' approach investigates the *role* PDPs are playing (or are allowed to play) within policy settings, shifting the focus towards understanding *why* public participation processes are implemented and how exactly they function within institutional contexts. These frameworks, applied in different sections of thesis, together

provide a rich understanding of how public participation interacts with and unfolds in socio-economic policymaking spaces.

3.3.2 Understanding how the design of public participation processes interacts with social and political inequalities

The above framework provides a useful lens through which to consider the policy context in which PDPs are taking place. However, it does not provide any tools for understanding how the *process* of public participation plays out in practice. As demonstrated in the literature review, there is a vast, and growing, literature on public participation in policymaking, and more specifically in the application of democratic innovations worldwide. The fields of democratic theory, policy analysis and political science are now littered with different analytic tools designed to help us understand, in more detail, how participatory-deliberative processes unfold and operate in the policymaking systems in which they are taking place (see for example, Arnstein, 1969; Fung, 2006; Gaventa, 2006; IAP2, 2018). One such tool is Smith's categorisation, or framework, of *democratic goods*. Designed to respond to a perceived 'failure to systematically engage in the 'messy' and detailed task of institutional design' (G. Smith, 2009, p. 8) this framework provides a simple, but helpful heuristic of democratic goods through which to synthesise different forms of public participation and democratic innovations.

For Smith, whilst democratic theorists had become powerful advocates for increased citizen participation in policy decision making, their discussions of how citizen participation occurred in practice had 'remained at a high level of abstraction' (G. Smith, 2009, p. 8). As such the democratic goods framework was developed to support better evaluation and understanding of how democratic innovations and participatory practice played out in real world settings (see Smith's own extensive application of the framework across different cases and socio-political contexts for more detail, 2009).

Borrowing heavily from both participatory and deliberative democratic theory, the framework is intended to provide a tool which is flexible enough to be applied across the broad spectrum of participatory activities which can fall under the umbrella of *democratic innovations*, as well as supporting better interrogation of whether policymaking institutions realise particular 'desirable qualities', i.e., democratic goods, thought to be central to their 'democratic status' (G. Smith, 2009). Through consideration of each democratic good, the framework is also intended to confront, rather than avoid, common critiques associated with citizen participation and democratic innovations generally: 'It is too easy to be swept along with the rhetoric of participation and not ask hard questions of institutional designs' (G. Smith, 2009, p. 14). This thesis takes full advantage of the flexibility of this framework. Typically the framework consists of four democratic goods: inclusiveness, considered judgement, popular control and transparency, plus two institutional goods: efficiency, i.e., perceived 'costs' incurred for both the public administration and citizens, and transferability, i.e., understanding whether different processes can be applied to different policy problems in different socio-political contexts (G. Smith, 2009). Whilst each have merits in understanding institutionalised participatory mechanisms, this thesis is not concerned with the *institutional goods*. This is because, whilst recognising the value of studies which investigate PDPs as separate from their distinct social, political and policy contexts, this study takes the view that the unique context of the PDP is deeply intertwined with how the processes unfold. Similarly, the four *democratic* goods appear to present the most opportunities for investigating how democratic innovations interact with social and political inequalities. The framework is therefore simplified solely to the democratic goods of *inclusiveness*, *considered judgement, transparency* and *popular control*, detailed in turn now:

Inclusiveness

Smith defines inclusiveness, or inclusion, in two ways: presence and voice. Presence in the sense of *who* is involved in the process and voice in the sense of *how* they are enabled to contribute and be heard during that process (2009). As discussed, participatory-deliberative processes internationally, are often criticised for failing to ensure heterogeneity in both representation and communication modes, instead reproducing socio-economic environments dominated by privilege and unequal power dynamics (Fraser, 2000; Young, 2000). Indeed, central to the concept of inclusiveness is the recognition that political participation of any kind is socially patterned (Lijphart, 1997), with some groups routinely marginalised or excluded from decision-making spaces, resulting in, what can be, profound inequalities in influence (Dalton, 2017; McCartney et al., 2021). Understanding how inclusiveness is realised *within* participatory processes is for Smith (2009), and others (Bohman, 1998; Fraser, 2000; Fung, 2005; Young, 2000), crucial to understanding both their value and legitimacy as *democratic* processes. For Smith, this means interrogating whether 'democratic innovations [can] be designed so that differentials that traditionally affect levels of engagement across social groups are reduced or even neutralised' (G. Smith, 2009, p. 22). This question is particularly pertinent in the context of this thesis which is also concerned with policymaking to tackle social inequalities in health. Understanding *who* is enabled to participate and be heard in participatory-deliberative processes is then important.

Considered judgement

One of the common arguments presented for increased use of participatory-deliberative processes in policy decision making is that through these processes, citizens are able to make 'thoughtful and reflective judgements' (G. Smith, 2009, p. 24), on often-complicated policy issues. This is a particular feature of deliberative democratic theory, which advocates strongly for citizens to be able to engage in 'high quality argumentation or rational-critical debate' (Bächtiger et al., 2018, p. 3) in order to reach conclusions for the common good (Gutmann &

Thompson, 2004). This is thought to be a corrective to one of the perceived issues with representative democracy, viewed as providing no such opportunities for this kind of in-depth citizen deliberation (Fishkin, 2018). This argument is also central to those which advocate for the exploration of public participation in policymaking to tackle social inequalities in health, where deliberative fora are considered to provide 'constructive discursive spaces' (Smith et al., 2022, p. 129) for citizens to contribute to ongoing debate on policy action. Sitting at the heart of this is the democratic good of *considered judgement*, which assesses whether or not citizens have had the opportunity to increase their technocratic knowledge of a particular issue as well as whether or not they have been exposed to and engaged with a variety of views and opinion on the subject (G. Smith, 2009).

Popular control

This democratic good is concerned with the level of influence participating in a democratic innovation affords the citizens involved. Common criticisms laid at the door of participatory-deliberative processes is that they fail to provide citizens with any more agency than voting in an election (Knight & Johnson, 1994); or that real decision-making power remains in the hands of institutions (Rolfe, 2018), who either wholly control the agenda (Bua, 2012; Bussu, Golan, et al., 2022) or co-opt public participation to legitimise decisions which have already been made (Font et al., 2018; Fung, 2015; White, 1996). In Smith's framework citizen influence is considered across the whole process design, including: 'problem definition, option analysis, option selection and implementation' (G. Smith, 2009, p. 23). This differs slightly from other frameworks which tend to consider citizen influence on the overall policy *proposals*, as detailed in other analytical models (see for example, Beetham, 2012). Indeed, as detailed, more recent work to understand the *impact* of participatory-deliberative processes has shifted its focus towards the *embeddedness* of public participation within the policymaking processes of institutions (Bussu, Bua, et al., 2022) and more

specifically consider how such public participation interacts with and influences policy decision-making (see for example, Bussu, Golan, et al., 2022; Demski & Capstick, 2022; Russell, 2017).

Transparency

The final good included in the analysis here is one which cuts across the preceding three: transparency. For Smith this is founded on two levels: clarity of process for the citizens involved and the publicity surrounding the democratic innovation (2009). Transparency of process ensures that citizens have a robust understanding of participatory process they are involved in, for example knowledge of 'how the issue under construction [has] been selected, who is organising the process, how the outputs of the process [will] affect political decisions' (G. Smith, 2009, p. 25). Publicity relates to how the details of both the process and outputs are shared or made publicly available, this relates to the visibility and perceived legitimacy of decisions which have been made by institutions (G. Smith, 2009) as well to the concept of reciprocity, and how the results and outcomes of the process shared with the people who participated and with those whom any changes will affect (McCoy & Scully, 2002).

These four democratic goods provide a tool through which to understand how participatory-deliberative processes are currently implemented within different policy settings. They focus attention on specific design elements of participatory-deliberative processes which link into and build on the purpose and policy context investigated via Whitehead (2007) and Bacchi's (2009) approaches. Through this synthesised framework the different facets, modes and roles of public participation are illuminated, both in terms of policy context and institutional design. This in turn provides useful intelligence on their potential to play a part in any 'democratic rejuvenation' to tackle the socio-economic determinants of health inequalities. A visual representation of this conceptual framework is detailed in Figure 3 below, and Chapters 4 and 5 provide more detail on how this framework was operationalised in different stages of the study:

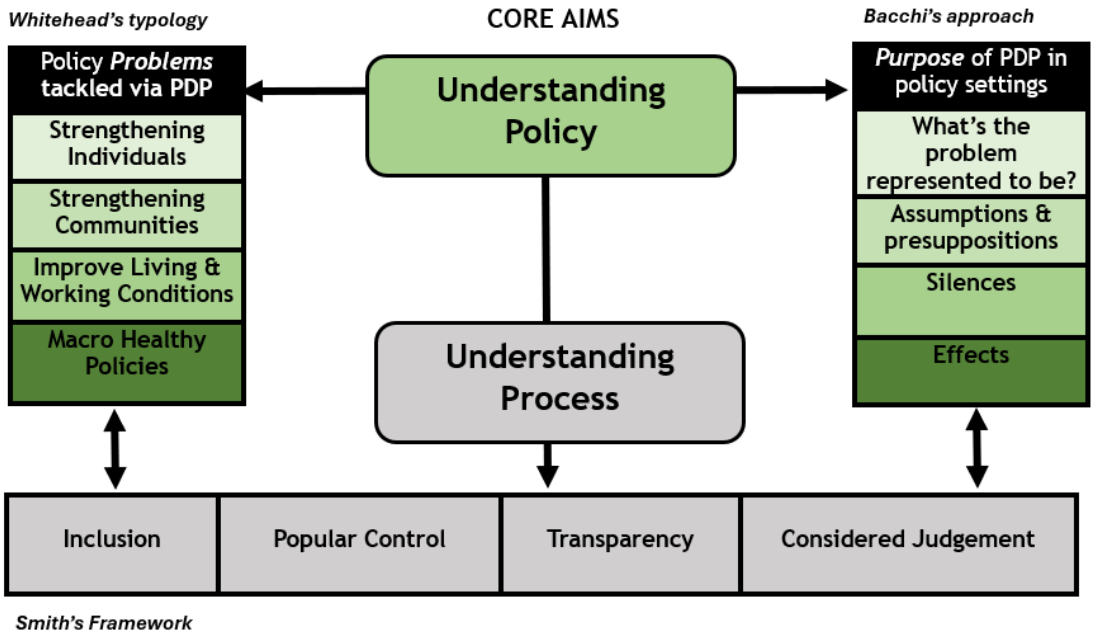


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework for the whole thesis

3.4 Research Questions

Given the centrality of the Conceptual Framework in realising the aims of this thesis, it is helpful to now provide a reminder of the research questions, previously stated in Chapter 1:

1. How and to what effect are participatory-deliberative processes applied in socioeconomic decision and policymaking in Scotland and the UK?

2. What is the *purpose* of participatory-deliberative processes within policymaking in Scotland and how is this characterised in policy and stakeholder accounts?

3. How are the democratic goods of inclusion, popular control, considered judgement and transparency conceptualised in participatory-deliberative processes?

   i.) What types of publics are participating and why?
   ii.) What is the role of evidence and expertise?
   iii.) How do participatory-deliberative processes connect to and impact policy decisions?

4. What can we learn from existing/contemporary examples of PDPs about the opportunities and challenges of a 'democratic rejuvenation' to address health inequalities?

3.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has detailed the synthesised conceptual framework which has been brought together for this study. It has provided an overview of the three key underpinning theories which are combined to unpick its research questions, detailed above. The following chapters detail the different steps and methods undertaken in order to answer these questions.

Chapter 4: Systematic Scoping Review

4.1 Overview of chapter

This chapter details the first step taken to answer the research questions of this thesis. It sets out a Systematic Scoping Review undertaken to explore RQ1: how and to what effect are participatory-deliberative processes applied in socio-economic decision-making in the UK and Scotland? The first section provides rationale for the study and details the design and methods, including the search strategy and results. The following sections detail the findings based on synthesis through the Conceptual Framework (detailed in the preceding chapter), in particular highlighting a series of disconnects identified across the participatory-deliberative processes (PDPs) included in the Review. This Review has been published as a stand-alone study in the *Evidence and Policy* journal, accessible here: https://doi.org/10.1332/17442648Y2025D000000053. This chapter has been rewritten separately from this publication, specifically including expanded sections on inclusion/exclusion criteria, inclusiveness and in its discussion section. Where there are direct crossovers with the existing publication (for example the Study Aims, Data Extraction Table and Searches), they have been clearly cited as verbatim.

4.2 Study Design

As established, this thesis is seeking to learn lessons from current participatory practice in the UK, which might inform a suggested 'democratic rejuvenation' to tackle health inequalities. This means that the first step in the project was to try to gain a better understanding of how PDPs are currently operating within policy decision-making settings in the UK. There are two key domains which are of particular interest:

participatory-deliberative processes and socio-economic policymaking, areas which are both broad and complicated in equal measure. This meant that gaining an understanding of participatory practice happening *across* the UK would require a methodology which could cope with distilling diverse and complex domains of interest. It was for this reason that a Systematic Scoping Review was chosen to explore RQ1: how and to what effect are participatory-deliberative processes applied in socio-economic decision-making in the UK and Scotland?

4.2.1 Identifying the key aims of the study

Policymaking which falls under the banner of 'socio-economic' decision-making is vast and varied. This might include policy action on income, housing, education, employment, poverty, deprivation or wealth – to name just a few of the interconnected concepts which might be considered as 'socio-economic' (Shaw et al., 2007). For this reason, it was necessary to identify some key aims for the Systematic Scoping Review which would enable the study to explore current usage of PDPs in socio-economic policymaking in the UK, whilst remaining feasible within the confines of a PhD project undertaken by one researcher.

This meant first narrowing down the policy domain. This study was designed in 2022 when the UK (and much of the rest of the world) was post-pandemic and in the midst of a severe cost-of-living crisis producing increasing levels of financial precarity across the country (Clark & Wenham, 2022). Relatedly, this period also saw the publication of studies which clearly demonstrated the catastrophic health impacts of austerity, including 'welfare reform' policies, on disadvantaged groups (Walsh, Dundas, et al., 2022; Walsh, Wyper, et al., 2022). This, in conjunction with my own background working in welfare rights and anti-poverty settings, led to the selection of 'income insecurity' as the policy lens through which PDPs might be understood. This concept links into a variety of different aspects of socio-economic decision-making including social security, employment, and poverty – areas identified as key to any policy

action which might reduce health inequalities (Bambra et al., 2021; McCartney et al., 2013; Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015; Smith et al., 2016). As such, the Review had the following aims:

- ‘Examine how, when and where PDPs have been applied in policymaking related to income insecurity in the UK
- Understand how these processes influence policy outcomes and at what level, using a combined analytical framework of Whitehead’s typology of actions to tackle social inequalities in health (Whitehead, 2007) and Smith’s categorisation of democratic goods (G. Smith, 2009)’ (Baillie et al., 2025, p. 432)

4.2.2 Methods

The design of this study was informed by contemporary methodology literature related to systematic scoping reviews. This included drawing on Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) much cited framework on the necessary steps and stages, as well as wider work which has further enhanced and evolved thinking around how best to conduct systematic scoping reviews (Levac et al., 2010; Pham et al., 2014). As such, this Review is structured according to Joanna Briggs Institute’s guidance on conducting systematic scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2017), which was used in conjunction with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) checklist (Tricco et al., 2018). In addition, this Review sits alongside others which have sought to explore how public participation unfolds in different, but related, contexts, including within health care settings (Baumann & Brütt, 2021; Degeling et al., 2015); considering particular types of PDPs (for example citizens' juries, Street et al., 2014); and on a much bigger scale investigating multiple forms of public participation (Popay et al., 2007).

4.2.2.1 Search strategy

One of the first steps in conducting a systematic scoping review is determining the search terms which will be used to identify literature which is relevant to the study aims. A helpful tool for this endeavour is Peters et al.'s Population, Concept, Context (PCC) framework (2017), detailed in Table 1 below. In addition, Popay et al.'s (2007) rapid review of community engagement activities in the context of the social determinants of health (cited above) played a pivotal role in shaping the search strategy, particularly around useful search terms for the 'concept' part, given the demonstrable heterogeneity of public participation.

PCC element	Definition	Search terms
Population	The public, citizens, people with lived experience	public OR citizens OR "lived experience" OR community OR lay OR household* OR low-income OR residents OR stakeholder* OR partners*
		AND
Concept	Participatory-deliberative processes	participat* OR deliberat* OR "decision-making" OR governance* OR "democratic innovation" OR "participatory democracy" OR OR "deliberative democracy" OR "community involvement" OR "community engagement" OR collaborat* OR involve* OR participatory w process* OR deliberative w process OR citizens w jur* OR citizens w panel+ OR citizens w assembl* OR community w forum OR community w panel OR collaborative w approach* OR neighbourhood w committee+ OR neighbourhood w forum+
		AND
Context	Policymaking related to income insecurity in the UK	policymaking OR "social policy" OR "public policy" OR "economic policy" OR "income insecurity" OR income OR poverty OR depriv* OR inequalit* OR austerity OR "financial insecurity" OR "economic insecurity" OR "job insecurity" OR socio-economic OR "economic democracy"

Table 1: Population Concept Context Framework (Peters et al., 2017)

The topic areas of participatory-deliberative processes and income insecurity bridge academic and policy disciplines including social, public health and political science. Thus, a search for primary peer reviewed literature was conducted on the following databases:

- Medline (EBSCO)
- EconLit (EBSCO)
- SocINDEX (EBSCO)
- SOC Abstracts (PROQUEST)

In addition, this Review was interested in the practicable application of participatory-deliberative processes in real-world policy contexts, therefore searches were undertaken to identify grey literature of relevance, primarily on: BASE Database, as well as on the following websites of organisations and institutions: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Involve, IPPR, COSLA, UK and Scottish Government, Participedia and Local Government Association. The development of the strategy was an iterative process, which piloted a number of search terms and combinations. For example, terms which yielded lots of irrelevant results, such as 'welfare', which largely produced literature related to child welfare and child protection were removed. The strategy and terms were then peer reviewed by both the supervisory team (KS, GF and MM) as well as an experienced information scientist who specialises in literature reviews (VW) and then refined before the final strategy agreed. The final search terms are summarised in the table above and the full strategy detailed in Appendix 1. For grey literature searches, due to the variation in platform, it was not possible to conduct the search strategy as formulaically as in the academic databases, therefore key search terms were identified and used across the websites to ensure consistency. These terms and related searches are also detailed in Appendix 1.

4.2.2.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The broad inclusion criteria for articles in this Review were that:

- They detailed a **participatory-deliberative process** which took place in the UK
- The participatory-deliberative process aimed to influence **policymaking** related to **income insecurity** or broader **income-related policy**, including at a **local** and **national** level
- The work took place **in the UK** from **2007** onwards

The previous international review of community engagement initiatives employed in the context of tackling the social determinants of health found the literature related to community involvement to be very diverse (Popay et al., 2007), meaning clear selection criteria were necessary to find the most pertinent articles. Although the focus was different for that study, as mentioned, there is overlap with the population and concept elements of this Review. For this reason, articles were selected from 2007 onwards to avoid any duplication and clearly differentiate this study in its own right. In addition, as highlighted, from the financial crash in 2008, the UK witnessed significant reforms to socio-economic policy, largely in the form of austerity (Bartley & Blane, 2016) so there is wisdom in considering this distinct period in UK policymaking.

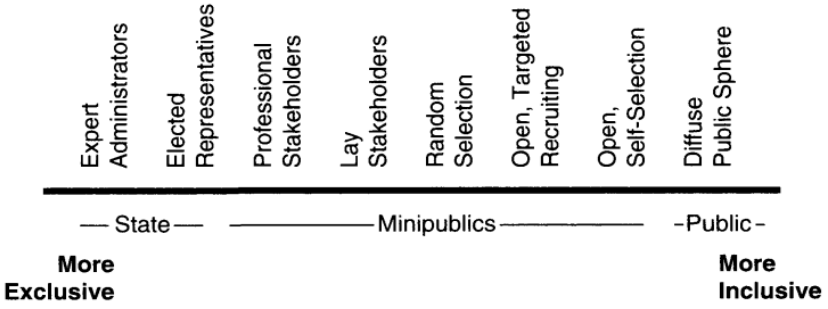
Whilst the search strategy was designed to be as robust as possible, the inclusion/ exclusion criteria consisted of a number of umbrella terms, which are often applied pluralistically to a wide variety of settings and contexts. For this reason, it is helpful to outline the definitions developed and used in this Review, which were guided by the overarching aims of the study. The inclusion/exclusion checklist can be found in Appendix 2.

Participatory-deliberative processes

As discussed, public participation as a concept and practice is nebulous (Ganuza, 2017; Pateman, 1970), with the increasing spread of participation in governance worldwide resulting in seemingly innumerable interpretations of what constitutes participation itself (Barnes et al., 2007; Fung, 2006; Ganuza, 2017). This thesis employs the purposefully broad term *participatory-deliberative processes* to reflect the diversity of approaches which exist in the context of public participation (Fung, 2006;

Parkinson, 2006). Whilst the breadth of this term is helpful, in the context of a systematic scoping review it was necessary to be clear about the particular types of participatory-deliberative processes of interest here.

Fung defines participation plurally, using the terms 'participation', 'direct public participation' and 'citizen participation' interchangeably (2006), asserting that there is no canon of participatory functions, rather a variety of mechanisms, purposes and designs which change depending on the context and the institutional aims. Indeed, there are many long-standing conceptualisations of these mechanisms, purposes and designs, often presented as ladders or spectra (Arnstein, 1969; IAP2, 2018; Oswald et al., 2018), and widely used to determine the *type* of public participation employed by institutions. For the purposes of this Review, one dimension of Fung's Democracy Cube (2006) was used to shape the approach to inclusion/exclusion and determine which processes were included (or not):



(adapted from Fung, 2006, p. 68)

Participatory-deliberative processes at the exclusive end of this arm, focused solely on the participation of expert administrators, elected representatives or professional stakeholders were excluded. This is because this Review is primarily interested in the processes and opportunities for *citizens, rather than technocrats,* to participate in. In keeping with this, the inclusion/ exclusion criteria also differentiated according to concepts of associative, direct and hybrid democracy, described below:

- ‘Associative democracy, where those invited to participate are community representatives or intermediaries from established community groups and associations…
- Direct democracy, where those invited to participate are citizens/residents that do not need to be part of existing community groups or associations…
- Hybrid democracy, where those invited to participate are a mix of community representatives/intermediaries and citizens/residents…’

(Weakley & Escobar, 2018, p. 55)

Examples of purely associative democracy, i.e. the participation space is *only* open to citizens as representatives of established and formal groups, organisations or associations were excluded, whilst examples of direct or hybrid were included. Again, this was to keep the focus on participatory-deliberative opportunities for *citizens* rather than professional stakeholders. Finally, processes which did not involve citizen interaction or discussion with one another (in any form), such as online consultations which invite pre-written submissions were excluded. This is because this Review is interested in public participation as a deepening of democratic practices (Fung et al., 2003) and shares Young’s view that ‘[a] useful way to conceive of democracy is as a process in which a large collective *discusses* problems such as these that they face together’ (2000, p. 28, emphasis added).

Policymaking

A key component for Fung (2006), in keeping with other participation advocates (Barnes et al., 2007; G. Smith, 2009; Ganuza, 2017), is that public participation, in whatever form, constitutes participation in the *governance* of society, namely through the co-development of policies and laws which impact on the lives of the people participating (Fung, 2006). Indeed, Pateman (1970) argued that meaningful participation *had* to involve devolution of decision-making power into the hands of citizens. However, policymaking processes are inherently complicated (Cairney,

2020b) and often fractured over a variety of settings, spaces and divides (Vlahos, 2021), involving many actors and environmental factors. So, in reality, determining exact points of influence can be challenging. For this reason, it was necessary to be clear about the nature of relationship between the participatory-deliberative process and the policymaking institution. This Review sought to understand 'institutionalised mechanisms' (G. Smith, 2009, p. 2). For Smith, this constitutes participation in decision-making at the strategic and macro level of policymaking (2009). Here, however, in order to capture participation across the fractured eco-system of policymaking, 'institutionalised mechanisms' were defined in a looser sense (Newton, 2012). In this context it means participatory-deliberative processes which were institutionalised in that they were *funded and / or convened* by a policymaking institution, with the specific aim of influencing decision or policymaking within that institution, at any level.

Closely linked to this, is the nature of the participatory-deliberative space in relation to the policy domain (Thorpe & Gaventa, 2020). Theorists argue that it is important to consider the characteristics of the different *types* of spaces where participation takes place (Oswald et al., 2018). Participatory spaces in the context of socio-economic policy can be characterised in three ways: claimed, invited and closed (Brock et al., 2001; Oswald et al., 2018):

- *Claimed* spaces operate outwith institutional settings and typically involve decision-making within associations or social movements or through the creation of alternative pathways or mechanisms to influence institutional decision-making from the outside
- *Invited* spaces incorporate existing processes or mechanisms into which citizens are invited to participate, for example policymaking, budget allocation, grant-funding decisions or service and community planning.

- *Closed* spaces are those decision-making settings which typically remain inaccessible to the general populace, for example business negotiations, trade talks or fiscal and economic policymaking

For the purposes of this Review, articles were excluded if they related to participation in *claimed* spaces, not because these settings and processes do not have any value but because the focus of the Review is to understand participation processes which work in synergy with existing governance arrangements (Fung, 2006) rather than separately. Therefore, this Review included studies which related to invited and closed spaces.

Policy domain

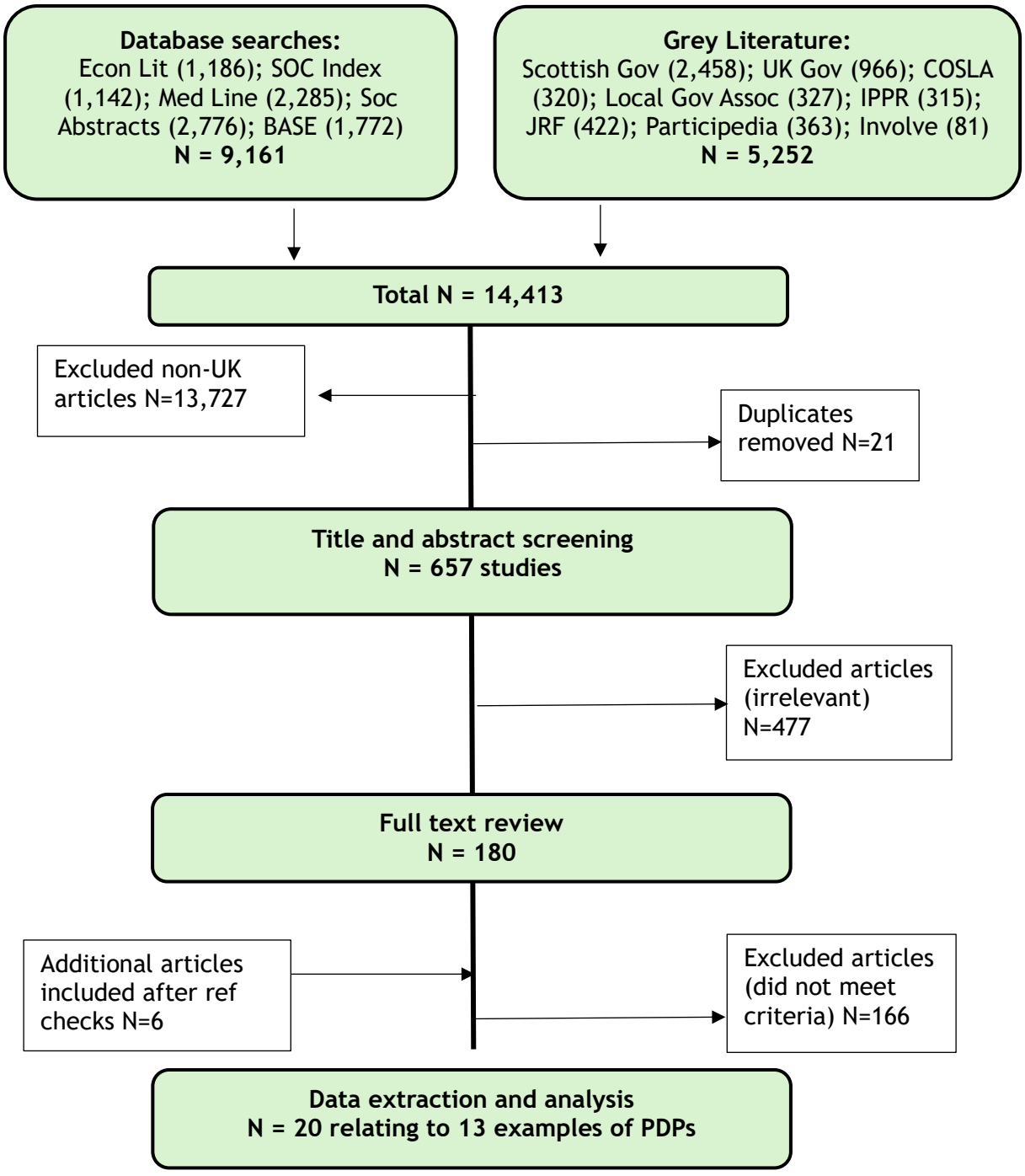
The policy focus of this Review was related to income insecurity. Income insecurity in the context of this research was defined by three elements: inadequacy, instability and constraint (Young, 2021, 2022). Therefore, any decision-making related to the amount of income people have, the reliability of that income and the impact this has on their life met the inclusion criteria. This theoretically incorporates a vast spectrum of policymaking and participation, as such the policy domain was further defined as *income-related policy* and included typical areas of macro-economic decision-making related to tax, debt, interest rates and the ownership and management of economic institutions (Cumbers, 2020; Thorpe & Gaventa, 2020) as well as more local decision-making mechanisms such as the availability or accessibility of local authority administered benefits or the pathways and systems of support which enable people to access their full financial rights and entitlements. Decision and policymaking takes place at both a local and national level and often in sites which are considering a multiplicity of policy priorities, therefore examples which considered governance and decision-making processes in a broad sense were included (for example community planning partnerships, city-wide action plans or national policymaking to tackle poverty), to ensure that participation which connected to income-related policy but was perhaps subsumed in a broader policy domain, such as health inequalities, was not missed. Similarly, the policy domain was

identified from the policy *aims* of the process, as long as this connected to income in some way, it met the inclusion criteria. Notable exclusions for policy domain were adjacent policy areas, for example if the participatory opportunity related to health care or service planning which did not in any tangible way connect to income insecurity.

4.2.2.3 Searches

Figure 4 details the searches and screening process below. The searches and screening took place between June 2022 and August 2022. Initial results of the literature searches yielded many returns of non-English articles and examples from outwith the UK, therefore the first stage of screening excluded anything non-UK based (N=13,727). A total of N=657 publications were put forward for title and abstract screening and N=180 to full text review. Screening was conducted with the support of the supervisory team for this thesis, with around 10% of articles double screened at each stage. Covidence was used as the screening and data extraction platform alongside the inclusion/ exclusion checklist (detailed in Appendix 2) and any conflicts around inclusion were discussed and resolved at meetings throughout June - August 2022. A total of 20 articles relating to 13 participatory-deliberative processes (PDPs) were included for analysis in the Review. For ease, participatory-deliberative processes were considered the unit of analysis – including when there was a group of articles relating to one process.

Figure 4: Systematic Scoping Review Searches



(Baillie et al., 2025, p. 434)

4.2.2.4 Application of the Conceptual Framework

Chapter 3 detailed the Conceptual Framework developed for this thesis as a whole. In its full version, it consists of three interlinked theories: Whitehead's Typology of actions to tackle social inequalities in health (2007), Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' (2009) and Smith's categorisation of Democratic Goods (2009), however it is not applied in full across this Review. Indeed, it is not possible (or feasible) to conduct the in-depth policy analysis associated with Bacchi's approach (2009) across the 13 examples of PDPs found here – this level of policy analysis will come in later sections of the thesis (notably, Chapter 6). Nor was it possible to investigate all four democratic goods in Smith's framework here. The reasons for this were largely down to the level of data and analyses provided in the included articles. Most are drawn from grey literature sources and given the limited reporting of many simply do not provide enough information to adequately assess all of the goods. In particular, understanding *considered judgement,* and whether citizen decisions were based on 'raw preferences... rather than on an informed, reflective assessment of the matter in hand' (G. Smith, 2009) was difficult. That said, there is still an interesting story to be told across these PDPs, which is as much based on the detail that is included as on what is missing.

The conceptual framework was simplified to synthesising the policy aims and resultant participatory outcomes through Whitehead's typology of actions to tackle social inequalities in health (2007), as well as considering aspects of *inclusion*, i.e., who is participating?, *transparency*, i.e., how clear is the process design and decision-making within it?, and *popular control*, i.e., what evidence is there of citizen influence on policy as a result of the PDP? Figure 5 details this adapted version of the conceptual framework:

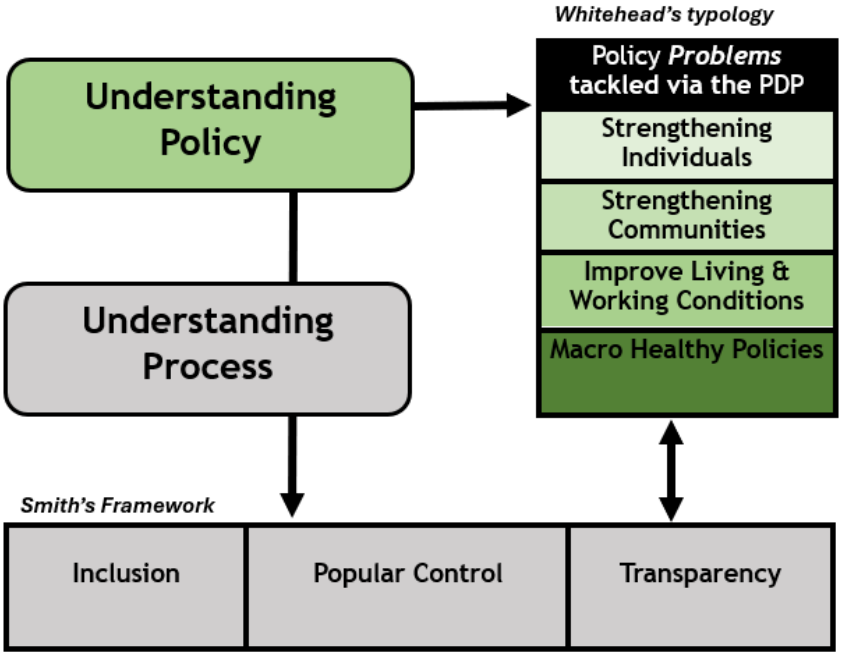


Figure 5: Conceptual Framework as applied in the Systematic Scoping Review

4.3 Findings

Table 2 provides detail on the included articles and associated data extraction. The findings are then separated into two sections. The first section details the *characteristics* of the PDPs included in the Review. This includes providing detail on the sources of articles, the institutional location and types of PDP, the participating citizens and the type and level of policymaking the PDPs are connected to. The second section explores a series of disconnects highlighted across the analysis: Upstream policy problem, downstream citizen input; Big remits, little accountability; and Citizen recommendations: a confused smorgasbord. This section of the chapter is structured in line with the existing publication (Baillie et al., 2025), with a number of expanded sections, notably related to the participating citizens and the discussion of disconnects.

Table 2: Systematic Scoping Review, Data Extraction Table (adapted from Baillie et al., 2025)

Reference	*Type of document*	*Type of PDP*	*Who participated?*	*Policy ambitions: aims & objectives of PDP*	*Evidence & Expertise*	*Participatory outcomes*
1. **Spending Review 2010: Jury's verdict** (Mellor & Cooke, 2010)	Grey literature Final report produced by external consultant	Citizen's Jury	24 x citizens who were 'broadly representative of the population', i.e., mini-public	Report states the jury was convened 'to help inform the Coalition Government's thinking by providing insight into citizens' attitudes and views on the deficit, and to understand the criteria important to citizens that government should use when selecting where and how to make cuts in public spending' (p. 2). The report also details the follow up meeting to review specific policy areas of education reform and charging for public services.	Representatives brought in from UK Government and various thinktanks (including the facilitating organisation). No information provided on format and content of evidence and expertise.	Produced a suite of Jury 'findings' and verdicts in support of the spending review, educational reform and charging for public services.
2. **Community empowerment: Identifying the barriers to ''purposeful'' citizen participation** (Adamson, 2010) **Participatory Community Regeneration: A Discussion of Risks, Accountability and Crisis in Devolved Wales** (Dicks, 2014)	Peer-reviewed Qualitative evidence analyses	Collaborative governance	Residents from 'disadvantaged' areas in Wales (No information provided on numbers)	To provide opportunities for residents to influence state-funded regeneration process in disadvantaged communities in Wales. Aimed at 'programme-bending' where community input influenced how local services were delivered and the development of 'priorities for action in each community' (p. 116)	No information provided on how or if evidence and expertise was brought into the participatory space.	Regular citizen representation in planning partnership board meetings and pre-determined thematic sub-groups

Reference	*Type of document*	*Type of PDP*	*Who participated?*	*Policy ambitions: aims & objectives of PDP*	*Evidence & Expertise*	*Participatory outcomes*
3. **Deliberative Manoeuvres in the Digital Darkness: e-Democracy Policy in the UK** (Moss & Coleman, 2014)	Peer-reviewed Qualitative survey & evaluation	Participatory online forum	Crowdsourcing, no exact details given (or known)	An online platform (*The Spending Challenge*) aimed at involving the public in identifying ways 'to reduce the deficit by cutting public spending in a way that is fair and responsible' (p. 421) Largely aimed at online deliberation and generation of ideas to cut public spending at the UK Government level.	No information provided on how or if evidence and expertise was brought into the participatory space.	High level of public participation: over 100,000 suggestions made or interacted with on the forum
4. **Public Perspectives of the Collaborative Economy** (Scott, 2017)	Grey literature Final report produced by external consultant	Deliberative workshops	50 x citizens of Glasgow & Edinburgh recruited to reflect a 'cross section of the population within these cities', i.e., a mini-public	To 'compliment and inform the work of the Expert Advisory Panel on the Collaborative Economy' (p. 2) convened to support policy development at Scottish Government level.	Participants provided with a variety of information related to the Collaborative Economy via the facilitating organisation as well as one external presentation from third sector organisation. Some information provided on the format and content of evidence and expertise.	Produced a suite of 'Key Messages' for the Expert Advisory Panel on the Collaborative Economy
5. **Blackpool Far North Health and Well Being Inquiry** (Byrant & Beddow, 2017)	Grey literature Final report produced by external consultant	Citizen's Jury	26 x citizens of Blackpool North, aiming for a 'diverse group of local residents', i.e., a mini-public	To develop recommendations for the Local Authority & NHS Clinical Commissioning Group in answer to the following question: "For people living in Blackpool Far North what are the main things that affect people's health and wellbeing and what can be done about them?" (p. 2)	Information provided on the topics discussed, but no detail on how or if evidence and expertise was brought into the participatory space	Produced a suite of 30 recommendations which were ranked according to priority.

Reference	*Type of document*	*Type of PDP*	*Who participated?*	*Policy ambitions: aims & objectives of PDP*	*Evidence & Expertise*	*Participatory outcomes*
				In addition, a top-level aim for the inquiry was to support a move away from medical-based interpretations of health towards recognition of its social determinants.		
6. Social Security Lived Experience Panels Annual Reports (Scottish Government, 2018b, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2022f)	Grey Literature 4 x Annual reports 1 x report on panel members' demographics produced by convening institution	Collaborative Governance	Circa 3000 Scottish citizens with lived experience of accessing the UK benefits system	Lived experience panels convened across a variety of characteristics and experiences of benefits to 'inform all the key decisions across the design of social security' (2019, p. 7) in Scotland.	Information provided on the topics discussed, but no detail on how or if evidence and expertise was brought into the participatory space.	Co-produced 'Our Charter' to guide the development of the Social Security Agency and its founding principles Citizen input on decisions related to: ○ Style and wording of award letters ○ Branding of the new agency ○ Application process design

Reference	*Type of document*	*Type of PDP*	*Who participated?*	*Policy ambitions: aims & objectives of PDP*	*Evidence & Expertise*	*Participatory outcomes*
7. Citizen's Assembly of Wales – Final Report (Involve, 2019)	Grey Literature Final report produced by external consultant	Citizen's Assembly	60 x citizens of Wales recruited via a 'civic lottery', i.e., a mini-public	The Citizens' Assembly was convened to answer the following question: 'How can people in Wales shape their future through the work of the National Assembly for Wales?' (p. 3) It focused on the ways in which citizens might inform on the work of the Welsh Assembly, with a particular focus on how citizens might be involved in economic decisions.	Representatives from academia and think tanks brought into the participatory space. Some information provided on the format and content of the evidence and expertise.	Produced a series of results from voting / ranking exercises, alongside rational and notes from deliberations on pros and cons
8. A Fairer Scotland? Informing the Scottish Government on the real impact of poverty through lived experience (The Poverty Truth Commission, 2020)	Grey Literature Final report produced by external consultant	Deliberative working groups	People with lived experience of poverty connected to working groups across Scotland No information provided on numbers or demographics.	To provide Scottish Government with detail on the work and 'impact' of the Poverty Truth Commissions across Scotland and 'inform a new set of actions towards a fairer Scotland' (p. 1).	No information provided on how or if wider evidence and expertise was brought into the participatory space. However, the 'lived experience' of the participants is characterised as crucial expertise.	Produced a suite of themes from the working groups as well as a number of 'calls for action'
9. Our Lives, Our Solutions: The Annual Report of the Get Heard Scotland Project (Cowan, 2020)	Grey Literature Final report produced by external consultant	Deliberative workshops and events	Circa 200 people with lived experience of poverty from across Scotland.	To 'help people on low incomes get their voices heard on the policies and decisions that most impact their lives and communities' (p. 2) with a particular view to influencing Every Child Every Chance, Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty	No information provided on how or if evidence and expertise was brought into the participatory space. However, as above, 'lived experience' of the participants is	Produced a suite of 60 policy solutions and detail on key themes from the discussions

Reference	*Type of document*	*Type of PDP*	*Who participated?*	*Policy ambitions: aims & objectives of PDP*	*Evidence & Expertise*	*Participatory outcomes*
			No information provided on demographics.	Delivery Plan 2018-2022 (Scottish Government, 2018a).	characterised as crucial expertise. In addition, final recommendations 'shaped by' an Evidence Analysis Group populated by community activists with lived experience of poverty, but no further detail provided.	
10. **Camden Health and Care Citizen's Assembly – Final Report 2020** (Kaleidescope, 2020)	Grey literature Final report produced by external consultant	Citizen's Assembly	Residents of Camden. (No info provided on numbers)	To inform the Camden's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and build on the previous work of the Neighbourhood Assembly across three priority areas: - Health inequalities, - Staying healthy and well - Local service provision	Representatives brought in from local services and national organisations. Some information provided on the content of evidence and expertise, but no detail provided on the format.	Produced a suite of 'expectations' across the three priority areas aimed at: ○ How services can help ○ How the community and individuals can help
11. **Doing Politics Differently: The report of the Citizen's Assembly of Scotland** (Citizen's Assembly Scotland, 2020) **Scottish Government**	Grey literature 1 x final report produced by the Citizens' Assembly;	Citizen's Assembly	104 x citizens 'broadly representative cross-section of Scotland', i.e., a mini-public	What kind of country are we seeking to build? How best can we overcome the challenges Scotland and the world face in the 21st century, including those arising from Brexit? What further work should be carried out to give us the information we need to make informed choices about the future of the country?	Wide range of representatives brought in from across academic, political and third sector settings. Full detail provided on both the format and content of the evidence and expertise brought into the participatory space.	Produced a shared 'Vision' and a suite of 60 cross-sectoral recommendations. Scottish Government published an official response to the recommendations of the assembly.

Reference	*Type of document*	*Type of PDP*	*Who participated?*	*Policy ambitions: aims & objectives of PDP*	*Evidence & Expertise*	*Participatory outcomes*
Response to Doing Politics Differently – The Report of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland (Scottish Government, 2021e) **Research Report on the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland** (Elstub et al., 2022)	1 x report produced by the convening institution 1 x research report produced by collaborative research group and convening institution			The aim was to develop a set of actions to be taken forward by Scottish Government.		
12. **Scottish Parliament Citizens' Panel on COVID-19** (Scottish Parliament, 2021)	Grey literature Final report produced by the convening institution	Citizen's Jury	20 x citizens who were 'randomly selected and stratified', i.e., a mini-public	The panel was convened to answer the following question: 'What priorities should shape the Scottish Government's approach to COVID-19's restrictions and strategy in 2021?" In response to the four harms of COVID-19: Direct & Indirect health impacts, Social and Economic	Range of representatives from across academic, political, third sector and media settings, with the majority of input coming from academia. Full detail provided on both the format and content of the evidence and expertise brought into the participatory space.	Produced a suite of 26 recommendations across the four harms
13. **Bristol Citizen's Assembly: how do we recover from COVID-19 and create a better future**	Grey literature Final report produced by	Citizen's Assembly	60 x citizens 'reflective of Bristol's local diversity', i.e., a mini-public	Convened to answer the following overarching question: "How do we recover from COVID-19 and create a better future for all in Bristol?"	Detail provided on membership of an Advisory Panel who supported 'comprehensive, accurate and balanced' evidence	Produced a suite of 17 recommendations, with accompanying detail and rational and how it can be implemented

Reference	*Type of document*	*Type of PDP*	*Who participated?*	*Policy ambitions: aims & objectives of PDP*	*Evidence & Expertise*	*Participatory outcomes*
for all in Bristol? (Involve, 2021)	external consultant and convening institution			With 'deep dives' into the following topics: - Climate Change - Transport - Health Inequalities In order to feed into the One City Economy Board to influence the COVID-19 recovery strategy as well as into Bristol City Council's Cabinet.	provision for the Assembly. In addition, external speakers categorised into: - Impartial specialists - Advocates - Experts by Experience However, no further detail provided on format and content of evidence and expertise brought into the participatory space.	

4.3.1 Characteristics of participatory-deliberative processes

4.3.1.1 Type of literature

The articles included in this Review provide, in varying degrees, information and detail on each PDP. This includes 'the length of process, participants involved, themes from discussions, and the resulting participatory outcomes, which are, for the most part, in the form of a stand-alone suite of citizen recommendations' (Baillie et al., 2025, p. 435). Although there were robust searches of academic databases, this Review was primarily interested in real-world examples of PDPs, and as such, a majority of the PDPs are detailed from grey literature sources, via a final report, often produced by an external consultant or the convening institution (N=11; References 1, 4-13). The uptick in participatory-deliberative processes worldwide (OECD, 2020) has produced a parallel 'participation industry' (Behrer & Lee, 2019), where governing institutions increasingly rely on consultants to support, convene and deliver participatory processes. This in turn produces tensions in the reporting of PDPs. Public participation professionals who are funded by policymaking institutions, or indeed civil servants who are employed by them, are not necessarily in a position to provide the level of critique or synthesis which might be found in academic reflections on PDPs (see for example, Smith et al., 2021). This is perhaps why most of the articles included here are descriptive, and do not include critical analysis of the process and its outcomes. Indeed, understanding citizen experiences of these PDPs or getting a sense of how the PDP was synthesised and the final report produced is often not possible. However, as simple records of the PDPs, the included articles provide insight into how public participation processes are designed and described in socio-economic policy settings in the UK. Indeed, when synthesised through the conceptual framework, there are some clear commonalities in what is included in these reports as well as, crucially, in what is missing.

4.3.1.2 Institutional spread and type of process

There was an interesting geographical and institutional spread of PDPs included in this Review (see Table 3). A majority of PDPs took place in Scotland, convened or funded by either Scottish Government or Scottish Parliament (N=6; References 4, 6, 8, 9, 11 & 12). The next biggest grouping occurred at Local Authority and / or Health Trust level across England and Wales (N=4; References 2, 5, 10 & 13). Conversely, the returns from UK Government were much smaller with few options available for review, resulting in two inclusions in total (References 1 & 3).

Table 3: Institutional location / level of PDPs, Systematic Scoping Review

Institutional location/ level	No. of PDPs
UK Government	2
Scottish Government/ Parliament	6
Welsh Assembly	1
English or Welsh Local Authority /Health Trust	4

Similarly, although the results of PDPs included from the searches were small in total (N=13), there was variety in the *types* of PDPs employed by institutions. This variety reflects the increasing use of deliberative techniques and democratic innovations more broadly and included a majority of citizens' assemblies and juries (N=7; References 1, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12 & 13), followed by deliberative workshops (N=3; References 4, 8, 9), collaborative governance (N=2; References 2 & 6), and one participatory online forum (N=1; Reference 3). Almost all of the processes, regardless of their type, shared similar outputs, with all, except one (Reference 2), producing a stand-alone suite of citizen recommendations or suggestions to be submitted to the connected policymaking institution for consideration and action (N=12).

4.3.1.3 Who participated?

Understanding *who* participated in the PDPs, and importantly why those particular groups or people were represented, sometimes proved

challenging. Interestingly, that is not to say that inclusiveness was not important for each PDP. Indeed, demonstrating *representativeness* (in some sense) was important across the examples, however there was significant variance in the attention it was given.

There were some PDPs (N=5) which provided a lot of information about the participating citizens. For example, giving demographic breakdowns related to age, gender, ethnicity and geographic residence (Reference 12), with others including additional information alongside this, on characteristics related to working status or categorisations such as social grade (Reference 4), educational qualifications and voting history (Reference 7) or protected characteristics (References 6 & 13). However, a majority (N=8; References 1, 2, 3, 5, 8-11) provided very little detail on the participating citizens. Instead, these examples simply stated that the group of citizens represented a cross-section of society or, conversely, that the citizens represented specific groups, for example, having 'lived experience' of poverty or living in a disadvantaged area, whilst giving no further information on other, important, demographics.

Indeed, there is inconsistency in how inclusion, and perhaps more specifically representativeness, is both conceptualised and realised across the PDPs included in this Review. Underscoring this inconsistency is missing information. Even in the examples which provide detailed breakdowns of demographics, this is seldom accompanied with detail on why these particular groups are represented. For example, one PDP which sought groups of citizens with experience of accessing the UK benefits system provides a breakdown on the religious denomination of participating citizens (Reference 6), but it is unclear why this distinction is important in that context. Indeed, how conceptualisations of inclusiveness *connected to* the policy problems or areas being discussed is often unarticulated. There is one exception to this, where a Citizens' Panel convened to deliberate the potential harms of COVID-19 purposefully aimed for an over-representation of participants from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds (Reference 12), in recognition of the

disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on these population groups (Katikireddi et al., 2021). However, this is not mirrored in other examples, particularly those which focused on health inequalities (References 5, 10 & 13) where there is no evidence of seeking an over-representation of any group, even those groups which suffer the greatest unfair burden of ill health.

This perhaps reveals a contemporary tension in different approaches to inclusion and recruitment in the design of PDPs. On the one hand, there appears to be a clear effort for many PDPs to demonstrate the involvement of diverse groups of people, often through convening a 'mini-public' (Elstub & Escobar, 2019), which represents a cross-section of society. This is certainly reflected in this Review where over half the PDPs involved a citizens' assembly or citizens' jury (N=7; References 1, 5, 7, 10-13). On the other hand, other examples here (N=4; References 2, 6, 8, 9) take a different approach and seek to represent particular groups, often those with 'lived experience' of disadvantage, or in the example above have employed stratified recruitment according to direct experience of the policy problem being discussed (Reference 12). The increasing use of mini-publics has been described as 'isomorphism' (Escobar & Bua, 2025) representing a 'deliberative hegemony' (Smith, 2019) which is potentially crowding out other, equally valid, participatory approaches. As listed above some of the PDPs have chosen different demographic characteristics to detail and use as their criteria for recruitment. However, it is often unclear *why* those particular aspects are important to those particular processes and whether the specific context and impact of the policy problem has been taken into account when seeking cross-sectional representativeness. Similarly, in the PDPs which sought specific groups with experience of disadvantage, this appears to be the sole criterion of representativeness with no other detail provided on the participating citizens, potentially obscuring other, important and intersecting, axes of disadvantage, for example related to ethnicity or gender (Hill, 2016).

The concept of inclusion has been extensively discussed by democratic theorists (Young, 2000), with long standing recognition that the existence of democratic and participatory processes will not organically negate deep rooted inequalities in political voice and representation (Fraser, 1990; Mansbridge, 1983). Indeed, some argue there is a risk that public participation processes can reinforce rather than challenge unequal power relationships and structures (Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2016; Rolfe, 2018). This point is particularly important in the context of social inequalities, and any associated 'democratic rejuvenation'. Salient questions, such as 'who is participating, and why?', are partially, or sometimes wholly, unanswered in the literature included in this Review, making it difficult to make an in-depth assessment of how, and if, inclusion and representativeness was realised (a challenge experienced in other reviews, for example, Street et al., 2014). Given the recognised, intertwined, social gradients in political participation and health outcomes (Reeves & Mackenbach, 2019), this suggests that there is a pressing need to better understand how inclusion is conceptualised, and evidenced, in PDPs. This requires critical analysis and reflection on the cohorts of participating citizens, particularly around the silences unearthed here: the criteria for recruitment, its connection to the policy problem being discussed and how intersectionality of different axes of disadvantage are represented and recognised.

4.3.1.4 Types of policy problems

The policy domain of 'income insecurity' was chosen for this Review as it was purposefully broad and allowed for investigation of PDPs taking place across multiple income-related policy areas. Three PDPs included here directly reference 'income insecurity' as a key topic, with the remainder linked to income through interconnected policy areas, as detailed in Table 4 below.

Although certainly not widespread, this Review does demonstrate that participatory activity is already happening across a variety of interlinked

socio-economic policy domains. Given it is unlikely that this study has uncovered all the participatory policymaking taking place across the UK, this suggests that there is an existing foundation (of sorts) on which a 'democratic rejuvenation' might be built.

Table 3: Policy domains of PDPs, Systematic Scoping Review

Policy domain	No. of PDPs	Specific topics and policy issues the PDP was aiming to solve or influence	References
Poverty	3	Tackling poverty & deprivation, income & food insecurity, income inequality, social security & employment	(2, 8, 9)
Public Health	3	Tackling health inequalities, with foci on employment, income, access to discretionary funds and food insecurity	(5, 10, 13)
Public Spending	2	Social security, poverty & access to public services with a focus on cuts to funding	(1, 3)
COVID-19	1	The four harms of COVID-19: direct & indirect health impacts as well as impacts at the economic & societal level	(12)
Economy	1	The 'Collaborative Economy', including, pay, conditions and security for workers involved in the gig economy.	(4)
Social Security	1	The development of income-based social security entitlements.	(6)
Democracy and Participation	1	Involving citizens in decision-making around financial/ resource allocation and general budgeting.	(7)
Multiple & overarching	1	Very broad: Incomes and poverty, tax and economy, young people, sustainability, health and wellbeing, and devolved powers for Scotland	(11)

(Baillie et al., 2025, p. 443)

4.3.2 Confronting disconnects between rhetoric & reality

A key part of the analysis was mapping the policy *aims* of each PDP onto Whitehead's typology of actions to tackle social inequalities in health (2007). As demonstrated in Table 4 above, all of the policy ambitions of the PDPs appear to fall, at least in part, into the upper levels of Whitehead's typology: Improving living and working conditions and Promoting macro healthy policies. However, when the participatory *outcomes* of each PDP, i.e., the resultant citizen recommendations, were also synthesised through the typology, this apparent upstream focus disintegrates in multiple ways. Indeed, when considered via the conceptual framework for this study a series of disconnects were identified between the policy ambitions of the PDPs and the reality of how they are functioning within income-related policy settings. These disconnects are grouped thematically and will now be discussed in turn:

- Upstream policy problem, downstream citizen input
- Big remits, little accountability
- Citizen recommendations: a confused smorgasbord

4.3.2.1 Upstream policy problem, downstream citizen input

Whilst all of the PDPs included in this Review state the *intention* to influence income-related policy domains, the participatory outcomes of many suggest that citizen input is often 'tightly bound' (Bussu, Golan, et al., 2022) or curated by the connected institution. This is well illustrated in the Experience Panels convened by Scottish Government to support the development of a Scottish social security system (Reference 6). A deepening of democratic practices in this policy area could be significant in the context of both health inequalities and income insecurity. Social protection systems play an important role in ensuring stability of income and access to vital health protecting resources (Bambra & Garthwaite, 2015; Young, 2021) but decision-making about welfare and social security

often takes place in ‘closed’ policymaking spaces, not typically open to public participation (Oswald et al., 2018). The PDP included here details extensive participatory work undertaken by Scottish Government since 2018, with nearly 3,000 people with ‘lived experience’ of accessing UK benefits involved in the panels (Scottish Government, 2020b). Scottish Government cites significant influence over the policy development of devolved benefits, promising ‘that panel members have an opportunity to participate to inform all the key decisions across the design of social security, even and especially when topics are complex or sensitive’ (Scottish Government, 2019, p. 7), and insisting ‘[w]ith Social Security Scotland delivering 11 benefits… Panel members have been involved in shaping most of these benefits’ (Scottish Government, 2022f, p. 3). However, on closer analysis, the policy aspects which the panel members are being asked to co-design are less to do with the substantive policy detail, such as the *rate* or the *regularity* of social security payments, and more to do with the style and wording of award letters, branding and application process design. The policy level quickly shifts away from upstream, socio-economic policy towards action at the *strengthening communities* level (Whitehead, 2007) focused more on the *accessibility* of the Scottish social security system rather than the detail of the provision and entitlements contained within that system.

Indeed, there are further examples which demonstrate this slide downwards. Two peer-reviewed articles included relate to a long-standing urban regeneration project in Wales (Reference 2). The initiative was purposefully targeted at ‘the country’s 100 ‘most disadvantaged communities’ ... plus 32 pockets of deprivation’ (Dicks, 2014, p. 960), and viewed as being part of a broader tackling poverty agenda in Wales, however, both articles are deeply critical of the perceived relegation of citizen contributions (Adamson, 2010; Dicks, 2014). Critiques include the persistent mediation of citizen input by officials in cross-sectoral partnership meetings (Adamson, 2010) as well as the confines of the participatory opportunity available for citizens, which was often in the form of invitation onto pre-determined, skills-based working groups:

> Once poverty is deconstructed into multiple deficits possessed by neighbourhoods (lack of the 'right' job skills, eating habits, parenting ability, etc.), the notion of combatting it through distinct themes – such as education, health, community safety – begins to seem logical. (Dicks, 2014, p. 961)

Here, the problem of poverty and deprivation is viewed through a *strengthening individuals* and *communities* lens (Whitehead, 2007), effectively proscribing discussion of the upstream drivers, and as such, any potential resultant policy action. This pre-determined, individual or community focus is present in other PDPs, for example a citizen's assembly specifically focused on tackling health inequalities advised citizens to provide recommendations on only two levels: how services can help and what individuals and communities can do (Reference 10), essentially ignoring the structural context which produces social inequalities and the health differences which flow from them.

Interestingly, there is one example which does retain its macro-policy focus, but this focus appears carefully curated via an individual and lifestyle-based lens. This example details a citizens' jury convened to consider and inform the Spending Review in 2010 (Reference 1). In this PDP the notion of increasing *personal responsibility* is strongly threaded through, in what appears to be justification for cuts to public spending:

> The Jurors are now well-informed and engaged in the debate about the future of the economy. However, they remembered only too well how ill-informed they were when they began the Jury in July and were clear that none of their friends and family are any better informed, as they were still asking why the spending cuts were needed. (Mellor & Cooke, 2010, p. 7)

Here, it appears that the main function of the participatory process was to reinforce 'changing the mindset from state dependency to personal responsibility' (Mellor & Cooke, 2010, p. 5) on the part of the participating citizens. Indeed, throughout this article over-use of state support is routinely characterised as the motivating factor for the actions in this Spending Review, rather than the global financial crash which precipitated it and the eventual sweeping cuts to public services and social protection systems (Karanikolos et al., 2013). Overall, across the

PDPs there appears to be a common disconnect between the stated upstream policy focus of the process and the actual policy window which is open to citizen input. Whilst many claim to provide doors into policy development at a macro or upper socio-economic policy level, this appears to be 'tightly bound' (Bussu, Golan, et al., 2022) or carefully curated by the institution, instead producing foci at the *strengthening individuals* and *communities* level (Whitehead, 2007).

4.3.2.2 Big remits, little accountability

The second disconnect identified in the analysis presents a rather different issue than the first described above. Indeed, in contrast to the tight control or curation witnessed in those PDPs, there were many examples (N=7; References 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13) where citizens were evidently *not* constrained in what they were able to discuss or recommend. Here, the suites of citizen policy recommendations produced were both wide-ranging and multi-level, resulting in a different sort of problem: impossibly large remits. This appears particularly problematic when trying to assess levels of popular control, i.e., citizen influence on policy decision-making. One example demonstrates this issue well: a citizens' assembly convened to answer a series of open, very broad, questions (Reference 11). This PDP produced a total of 60 recommendations which cut across eight policy domains, leading an associated research report to conclude that this breadth of remit likely hindered its capacity to influence policy decision-making (Elstub et al., 2022). Certainly, given their volume and variety, it was difficult to identity a specific mechanism or point of accountability for the multitude of citizen proposals within the institution.

As detailed, it was not possible to investigate the individual policy fates of each suite of recommendations produced by the PDPs. Charting these often long and complicated journeys (Challies et al., 2021; Font et al., 2018) was simply outwith the scope of this study. That said, there was a clear theme related to a lack of *built-in* accountability across the

articles. A small cohort (N=4) do detail their eventual impact on policy decision-making. But this impact often appears negligible (N=3; References 2, 5, 11) or challenging to attribute to the PDP itself (N=1; Reference 3). Indeed, one peer-reviewed article related to an online PDP (the Spending Challenge - which produced no less than 100,000 citizen suggestions) suggests that the process may have been tokenistic, serving to legitimise decisions which had in fact already been made and actioned:

> It is not entirely clear what impact, if any, public suggestions, elicited through the Spending Challenge… had… the Government reported that public input had influenced policymaking and specific ideas were cited as evidence… However… we might question 'how new some of the large savings from the 'Spending Challenge' are in reality'. (Moss & Coleman, 2014, p. 422)

Explicit policy impact, i.e., direct influence on policy development and associated decision-making, as a result of public participation has long been recognised as difficult to evidence and understand (Russell, 2017). Certainly, there is a loud silence related to institutional accountability across the PDPs included here. Some PDPs name the strategic or steering group the citizen recommendations will be fed into (References 3, 4 & 10), but this is rarely alongside further institutional commitments related to responding to or actioning the suggestions, with only one example including a formal response from the institution (Reference 11). Similarly, there is a small group (N=4; References 7, 8, 9 & 12) who provide no information on the agreed next steps or ways in which the multitude of citizen recommendations will connect to and interact with the associated policy domains. Given this Review purposefully sought to understand '*institutionalised* participatory mechanisms, supposedly connected, by design, to policymaking spaces' (Baillie et al., 2025, p. 445), this lack of *built in* accountability is notable. This repeated omission suggests that PDPs are sometimes segregated from the policy settings they hope to influence, often without any obvious agreed or planned mechanism through which any influence might be achieved.

4.3.2.3 Citizen recommendations: a confused smorgasbord

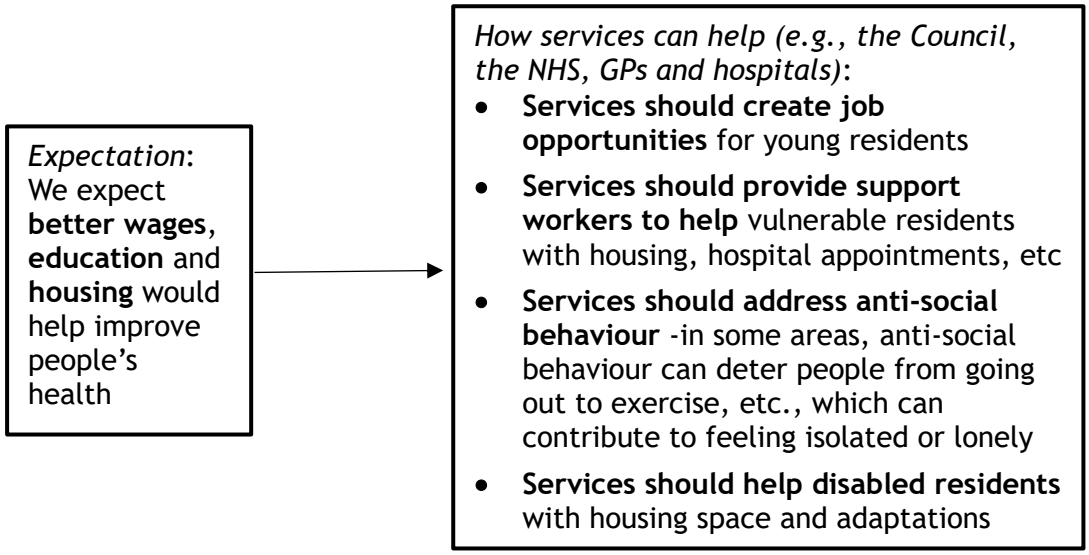
The final disconnect relates to the ways in which the policy problems discussed by citizens were framed within the PDPs. A key component of Whitehead's typology (2007) is considering how policy problems are understood and in particular their 'perceived causes'(2007). Numbering from 17 up to 60, the suites of citizen recommendations produced by PDPs repeatedly reflect a confused smorgasbord of policy proposals, which are both wide-ranging and, often, contradictory in their explanation of the problems they purport to solve. There are three citizens' juries and assemblies which focused on health inequalities which illustrate this well. In each, the collection of citizen recommendations tells a complicated story about public perspectives on the nature and genesis of health inequalities and the required policy action to facilitate their reduction. A perfect example of this complexity and contradiction is the dual conceptualisation of unemployment in the citizen recommendations from one example (Reference 5). Employment is identified as a key determinant of health during the citizen deliberations, and, as such, of the thirty recommendations produced, two relate to unemployment. However, as demonstrated in Table 5 below, each provides a very different narrative for its drivers and resultant policy solutions:

Table 4: Systematic Scoping Review, dual conceptualisation of unemployment

Recommendation no. 5	Recommendation no. 10
People don't know how to care for themselves when they leave school as they are not taught any life skills. This impacts local people as they don't know how to apply for a job, [make] a decent meal or pay a bill. This results in lots of unemployment in Blackpool and people with health and weight problems as they don't know how to create something tasty yet healthy. This could be fixed by teaching life skills in schools so when the students	Employers need to provide a living wage and work contracts that give you security and employee benefits (sick pay, holiday pay, pension) and not just seasonal or temporary contracts. The impact of this is unemployment, poverty, lack of life quality, health problems, lack of security, inequality and crime. This has come about because of austerity, lack of investment, the erosion of workers' rights, a target driven culture, privatization and a failure to value workers (p. 17)

leave they can lead a healthy and happy lifestyle. (p. 16)	

Here, we meet a familiar tension: individualised notions of health versus recognition of structural determinants (Mead et al., 2022). Another example produces a similarly confused narrative about required policy action (Reference 10). Here, under the policy priority to '[r]educe health inequalities in the borough' (Kaleidescope, 2020, p. 22) achieving better wages, education and housing is distilled into only four policy recommendations, which appear somewhat disconnected from the policy expectations they are attached to:



(adapted from Kaleidescope, 2020, p. 22)

There is across these suites of citizen recommendations a tendency to weave together, at times contradictory, narratives about the causes of and solutions to health inequalities, where individual, lifestyle-based explanations are intertwined with those which locate the genesis of social inequalities within a macro-economic domain. Other studies also have found these 'disrupted narratives' (Mackenzie et al., 2020) and argue that these apparent contradictions in understanding present an opportunity for deliberation and discussion. It is, however, unclear whether the complexity evident across the citizen proposals was discussed, reconciled or even acknowledged in the examples here.

Indeed, there is a distinct (and common) lack of transparency around how the policy problems and any underpinning theories for their existence were framed in the PDPs in this Review. There are two which provide a lot of detail on the type of expertise brought into the participatory space as well as which 'experts' contributed and what they spoke about (References 11 & 12). These are, however, the exception. More commonly, expert contributions are cited without any further detail on the content or nature of the expertise provided. A core tenet of deliberative democracy is the concept of *rational-critical* debate (Bächtiger et al., 2018) informed by exposure to a spectrum of evidence and expertise on a particular subject or issue (Fishkin, 2018). The lack of detail provided here means it is difficult to understand if this was achieved in many of the examples. Indeed, the confused smorgasbord of recommendations produced by some strongly suggests citizen discussions were not adequately anchored in contemporary knowledge and evidence. This potentially undermines hopes that these types of processes might provide 'constructive discursive spaces' (Smith et al., 2022, p. 129) through which issues like health inequalities might be better tackled.

Overall, these three disconnects combined demonstrate the complexity of designing PDPs in real-world policy settings. Whilst all share *intentions* to influence policy decision-making related to income in the UK, the *reality* of how the PDPs are functioning effectively disconnects from these ambitions in multiple ways. This includes via the confining of citizen input to downstream or process-based policy windows, or the apparent distinct separation of citizen discussions from policy decision-making spaces, underscored by a common lack of built-in accountability. This appears exacerbated by unclear and, in many cases, unknown, use of evidence and expertise to frame, often complicated, policy problems. This lack of attention to 'problem representation' (Bacchi, 2016) produces disrupted narratives, 'which appear unexplored and the opportunity for in-depth deliberation potentially lost' (Baillie et al., 2025, p. 446).

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has detailed the first stage in the study, a Systematic Scoping Review. Using income insecurity as the policy vector through which to understand how and to what effect participatory-deliberative processes are applied in socio-economic decision-making in the UK (RQ1), this study has uncovered some useful insight into the current function of PDPs. Indeed, it serves as a sense check for any 'democratic rejuvenation' in the context of policymaking to tackle health inequalities. Whilst there is participatory practice currently taking place in socio-economic domains, the practice analysed here is characterised by a series of disconnects, which are underscored and shaped by important silences. These findings suggest that further empirical exploration is required on some key areas. Understanding how inclusion is conceptualised within PDPs appears to be particularly important in the context of increasing inequalities. Asking questions of PDPs such as 'who is participating, and why?' seems necessary to ascertain how these types of participation processes interact with social and political inequalities, and, crucially, whether they reproduce or redress these imbalances. Similarly, investigating the role of evidence and expertise and how policy problems are framed within the PDPs appears necessary - particularly in the context of complicated and multi-layered problems like health inequalities. Relatedly, further work to understand the 'embeddedness' (Bussu, Bua, et al., 2022) of PDPs within policy systems, with a particular focus on the *role* and *function* they currently play within policy settings is required, including critical reflection on the actual policy windows available for citizen input and the genuine locus of decision-making power.

These areas for exploration are, of course, complex and vast. The following chapter details the methodology and methods of a Dual Case Study, designed to attempt to fill some of these gaps in understanding. It aims to address the remaining RQs, which link into and complement the areas for investigation cited above:

2. What is the *purpose* of participatory-deliberative processes within policymaking in Scotland and how is this characterised in policy and stakeholder accounts?

3. How are the democratic goods of inclusion, popular control, considered judgement and transparency conceptualised in participatory-deliberative processes?

    i.) What types of publics are participating and why?
    ii.) What is the role of evidence and expertise?
    iii.) How do participatory-deliberative processes connect to and impact policy decisions?

4. What can we learn from existing/contemporary examples of PDPs about the opportunities and challenges of a 'democratic rejuvenation' to address health inequalities?

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter details the methods used to understand, in more depth, the current usage of PDPs within Scottish policymaking focused on socio-economic issues. The first part deals with the methodological approach, including an outline of the research paradigm in which the study is situated and my own positionality. The second section details the accompanying rationale for the study design and associated case selection, including the shift towards Scotland specifically. This is then followed with detail on the data generation processes, including the sampling strategy and specific challenges encountered related to reciprocity and methodological limitations. The final section describes how the data were analysed, including the analytic approach taken to synthesise and triangulate different forms of evidence. It concludes by looking forward to the following Findings Chapters and how these are structured.

5.2 Methodology approach

5.2.1 Using a case study methodology

Researching participatory-deliberative processes, or democratic innovations more broadly, often requires recognition of unique environmental, cultural or political factors which influence how the processes unfold (Elstub et al., 2019; G. Smith, 2009). Participation does not take place in a vacuum - context is key (Elstub & Escobar, 2019). It is for this reason that case study methodology is popular when researching participatory-deliberative processes in policymaking (Talpin, 2019), given it allows for 'bricoleur design' (Hyett et al., 2014, p. 2), i.e., a variety of data generation and analysis methods which can be applied to gain an in-

depth understanding of the case(s). This is particularly helpful in the context of this study, seeking to understand not just the application of PDPs, which are almost uniform in their diversity (Fung, 2006), but also how they occur in socio-economic policy settings, which are powerfully shaped and defined by the political, cultural and social environment in which they reside.

In short, a case study enables the study of complex phenomena within their, often equally complex, contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Indeed, one of the strengths of a case study approach is that this methodology can cope with distinct settings, differing variables of interest and multiple sources of evidence and data (Yin, 2018). Whilst, the Literature and Systematic Scoping Reviews, detailed in Chapters 2 & 4, revealed some key themes and pertinent questions, they could not provide the in-depth understanding which can be achieved via a case study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Similarly, there is growing interest in 'systematic comparisons of democratic institutions, devices and processes [to] provide a unique quality of knowledge' (Ryan, 2019, p. 558), which can enable deeper insight into how participatory-deliberative processes operate in different settings and policy contexts. It is for this reason that a multiple, or collective, case study methodology (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Yin, 2018) was chosen, with two participatory-deliberative processes identified for investigation and comparison.

5.2.2 Research paradigm and positionality

This study is situated within an interpretive or social constructivist paradigm. Sometimes simply called a constructivist worldview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) or constructionism (Braun & Clarke, 2013), the starting point for research here is often 'a social phenomenon that needs to be better understood' (Blaikie & Priest, 2017, p. 26) with 'constructivist researchers often address[ing] the 'processes' of interaction among individuals' (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 24). This paradigm implies certain

ontological and epistemological assumptions on the part of the researcher (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). In terms of ontology, in an interpretive or social constructivist paradigm there is no singular truth or reality, instead 'the world is constructed (produced) through various discourses and systems of meaning we all reside within' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 30). Similarly, from an epistemological point of view, it is assumed 'there are *knowledges* rather than knowledge' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 30) meaning the researcher seeks to understand 'a complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few [pre-determined] categories or ideas' (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 24). Indeed, an interpretive or social constructivist paradigm considers the specific context (i.e., the cultural, social and historical settings) which forms the backdrop to the research and shapes how meanings and experiences are constructed. Similarly, this approach acknowledges the ways in which the background of the researcher, 'their own personal, cultural and historical experiences' (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 24), influences the design of the project and, crucially, the interpretation of data. Departing from a positivist stance that the researcher's subjectivity should be erased as much as possible, a social constructivist or interpretive paradigm acknowledges that 'this is just not possible… social scientists approach research from some sort of view; they have to stand somewhere. The point of view adopted should be made explicit and the role that this plays should be acknowledged' (Blaikie & Priest, 2017, p. 17).

Which brings us to the notion of positionality and its importance in qualitative inquiry. Positionality encompasses recognition of the researcher's worldview (as described above) but also, often, their relationship to or with the research subjects (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Yip, 2024):

> Whether the researcher is an insider, sharing the characteristic, role, or experience under study with the participants, or an outsider to the commonality shared by participants, the personhood of the researcher, including her or his membership status in relation to those participating in the research, is an

> essential and ever-present aspect of the investigation. (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009,p. 55)

This positioning in this project involves some complexity. Considering positionality through a simplistic lens, I am an outsider to both the PDPs in this case study. I was not directly involved in the design or delivery of either. This decision was purposeful, allowing appropriate distance to explore and understand the PDPs in the context of the research questions posed. Similarly, (perhaps interestingly) I have never participated as a citizen in public participation processes like the ones I am investigating here. However, I come to this research project with almost a decade's worth of experience working across community and policy settings, often in roles that aimed to bridge the gap between decision-making and citizens. This professional participatory background is, of course, valuable, and undoubtedly shaped the type of questions I was interested in exploring and the approaches I would use to do so. Indeed, I have planned, convened and delivered participatory processes so from this point of view, I could be viewed, in some ways, as an insider to the research. Yip asserts that it is important not to view insider/ outsider positions as 'binary' but instead as 'fluid and situated on a continuum' (2024, p. 223). For this reason, I position myself here as an outsider (insider), a researcher almost certainly looking from the outside into these PDPs but doing so with knowledge and experience of what is like to be on the inside of facilitating and designing these types of participatory processes.

5.3 Study Design

The previous literature reviews detailed the inherent heterogeneity of participatory-deliberative processes as well as the complexity of policymaking to tackle socio-economic inequalities, meaning there were multiple possibilities for the design of a study to explore these phenomena in this context. According to Yin, 'the selection of your case should be related to your theory or theoretical propositions of interest'

(2018, p. 49), therefore it was necessary to develop clear criteria for both the study design and the selection of cases. Before detailing the criteria, case selection and case profiles, it is helpful to first explain two key decisions which bound the study as a whole: the geographic location, i.e., Scotland; and the number of cases (N=2).

The geographic lens for this thesis has, up until this point, been UK-wide. The Systematic Scoping Review investigated how, when and where PDPs had been applied in income-related policy across the UK. Of the 13 examples found, almost half (N=6) were in Scotland, suggesting a greater focus on public participation in this country. Whilst still part of the UK, and as such subject to national policies set by UK Government, it is now widely accepted that Scottish policymaking inhabits a political space of its own (Cairney, 2014, 2020a; Elliott, 2020; Housden, 2014). Indeed, Scotland has been in the process of its own particular 'democratic renewal' (Escobar, 2022) for the past two decades, with a series of constitutional and legislative changes which either mandate or encourage citizen participation in governance (Escobar, 2022). It has even coined its own catchphrase: the Scottish Approach to Policymaking (Cairney, 2020a), which emphasises policymaking built on collaboration and co-production (Cairney, 2020a). In this context, Scotland provides a diverse participatory terrain (Escobar, 2022) through which to further understand public participation, particularly in socio-economic domains. Another key reason for pivoting the project focus towards Scotland is pragmatism. The immersive nature of a case study as empirical investigation necessitates significant time conducting fieldwork. Locating the study within a bounded, but feasible, geographic setting allowed me to spend appropriate time in both case study sites, whilst still leaving room for pertinent axes of cross-case analysis (as detailed in the case selection below). The Scottish location also allowed the project to benefit from my own existing networks and contacts, increasing the likelihood of being able to access the volume of data necessary for conducting a case study. Similarly, pragmatism underpinned the decision to focus on two cases within the study. Whilst there are compelling arguments for larger scale

comparative studies which consider and contrast high numbers of PDPs (Challies et al., 2021; Font et al., 2018; Ryan, 2019), the in-depth nature of qualitative inquiry required to answer the research questions of this thesis meant that it was outwith the scope of the study, and one researcher, to do a comparison across many examples. Following Yin's (2018) rationale that it is not always the *number* of cases which is important but instead the points of analyses across the *case study* as a whole, two cases, i.e., examples of PDPs, which were 'most-different' in format (Gerring, 2017), were chosen for the study.

5.3.1 Case Criteria and Selection

Careful case selection was a crucial component of the study design. The nebulous world of public participation can be a confusing place (Lewis et al., 2019) where definitions for what constitutes 'participation' often coalesce, conflate and at times contradict (Mutz, 2006). As with the Systematic Scoping Review, clear criteria for case selection were necessary to identify different examples of PDPs which could potentially form a case within the study. Gerring states that '[i]n order for a case to be something broader than itself… the chosen case must be representative of a larger population' (2017, p. 45) With this in mind a range of participatory-deliberative processes were identified, all of which broadly fell into one of the four 'families' of democratic innovations: mini-public, Participatory Budgeting (PB), collaborative governance or referenda and citizen's initiatives (Elstub & Escobar, 2019). All of the potential cases were examples from Scotland, including PDPs at both a local and national level, and which connected to socio-economic policy areas. Mirroring the Systematic Scoping Review, 'institutionalised' examples were sought, i.e., PDPs which were either *funded* and/or *convened* by a policymaking institution. In addition to this, potential examples were identified if they were currently in-process, planned or completed in the recent past as this increased the number and type of potential data generation methods and crucially opened the door to

direct observation as a form of evidence gathering. A total of seven potential cases were identified, please see Appendix 3 for detail of the options compiled.

5.3.2 The role of the Policy Stakeholder Panel

Screening and case selection often involves 'querying people knowledgeable about each [potential] candidate' (Yin, 2018, p. 105) to identify the best cases for your study. In order to choose the two cases which would form the dual case study, I sought advice from external experts through the convening of a Policy Stakeholder Panel. The overarching aim of the Policy Stakeholder Panel was to support the development of the study as well as to locate the research design within current knowledge and practice. The Panel consisted of senior leads from third sector and academic settings with a particular interest in participation in socio-economic decision-making.

Table 5: Policy Stakeholder Panel Members

Policy Stakeholder Panel Members	No. of representatives
Directors of anti-poverty charities	3
Policy representative of third sector organisation and Chair of statutory commission	1
Community Development Manager for locally based housing association	1
Academic expert in knowledge exchange	1

The Policy Stakeholder Panel met three times throughout the lifetime of the project. The initial two meetings were focused on case selection. The potential cases were presented to the Panel who considered and discussed the utility of each in light of the aims and objectives of the study as well as their own professional preferences and interests. The Panel members felt the most useful and in-depth learning would come from choosing cases which were 'most-different' in format (Gerring, 2017), providing ample opportunity for different axes of comparison. As such, two PDPs were identified using the following rationale:

- Including *one local* and *one national* case would provide insight into PDPs operating at *different levels* of government
- Examples of *different types* of democratic innovations, i.e., choosing examples which fall into more than one 'family' would allow for investigation of *different types of recruitment method* and *process*
- Choosing *two different policy contexts* would provide an opportunity to explore different aspects of socio-economic decision making, providing greater insight into the conceptualisation of participatory-deliberative processes which connect to social inequalities.

The selected cases are as follows:

Case 1 is an example of *collaborative governance* and constitutes an 'Experts by Experience' Panel convened by the Scottish Government's Poverty and Inequality Commission. It is a *national* example, bringing together a group of people with 'lived experience' of poverty from across Scotland to feed into the work of the Poverty and Inequality Commission as well as to Scottish Government. It had a particular focus on *Child Poverty* as the key policy area of interest, an issue which is deeply connected to health inequalities. It is not surprising that the Policy Stakeholder Panel members were interested in this type of participation process, given their collective roles in the anti-poverty sector.

Case 2 is an example of a *community assembly* and is part of a project funded by the Scottish Government across the North-East of the country. This project aims to involve different place-based communities in local decision-making related to Just Transition to net zero, so although this example was nationally funded it had a *local* focus. It was also convened by a third sector intermediary, a common practice in institutionalised participatory processes. The policy context of this participatory-deliberative process was particularly interesting to the Policy Stakeholder Panel. The idea of a *Just Transition to net zero* was regarded as important and connected to health inequalities but also as relatively

unknown to the members in terms of its policy content and detail, making it an interesting area for comparison with Case 1.

The purpose of this dual case study is then in essence a 'cross-case' (Gerring, 2017) comparison 'to understand the similarities and differences between the cases' (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 4). As such, the two selected cases offer a multitude of comparators, and a source of rich learning for deeper understanding of the varying usage of PDPs in socio-economic policy settings, detailed in Table 7 below:

Table 6: Case Comparators

Comparator	Case 1	Case 2
Type of Democratic Innovation	Collaborative governance	Community Assembly/ Peoples' Forum
Recruitment method	Closed / enclave	Open
Location of PDP	National	Local
Institutionalised mechanism	Convened by Statutory Commission / Scottish Government	Funded by Scottish Government, convened by third sector intermediary
Policy context	Tackling poverty, particular focus on child poverty	Just transition to net zero

5.4 Case profiles

The two cases are described in the tables below. The profiles are not intended to provide the 'thick' description associated with case study methodology and qualitative inquiry more generally (Liamputtong, 2020), this will come in later chapters along with reflection on the similarities and differences across the two examples. The purpose here is to provide an overview of each case to aid the reader in understanding the subsequent methodological decisions related to data generation processes. In addition, it is necessary to acknowledge that for Case 1 no pseudonyms have been used - this PDP has been named. Whereas for Case 2, the name of the PDP

and subsequent references have been anonymised or pseudonymised. The rationale for both these decisions is explained later in this chapter in the *Ethics & informed consent* section.

Table 7: Case profiles - policy context, aims and objectives

Case	***Location***	***Institutional mechanism***	***Policy context***	***Aims and objectives of the PDP***	***Outputs of the PDP***
Case 1: *Experts by Experience Panel*	National	Convened by Statutory Commission (the Poverty and Inequality Commission), which has statutory duties to provide advice and scrutiny on Scottish Government's plans and progress on reducing child poverty. This Commission also funded the Experts by Experience Panel (in part) alongside an additional, third sector, funder.	Tackling poverty, with a particular focus on child poverty	The Experts by Experience Panel was set up as part of the Poverty and Inequality Commission's overarching aim to: *Amplify the voices of experts by experience to make sure they are part of identifying issues, developing and designing solutions, and scrutinising progress (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021a).* The Panel's main role was to support the Commission to provide advice, scrutiny, and advocacy, sometimes directly, to ministers and the Commission members.	During its lifetime the Panel contributed to key outputs of the Poverty and Inequality Commission, including: - Advice to Scottish Government on its Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026, and advice to Scottish Government on the cost-of-living crisis - Commission responses to Low Income Winter Heating Consultation and Draft Rented Sector Strategy Consultation - Scrutiny to Scottish Government on their Child Poverty Delivery Progress Report 2022-2023 The Panel also identified their own priorities related to their experience of poverty and inequality resulting in the following outputs: - Submission to the Adult Disability Payment: Mobility Component Consultation - Submission to Social Security Scotland's draft regulations on the new Carer Support Payment - Submission to the Scottish Affairs Committee's call for evidence on the cost-of-living crisis in rural communities

Case	*Location*	*Institutional mechanism*	*Policy context*	*Aims and objectives of the PDP*	*Outputs of the PDP*
Case 2: *The Townsley People's Forum*	Local	Funded via Scottish Government's Just Transition Fund as part of the Just Transition Communities Project, hosted at North-East Scotland Climate Action Network (NESCAN).	Just Transition to net zero / health and wellbeing	The Townsley People's Forum was convened as part of a series of community assemblies across the North-East of Scotland which aimed to: *'[explore] how communities can be part of a deliberative process of designing, creating and delivering a 'Just Transition' (NESCAN, 2024b).* The assembly in Townsley had a 'focusing question': *How can Townsley reclaim the power to make this a healthy community to grow up and live in?* Townsley is an urban locality in the North-East of Scotland which has been subject to significant redevelopment related to both the oil and gas industry and renewable energy. There is a current redevelopment plan for the main green space in the area: Townsley Park. This redevelopment, spearheaded by a private-sector led consortium known as the Renewable Energy Transition (a pseudonym), is also funded via the Scottish Government's Just Transition Fund ([RET] Ltd., 2023a).	The two-day Assembly produced the *Declaration of Townsley*, which consisted of 6 actions the attendees committed to take. This included committing to 'stop the land grab' of the park via legal and direct action; continued use of the park; demanding an incinerator which had been located across from the local primary school be decommissioned; explore the possibility of a Townsley retrofit project; increase 'collaboration within the community' and calling for a 'just and fair transition'. Since the two-day Assembly in May 2023, work has been ongoing (via the Steering Meeting, detailed in Table 9). In the data generation of this study a variety of actions, plans and ideas were either suggested or in development. This included: • Organising community events • Establishing partnerships and relationships between the Assembly and local organisations • Developing a community information website • Supporting the set-up of an outdoor classroom • Developing a pilot retrofit project for Townsley

				There is long standing and strong opposition from residents of Townsley (and beyond) to the development of the park, as demonstrated by an earlier Assembly held in 2021 ([Anon], 2021) and ongoing campaigning work (Friends of [Townsley] Park, 2023). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this issue became the main focus for deliberations at the two-day Assembly held in May 2023.	• Developing new, local voting mechanisms • Organising a mural on a local street

Table 8: Case profiles - process design

Case	***Type of PDP***	***Who organised and facilitated the PDP?***	***Recruitment***	***How did the process work?***
Case 1: *Experts by Experience Panel*	Collaborative Governance	The Secretariat (a group of civil servants who support the Poverty and Inequality Commission) convened and supported the Experts by Experience Panel. This included a dedicated Senior Participation Officer, recruited specifically to facilitate and recruit for the Panel.	Advertised via third sector and anti-poverty networks. Prospective Panel members had to fill in an application and be interviewed before being offered a place on the Panel.	The Panel met online (on Zoom) on a monthly basis for meetings of around two hours. When the Panel was first starting the meetings were more frequent (every two weeks), although this was only for a short period of time. They also met in-person on a handful of occasions. These meetings were organised and chaired by the Senior Participation Officer or other members of the Secretariat. Panel members were also invited to be part of thematic sub-groups of the Commission and attend meetings or events with Scottish Government Cabinet Ministers.

				Information and additional reading materials were shared by the Secretariat in between meetings. In addition, the Panel were regularly asked to complete online surveys and questionnaires before attending meetings.
Case	***Type of PDP***	***Who organised and facilitated the PDP?***	***Recruitment***	***How did the process work?***
Case 2: *The Townsley People's Forum*	Community / Peoples' Forum	A collective of external facilitation consultants (from now on, the Organising Group) were funded (via NESCAN) to convene, organise and facilitate a community assembly in Towsnley. At the time of data generation, there was also a part-time Community Development Worker (also funded via NESCAN) who supported the ongoing work of the Steering Meeting for the Townsley People's Forum.	Open. Anyone can / could attend either the ongoing Steering Meeting or the two-day Assembly.	The Organising Group conducted an 'engaged listening' exercise, followed by broad outreach to local organisations and two public information meetings. This led to the convening of a Steering Meeting of around 15 people. This group of citizens worked with the Organising Group to plan and convene a two-day Assembly in May 2023. This two-day event was attended by around 100-150 people. Since the two-day Assembly, the Steering Meeting have continued to meet on a fortnightly basis. This incorporates an all day, in person, meeting one Saturday a month and an online, evening meeting one Thursday a month. These meetings are organised and facilitated by a member of the Organising Group and /or the Community Development Worker. In addition, members of the Steering Meeting use a WhatsApp group chat to communicate in between meetings, and some members regularly meet up in between the standard roster of whole group Steering Meetings.

5.5 Data Generation Methods

This study aimed to use a variety of methods to gather evidence, including in-depth interviews, direct observations and documentary analysis, all relatively common and valuable data generation processes employed in case studies (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Yin, 2018). In recognition that 'the array of qualitative sources of data are ever expanding' (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 147), an additional, somewhat less traditional, method was included in the data generation: a co-production workshop, detailed later in this chapter. Before moving on to describe each data generation method in turn, it is helpful to first consider how *access* to data generation was established for each case.

The foundation of any high-quality case study is built on robust relationships with research participants. Fieldwork in a case study can be time-consuming and, in the context of this study, required significant access to each PDP being investigated. For each case, initial engagement was focused on identifying professional stakeholders who formed some sort of gatekeeping role to the PDP, i.e., a person or group who organised, convened or supported the process. These individuals were identified via the initial policy documentation analysis related to each case and/ or existing contacts. Given the volume of data required to fully understand and build an in-depth case of each PDP, it was necessary to spend adequate time establishing good relationships with a variety of gatekeepers. This involved several initial meetings with individuals, 1:1 or in a group, to discuss the aims and objectives of the research as well submitting a participant information sheet and research proposal for the consideration of the participants of the process. In both cases, gatekeepers were the first stepping stone to gaining access to each PDP. Only once the citizen participants of the PDP had agreed, as a collective, for the process to be a part of the research project did recruitment and data generation begin. The relationships with the gatekeepers were maintained throughout the fieldwork, and in one case, for a number of

months after the fieldwork had come to an end. In addition, given the recognised 'inequalities in field relationships' (von Vacano, 2019, p. 79) which can occur in the process of data generation, where the researcher benefits more than the people being researched, it was important to embed *reciprocity* within each case from the beginning and prior to commencing the data generation processes. For each case, this involved agreeing a formal mechanism (i.e., a report) through which case specific learning could be shared with participants and organisers of the PDP as well as co-designing the plan for the co-production workshop to ensure its focus was of interest and use to both the participants and organisers of the process. This built-in reciprocity aimed to facilitate strong partnership-working and consistent dialogue between the research participants and the researcher hoping to enable 'continuous interaction between the issues being studied and the data being collected' (Yin, 2018, p. 82). These relationships with gatekeepers and how this intended reciprocity played out in practice are explored in more detail in the section after this (5.6) related to ethics and informed consent.

5.5.1 Policy Documentation

Documentary evidence is a common component of data generation and analysis in case study research (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Yin, 2018) and in the context of this study, which has a specific focus on how PDPs are conceptualised and understood within policy discourse, this form of evidence was crucial. It is in this way that the study departs from Yin's assertion that 'the most important use of documentation is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources' (2018, p. 115). This study views documentary evidence as equally valuable in its own right, with specific themes and learning existing in this data source alone. In this context, documentary evidence was sought for two purposes: to provide background information, i.e., to form the function described by Yin above, but also for analytic purposes: to provide insight into the policy conceptualisations of the PDP, particularly related to the purpose of participation within different policy contexts and the eventual policy

impact of the PDP and its outputs. As such, documentary evidence is categorised as either *background-narrative* or *high-level policy* (as detailed in the boxes for each case below). One of the recognised challenges of case study research is managing the volume of data, which can become significant (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The literature surrounding each case within the study was wide and varied, so for each PDP some pragmatic decisions were made around the sourcing and inclusion of documentary evidence, detailed case by case below.

5.5.1.1 Case 1: Documentary evidence

The sourcing of documentary evidence for Case 1 was relatively simple given that the Poverty and Inequality Commission have their own website where they publish relevant publications, reports and submissions to Scottish Government. This website also included a section specifically detailing the work of the Experts by Experience Panel. The breadth of work undertaken by members of the Panel was far-reaching. It was outwith the scope of this project to investigate every policy area the Panel discussed individually, as such, the decision was made to focus on Child Poverty given 'the Commission has specific duties under the Child Poverty Act, meaning it has the legal responsibility of providing advice and scrutiny to Scottish Ministers' (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021e, p. 3), a fact specifically highlighted in the Panel's Terms of Reference. The following documents were included for information and analysis:

Table 9: Case 1 – background-narrative documentary evidence

Document name(s)	*Detail on the document(s)*
Poverty and Inequality Commission Annual Reports 2020-21; 2021-2022; 2022-2023 (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021d, 2022f, 2023d)	Reports on the work of the Commission detailing the inception and delivery of the Experts by Experience Panel
Specific submissions from the Experts by Experience Panel to wider Scottish Government consultations: - Response to 'Cost of living: impact on rural communities in Scotland'	Submissions detailing the key points of the Experts by Experience Panel and / or sub-groups of its members

- Response to 'Adult Disability Payment: Consultation on the Mobility Component' - Response to 'Carers' Assistance (Carer Support Payment) (Scotland) Regulations 2023' (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2024)	
Process-specific documents: - Experts by Experience Panel: Terms of Reference (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021b) - Experts by Experience Panel: Ways of Working (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021c) - Involving experts by experience in the work of the PIC: Final report and reflection of findings for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, December 2022 (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022e) - Poverty and Inequality Commission website, including specific Experts by Experience webpage (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2024).	Documentation provided by the Secretariat who support the Panel. These detail the initial agreements around ways of working and terms of reference as well as an internal evaluation conducted for the third sector organisation who provided some of the funding for the Panel. These documents are not publicly available.

Table 10: Case 1- high-level documentary evidence

Document name(s)	*Detail on the document(s)*
Every Child, Every Chance: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, 2018-2022 (Scottish Government, 2018a)	This is the first Child Poverty Delivery Plan from Scottish Government since the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. It details planned actions over a four-year period.
Every Child, Every Chance: Tackling Child Poverty Progress Report, 2021-2022 (Scottish Government, 2022c)	This is the fourth annual progress report from the Scottish Government on the actions it has taken from 2021-2022 to reduce child poverty in Scotland.
Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, 2022-2026 (Scottish Government, 2022a)	This is the second Child Poverty Delivery Plan from Scottish Government since the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. It details planned actions over a four-year period.
Poverty and Inequality Commission's Strategic Plan, 2020-2023 (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021a)	This document details the role and aims of the Poverty and Inequality Commission, including its statutory duties as part of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, over a 3-year period.
Child Poverty Delivery Progress 2021-2022: Scrutiny by the Poverty	This document details the scrutiny provided by the Poverty and Inequality Commission on the progress

and Inequality Commission (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022d)	and actions which had been taken during 2021-2022 by Scottish Government to tackle child poverty.
Child Poverty Delivery Progress 2022-2023: Scrutiny by the Poverty and Inequality Commission (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2023a)	This document details the scrutiny provided by the Poverty and Inequality Commission on the progress and actions which had been taken during 2022-2023 by Scottish Government to tackle child poverty.
Advice on Scottish Government's Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026 (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022a)	This document details the advice provided to Scottish Government by the Poverty and Inequality Commission for their next Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

5.5.1.2 Case 2: Documentary evidence

The sourcing of documentary evidence for Case 2 was slightly more complicated than the Experts by Experience Panel above, given there was not one source via which every document could be accessed. In addition, desktop research, i.e., internet searches, only produced a small amount of literature. For this case, some of the documents included for analysis were sourced from interviewees. This proved to be both helpful and challenging, with interviewees often sharing a large number of publications, some of which related to the PDP but many of which related to other activities which were sometimes not directly connected to the Townsley People's Forum, too historical (for example detailing activity or work which predated the convening of the Townsley People's Forum by more than five years) or too technical (for example documents detailing broader environmental and scientific arguments in support of different forms of renewable energy) to be included. It is important to note that given this PDP has been anonymised, some documents have been renamed for this purpose. The following documents were identified from those shared by interviewees and desktop research:

Table 11: Case 2 - background-narrative documentary evidence

Document name(s)	*Detail on the document(s)*
Area-specific documents: - Local Authority: Locality Plan 2021-2026 (Community Planning [Anon], 2024)	Publications detailing the general profile of Townsley, and others detailing planned and ongoing work in the area as well as

- Locality Profile ([Anon] Health and Social Care Partnership, 2017) - Community Planning [Anon]: Townsley Strategic Assessment (Community Planning [Anon], 2016) - Consultation responses to planning decisions in Local Authority ([Anon], 2023) - Leading from the front? Increasing Community Participation in a Just Transition to Net Zero in the North-East of Scotland. (Potts & Ford, 2022) - Just Transition for Workers and Communities in [the North-East of Scotland]: Rapid Evidence Review (Shapovalova et al., 2023)	publications which focus on Just Transition in the wider urban area specifically.
Publications from Renewable Energy Transition - Investment prospectus for Renewable Energy Transition ([RET] Ltd., 2023a) - Renewable Energy Transition Draft Masterplan 2023 V8 ([RET] Ltd., 2023c) - Renewable Energy Transition Planning Banners for Consultation event ([RET] Ltd., 2023b)	Publications from and related to the Renewable Energy Transition, the planned redevelopment of the local park. Renewable Energy Transition is a pseudonym being used to protect the anonymity of Case 2.
Process-specific documents: - Narrative Report of the two-day Assembly held by the Townsley People's Forum ([Organising Group], 2023) - Documenting the Townsley People's Forum - Assembly 2021 ([Anon], 2021) - Townsley People's Forum webpage ([Anon], 2024) - The Declaration of Townsley ([Townsley Peoples' Forum], 2023) - Artwork and photos from the two-day Assembly (of written contributions) - NESCAN's website: community assemblies webpage (NESCAN, 2024a) - Our Shared Story: Just Transitions Communities (NESCAN, 2024b)	Variety of documents from the Townsley People's Forum, including a 'narrative evaluation' and the Declaration of Townsley, a key output from the two-day Assembly, as well as information from NESCAN, the lead organisation for the Just Transitions Communities Project.

Table 12: Case 2 - high-level documentary evidence

Document name (s)	*Detail on the document(s)*
Just Transition Commission: A national mission for a fairer, greener Scotland (Scottish Government, 2021c)	This document details the first report and recommendations of the Just Transition Commission to Scottish Government for action planning for the Just Transition to net zero.
Just Transition Commission: A national mission for a fairer, greener Scotland, Scottish Government Response to the report of the Just Transition Commission (Scottish Government, 2021b)	This document details the response from Scottish Government to the first report of the Just Transition Commission, including specific actions and plans which will be taken.
Making the Future: Initial Report of the 2nd Just Transition Commission (Scottish Government, 2022e)	This document details the second report and recommendations of the Just Transition Commission to Scottish Government for action planning for the Just Transition to net zero.
Draft Energy Transition and Just Transition Plan January 2023 (Scottish Government, 2023b)	This is the first (draft) Just Transition plan published by Scottish Government, relating specifically to the energy sector and detailing planned actions and activities by Scottish Government in relation to the energy sector.
Net Zero Nation: Public Engagement Strategy for Climate Change (Scottish Government, 2021d)	This document details the strategy and plans for engaging with the public in Scotland around both climate change and the Just Transition to net zero.

5.5.2 In-depth interviews with policy stakeholders

One of the strengths of a case study methodology is that it allows room for many perspectives of the same phenomena or experience (Yin, 2018). In order to understand how the PDPs included in this study were experienced and understood, in-depth interviews with a range of *policy stakeholders* were conducted. Research concerned with public participation into policymaking often has to consider the participatory process from a variety of different viewpoints, versions of public (Degeling et al., 2015) and different roles which citizens play in

participatory settings (Escobar, 2017). *Policy stakeholders* here are defined plurally to include anyone, from a professional or lay background, who either participated in, convened or organised the PDP (i.e., the case) being researched. It also included members of any other groups or spaces which the participatory-deliberative process fed into or was influenced by, for example an associated advisory or steering group. Interviews were semi-structured in nature (Liamputtong, 2020) and focused on the experience of the PDP as well as exploring key concepts, informed by the conceptual framework and research questions of the thesis. This included investigating participant conceptualisations of inclusion, decision-making, the role of experts/ expertise and the purpose and impact of the PDP. Every participant was also given space at the end of the interview to share any important reflections which had not been picked up in the questioning, this additional 'open space' proved to be a valuable source of data in understanding how the PDP was experienced. Please see Appendix 4 for an example of the topic guides used in interviews.

5.4.2.1 Sampling Strategy

Both a targeted and iterative approach was taken to the recruitment of research participants via purposive and snowball sampling (Liamputtong, 2020). The policy stakeholders can be broadly placed into two groups: professional stakeholders and citizen participants. For the most part the recruitment methods for each group were similar, involving an initial presentation to the participants of the PDP, explaining the research and answering any questions, followed up with an email or message requesting interview participants, most often shared via the gatekeeper of the PDP, i.e., an organiser or convenor of the process. In Case 1, this was strictly monitored by the convenors of the process, who requested that all contact and communication with both professional and lay participants be mediated by them in the first instance (by email). In Case 2, the process was less formal. Once the participants of the PDP had agreed, as a collective, to be part of the research, I was added to the group Whatsapp and permitted to contact individuals directly to request an interview. The continuous contact with the gatekeepers of each case

was helpful throughout the fieldwork period. On average I met once or twice a month with representatives from each case, to review how the recruitment and data generation was progressing and discuss potential interviewees who could be contacted. Every interviewee was offered the choice of an in-person or online interview. For Case 1, all bar one interview, took place online, via Microsoft Teams. For Case 2 the interviews took place in both community settings, i.e., in person, and online, via Microsoft Teams. A total of 28 policy stakeholders were interviewed.

Table 13: Interviewees for Dual Case Study

Case 1	**Case 2**
Facilitators/ convenor of the PDP	
1 x Member of Secretariat	2 x Members of Organising Group
Citizens who participated	
8 x Panel members	7 x Members of Steering Meeting
Institutional representatives who connected to the PDP	
1 x Civil Servant 1 x External Policy Advisor (to Scottish Government)	1 x Councillor 1 x MSP
Representatives of the 'empowered' space the PDP fed into	**Representatives of wider local stakeholders**
3 x Members of the Poverty and Inequality Commission	1 x Representative of local campaigning/ interest group 1 x Representative of local service 1 x Funding / grant holder
Total no. of interviewees per case	
14	14
Total no. of interviewees for synthesis across both cases: 28	

5.4.3 Direct Observation

Whilst a case study methodology is considered distinct from ethnographic approaches (Creswell, 2013), many case studies borrow techniques such as immersion and observation as a source of data generation

(Liamputtong, 2020; Yin, 2018). This is particularly helpful in the context of PDPs where direct observation of a part, or indeed all, of the process can be hugely insightful when considering how the process is managed and facilitated as well as how citizens interact with one another (Bächtiger et al., 2022). In the study of PDPs direct observations are a common data collection method, particularly when trying to understand the different communication modes and facilitation techniques employed in different processes, so much so there are a number of different methods which have been developed to aid the generation of observational data, including the Discourse Quality Index (Bächtiger et al., 2022), which was used to develop an observational protocol for this study. The Discourse Quality Index is a quantitative research method which is used to assess the deliberative quality of discussions within participatory settings (Bächtiger et al., 2022). There are five key indicators which are helpful in the context of observing participation: Participation Equality; Level of justification; Content of justification; Respect; Constructive politics (Bächtiger et al., 2022). It was outwith the scope (and interest) of this project to fully apply this method. However, this Index does provide helpful prompts with which to guide observations of participatory-deliberative processes, some of which are of use for this study and its focus on public participation in the context of inequality. Therefore, three indicators informed the observational protocol with notes taken on following questions:

- Participation equality: How easy is it for people to express their views? How often are people interrupted?
- Respect: Is the environment a respectful one? Are there any examples observed of explicit respect or disrespect?
- Constructive politics: How are decisions made? Is consensus achieved, if so, how? What other types of communication / discussion is observed?

In addition, the protocol contained additional prompts related to the physical space, the attending participants, including people providing evidence and expertise as well as facilitation and timing. An example of the protocol is detailed Appendix 5.

As well as formal direct observations, I also attended different parts of each PDP in a different capacity as a 'complete participant' (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In these instances, I presented to the group, for example sharing information about the research and often stayed for a proportion of the meeting itself. Detailed notes taken during and following these meetings proved to be another valuable source of observational data. The following direct observations and presentations took place:

Table 14: Direct observations for the Dual Case Study

Direct observation and meeting attendance	
Case 1	Case 2
1 x presentation to the Experts by Experience Panel (in-person) 1 x direct observation of full meeting of Experts by Experience Panel (online)	2 x direct observation of Steering Meeting (1 x in-person; 1 x online) 1 x presentation to the Steering Meeting (online) 1 x direct observation of Townsley Community Council Meeting (in-person)

5.5.4 Co-production workshop

Given the design of this study is underpinned by the notion of *reciprocity* (von Vacano, 2019), an additional method was added to the traditional case study repertoire: a co-production workshop. According to Campbell and Vanderhoven 'co-production re-defines relationships between research participants from being essentially extractive or transactional to being interactive' (2016, p. 12). Whilst recognising there are many different iterations, usages and applications of the term 'co-production' (Bandola-Gill et al., 2023) across academic and real-world settings, this study defines the term broadly as 'collective knowledge making' (Bandola-Gill et al., 2023, p. 275). In the context of this study, this means that for each case, a workshop was co-designed with the express aim of exploring issues, topics and questions which would produce knowledge and learning of benefit to both this study and the research participants. Each workshop

included perspectives from a variety of policy stakeholders, with, as expected, a majority of citizen participants represented in each workshop. Notes from small group discussions, including outcomes from any voting exercises and key points from group discussions were written up into stand-alone reports for each of the PDPs, which were then synthesised alongside the other forms of evidence for the case study. Please see Table 16 below for an outline of each workshop:

Table 15: Co-production workshops

Co-production workshops
Case 1
Focus and structure
Aim: To co-produce a suite of 'lessons learned' according to two categories: 'what we appreciated' and 'what we would change'. This session was planned in conjunction with the Secretariat and informed broader evaluation and legacy work to bring the Panel to a close. In preparation for the workshop Panel members were asked to complete a survey posing the following questions: ○ ***Relationships within the Panel:*** How did the Panel communicate with one another? Including format of meetings, how discussions took place, decisions were made and interaction between the Panel members. ○ ***Relationships with the Commission:*** How did the Panel communicate with the Commission? Including reflections on working directly with the Commissioners and the influence of the Panel in any Commission outputs, such as reports, advice or scrutiny provided to Government. ○ ***Relationships with Scottish Government:*** How did the Panel communicate with Government? Including reflections on the Panel's influence on Government policy, interactions with ministers and officials and any Government responses or feedback to Panel recommendations / contributions. The responses from Panel members (N=15) formed the basis of the workshop. The session took place online and consisted of two parts: - **First half:** reflective session with Panel members only, aiming to identify a suite of 'lessons learned' to share with the Commission and Secretariat. - **Second half:** sharing the lessons learned and themes from discussions with members of the Commission and the Secretariat.

Participants

11 x Panel Members
4 x Commissioners
4 x Members of the Secretariat

Case 2

Focus and Structure

Aim:
To consider in more detail how the Steering Meeting might increase its membership, particularly from residents of Townsley.

This session was designed using feedback from two discussions at the Steering Meeting, one where I presented and another where the group discussed what might be helpful to learn from the study generally. The group shared a number of questions or areas they would like to explore, with the membership of group being the most prominent. It was agreed that I would attend one of the all-day Saturday meetings and have 45 minutes with the group, following the below session plan:

- Chalk talk exploring the who, what and why of people getting involved in the Steering Meeting: participants were asked to walk around (in silence) responding to the questions below, they were also invited to respond to others' answers either with stickers or their own words.
    - The Townsley Peoples' Forum is… if you had to describe the assembly to a stranger, what would you say?
    - Townsley is… how would you describe the place, people, environment, living here etc.?
    - Who do you want to get involved in the Townsley Peoples' Forum
    - What are the different ways that people can get involved in the Townsley Peoples' Forum?
    - What might stop people from getting involved in the Townsley Peoples' Forum?
- Reflective exercise 1 in small groups: what did you learn/ anything new / any surprises?
- Reflective exercise 2 in small groups: considering the final question on what might stop people from getting involved. Small groups were invited to place these barriers into two categories: we can do something about this right now/ we can't do anything about this (yet).

Participants

2 x Members of the Organising Group
9 x Members of the Steering Meeting

It is important to note that the time and depth of the co-production workshop varied for each PDP. This related to their capacity and individual preferences, as detailed in Appendix 6, which provides more detail on the planning and write up of both.

5.6 Ethics, informed consent and reflexivity in practice

In order to ensure ethical rigour and high research standards throughout the data generation processes, this study was reviewed, and subsequently approved, by the University of Glasgow, College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences' Ethics Committee. Informed consent (Marzano, 2012; Murphy & Dingwall, 2007) obtained through open and transparent (Thomas, 2017) research practices underpins this research project, particularly around the issue of maintaining anonymity. It is important to recognise that anonymity is not always a simple concept and in the context of this research, presented some complexity. Both the PDPs being researched are in the public domain and represent highly unique policy and participatory contexts (hence their selection as cases). Similarly, the role of professional stakeholders is of some interest to this research, so removing these details altogether would impact the analysis and ultimately detract from the research project. This complexity related to anonymity is recognised across the methodology literature (Denscombe, 2010; Marzano, 2012). Interviewing 'elites' or professional stakeholders is certainly not a new idea (Lilleker, 2003) and the issue of maintaining anonymity whilst being clear about the 'kind of actors' (Stewart & Smith, 2015, p. 420) included in the research has been confronted in other related studies (Rolfe, 2016; Stewart & Smith, 2015).

In keeping with the Social Policy Association's Guidelines on Research Ethics (2009), I aimed to ensure transparency with all research participants. Initial negotiations with gatekeepers and policy stakeholders highlighted the public nature of the participatory processes and policy settings being observed and researched, as well as the potential limits placed on anonymity as a result. This approach has been successful in

other studies (Marzano, 2012) which sought out professional or elite stakeholders (Lilleker, 2003; Stewart & Smith, 2015) or considered participation in unique contexts (Rolfe, 2016). Anonymity of interviewees' names and job titles have been protected with pseudonyms and descriptors related to the broad area of work and relationship to the process used in their place.

Furthermore, prior to field work, I decided that the true name and location of each process would be provided in the thesis. This is because the level of detail and description of the context and process of each case meant the likelihood of deductive disclosure was very high, even with the use of pseudonyms. I decided that transparency and honesty was best practice - the fact that the processes would be named was discussed with every research participant before obtaining consent and included as a statement in the consent form. For many, given the relatively non-sensitive nature of discussion topics (as detailed in the topic guide) as well as the pre-determined publicity attached to, and in many ways promoted, in relation to participatory-deliberative processes, interviewees were all capable of 'taking a critical and informed view of the research before giving consent to participate' (Rolfe, 2016, p. 178). Indeed, a number of participants advised they would be happy to be named rather than anonymised, with one participant directly questioning the need for anonymity to be used at all.

Despite this, after field work and analysis was completed, I decided to anonymise Case 2, i.e., protect, as much as possible, the identity of the participatory process. There were a number of reasons for this decision which are detailed in the following section.

5.6.1 Reflexivity in practice: the reality of being on the outside

There is, of course, no perfect methodology. Whilst the preceding sections have provided the rationale for the chosen methodological approach and subsequent study design choices, with every decision made,

there was something gained, and, sometimes, something lost. There were some interlinked limitations in my methodological approach which are important to recognise. These related to my outsider (insider) position and to reciprocity, and the challenge of ensuring this when using non-participatory methods. These limitations emerged in fieldwork and had a pivotal role in determining subsequent decisions around anonymity described above (notably, anonymising Case 2).

Given my experience working with different groups in community settings, work I greatly enjoyed, I expected the more institutional relationships in Case 1 to be more challenging to manage. And there were indeed some challenges here. The strict control over communication for example meant that my research participants (particularly the citizen Panel members and members of the Commission) were consistently held at arms-length, suggesting a potentially paternalistic approach on the part of the Poverty and Inequality Commission and its supporting Secretariat. That said, through time, I developed a productive working relationship with the Secretariat in particular and I had several opportunities to discuss the two stand-alone reports which I submitted to the Commission (see Appendix 7), with the findings of both included, in detail, in a final report of the Experts by Experience Panel (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2023b). I did not receive any feedback from Panel members however, nor was there a clear mechanism for me to do this given the controlled communication I had had to date. This means I do not know how the findings were received and understood by this cohort of interviewees, a limitation, I believe stems from the positioning myself as an outsider (insider) and not employing more participatory methods which would have built in space for this shared critical reflection.

In Case 2, the paternalism exhibited by the gatekeepers in Case 1 was mirrored in the initial stages of relationship building. I had meetings with several members of the Organising Group, and one in particular who stated explicitly that they wanted to assess my intentions before I was permitted to submit a proposal to the Steering Meeting (interestingly,

despite performing this gatekeeping role, this person was subsequently absent from any meetings I attended and during interviews, it appeared some members of the Steering Meeting did not know their name). Before submitting the proposal, the Organising Group also requested significant edits to terminology and language, citing perceived difficulties around accessibility. It was unclear however, why there was a perception that some members of the group would not understand certain words. Observational and interview data suggests that current members of the Steering Meeting either have a high level of education and / or are very comfortable with technical / administrative documents so this anxiety was even more surprising once I started fieldwork. Despite some initial differences in opinion, I managed to produce a proposal which the Organising Group were happy to go to the Steering Meeting with and there was a degree of enthusiasm about what might be learned from the study, and the stand alone report I had agreed to submit for them. I met regularly with one member of the Organising Group who was very helpful in introducing me to other potential interviewees and promoting participation in the study within the Steering Meeting. Similarly, during interviews, many of which were face to face, I spent a long time with members of the Steering Meeting and believed I had built up good relationships with my research participants. There was a provisional agreement that once I had submitted the stand-alone report, I would return to the group to discuss the findings in more detail. I also spent a great deal of time ensuring the stand-alone report I submitted was written in as plain language as possible, asking people unconnected to research or participation to proof-read for understanding, as well as using graphic design so it was potentially useful for funders and/or sharing with wider stakeholders (see Appendix 7).

Once I submitted the report however, communication with the group almost entirely ceased. As detailed above I was added to their WhatsApp group, but on sharing the report with the group I removed myself as it no longer felt appropriate to be privy to their conversations given the fieldwork had come to an end. I did however share my contact details and

invited feedback individually, and collectively, from my research participants as well as reaching out to the Organising Group member I had been meeting regularly with about when would be best to return to the group to discuss. I received no reply to these emails, other than two participants acknowledging receipt of the report. I do not know why this is, it could be that this was a very busy time for the Steering Meeting and interest had simply waned or that the report was disappointing or included some uncomfortable findings, which they did not want to explore in any more detail. Either way, for me, this was a disappointing end to the relationship and one worthy of critical reflection. Whilst I sincerely aimed to build in reciprocity within this case, with hindsight I am not sure this was achieved in its fullest sense. Here, again, I think the incorporation of more participatory methods, particularly around analysis and synthesis might have been more beneficial for my research participants, potentially creating a better platform than a stand-alone report for the sharing and producing of knowledge.

Whilst I believe that a case study methodology was the right decision for this project, as well as positioning myself as an outsider (insider), I think it is important to recognise that this played out in a way which prevented me from understanding and incorporating reflections on the findings, particularly from citizen participants. For me, this suggests that building in reciprocity is much more complicated than anticipated and that, to achieve well, needs to be better embedded into each methodological decision from the outset, with recognition that different types of participants might need different methods to be able to share in and benefit from the knowledge produced.

This end to the researcher-participant relationships in Case 2 also prompted critical reflection on the naming of the participatory process in this thesis and other publications. Although the subject matter explored here is relatively non-sensitive, there are some findings which could be uncomfortable, disruptive or even hurtful to members of this PDP. As such, I hold a lot of power in this situation. The reality is that naming this

process might bring unwanted attention or critique on this group and its members. Whilst I discussed anonymity with each interviewee and with the gatekeepers prior to fieldwork, I felt uncomfortable with the prospect of publishing these findings using the group's real name. I believe, given the way the researcher-participant relationship ended, that I no longer have the ethical licence to do this. As such, I decided to anonymise this process, as much as possible. The risks of deductive disclosure are still high, this is unavoidable, but wherever possible I have protected the identity of the PDP. This step helps maintain the integrity of the study, whilst also limiting as much as possible any accidental negative impact to the PDP as a collective or to individual participants as a result of being involved in this project.

5.7 Analysis

As demonstrated in this chapter, this case study brings together not only a large quantity of qualitative data but also a number of different forms. In recognition that 'developing a good cross-case analysis/ synthesis is not a simple matter' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 172), the development of an analytic approach and framework was an integral part of the study design. According to Yin, in case study analysis 'there are few fixed formulas or cookbook recipes to use as guides' (2018, p. 165), rather the synthesis is dependent on the researcher's empirical aims as well as appropriate and adequate usage and presentation of the evidence gathered. The analytic approach for this study is multi-layered, relying on both *methodological triangulation*, i.e., multiple methods of data collection as well as *theoretical triangulation*, i.e., the application of different theories to answer or explore the same questions (Liamputtong, 2020). In this section, I will first set out a brief reminder of the conceptual framework of the thesis, highlighting the aspects which formed an integral function in the analysis of the case study data. I will

then describe the analytic process, providing detail and rationale for the coding framework and synthesis.

5.7.1 Conceptual Framework

As detailed in Chapter 3, there is a conceptual framework which underpins the design and analysis of this study. Whilst there is no need to repeat what has already been set out, it is helpful to provide a brief reminder of the framework, particularly the WPR approach, as it was applied here before detailing how it was operationalised within the case study. The full conceptual analysis combines three theoretical frameworks: Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' (WPR approach) (2016), Whitehead's typology of actions to tackle social inequalities in health (2007) and Smith's categorisation of democratic goods (2009). The Systematic Scoping Review used Whitehead's typology of actions to tackle social inequalities in health (2007) as the vector through which to understand the policy context of PDPs. As stated earlier, this study views the policy documentation review stage of data generation and analysis as integral, meaning this case study required a different, deeper form of policy analysis. The study of public policy is an academic discipline in its own right, underpinned by a variety of theories and concepts (Cairney, 2020b), therefore it was necessary to identify an appropriate analytic tool to synthesise the documentary evidence. Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach was chosen to analyse the high-level policy documents (detailed in Tables 6 & 8 above). In brief, this approach aims to invert to idea that policies solve problems, rather it views policies themselves as problem *producers*. In this context policies become 'problem representations' (Bacchi et al., 2016) which need to be explored and understood via the posing of six key questions, which were central to the analysis of high-level policy documents in each case:

1. What's the problem represented to be in a specific policy?

2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/ where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced? (adapted from Bacchi, 2009, p. xii)

The second aspect of analysis for the case study returns to Smith's (2009) analytic framework of *democratic goods* (set out in Chapter 3), considering *inclusion*, *popular control*, *considered judgement* and *transparency*, as detailed in Figure 6 below:

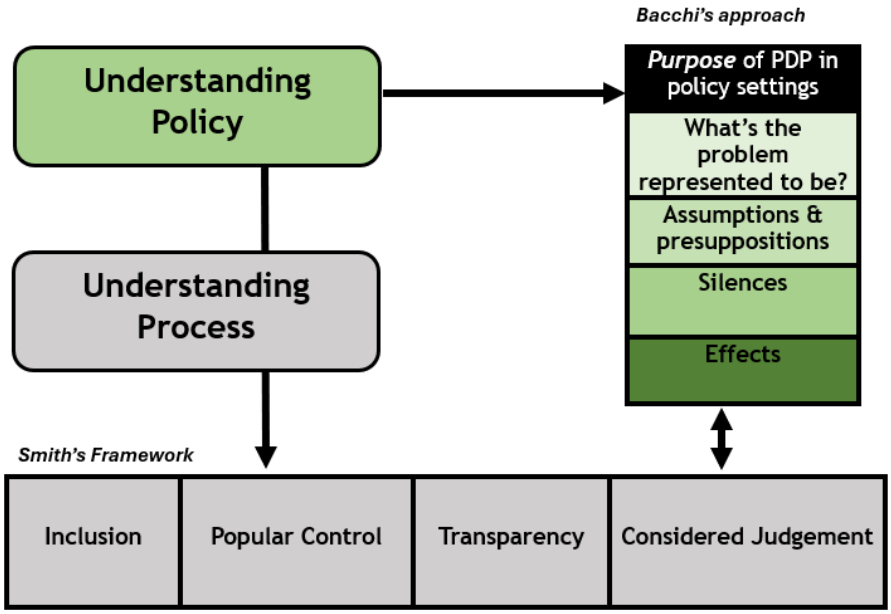


Figure 6: Conceptual Framework as applied in the Dual Case Study

5.6.2 Applying the conceptual framework within the analysis

Whilst the conceptual framework gives helpful detail on the theoretical concepts which were used to make sense of the data, it does not necessarily provide detail on *how* the analysis took place. The operationalising of the analytic framework took place in two stages: WPR policy analysis followed by reflexive thematic analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis is a common approach used to reveal and understand patterns or meaning across qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2021c), given that this approach 'can be flexibly applied to make sense of any kinds of methodological frameworks used in qualitative research' (Liamputtong, 2020, p. 260). This approach to analysis was chosen thanks to its 'theoretical freedom' (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and ability to cope with the complexity of the conceptual framework, combined with the volume and variety of data. Braun & Clark (2021c) have developed a simple, but well-regarded, heuristic of the different phases typically undertaken in reflexive thematic analysis, which were followed, in an adapted form, for this study:

- Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the dataset
- Phase 2: Coding
- Phase 3: Generating initial themes
- Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes
- Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes
- Phase 6: Writing up

The simplicity and flexibility of Braun and Clark's analytic guide to reflexive thematic analysis has led to many iterations and applications. This in turn has led to critiques (often by the theorists themselves) that the approach is sometimes misinterpreted as 'one size fits all', when in fact any approach to *reflexive* thematic analysis will exist across a spectrum of options determined by the analyst's epistemological position, research aims and theoretical underpinnings (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). Indeed, core to their approach is the concept of *reflexivity*, and *researcher subjectivity*, both of which are viewed as essential resources

(Braun & Clarke, 2021c) throughout the analysis. Along with Braun and Clark, and in keeping with my own social constructivist positioning, this thesis also 'treats knowledge as situated, and as inevitably and inescapably shaped by the processes and practices of knowledge production, including the practices of the researcher' (Braun & Clarke, 2021c, p. 12). To this end, the phases above were conducted iteratively, in a non-linear, 'progressive, but recursive process' (Braun & Clarke, 2021c, p. 34). In addition, the plurality of options and applications of reflexive thematic analysis were purposefully embraced, through the combination of different analytic approaches (for example, with the conceptual framework) as well as adaptation of each phase to suit the needs and goals of the study (for example, through the use of a codebook). I will now outline how each stage of the analysis was conducted. Figure 7 below provides an outline of how the analysis was structured (adapted from Creswell & Poth, 2017).

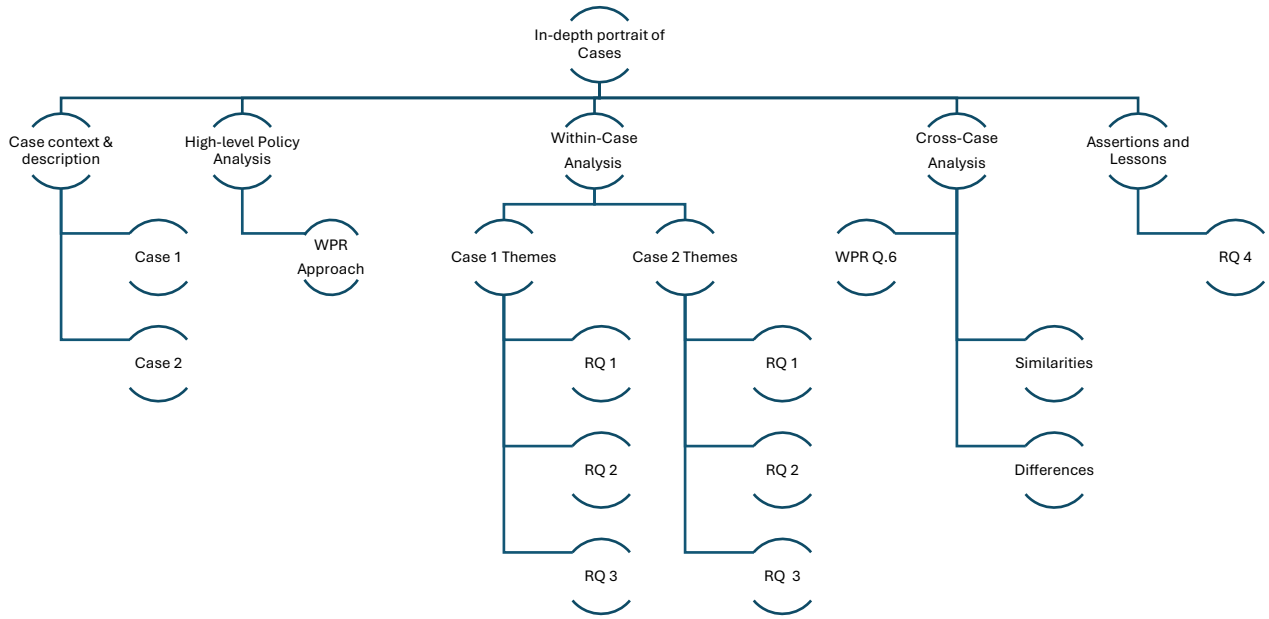


Figure 7: Structure for data analysis, Dual Case Study

5.7.3 Stages of analysis

The first stage of analysis focused on policy and the WPR approach. The WPR questions were applied across the policy domains of each case: tackling child poverty (Case 1) and Just Transition to net zero (Case 2), using *public participation* as the common thread, or the 'problem representation' (Bacchi et al., 2016). I developed an analytic table, which included the core WPR questions, for each high-level policy document (detailed in Tables 6 & 8), and systematically worked through each question, recording key points and evidence for each one. In order to identify the dominant problem representations related to public participation *across* the policy domains of child poverty and Just Transition to net zero, I also created a cross-case analytic table. I then combined the key points for each WPR question, recording the shared key parameters and perspectives as well as any identified differences in how the policy documents characterised public participation. This analysis is written up and detailed in Chapter 6. I have included the working for WPR Q.1 as well as a synopsis of the key points from the whole WPR analysis in Appendix 9.

The second stage of analysis incorporated a much bigger data set, including interview transcripts, direct observations, workshop data and background-narrative documentary evidence. I began by reading through every data set, at least once, whilst making notes and comments on each transcript or document. I then developed an abductive codebook for application across the data as a whole. This means that the codebook was both *theoretical (or deductive),* i.e., 'driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interests' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84), in this case the conceptual framework, and *inductive*, i.e., 'data driven' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). *Deductive* codes were also generated from the WPR policy analysis as well as from the Systematic Scoping Review. *Inductive* codes were generated iteratively, from the initial read through and as the data analysis progressed. It is important to note that this

application of reflexive thematic analysis was reliant on a codebook, which departs from the assertion that in this approach, ‘coding is open and organic, with no use of any coding framework’ (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, p. 334). The reasons for this are simple. There was a significant amount of data to organise and the theoretical lenses through which I was synthesising the data were multi-layered. A codebook provided a way to organise different sections of the data and analysis. It was not however a ‘fixed’ framework, it was an organic and dynamic codebook which was adapted as new and different understandings of the data were found. In addition, whilst some themes were identified in the early stages of analysis, these were reviewed, revisited and interrogated as the analysis and write up progressed. This required deep immersion in the data as well as dedicating sufficient time and head space to process and digest the new themes or findings. All of the data were uploaded and analysed on N-vivo, Figure 8 shows how the codebook analysis was conducted on this platform:

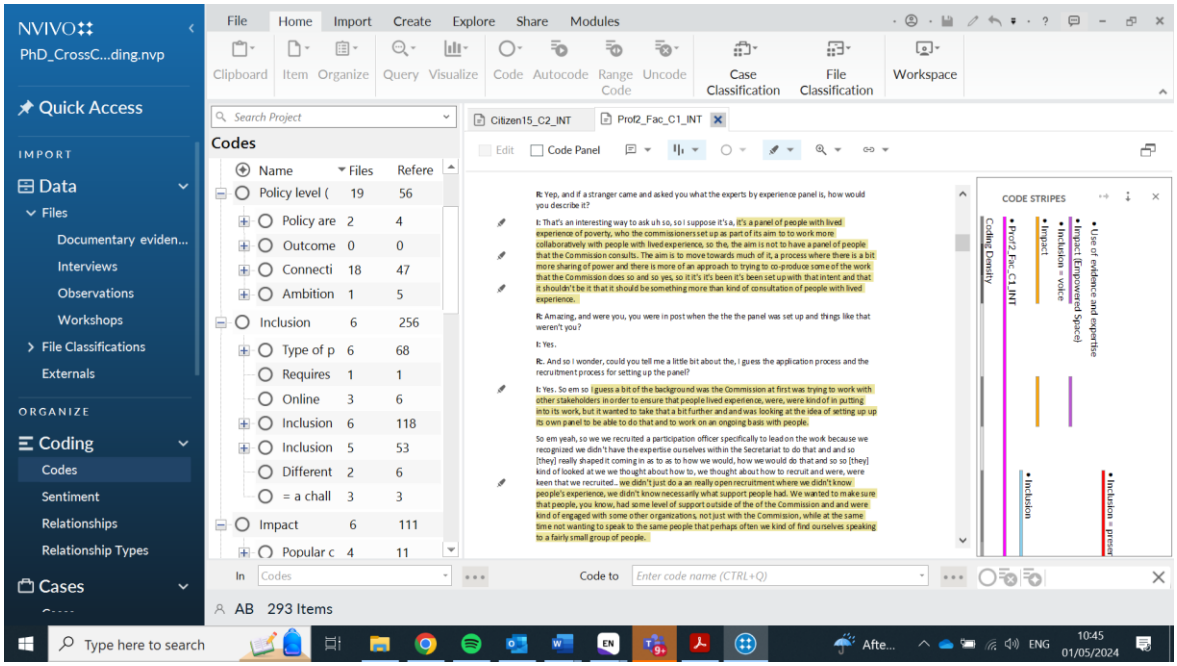


Figure 8: N-vivo coding

5.7.4 Thematic maps

Thematic maps were developed throughout the analysis to help refine and review the themes and sub themes for the Case Study. As this study forms one part of a broader thesis, thematic maps were developed for the thesis as a whole, including previous findings (for example from the Systematic Scoping Review). In addition, in the process of developing and identifying themes, specific maps were developed for both 'headline' themes as well as 'sub-themes'. Two maps from different stages of analysis are detailed below.

Figure 9: Thematic Map 2 _Disrupted Narratives

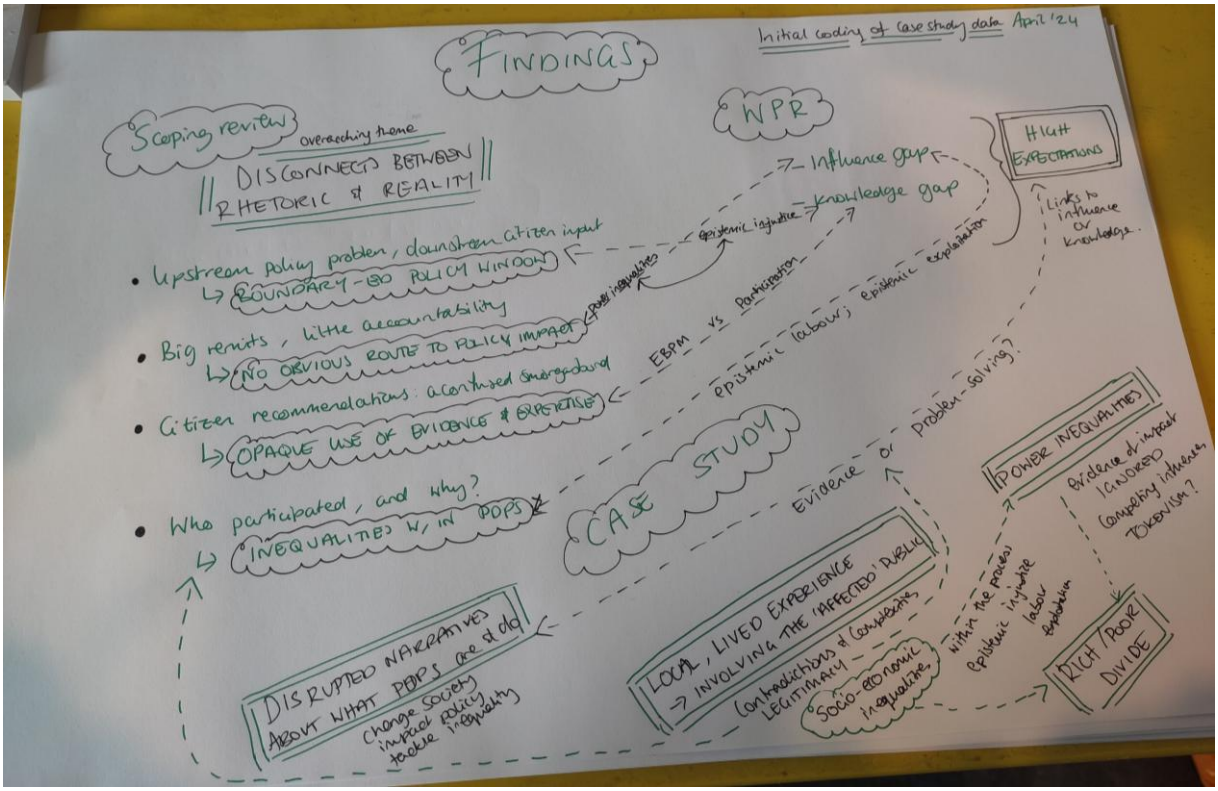


Figure 10: Thematic Map 1_Whole Thesis

5.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has set out the methodological approach for the case study, including detailing the research paradigm and my own positionality. It has also provided an outline of the study design, case profiles and data generation processes as well as the analytic approach applied to synthesise the data and answer the research questions. The following chapters will now move on to the findings of the case study and are structured according to the research questions:

Chapter 6 explores RQ2: What is the purpose of participatory-deliberative processes within policymaking in Scotland and how is this characterised in policy and stakeholder accounts?

The first section of this chapter focuses on policy and details the WPR analysis, unpicking the assumptions, silences and effects of how public participation is conceptualised across the high-level policy documents

detailed in Tables 6 & 8 above. The second half focuses on policy stakeholder conceptualisations of public participation, drawing on interview, observations and background narrative evidence.

Chapter 7 explores RQ3: How are the democratic goods of inclusion, popular control, considered judgement and transparency conceptualised in participatory-deliberative processes?

i) What types of publics are participating and why?
ii) What is the role of evidence and expertise?
iii) How do participatory-deliberative processes connect to and impact policy decisions?

This chapter first considers inclusiveness and some of the inherent challenges attached to this revealed via the analysis. It then moves on to considered judgement and how expertise and truth are understood in the context of each PDP. Finally, it focuses on popular control and the impact of the PDPs on policy decision-making and the role which historical injustice and profound power differentials play in how this impact is described and understood.

Chapter 8 explores RQ4: What can we learn from existing/contemporary examples of PDPs about the opportunities and challenges of a 'democratic rejuvenation' to address health inequalities?

This chapter is the concluding chapter of the thesis and brings together learning from across the studies (Systematic Scoping Review and Dual Case Study). It reflects on the findings in light of health inequalities literature and specifically considers some of the challenges unearthed, detailing a proposed participatory 'fantasy paradigm'. It then discusses some of the opportunities and areas for further empirical research to better understand the role that participatory-deliberative processes might play in policymaking to tackle social inequalities in health.

Chapter 6: The purpose of PDPs - an analysis of policy and policy stakeholder accounts

6.1 Chapter overview

This chapter details the first set of findings from the dual case study. In the following sections I will explore how the *purpose* of PDPs (participatory-deliberative processes) is characterised in both stakeholder accounts and policy documentation (RQ2). The first section will focus specifically on the policy analysis, applying the WPR approach detailed in Chapters 3 & 5. Using high-level policy documents from across the policy domain of each case, Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero, I will detail the different ways that public participation is characterised as well as the potential consequences which flow from this representation, exploring both the shared parameters and key differences across both sets of policy documents. The second section explores policy *stakeholder* accounts of the *purpose* of PDPs. Using interview, workshop and observational data from each case, I will detail the different conceptualisations of PDPs and their intended purpose in policy making settings and beyond. The aim is to explore the commonalities and differences across and between both cases and where parallels (or tensions) emerge across citizen, professional and policy characterisations of the role and purpose of public participation in policymaking, providing useful intelligence on how public participation currently functions within different policy settings in Scotland.

6.2 Policy analysis: 'What's the problem represented to be?'

This section details the analysis of policy documents, applying Bacchi's 'What's the problem represented to be?' (WPR) approach. As a brief

reminder, the WPR approach is concerned with 'problem representations' which are implicit in policy proposals. It begins from the premise that governments do not 'solve' problems but in fact *produce* particular types of problems: '[p]olicies give shape to problems, they do not address them' (Bacchi, 2009, p. x). Heavily influenced by Foucauldian ideas of power and knowledge, a WPR approach aims to both dissect and challenge the 'taken for granted' truths which are presented via policy proposals: 'what we propose to do about something indicates what we think needs to change' (Bacchi, 2009, p. xi). For Bacchi, policy proposals are cultural *products* and, as such, their associated problem representations require close scrutiny (Bacchi et al., 2016). In a WPR context, problems are not fixed and exogenous to the policy making process but created from within. Its starting point is one that recognises that policy produces winners and losers (Cairney, 2023), often exerting a 'deleterious' and unequal impact across certain groups (Bacchi, 2009). A WPR analysis is intended to expose the deep-seated presuppositions which underpin certain forms of policy action as well as the effects which are experienced as a result:

> The objective is to make visible the multiple and overlapping forms of rule (political rationalities) enshrined in selected programs, projects or legislation, to identify silences and ambiguities where they exist, to assess the implications that flow from specific ways of representing the 'problem', and to identify forms of resistance… (Bacchi, 2009, p. 140)

Sitting at the core of the WPR approach is a concern with the power relations implicit in problem representations. Working backwards from the policy proposal(s), it considers what or who has been identified for change or intervention, how this 'problem' has been constituted, and which 'knowledges' or 'truths' reinforce this representation, aiming to draw attention to the, often hidden or obscured, discourses which 'produce hierarchical and inegalitarian forms of rule' (Bacchi et al., 2016, p. 4).

In this section, I will first explore how public participation is characterised across both sets of high-level policy documents relating to Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero (these are described in Chapter 5, Tables 6 & 8). I will then detail the dominant problem representation related to public participation, i.e., what problem is public participation constructed to solve in these policy accounts? Then, I will explore the presuppositions and assumptions which underpin this representation of public participation as well as any associated silences and potential effects which emerge from thinking about PDPs in this way. For simplicity, where it is not immediately obvious, the prefix CP and JT will be used when quoting Child Poverty or Just Transition to net zero documents respectively.

6.2.1 Characterisation of public participation

The concept of public participation is a common thread throughout both Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero policy programmes, with repeated statements which place the (potential) role of participation front and centre to any (successful) decision-making. This push for public participation as a central component of developing policy is strongest in the documentation from the statutory Commissions, who routinely advocate for further, and widespread, citizen involvement in policy decision-making:

> *The Commission's principles commit us to amplifying the voices of those who are often not heard. We know that people with lived experience are experts because of their experience and bring knowledge and ideas that are needed to successfully tackle poverty. (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021a, p. 6)*

> *Without finding ways to give greater power to communities over decisions that affect them, opportunities to find the most effective solutions to local circumstances will be missed. (Just Transition Commission, 2021c, p. 56)*

These participatory aims are also strongly echoed across the documents produced by Scottish Government when setting out their plans and proposals for tackling Child Poverty and a Just Transition to net zero.

Public participation is routinely conceptualised as both an *integral* and *necessary* part of policy decision making:

> *[Just Transition will be] [c]o-designed and co-delivered to ensure all partners are empowered to engage, and that action is fair and co-ordinated. This means placing those most likely to be negatively impacted by the transition at the heart of our process. (JT, Scottish Government, 2021b, p. 33)*

> *…[an identified action is to] [w]ork with those with lived experience of child poverty to ensure their voices are at the heart of our policy development and delivery models .(CP, Scottish Government, 2018a, p. 95)*

The fact that there is such a strong participatory emphasis in both the policy programmes analysed here is not wholly surprising given the high-profile nature of each domain and the long-standing commitment of Scottish Government to take a more participatory approach to policymaking (Cairney, 2020a). Indeed, public participation in policy and decision making is becoming increasingly institutionalised in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2022d). A series of constitutional and legislative changes over the past two decades have fostered a 'democratic renewal' (Escobar, 2022) across the country, resulting in a multitude of participatory-deliberative processes, occurring at both national and regional policymaking levels (Bynner et al., 2023; Escobar, 2022). Whilst public participation is, of course, not exclusive to Scotland in the UK, devolution and the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 provided Scottish policymakers with greater legislative powers and scope to shape how policies would be formed and public services delivered (Cairney, 2020a; Keating, 2020), which crucially placed a more participatory approach at its core:

> The founding of the Scottish Parliament was enthused with a vision entailing the transformation of the political process in Scotland to make it more open, transparent, inclusive, consultative and *participatory*. (emphasis added, Bonney, 2003, p. 459)

Whilst some of the participatory endeavours of the Scottish Government over the past two decades have been subject to critique (see for example, Bennett et al., 2022; Elliott et al., 2019; Matthews, 2012; Rolfe,

2016; Sinclair, 2008, 2011), this has seemingly not dampened any (theoretical) commitments to participatory policymaking, demonstrated by recent legislation and policy proposals which seek to increase opportunities for citizen participation, including the Community Empowerment Act in 2015 (Elliott et al., 2019), joining the Open Government Partnership, which specifically focuses on incorporating participatory decision-making within government (Escobar, 2022) and more recently the convening of an Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy Working Group (Scottish Government, 2022d). It is perhaps for this reason that, across the policy documents related to Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero, public participation is broadly presented as an 'intrinsic good' (Kerr, 2023; Smith-Merry, 2020; Stewart, 2016), demonstrating 'the more or less unquestioned positive associations' (Walker et al., 2015, p. 9) commonly attached to increasing public participation in institutional decision-making:

> *Meeting our aspiration of a transition that has people and places at its heart requires the meaningful involvement of Scotland's citizens in decisions that affect them. (JT, Scottish Government, 2021c, p. 57)*

> *[Knowledge] and expertise of people with direct experience of poverty is crucial in developing solutions to poverty that work in practice. The [Scottish Government] should involve these experts by experience in developing solutions and actions which shape delivery. This will help ensure that policies and actions are better designed and respond to the reality of people's lives. (CP, Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022a, p. 30)*

It is important to note that both the documents related to Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero also identify a particular *type* of public to participate: the 'affected public' (Degeling et al., 2015). Peppered throughout the documents are descriptions which characterise citizen participants as 'people likely to be impacted' (JT, Scottish Government, 2021b, p. 12) or 'people who have experienced the damaging impacts of poverty first hand' (CP, Scottish Government, 2022a, p. 4). It appears central to characterisations of public participation in these policy accounts that the participating public are those who will be *impacted* or *affected* by any policy outcomes being discussed or developed.

In short, the broad characterisation of public participation across Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero documents is that it is an integral and necessary component of policy decision-making; that it is an 'intrinsic good'; and that it aims to involve the 'affected public', i.e., people who will be directly impacted by the resultant policy decisions.

6.2.2 What problem does public participation solve?

Given public participation is regarded as so crucial and beneficial, for both these policy areas, the next logical question in the analysis is then, why? What is the problem which public participation is solving? In the context of both the policy domains analysed here, public participation appears to solve the problem of *poor decision making* by Government, and in effect fills two interconnected holes in current policy making:

1. *A knowledge gap*: the problem is that institutions do not possess the *right type* of knowledge to develop public policy which meets people's needs. This leads to policy programmes which are ineffective or not fit for purpose. For example:

   > *Policymakers need to understand the experiences of families, and work with families to deliver solutions in ways that meet their needs. (CP, Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022a, p. 30)*

2. *An influence gap*: policy and decision-making spaces have not typically been open to citizen or community input. The problem here is that without a 'seat at the table' for citizens and communities, their needs and wants are ultimately unheard and this leads to policy programmes which have unfair and unequal impacts. For example:

   > *Without careful design and meaningful engagement there is a risk that benefits may flow mainly to large landowners and opportunities for community benefit will be missed. (JT, Scottish Government, 2021c, p. 34)*

When subjected to WPR questioning, this dual problem representation co-exists in each domain and produces a series of key themes and critical reflections, revealing some (likely) unintended consequences of thinking about public participation in the terms set out across the Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero documents.

6.2.3 Assumptions, silence and effects

After identifying the dominant problem representation in relation to public participation, the next stage in WPR analysis is to 'dig a little deeper… to see what is driving this agenda' (Bacchi, 2009, p. 159). This involves exploring the assumptions which underpin the problem representation, thinking about who or what is intended for change and the implicit silences, i.e., what is ignored. The aim is to explore and expand the 'problem-space' (Bacchi, 2009) and through doing so, identify the potential lived, subjective and discursive effects of the problem representation. In the context of this analysis, three interconnected themes have been highlighted, each will now be discussed in turn:

- *Increased public participation = very high expectations*
- *The differing functions of participation*
- *The role of citizens: to educate or to be educated*

6.2.3.1 Increased public participation = very high expectations

Both sets of documents demonstrate high expectations for what public participation can achieve within these policy programmes. This is often characterised as a *transformation* of current policy making which leads to *better/ fairer decision-making*, with both policy domains underpinned by the stated core aim of reducing inequality:

> *Poverty and inequality is not inevitable… the choices that we make can transform our economy and society. (CP, Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021a, p. 1)*

> *A just transition is both the outcome – a fairer, greener future for all – and the process that must be undertaken in partnership with those impacted by the transition to net zero. Just transition is how we get to a net zero and climate resilient economy, in a way that delivers fairness and tackles inequality and injustice. (JT, Scottish Government, 2021b, p. 5)*

Across the document data, increased public participation is positioned as a central mechanism to achieving this:

> *Whilst we have expertise as a Commission, we know that those who experience poverty and inequality are also experts and that their knowledge, insights and partnership in designing policies are vital if we are to be successful in eradicating poverty in Scotland (CP, Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021a, p. 1)*
>
> *…a better, fairer, and more inclusive society for everyone: a society in which individuals and communities across Scotland are actively involved in making the decisions that affect them. (JT, Scottish Government, 2021d, p. 8)*

The broad assumption presented here, appears to align with the deliberative notion of pluralism, i.e., the more people and perspectives involved in a policy making process, the better, fairer and more effective the policy outcomes will be (Fishkin, 2018; Fung, 2005; Young, 2000). The expectations for what increased public participation in policymaking can achieve are very high across these two policy programmes. Indeed, at times, public participation is viewed as fundamentally emancipatory, particularly in the context of the Just Transition to net zero documentation, where the opportunity to participate, and 'have your voice heard', is often characterised as a form of resistance to historical inequities and injustices:

> *Scotland continues to bear the scars of poorly managed, abrupt and unplanned transitions of the past. Despite decades having passed, many of our coalfield communities remain disadvantaged in relation to education, employment and income levels compared with the rest of the country….*
>
> *A set of Just Transition Plans will be developed, through collaboration and partnership, ensuring that people likely to be impacted by the transition have a voice. This will help us all to manage the inherent trade-offs that come with periods of structural change to ensure the outcome is equitable. (JT, Scottish Government, 2021b, p. 11)*

In these policy contexts, public participation is viewed as a vehicle through which status quo decision making arrangements can be challenged via the inclusion of new knowledges and perspectives, accompanied by the underlying assumption that this will produce more egalitarian policies.

This, of course, is not a unique conceptualisation of public participation. There are many ardent advocates of the emancipatory and equalising potential of increasing public participation in policy making (Bächtiger & Dryzek, 2024; Fishkin, 2018; Fung, 2005; G. Smith, 2009; Young, 2000), as well as a vast literature which details the challenges associated with this kind of endeavour (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Elstub et al., 2019; Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2016; Lee et al., 2015b). These challenges are largely unacknowledged in the documents examined here. Instead, the narrative of how participation unfolds and interacts with the policy making process is one dimensional, producing a relatively narrow representation of how public participation might function in a policy making setting. In this narrative, 'policy problems are amenable to technical policy solutions' (Cairney, 2023, p. 1821), i.e., the 'right' policy decisions will be made if decision makers have access to the experiential knowledge of citizens and those same citizens are present to state their case.

> *…it is important that we get it right and meet the needs of parents. To do so we will establish a dedicated lived experience panel by summer 2022 to inform the development of employability activity…ensuring these users are at the heart of policy and service design. (CP, Scottish Government, 2022a, p. 32)*

This in turn produces an overly simplistic view of policymaking, where decision making is logical and sequential, with clear entry points for the incorporation for citizen input and influence, often described as 'the story of how policy should be made' (Cairney & Kippen, 2024, p. 4). The reality however is much more complicated. Policy decision making is fractured across multiple centres and decision-making power dispersed amongst various actors and groups (Cairney & Kippen, 2024; Vlahos, 2022). It is not a simple process but instead a highly complex one (Cairney, 2020b).

There are two interrelated silences implicit in this narrow representation of how participation and policy making interact. The first is that it ignores an increasingly common 'uneasy tension' (Stewart et al., 2020) between two current trends in policymaking practice and theory:

'evidence-based policymaking' vs participatory or deliberative democracy (Hill O'Connor et al., 2023). As Scotland has witnessed its own 'deliberative turn' (Dryzek, 2010) and sought to increase participation opportunities so too has interest in policymaking which relies on expertise and evidence to reach *good policy outcomes* (Cairney, 2020b) increased. Whilst both of these approaches are potentially desirable, they are not necessarily always compatible:

> …politics is about the choice between many preferences whenever they collide, and a process driven solely by expertise will produce very different outcomes to a process solely driven by participatory democracy. (Cairney, 2020b, p. 3)

In the policy documents analysed here, this tension is unacknowledged. There is a strong focus on using contemporary evidence and expertise *as well as* public participation as means to producing policy, suggesting an assumption that participatory outputs and evidence will seamlessly combine, whilst any necessary trade-offs between these two approaches are unexplored or ignored:

> *…deliberative forums are useful for cancelling out the 'noise' that often exists in difficult debates around climate action. They can be helpful in agreeing important principles for action, based on the best available evidence and the priorities of communities across Scotland. (JT, Scottish Government, 2021c, p. 59)*

> *Whilst quantitative data will enable us to track progress towards our outcomes, families will often not fall into one priority group and in reality many face a combination of barriers and discrimination. We will ensure we use lived experience and a deeper understanding of the impact of intersection of characteristics in the design, implementation and monitoring of our actions and policies to ensure delivery of approaches which are increasing tailored and, ultimately, more effective. (CP, Scottish Government, 2022a, p. 20)*

The second implicit silence is that this representation of public participation also then ignores the *politics* of policymaking. It 'downplay[s] power and contestation' (Cairney, 2023, p. 1821) and the various ways that policy actors and institutions 'cooperate or compete to use information selectively to define problems, and select policy solutions with inevitable winners or losers' (Cairney, 2023, p. 1821). In this

simplistic narrative of participation in policymaking, powerful influencing factors such as political ideology, commercial power and wealth are given very little attention, and simple citizen presence in the policy process is seen as an effective antidote to any existing inequality in influence.

> *[Just Transition is] an opportunity to invigorate local democracy and collaboration between business, trade unions, communities, academics, local and national governments and the third sector. (JT, Scottish Government, 2021b, p. 7)*

This largely ignores the 'unequal bargaining power' (Davis, 2016, p. 9) possessed by different stakeholders, or *tracker privileges* or *prejudices* (Fricker, 2007), experienced by different groups, whereby some voices 'consistently gain credibility' (Kerr, 2023, p. 7) over others within policy decision making spaces, and ultimately exert more power and influence on the eventual policy proposals produced (Kerr, 2023, 2024). Seen through this prism, the expectations for what participation can achieve in both these policy contexts appear very ambitious. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that as public participation opportunities have increased worldwide (and in Scotland), we have also witnessed a widening gulf between the living and working conditions of different groups and sharp increases in socio-economic inequalities (Miall et al., 2022; Walker et al., 2015), suggesting that increased public participation does not so easily fill the knowledge and influence gaps in current policymaking, nor automatically produce fairer policy outcomes as a result.

6.2.3.2 The differing functions of participation

One of the reasons for this gap between participatory rhetoric and reality is perhaps related to the almost bewildering number of forms, processes and techniques that can fall under the umbrella of *participation* (Fung, 2006; Parkinson, 2006). This heterogeneity in application renders the concept of *public participation* highly flexible and open to numerous interpretations (Barnes et al., 2007; Beresford, 2021; Fung, 2006). Both policy programmes have the stated intention of involving people directly in decision-making related to *policy development*. This is perhaps best illustrated by the Poverty and Inequality Commission's overarching aim:

> *Amplify the voices of experts by experience to make sure they are part of **identifying issues**, **developing and designing solutions**, and **scrutinising progress**. (emphasis added, Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2020, p. 6)*

Similarly, the terms 'co-production' and 'co-design' are peppered throughout the policy proposals and are particularly present across the Just Transition to net zero documents. These terms share the flexibility and heterogeneity associated with public participation, they are often called 'buzzwords' (Cairney, 2023) which can be attributed to all sorts of, very different, activities (Bandola-Gill et al., 2023; Williams et al., 2020). Despite this, use of these terms in these policy contexts is rarely accompanied by detail about what this means, with only one document providing a formal definition:

> *Co-design relies on an inclusive and participative engagement process that empowers specific groups and people in society, to **directly influence policy decisions and actions**. The aim is to ensure that plans reflect their needs and circumstances, and the barriers they face. (emphasis added, JT, Scottish Government, 2023b, p. 188)*

Even with a level of ambiguity, the purpose of participation is broadly constituted as highly active for citizens, where they are enabled to take on the role of *inquirers* (Kerr, 2023) and the participatory setting largely characterised as a collective decision-making space, where citizens are 'knowledge producers', or *epistemic agents* (Pohlhaus, 2017), with the opportunity to shape and influence the policy outcomes.

> *In developing this plan we have heard from partners across Scotland, including parents with experience of living on low incomes and from children and young people themselves. They have shared their thoughts on what progress has been made, and their frustration where this has not been enough, their concerns about the barriers faced by too many families in Scotland, and, crucially, their ideas for what can make a difference. (CP, Scottish Government, 2022a, p. 22)*

> *The Scottish Government is committed to being an Open Government where citizens are co-designing the policies which affect their lives both now and in the future. This extends to our approach to climate policy. (JT, Scottish Government, 2021d, p. 17)*

However, on closer inspection both policy programmes drift far from this characterisation of participation. Indeed, the policy documents analysed here, at times, reveal a different narrative about how public participation *functions* within policymaking, which moves away from active policy development towards providing legitimacy and evidence as its key purpose.

This is well demonstrated in the presentation of citizen contributions across the policy programmes. Despite the conceptualisation of citizens as active problem solvers in the development of policy, their input appears, at times, to be confined to that of evidence sources. This is particularly true in the Child Poverty literature where the contributions of people with 'lived experience' tend to be in the form of individual quotes often provided to legitimise the intended actions described, transforming the function of participation from decision-making to *evidence-producing*. This is reinforced time and again through the Child Poverty Delivery Plans and Progress Reports (Scottish Government, 2018a, 2022a, 2022c), where citizen participation is often delimited to the provision of testimony for the consideration and synthesis of government, effectively reducing the role of citizens to that of a source of information:

> *Most importantly, we will listen closely to the experiences shared by those families working with us, to understand individual stories …. In doing so* ***we will make best use of the information and intelligence available*** *to us as a partnership. (emphasis added, CP, Scottish Government, 2022a, p. 26)*

Even in the documents produced by the Poverty and Inequality Commission, who strongly advocate for the incorporation of people with lived experience into policy decision making, there is still a tendency to present any participatory activity as predominantly a source of 'lived experience' evidence rather than providing comprehensive detail of the discussion, deliberations, and subsequent policy decisions which citizens were a part of. This is exacerbated by consistently limited detail on the how, when, who, what, why and where of the processes through which people participated. Even where detail is provided in the documents

about the ways in which people with lived experience were involved it tends to be brief and the issues which citizens have influenced described as incredibly broad and largely one-dimensional:

> *…we have placed the **highest importance** on hearing from those with experience of poverty and supporting them to inform responses to reduce poverty at a community, local and national level… Through this engagement **people with lived experience were central to informing policy choices**, and in particular a focus **on simplifying public sector systems** and **making those easier to navigate for those who need them most**. (emphasis added, CP, Scottish Government, 2022c, p. 60)*

This appears to undermine the intended aims of participation to involve people in 'co-producing' or directly informing policy, and instead reveals a potentially selective, vague or tokenistic use of citizen contributions. This, in turn, produces a form of *epistemic injustice* (Fricker, 2007), i.e., unfair practices which relate to knowledge production and communication (Kerr, 2023), where 'particular knowers are precluded from making an impact' (Pohlhaus, 2017, p. 14). In this context, participating citizens are effectively denied the role of problem solver or inquirer and instead their input appears relegated to that of information provision. When reduced to sources of evidence, the role and influence of citizens becomes greatly diminished. The claims of placing the 'highest importance' on this type of information are undermined by the effective silence on how citizens were involved in the interpretation, synthesis and eventual decision-making. This phenomenon has been highlighted in other studies:

> These patches of silence… result from calling into being the 'testifying' epistemic subject at the exclusion of the inquiring (hermeneutical) subject, when both facets would be necessary for the just representation and participation of first-hand experience in policymaking (Kerr, 2023, p. 9)

It appears we have different narratives of how public participation *functions* within policymaking. On one hand, across the Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero documents, there are repeated references and statements which suggest public participation is primarily about policy design and development, with citizen participants cast as 'epistemic

agents' or 'inquirers' within the process. On the other hand, the vague use of citizen contributions and limited detail on *how* citizens actively inform or participate in policy decision making undermines this claim and appears to view public participation as performing an evidence-producing or legitimising function instead.

6.2.3.3 The role of citizens: to educate or be educated

The final theme identified in the WPR analysis is related to *who* is participating in the policy programmes and how they are characterised. As established, in both policy programmes, public participation is largely aimed at the involvement of the 'affected' public (Degeling et al., 2015), however this is conceptualised a little differently by each policy area. In the case of Child Poverty, the 'affected' public are commonly referred to as 'people with lived experience' or as 'experts by experience'. Indeed, across the Child Poverty documents the 'affected' public are broadly seen as people who bring a particular *lived* knowledge type rather than simply people who are recipients of policy impacts. In the Just Transition literature, it is much broader, participants are most commonly referred to as 'impacted communities', and in this context, they are rarely characterised as 'experts', rather people who may bear the brunt of unfair or unequal policy decisions, with a definite focus on marginalised or disadvantaged communities: 'Policy development should prioritise engagement with the most marginalised groups' (JT, Scottish Government, 2022e, p. 9). This focus on engaging with groups who experience disadvantage is a common aim across participatory and deliberative practice and theory (G. Smith, 2009; Young, 2000) often based on the premise that inegalitarian forms of rule leave some groups 'politically rich' and others 'politically poor' (Dalton, 2017; McCartney et al., 2021), with the primary objective of public participation to redress this imbalance through the incorporation of 'seldom heard' voices. This certainly appears to be the aim across the Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero documents, which appear to view participation of disadvantaged groups as an antidote to technocratic policymaking which

‘plac[es] narrow limits on participation, by prioritising small groups of experts over large groups of affected citizens’ (Cairney, 2023, p. 1824). Indeed, the use of the term ‘experts by experience’, in particular, could be seen as a form of resistance to typical understandings of what constitutes expertise and a deliberate move, however (un)successful, to try to open the policymaking door to different forms of experiential knowledge. However, despite the equalising intentions of primarily engaging with groups who experience disadvantage, there are some, potentially, negative consequences which arise from this focus, which relate to the implicit roles designated to citizens within public participation. These different roles and their consequences will now be discussed in turn.

To educate

A key aspect of the ‘problem representation’ of public participation across these two policy domains is that it fills a *knowledge gap,* i.e., it brings in forms of knowledge which are assumed not to exist within current institutional policy making spaces, often related to the *effect* of policies on certain communities and groups. Here the purpose of participation is to listen to or engage with groups who experience the ‘deleterious’ impacts of policy, in order to learn from them about the specific challenges and problems they face:

> *We know that one of the best ways to identify the real issues within Seldom Heard groups is to listen to the people that belong to these groups. (CP, Scottish Government, 2022a, p. 64)*

> *Certain regions and certain groups within society will experience the transition to net zero more acutely than others and this disparity will need to be reflected in the level of engagement. (JT, Scottish Government, 2021b, p. 34)*

This concentration on the involvement of disadvantaged groups is underscored by a tacit assumption that public participation is an obvious mechanism through which ‘unheard voices’ can be recognised and acknowledged in the policy making process. However, this hyper focus on

people who experience poverty and disadvantage can also be seen as *epistemic exploitation,* where privileged groups (in this case read policy and decision-makers), expect 'marginalised persons to produce an education or explanation about the nature of the oppression they face' (Berenstain, 2016, p. 570) with the seeking of this information seen as 'a necessary and even epistemically virtuous form of intellectual engagement [that] is often treated as an indispensable method of attaining knowledge' (Berenstain, 2016, p. 570).

In reality, by focusing largely on the increased participation of marginalised groups, an imbalance in *epistemic labour* (Pohlhaus, 2017) is produced, where the engagement, resource and energy required to be 'listened to' is far higher for people experiencing poverty or vulnerable to negative impacts of policy than it is for people who experience privilege and wealth and who ultimately benefit from certain policy (in)action: 'The rich themselves – by their absence – are granted a right to silence and privacy, to non-participation in the classificatory mechanisms of the state' (Kerr, 2023, p. 13). Put simply, by limiting the focus on disadvantage, the *advantage* experienced by other groups is ignored or obscured (Bacchi, 2009; Eveline, 1994). For Kerr, this points to a gaping hole in knowledge production in the context of policy making, something she terms 'wealthed ignorance':

> … [poorer people] provide testimony in a space where the lived experience of wealth goes un-articulated and this perpetuates the harmful idea that this (rich) knowledge is neutral or non-operative in the context of social policy. (Kerr, 2023, p. 13)

This links back to an earlier silence highlighted in the analysis: the role of power and politics within policymaking and inequalities in influence experienced by different groups. In the narrative presented here, a primary role of citizens within participation settings is to *educate* policymakers about the challenging impact of policies on their life, whilst other, potentially much more powerful, influencing factors on policy decisions remain unacknowledged.

To be educated

The role of citizens as *educators* within public participation processes is not, however, static across the policy domains. Indeed, at times, we see their role inversed, with the purpose of public participation positioned as predominantly educational *for* citizens and aimed at changing the behaviour of participants rather than influencing policy decisions. This is best illustrated in Scottish Government's Net Zero Public Engagement Strategy (2021d). This plan aims to '[e]nsure those affected by [Scotland's] transition and climate impacts are engaged in the design and delivery of key policies' (Scottish Government, 2021d, p. 7) and provides detail on the various participation processes which citizens can be involved in related to Net Zero. However, much of the activity described focuses on public engagement as a means to change behaviours related to energy consumption and climate action, and we meet a familiar silence when it comes to *how* citizens will be informing policy decisions.

> *We will continue to develop and promote climate engagements and conversations throughout Scotland in a variety of formats... We will provide resources, such as toolkits with key messaging, definitions and examples of positive behaviours, to facilitate climate conversations and events across the nation. (JT, Scottish Government, 2021d, p. 32)*

In this context, citizens are not necessarily participants in policy production, but instead cast as the subjects of policy proposals, i.e., the locus identified as needing to change. This focus on citizen education to produce certain behaviours is not exclusive to the public engagement strategy and crops up across the Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero documents. There are repeated statements across the literature which equate 'empowering communities' directly to communities taking action for themselves:

> *[The programme] supports disadvantaged people in local communities to become more engaged, more socially included and be more economically active, thereby encouraging participants to make career choices, engage with formal learning and training and move into employment (CP, Scottish Government, 2022c, p. 55)*

> *Our Climate Action Towns initiative will empower and support communities to take action on climate change. (JT, Scottish Government, 2021d, p. 38)*

The effect of framing the purpose of public participation in this way is that it *responsibilises* citizens involved (Rolfe, 2018) and locates both the genesis and solutions for problems such as the climate emergency and poverty at the doors of communities rather than government. This idea is further crystallised in the use of lived experience 'evidence' in the most recent Child Poverty Delivery Plan, where parent narratives are provided to justify and legitimise the policy action taken by government:

> *Annabelle received support from [Scottish Government programme] around her social, emotional, physical and mental wellbeing, including how to manage social boundaries and learning about the importance of self-care. (CP, Scottish Government, 2022a, p. 28)*

> *[Quoting Mandy]: Without these [Scottish Government] interventions this flat would just have been another fail and meant nothing to me. I now feel I have a home which is safe and secure and am enjoying putting my own stamp on it. I feel better in myself knowing my budgeting is improving and with the advice and assistance provided I feel more confident dealing with things. (CP, Scottish Government, 2022a, p. 70)*

In the stories above, poverty is an individual problem related to a lack of skills around self-care, budgeting, social interactions and confidence, with the role of government positioned as filling this gap in capacity. This narrative of personal failure is a long standing and powerful one in policy making settings (Crawford, 1977) and reflects a stubborn commitment to neoliberal governance which favours individual action over state driven solutions (Cairney & Kippen, 2024), strongly echoing the lifestyle drift phenomenon (Katikireddi et al., 2013) highlighted in the initial literature review for this study (Chapter 2). Perhaps even more problematically, the fact that both these examples come from mothers reflects 'feminised discourses' whereby self-blame and critique are reinforced and internalised (Peacock et al., 2014), whilst macro-political determinants (such as austerity programmes, Walsh & McCartney, 2024) which shape these families' lives remain unacknowledged. This calls into question

whether public participation in the context of these two policy areas really does present an opportunity to influence and 'transform' current decision-making or is instead a mechanism through which status quo ideology and governance arrangements will be facilitated, reinforced and legitimised. Indeed, in the policy documents analysed here we see confusing and contradictory roles for citizens, who are at once described as bringing a specific, and highly valued, lived knowledge type whilst also being cast as the subjects of individualised, educative policy proposals and the locus for change.

6.2.4 'What's the problem represented to be?': summary

The narratives presented across the Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero policy programmes appear to place public participation on a pedestal which promises citizens a great deal of influence on policy making. There is a clear, theoretical commitment to place people 'at the heart' of policy development but through investigation of the presuppositions and silences implicit in this representation of public participation, this commitment is undermined in a variety of ways. Whilst public participation is routinely conceptualised as filling both a knowledge and influence gap in current institutional decision-making spaces, there are different conceptualisations of the purpose of public participation and citizens' role within it. Simplistic narratives of how participation processes fit into policy decision-making, which is highly complex and fractured, ignore the multiple and varied influences and knowledge types which determine which policy proposals are actioned and implemented by Government. The roles presented to citizens are multiple and, at times, contradictory. Citizens are presented as problem-solvers, information sources, and as the subjects of change. Tokenistic, individualised and vague use of citizen contributions throughout the documents challenges the notion that citizens are permitted the role of *epistemic agents* (Pohlhaus, 2017) within policy making spaces and

instead reduces the function of participation to that of legitimation, evidence production or behaviour change. Indeed, the focus on participation as a mechanism to legitimise or generate evidence, solely on the symptoms and negative impacts of policy as they are experienced diverts attention from the structural factors which produce these effects (Kerr, 2023). This, in turn, produces multiple forms of epistemic injustice by placing disproportionate participatory expectations on people who are already experiencing the deleterious impact of inequality whilst ignoring how power, politics and advantage operate and influence policy making spaces.

6.3 Purpose of PDPs: citizen and professional stakeholder accounts

This section explores citizen and stakeholder accounts of the *purpose* of PDPs. Using interview, workshop and observational data from each case, I will detail the different conceptualisations of PDPs and their purpose in policy making settings and beyond (RQ2). The aim of this analysis is to explore both the shared parameters and key differences across understandings of PDPs and their function in policy spaces (as a reminder Chapter 5 includes an overview of each case profile). In exploring these varied conceptualisations and descriptions, a number of key themes were identified, revealing both fluid and disrupted narratives about what a PDP is and does. These themes connect to, expand and disrupt the findings of the WPR analysis above and will now be discussed in turn. The first theme relates to findings across both cases, whilst the second and third pull out specific findings related to Case 1 and 2 respectively:

- *High hopes vs pragmatism*
- *Citizens=evidence vs citizens=problem-solvers (Case 1)*
- *Holding institutions to account vs citizens taking action (Case 2)*

6.3.1 High hopes vs pragmatism

In every interview, research participants were asked to describe the PDP and what they hoped it would achieve, as well as motivations for getting involved. There was some consistency across the responses, particularly regarding aspirations for what the PDP might accomplish. Indeed, expectations and hopes were sometimes very high, reflecting some of the high expectations revealed in the preceding policy analysis. For the Experts by Experience Panel (Case 1), these expectations included a desire for the PDP to '*genuinely influence'* **Prof1_Commission_C1** or to '*ensure the voices of people are heard… in the corridors of Scottish Parliament'* **Prof5_Commission_C1**, whilst for citizens there were often personal motivations to '*make a difference'* **Citizen1_C1** in some way to their life or the life of their family and friends:

> *I was hoping that [it] would make change in the Scottish Government.* **Citizen7_C1**
>
> *I want things to change in the years to come, for things to be better for [my children] because I can see it getting harder and harder. You know I have lived the life that I have and I've had to watch every pound and it it's been difficult bringing [my children] up. I don't want [them] to go through what I've been through.* **Citizen5_C1**
>
> *You try and better it, so hopefully it's better in the kids' futures.* **Citizen8_C1**
>
> *[I hoped] we could really feed into government policymaking and that we would see some kind of responsive reaction to that in terms of starting to see what that change looks like.* **Citizen6_C1**

These high hopes were mirrored in the Townsley Peoples' Forum (Case 2), where aspirations focused less on government policy change and more on societal or community transformation. This included aims to fundamentally change existing democratic arrangements, tackle poverty and inequality or to *'[transform] peoples' lives'* **Prof12_Facilitator_C2** through the work of the PDP:

> *Just to make it a better, nicer place for families to grow up in.* **Citizen9_C2**

> *I was hoping that we would get a chance to co-create power with democratic processes, with people in that community and that we would have, we would be able to develop ideas and projects... that would you know, materially benefit people in that community.* **Prof8_Facilitator_C2**

> *… we've got opportunity here and need to take the opportunity to heal communities to and to get rid of inequality, to promote inclusion, to, to really boost people, you know, get people out of poverty, but in a really positive way.* **Prof10_LocalRep_C2**

> *[The inspiration for Townsley Peoples' Forum has], kind of, been able to take over and create this, like, new society, where they have this participatory decision-making, where the people are coming together. It's a, sort of, Peoples' Forum to make decisions about how things would operate in the community.* ***Citizen14_C2***

> *[The Townsley Peoples' Forum] could be the inspiration for a future society where all needs are met.* **Workshop_C2**

Often sitting at the heart of these aspirations was a desire for citizens to be '*heard*' or '*have a say*' in policy making spaces, which they were perceived as being routinely excluded from:

> *… it's… bringing people together and trying to give people… [a] voice because we, you know, local communities very rarely… feel they have a voice. And actually, very rarely do have a voice in… any meaningful way. And so, I think that there's huge power in these kinds of local community assemblies that Townsley is, I think, a pretty good example of.* **Prof13_InsitutionalRep_C2**

> *… you can join this expert panel like, 'Well, that's sounds interesting because I feel utterly invisible'. And you know, my voice isn't being heard so far. So, I thought I've got nothing to lose.* **Citizen1_C1**

> *… the Townsley Peoples' Forum wants more community engagement. That means they get a say in what happens, you know.* **Citizen14_C2**

> *I'm participating means I want to be heard.* **Citizen2_C1**

These descriptions strongly reflect the representation of public participation as filling an influence/ knowledge gap in institutional decision-making spaces. Indeed, across both cases *poor or unfair decision-making* by Government was often cited as the rational for why PDPs were necessary. In the Experts by Experience Panel, the idea that institutions did not possess the right *type* of knowledge to make effective

decisions was particularly present, with decision or policy makers regularly described as ignorant or naïve to the real-world impact of policy decisions:

> *They seem to be living in their own little bubble… these officials here. No, I don't think they have a clue about the real-world.* **Citizen1_C1**

> *The more that they hear, the more, hopefully, the policies will relate to what's real, really happening on the ground rather than what politicians imagine is happening, you know because there's always that gap between what you intend and what the actual reality is.* **Prof1_Commissioner_C1**

> *What would a millionaire billionaire Prime Minister know about the difficulties I have to pay my gas bill or the bill I just got today is going up by £15? £15 a quarter is a lot to me, added on to what I've already got and the struggles I already have.* **Citizen5_C1**

> *There's nothing worse that way, like getting told from somebody that's read a book that was published like how many years ago and they tell you something and you're like, no, no, that's not what I'm going through… it's rubbish* **Citizen8_C1**

> *[Scottish Government] are making decisions about things they don't understand* **Direct Observation1_C1**

In the Townsley Peoples' Forum, institutional decision-making was regularly characterised as inherently unfair. In this context, the PDP was viewed as a potential *replacement* for existing unjust decision-making processes (for example within local and national government) and democratic systems which were seen as not fit for purpose nor serving the interests of '*ordinary people'* **Citizen14_C2**:

> *We totally recognize the way of making decisions in our, in society, particularly Western society is basically finished… it is just not fit for purpose anymore… so in a way that's probably one of the ways best ways to describe it, is that that total acceptance that the way we do things generally… the way we do things from a local level to a government level, to even an international level is basically, yeah, we think it's had its time.* **Prof12_Facilitator_C2**

Indeed, the Townsley Peoples' Forum was often described a space for local people to '*stand up*' to or challenge the perceived injustices being experienced in the area:

> *This is a group that I feel it's trying to connect with the people and the groups in Townsley to have one voice, one loud voice that is going to stand up against what is being done in Townsley.* **Citizen9_C2**

> *I mean, it's scandalous the way things have gone, and the reason it's gone that way is because we didn't have People's Assemblies. We've allowed the politicians to just get off with too much.* **Citizen10_C2**

Despite the focus on significant policy and societal change for what the PDPs might achieve, these hopes were often, although not always, qualified with more pragmatic descriptions about what the PDP was doing in practice. The participating citizens in particular, often shared more conservative views on what the PDP was able to do, which drifted somewhat from their initial ambitions of what they hoped it would achieve.

In the case of the Experts by Experience Panel, citizens regularly described the PDP as primarily *educational*. This was often conceptualised as reciprocal 'learning relationships' between the participating citizens within the process and between citizens and the Commission. Citizens in this case often recounted learning from other members of the PDP about experiences which were different from their own and, importantly, which challenged pre-conceived ideas about poverty:

> *It's done a lot of myth-busting for me, and especially you know, because there being a lot about poverty in the media and I've been able to put faces to those situations… I think I'm able to empathise a lot better as to what the challenges are.* **Citizen6_C1**

> *There's all these little things, you know, that I didn't quite understand that kind of made me realise a lot more about poverty and why people end up in poverty and can't get out of poverty. So, it's been really educational from that point of view.* **Citizen1_C1**

Citizens also described the PDP as performing a reciprocal educative function between the participating citizens and the Commission, where they were able to learn about different policy areas, notably in relation to Child Poverty, as well as having the opportunity to detail and 'educate' the Commission on issues they were experiencing:

> *[The PDP's purpose is] to tell the Commission about issues relating to poverty and inequality that they feel are important; the Commission can also bring important issues to the Panel* **Terms of Reference** (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021e)

> *I think some things came as a shock to [the Commission] about certain things. Like things came to us panel members as a shock when they showed us figures for poverty – we didn't know the things they gave… to us, that we weren't aware of.* **Citizen7_C1**

Whilst these 'learning relationships' were highly valued by both the participating citizens and members of the Commission; they perhaps represent a significant dilution of the initial aims to influence or directly inform policy decision-making.

In the case of the Townsley Peoples' Forum, some citizens expressed scepticism about the high expectations associated with the PDP, stating that building *collaboration* and *awareness of local issues* were more achievable/ likely outcomes:

> *… collaboration, people that work together. And I think, you know, that is happening now. So, the Forum is not going to deliver any democratic change, and it's certainly not going to stop the RET, but the people that have joined, have taken part, they've discussed what Townsley wants, in their vision, and they've taken something from that and they're moving that forward. And people can see that.* **Citizen12_C2**

> *In theory it makes people more aware, but whether we've had any impact on the powers that be or the ways that decisions are made, I would question.* **Citizen13_C2**

Indeed, it was common for citizens to describe the Townsley Peoples' Forum as a *problem-solving space*, for local people to come together to talk about and discuss local issues:

> *It just has different labels but just people getting together to chat and work out a problem it's an Assembly* **Citizen10_C2**

> *… to get people together and have a discussion about where to go next as a community.* **Citizen12_C2**

> *A coming together of people from Townsley and elsewhere to explore issues of concern and to work out what to do about them* **Citizen11_C2**

In these narratives, the purpose of the PDP becomes less about large scale societal or community transformation and more about collective thinking and discussion between local people. What we see in these accounts is a tendency to hold very high hopes for what PDPs can achieve and the purpose they serve within policy making settings and beyond. These high hopes are, however, tempered by the participating citizens who appear to hold more pragmatic opinions about what PDPs are actually doing in practice.

6.3.2 Citizens = evidence vs citizens = problem solvers (Case 1)

We saw in the policy analysis above that citizens can be assigned different roles within participation processes, and this often relates to the function the PDP is serving. In the case of the Experts by Experience Panel, citizen and stakeholder accounts revealed different, at times opposing, narratives related to whether the PDP functioned as a *collective decision-making* space or as an *evidence-producing* one. The overarching principle which runs through the Commission's work implies the former:

> *Amplify the voices of experts by experience to make sure they are part of **identifying issues**, **developing and designing solutions**, and **scrutinising progress**. (emphasis added, Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2020, p. 6)*

This is reinforced across the literature produced by the Commission (as well as in interview data), which clearly characterises the Experts by Experience Panel as a *decision-making* space, and one in which citizens are cast as *problem solvers*:

> *Parents, and particularly those facing additional barriers, need to be involved in designing solutions around work and earnings. Otherwise those actions may fail to meet their needs. (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022a, p. 56)*

> *I see the role with the experts by experience panel and I think it keeps the Commission real and in that sense and because too often things are done to people living in poverty rather than with them and I hope you know that the Experts by Experience Panel members and the Panel as a whole feels that they're working with the Commission rather than you know just being consulted by the*

Commission because there is a difference.
Prof1_Commissioner_C1

Citizens are most clearly performing a problem-solving function in the outputs which come directly from the Experts by Experience Panel itself, notably in responses to wider consultations or calls for evidence:

- Submission to the Adult Disability Payment: Mobility Component Consultation
- Submission to Social Security Scotland's draft regulations on the new Carer Support Payment
- Submission to the Scottish Affairs Committee's call for evidence on the cost-of-living crisis in rural communities (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2024)

In these responses, the discussions of PDP members and their resulting conclusions are clearly detailed, although they do appear to still primarily form an evidence-producing function given they are formal responses to consultations. Indeed, conceptualisations of what the Experts by Experience Panel *was doing* often veered towards descriptions of evidence provision rather than collective decision-making, with citizens largely cast as *information providers*:

> *… we then hand that information over to [the Secretariat] and they take it back, from us and say well, look, this is the information because we're coming from different angles and different experiences* **Citizen3_C1**

> *It would be a combination of our experiences versus do we think what's being proposed is OK and if something isn't being proposed, what would we suggest as being our options and they would then be collated at the end of the discussions and that would then be fed back through to Commissioners and the Scottish Government.* **Citizen6_C1**

> *… we obviously sit down and talk amongst each other and come up with ideas and feed our experience into something that then is put down on paper… And that information is fed to the Commission as before it goes to the government... So, to me personally, I find it difficult to see that there is a working relationship between the [Commission and the Experts by Experience Panel] because I can't see it... It's just a piece of paper given by [the Secretariat] to the Commissioners.* **Citizen1_C1**

In addition, observational data suggests that PDP member contributions in meetings tended to be hyper-individual rather than collectively agreed.

For example, during the meeting observed, the feedback from Scottish Government seemed to be in response to individual questions and reflections rather than fully deliberated recommendations or contributions from the Experts by Experience Panel as a whole. This was reinforced by stakeholder accounts which clearly viewed the PDP as primarily providing 'lived experience' evidence, where individual experiences were *'being recorded… being documented'* **Prof5_Commission_C1** and engagement with the Experts by Experience Panel formed part of a broader *'evidence base'* **Prof3_InstitutionalRep_C1**. Indeed, it was common for professional stakeholders to place engagement with the Experts by Experience Panel within a wider matrix of other sources of evidence including broader research, wider stakeholder engagement and impact assessments. It is important to note that this experiential knowledge was highly valued by all interviewees. Indeed, engagement with the Experts by Experience Panel was perceived as bringing *legitimacy* and *validity* to the outputs of the Commission or other empowered spaces. A number of reasons were provided for this, including that the Experts by Experience Panel provided a real-world '*sense check'* **Prof1_Commission_C1** of existing recommendations and that this '*different layer of information*' **Prof6_InstitutionalRep_C1** increased the '*strength*' **Prof5_Commission_C1**, relevancy or reliability of any policy proposals:

> *The fact [the policy recommendations] had been through that process [engaging with the Panel] probably strengthens those recommendations in the eyes of the government and officials I suspect* **Prof6_InstitutionalRep_C1**

This was echoed by participating citizens, who, at times, described the PDP's function as primarily one which supported and legitimised the decision-making of the Commission, specifically through sharing their individual lived expertise:

> *Better when you have people with lived experience coming out to talk. It also helps [the Commission], you know.* **Citizen2_C1**

> *I also think it was beneficial for them just to sense check their thinking and to make sure that they are actually representing the views of people in the community.* **Citizen6_C1**

> *… it's to give the Commission a, kind of legitimacy and that it is actually doing something that's genuine and authentic.*
> **Citizen4_C1**

However, the narrative of the Experts by Experience Panel as primarily providers of 'lived experience' evidence was not shared by every interviewee. Some people expressed concerns that the Experts by Experience Panel was not big or diverse enough to provide information on the scale necessary to be considered 'evidence':

> *I mean, look, anecdote is a very charged term, and I use that deliberately because it's what's used to write this type of evidence off. And I kind of don't mean to do that, but at the same time a bit I do just in the sense that you know, we should. If… it's really about the actual history of each individual's lived experience, then you know we're silly if we think that in the selecting a group of ten or twenty people can make that much difference and we should be asking one million people, right?*
> **Prof4_Commissioner_C1**

Similarly, for others it was more about the different perspectives which PDP members brought to the specific policy problems being discussed rather than the sharing of individual testimony:

> *There's a danger in these kinds of things that it turns into the equivalent of a poverty AA meeting of everybody getting up and sharing personal experiences, actually we have that commonality of experience. We don't really need to rehearse all that again.*
> **Citizen4_C1**

There appear to be a variety of conceptualisations of the roles of citizens within this participation process. Whilst there are clear ambitions for the Experts by Experience Panel to function as a collective decision-making space, and one in which citizens are problem solvers, it appears this is not always the case. At times, the citizen and stakeholder accounts align with the policy analysis and suggest that citizens are cast as information sources, providing individual testimony for the synthesis and interpretation of either the Commission or Scottish Government. This reveals a tension between the intended purpose of the PDP, i.e., to

involve people directly in policy decision making, and the reality of what the PDP is sometimes doing in practice, i.e., collating individual / lived experience evidence to legitimise or inform the decision-making of others.

6.3.3 Holding institutions to account vs citizens taking action (Case 2)

The differing narratives about what a PDP is and does continue in the case of the Townsley Peoples' Forum. In this context, citizens and stakeholders appear to share similar ambitions for what the Forum is aiming to do but, at times, hold different ideas about the ways in which it will achieve these objectives. Alongside some of the high expectations explored at the start of this section, there were some common threads throughout the data about what citizens and stakeholders hoped the PDP would do. This included ensuring people could have a voice in decision-making which affected their lives; bringing or gathering people together in order to think collectively about the issues they faced; and building confidence and coordination amongst the community in order to do this.

> *We're angry here. So, the change is, the change is being driven by local people. And I suppose local control of decision making and what we want to see.* **Citizen12_C2**

> *We need to discuss, we need to communicate, we need to give people self-confidence.* **Citizen15_C2**

Underpinning all of these aims was the idea that the Townsley Peoples' Forum was focused on '*trying to enable a sense of power within people'* **Prof12_Facilitator_C2**. This is perhaps best reflected in the question posed during the two-day Assembly, but is also reinforced by interviewee reflections:

> *How can Townsley reclaim the power and resources to make the community a healthy place to grow up in? (assembly question, [Organising Group], 2023)*

> *So, it's been set up to I think primarily bring people together, bring people together, and in doing that, you know, give people a greater awareness of citizen power... I think the Townsley Peoples'*

> *Forum had an ambition to be that sort of vehicle of re-empowering people.* **Prof13_InstitutionalRep_C2**
>
> *I guess what we're interested in is, is how to do, I don't think I would have described it like that at that point, but I'm now describing it as power with democracy and I don't think we have very many examples of that in our kind of normal experience of democracy.* **Prof8_Facilitator_C2**
>
> *… we're just keen to explore different ways in which people can actually… be represented and exert power and influence.* **Prof11_LocalRep_C2**

It is in descriptions of *how* this community or citizen 'power' will be reclaimed or realised that perspectives begin to diverge from one another and appear to split according to the type of respondent, either citizen or professional.

For citizens, *holding institutions to account* was central to conceptualisations of how the PDP would achieve its aims. For some, this was about recognition from local and national government of the specific injustices faced by residents in Townsley. For others, it was primarily about preventing the redevelopment of the local park and influencing institutions to make different decisions. Whilst others wanted to work alongside local and national government and saw the Townsley Peoples' Forum as a potential mechanism through which dialogue between the local community and institutions might be facilitated:

> *… all these things connect up to create change, to improve things for us locally. So, they are, all of them structured at local government. A lot of it will be done at Scottish and Westminster government. But if we don't have the discussions, we can't create that change.* **Citizen15_C2**
>
> *… what we're looking for is a standing Peoples' Forum. It's not something that just disappears after a meeting. So, we continue to be there, available for folks whenever an issue arises; then we can get down and discuss it and then put that output into the community council.* **Citizen10_C2**
>
> *We need the Council… to actually admit that Townsley shouldn't be really getting [the planned redevelopment of the local park]... There's plenty of land, brown land up at [other localities] that they could easily build on, they take their warehouses and that up there.* **Citizen9_C2**

> *… to get the wider community motivated to bring to the attention of the authorities that the people in Townsley were fed up... and... the injustices of what's happening to Townsley.*
> **Citizen13_C2**

These reflections were reinforced in observational data, where it was common for participating citizens to bring up and discuss the different pathways through which the Townsley Peoples' Forum might connect into institutional decision-making. This included through trying to establish formal links between the Forum and the Community Council as well as through working with Local Authority representatives to have the Townsley Peoples' Forum cited in the Locality Plan (Community Planning [Anon], 2024). In addition, at the Community Council meeting observed during fieldwork, it was clear that members of the Townsley Peoples' Forum were keen to ensure that there was recognition of work of the Forum within that space and vice versa. Indeed, ensuring institutional accountability and recognition appeared to be important for the participating citizens, particularly at a local government level.

Professional stakeholders had a rather different take on the relationship between the Townsley Peoples' Forum and institutions. In these accounts, the PDP achieved its aims via *citizens taking action* for themselves. Indeed, despite the fact that the PDP was funded by Scottish Government, some conceptualisations explicitly stated that the Townsley Peoples' Forum was specifically positioned as separate, or distanced, from institutional decision making. Here, the purpose of the PDP was to demonstrate to local people that '*we can take responsibility for what happens to us'* **Prof12_Facilitator_C2**, rather than looking for change or action at a local or national government level:

> *… to enable [the Townsley Peoples' Forum] to be a strong group of people in Townsley that were able to take, take the steps to fulfil a plan that they were going to create.* **Prof10_LocalRep_C2**

> *We haven't gone hard after [institutional] representatives because we're really wanting to start from the community.*
> **Prof8_Facilitator_C2**

> *[The Townsley Peoples' Forum is] just basically another way to meet people where you live... to then come together to make*

> *decisions about something which matters to where you live and to work out how we are going to actually do it rather than it come up with a set of demands to then ask somebody else politely how to bring about so that that, that's probably what I would say in a very simple form of what it actually is.* **Prof12_Facilitator_C2**

> *There wasn't a huge wish for the involvement of politicians and I think that's a positive thing, I think a community which wants to look after its own and wants to bring more community ideas without always relying on the state or local government is good because we've got limited resources and often you know… the community can do things better and cheaper than we can do.* **Prof9_InstitutionalRep_C2**

In these narratives, citizens taking action or 'responsibility' was regarded as a positive, and a key way in which citizen or community 'power' might be reclaimed and the aims of the PDP realised:

> *One of the main things that came out of the Forum is that three women got empowered, it just happened… they just have become this force of nature, and they do quite a lot together… They meet up every week. They kind of like just got into going to meetings and they're, these are the ones that've been going to the Council. And so, a lot of what we've been doing in the meetings is hearing back from them about what they've been up to.* **Prof8_Facilitator_C2**

This focus on citizen action is also reflected in the types of activity undertaken by the PDP, which are all driven by the work of the assembly members, and often the three women referenced above, rather than on input and collaboration with local and national decision-making bodies, as detailed in the Figure 11 below:

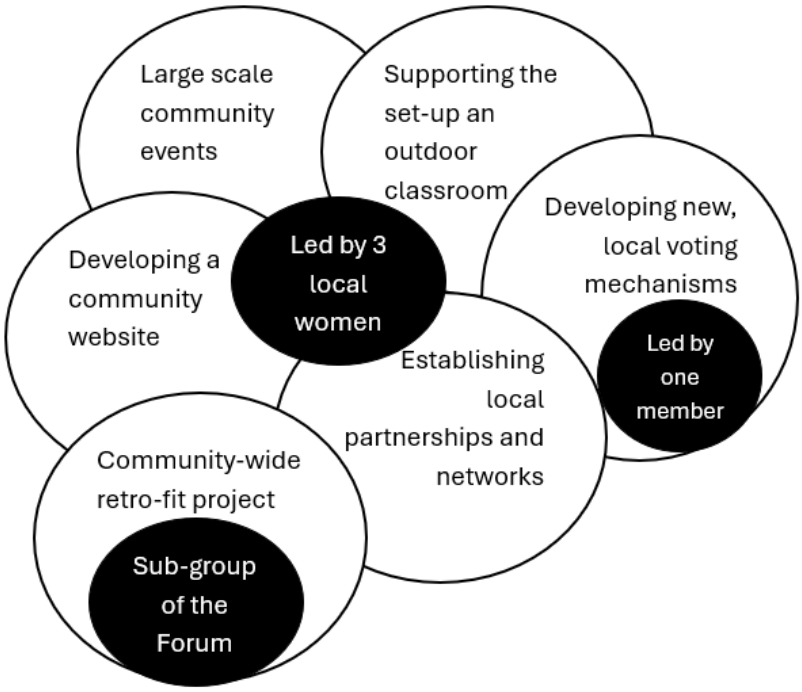


Figure 11: Activities of the Townsley Peoples' Forum and who is responsible

Despite professional views that citizens taking action was empowering for those involved, and ultimately a good thing, there were some concerns raised about the impact this has on the participating citizens. Indeed, some viewed the increasing burden of responsibility placed on citizen shoulders as unworkable or playing into a '*neoliberal*' ideology, which favours individual action rather than government intervention:

> *So, it's going to need an awful lot of effort and we're just a small group of overworked people so we're reaching out to other members of the community, other groups. But we haven't had much joy reaching out. So, if we don't get a lot of people to help us… it's going to be very difficult.* **Citizen13_C2**

> *… it does feel like sabotage when you can't pay labour, because that's probably one of the most important things for your movement, and it does seem like a push towards making everything run by volunteers. I think it's a very big part of this, like, sort of, neoliberal society.* **Citizen14_C2**

Similarly, one participating citizen expressed concerns that community level action by citizens had the potential to be co-opted or used as a proxy replacement for change within local or national government, and ultimately obscured any necessary upstream action to resolve local issues:

> *Just doing litter-picks and growing our own veg is not resolving the problem of poverty in Townsley, for example. And yet, they will be used as examples by the local council. For example, to say, oh, look, they are growing their own veg, they are doing what they can to help food poverty… you don't address what the causes are. You don't identify or acknowledge what the causes are... Or indeed, you, yourself, because of the structure, are obstructing that change and, as such, we are having tokenism as opposed to long-lasting solutions that are improving lives.* ***Citizen15_C2***

In addition, observational data suggests that this focus on citizen responsibility and action means that some members of the PDP are at risk of being overwhelmed, or becoming '*tired, scunnered*' **Workshop_C2** by the sheer volume of activity they are undertaking:

> *I'm at overload.* **DirectObservation4_C2**
>
> *I'm frazzled.* **DirectObservation1_C2**

There appears to be a tension between citizen and stakeholder conceptualisations of how the PDP will achieve its aims. Whilst aims to bring people together, support people to '*have a say*' in decisions which affect them and '*reclaim power*' are relatively consistent in descriptions of what the PDP is aiming to do, the ways and means of doing this are described in different ways. Where citizens expressed desires to *hold institutions to account*, professional perspectives appeared to favour *citizens taking action* for themselves. Critiques emerged around the focus on citizen responsibility which appears to place a high burden on the shoulders of some members, whilst potentially obscuring or reducing the role of local and national government in favour of individual / community level action.

6.3.4 Citizen and professional stakeholder conceptualisations: summary

This section has explored the multiple and varied conceptualisations of the purpose and aims of PDPs across citizen and stakeholder accounts. In alignment with the policy analysis, it appears there are consistently high expectations and ambitions associated with the use of PDPs. However,

disrupted narratives emerge in characterisations of what the PDP is doing, or able to do in practice. These narratives suggest that PDPs can sometimes drift far from their initial ambitions to influence policy or '*transform*' society, with citizens particularly expressing more conservative opinions about the potential outcomes of their participation. A series of tensions were identified in the conceptualisations of the role and purpose of the PDPs. This included whether citizens were cast in the role of problem solvers or sources of evidence, with some disagreement across interviewees as to whether small scale participation processes can form an evidence-producing function. In addition, there appear to be tensions between citizen and stakeholder accounts about whether PDPs are focused on holding institutions to account or motivating and supporting citizens to take action for themselves. Whilst professionals appear to view citizen action as a net positive, citizens expressed concerns about the increased responsibility and workload as well as the ways in which this individual or community focus diverts attention from responsibility and action at a local and national government level. Perhaps not surprisingly, this was particularly pronounced in Case 2, which details a place-based form of public participation, which, critics have argued intrinsically draws the 'gaze inwards' to focus on the behaviour and actions of groups of citizens rather than that of government (McCartney & Popay, 2025; Popay et al., 2020). Overall, however, the role and purpose of PDPs in policymaking and beyond is conceptualised as multi-faceted, with citizen and stakeholder narratives which are at once disrupted and contradictory, suggesting that, regardless of policy level, PDPs occupy fluid positions for both participating citizens and professional stakeholders.

Chapter 7: A focus on process - analysing PDPs through the lens of democratic goods

7.1 Overview of chapter

This chapter details the second set of findings from the multiple case study. These findings relate to the *design* of each PDP (participatory-deliberative process), and in particular consider how the *democratic goods* of *inclusiveness*, *considered judgement*, *popular control* and *transparency* are conceptualised across each example (RQ3). The purpose of this analysis is to build a picture from policy stakeholder accounts and documentary evidence of how the PDPs unfolded and operated, with a focus on *process* and the consequences which arise from certain design choices and decisions (as a reminder Chapter 5 includes an overview of each case profile). The themes identified under each 'good' reveal a number of complexities, and at times contradictions, in how the PDPs were designed, experienced and understood. The findings are organised thematically and, where appropriate, in correspondence to the relevant democratic good (please see Chapter 3 for more detail on the broader conceptual framework of the thesis).

7.2 Inclusiveness

The first step in understanding how inclusiveness, or inclusion, was conceptualised across both cases is understanding *who* was participating in each PDP. Whilst this may sound relatively simple, understanding and gathering data on the citizens involved in both the Experts by Experience Panel and the Townsley Peoples' Forum proved challenging, albeit for different reasons in each case. Neither PDP had publicly available data on the demographic composition of the attending citizens. In the case of the Experts by Experience Panel, data were indeed collected on a wide variety of socio-economic characteristics of the participating citizens, but

due to concerns around confidentiality and consent, convenors decided they were unable to share this in full and instead provided only limited detail (as shown in Table 17 below). In the case of the Townsley Peoples' Forum, no formal data are or were collected about either the members of the Steering Meeting or attendees of the two-day event in May 2023. This means that much of the information about the participating citizens is anecdotal and drawn from either interview or observational data. This shared lack of transparency, while challenging as a researcher interested in inclusion, does not necessarily translate to a wholesale lack of attention or significance dedicated to inclusiveness as a democratic good in each case. Indeed, achieving 'inclusive' processes was of deep concern across the research participants and featured strongly in interview and observational data as well as in the workshops convened with participating citizens in each case. This means that even without robust data on the demographic make-up of PDPs, there is still an interesting story to be told in how inclusiveness was conceptualised across the PDPs, and one which is often characterised by complexity and contradictions.

7.2.1 Inclusion = diversity, accessibility, ambiguity

Every interviewee was asked how they understood or defined inclusion in the context of public participation. Conceptualisations varied on a theme, with most interviewees defining inclusion as involving everyone, involving everyone who is directly affected by the problems being discussed or involving people who are considered to be particularly marginalised from decision-making spaces. Indeed, inclusion across both cases appeared to be commonly defined by notions of *diversity*, i.e., ensuring there are as many *different* people, voices and experiences represented as possible within the PDP:

> *[G]et some input and some experience from different parts of Scotland and from different… sorts of communities, as well as*

> *from different sorts of households and families.* **Prof1_Commissioner_C1**
>
> *Inclusion to me, number one would be diversity. People of different ethnicities or different orientations… getting involved…ordinary folk involved in democracy.* **Citizen13_C2**

Alongside this, inclusion was also defined in terms of *accessibility*, and for many interviewees this meant that everyone who wanted to be involved was able to participate:

> *100% inclusion. Everybody is included in whatever that needs to be done.* **Citizen2_C1**

This was particularly strong in the responses from members of the Townsley Peoples' Forum, who commonly described inclusion as ensuring the PDP was '*open to all*':

> *[No] matter what background… what you are… you feel that this thing is for you.* **Prof12_Facilitator_C2**
>
> *[Include] everybody that wants to be included and make it accessible for them* **Citizen10_C2**

Whilst available data on the socio-economic demographics of the participating citizens in each PDP was limited, it was possible to build a qualitative picture of who was participating, through the analysis of interview and observational data as well as gathering information on the recruitment method for each PDP. This data (captured in Table 17 below), demonstrates that both PDPs took a very different approach to realising *diversity* and *accessibility* in terms of inclusion.

Table 16: Recruitment methods and participants, Dual Case Study

Case 1: Experts by Experience Panel	
Recruitment method	Who participated?
Enclave/ targeted. The Commission purposefully sought to recruit people with 'lived experience' of poverty. Within this, representation of the 'priority families' identified by Scottish Government as more likely to live in poverty, was also sought (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022e).	19 people were originally part of the panel. This reduced to 16 during its lifetime. The Commission state that the panel were: • from across Scotland, based in cities, towns and rural areas

'Priority families' are defined as larger families (3+ children), young mothers (<25), families with a child under 1y, families from minority ethnic backgrounds, families who live with a disability, lone parents (Scottish Government, 2018a) Targeted recruitment and advertisement took place via organisations and networks who were known to support and work with people who live in poverty. Potential panel members were asked to complete an application form, followed by a telephone interview. 40 applications were received, with 19 people invited to become members of the panel. Each panel member was provided with renumeration for participating as well as bespoke support around any barriers to participation prior to and during the process. This included the provision of digital devices, adaptation of information provided and venues as well as ongoing 1:1 support from members of the Secretariat to help navigate any personal difficulties experienced throughout the process.	• diverse in terms of their identity and experiences of poverty • from groups most likely to experience poverty (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2024) Available data on the characteristics of panel members is limited to: • **Age** *16-35*: 5 *36-45*: 3 *46*-55: 6 *56+:* 2 • **Gender** *Male*: 5 *Female*: 11 • **Ethnicity** *White*: 12 *Non-white*: 4 • **Disability (personal)** *Yes*: 12 *No*: 4 It is not clear to what extent the 'priority families' were represented in the final composition of the Panel or how 'groups most likely to experience poverty' were defined/ represented.
Case 2: Townsley Peoples' Forum	
Recruitment method	Who participated?
Open. The two-day event and the ongoing Steering Meeting were/ are open to anyone, including people who do not live in Townsley and people attending as representatives of organisations rather than residents. During the data generation period of the study, this meant that both the two-day event and the Steering Meeting were drop in, with no requirement to confirm attendance in advance, even if attending for the first time. This appears to have changed since the data generation ended with the website now	It is estimated that around 10-15 people are current members of the Steering Meeting and around 150 people attended the two-day event. It is also estimated that around half the attendees at the Steering Meeting and at one point in the two-day event are /were Townsley residents ([Organising Group], 2023). In addition, Steering Meeting members also include people who live in other parts of the Local Authority, Scotland and Europe, as well as professionals who work in Townsley.

requesting that a 'Get in touch' form be completed in advance, providing basic contact details. The reason for this change is unclear. Advertisements and leaflets across the local area and networks formed the basis of initial recruitment. The Organising Group also conducted an 'engaged listening' exercise prior to the convening of any meetings. This consisted of around 60 informal conversations with people in Townsley as well as outreach to local organisations. In addition to this, community events, such as a community meal or fun day, are held around twice a year by the Steering Meeting to engage with local people and partners. There are 2-3 members who are Townsley residents who lead this work and actively engage with other organisations and groups in the area, including via attendance at the Townsley Community Council. There is no remuneration provided for participating in the two-day event or the regular Steering Meeting. There does not appear to be any dedicated support for new or existing members, although it is important to note that I was unable to secure an interview with the Community Development Worker who supports the group, who may (or may not) provide some support to existing members.	There is / was no formal demographic data collected for either the Steering Meeting or the two-day Assembly. The narrative report from the two-day event states that the majority of people in attendance were 'working class' ([Organising Group], 2023), however when asked how the convenors knew this, they said it was based on a 'feeling' rather than any data collected. Interview and observational data suggest that the Steering Meeting is largely, if not entirely, populated by people who are white, retired/ older and well-educated.

Despite the markedly different recruitment methods adopted by each PDP, there is a shared ambiguity across both cases about the demographic composition of the participating citizens, albeit to varying degrees. This demonstrates the general lack of transparency about inclusiveness cited above and appears to create specific effects for both the participating citizens and the potential outputs of each PDP, discussed in detail as we explore the democratic goods in more depth.

7.2.2 Lived, local, marginalised: involving the affected public?

Although *diversity* and *accessibility* were central to discursive accounts of inclusiveness, both PDPs did in fact seek (however unsuccessfully) particular population groups. In the case of the Experts by Experience Panel the space was specifically designed for people with 'lived experience' of poverty, and in the case of the Townsley Peoples' Forum, the space was specifically convened for 'local people', i.e., people who live in Townsley. Here, we meet a familiar conceptualisation of public participation, one which also emerged in the WPR analysis of policy accounts: involving the 'affected public' (Degeling et al., 2015) is one of public participation's common aims. In participant accounts, involving people who were going to be, or are currently, affected by the policy problems being discussed was a strong theme:

> *I don't think… we will always get inclusion right, because it is so diverse, but… we should try to reach out to the people who are experiencing… who are at the further end of whatever it is that we're addressing.* **Prof5_Commissioner_C1**

This was thought to bring both '*legitimacy*' and '*authority*' to the discussions and decision-making within both PDPs. Underpinning this, was also the idea that the citizens involved represented those who were typically marginalised from decision-making spaces through their experience of socio-economic *disadvantage*. In the Experts by Experience Panel this was characterised by groups of people, who thanks to their personal circumstances and experience of poverty, were 'often not heard' (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021a, p. 6). In the Townsley Peoples' Forum, this marginalisation was characterised by the fact that Townsley was often described as an area which experiences high levels of deprivation, stark health inequalities in comparison to the rest of the Local Authority, and a place where people 'felt defeated and their voices were never listened to' ([Organising Group], 2023, p. 1).

The typical social patterning of political participation tells us that people who experience socio-economic *advantage*, i.e., are time rich, with

ample resources and minimal barriers to getting involved (Hastings & Matthews, 2011), are more likely to participate in democratic innovations or wider participation processes (Dalton, 2017; Lightbody & Escobar, 2021). Both the cases repeatedly state the intention to invert this participatory trend through purposefully designing processes with a 'local' or 'lived' focus, which provides a space for people directly affected by particular issues to contribute and be heard:

> *[W]e aimed to give **local people** the experience of being genuinely listened to, and a sense that their experience and their voice matters* (emphasis added, [Organising Group], 2023, p. 2)

> *The Poverty and Inequality Commission believes that **people with experience of poverty** – **experts by experience** – should be at the centre of decision-making about poverty and inequality (emphasis added, Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021b, p. 1)*

Despite these intentions, conceptualisations of inclusiveness across the data appear to suggest that claims of involving the 'affected public' in each case were, at times, wholly undermined or called directly into question, as detailed in the boxes below.

Box 1: The affected public, Case 1

Affected public = lived experience

In the case of the Experts by Experience Panel, Panel members were often defined as the *recipients* of policies, or as people who were able to detail the '*human and… social impacts*' **Prof4_Commission_C1** of policy implementation, which otherwise would not be known. Whilst the Panel was convened to feed into the Commission on issues related to poverty and inequality in a general sense, both spaces had a strong focus on Child Poverty as the main policy area, a point specifically highlighted in the Panel's Terms of Reference:

> *It is the aim of the Commission to work together with the Panel to provide the best advice on actions to reduce poverty and inequality in Scotland. However, **the Commission has specific duties under the Child Poverty Act, meaning it has the legal responsibility of providing advice and scrutiny to Scottish Ministers*** (emphasis in original, Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021b, p. 3)

As detailed in Table 17 above, because of this focus, recruitment for the Panel was also weighted towards the 'priority families' (Scottish Government, 2018a) and it appears that a significant proportion of the

Panel's time was dedicated to discussing Child Poverty and scrutinising policy action of Scottish Government in this area. Indeed, throughout the publications of the Commission, it is strongly implied that the Panel represented the 'affected public' in the context of Child Poverty:

> *Our Panel, and other parents who we have spoken to, have identified how important childcare is to enable them to work* (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022a, p. 54)

> *Both our panel and the young people who took part in our workshops highlighted the impact of increased cost of living on children, young people and families living in poverty* (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022d, p. 23)

However, it appears that not all of the Panel members were current, primary caregivers for children and therefore impacted by or experiencing issues related to Child Poverty. This was highlighted as problematic by several interviewees, and in the Commission's own evaluation of the Panel, which questioned the appropriateness of Child Poverty as a policy area for the Panel as a whole:

> *Some points to improve upon appear to relate to the actual or perceived relevancy of the Commission's statutory focus on child poverty for all Panel members, some of whom do not have children* (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022e, p. 3)

> *You know one of the big problems we had at the beginning is that we spent way too much time on talking about children and the child poverty issues. Many of us don't have children and aren't that interested.* **Citizen1_C1**

Whilst it is not possible to know the percentage of Panel members who had children vs the percentage who did not (due to lack of available data), it certainly undermines the perceived '*legitimacy*' **Citizen4_C1** of the Panel, given that at least some did not represent the intended 'affected public', nor 'experts by experience' in relation to Child Poverty.

Box 2: The affected public, Case 2

Affected public = local people

In the case of the Townsley Peoples' Forum, the participating citizens were routinely characterised as representing the local community, i.e., people who live in Townsley. This is implicit in the name of the PDP, in descriptions of the

broader participatory project it is part of, as well as in the Declaration of Townsley, the key output produced at the end of the two-day Assembly:

> *Communities should be at the heart of telling our own stories* (Just Transition Communities Project, 2024)
>
> *WE'VE BEEN SUFFERING THE DESTRUCTION OF OUR COMMUNITY* (in original form, [Townsley Peoples' Forum], 2023)

Indeed, involving *local people* in *local decisions* was a common thread in how people spoke about the Townsley Peoples' Forum:

> *I would say it's local people who probably have had enough of local issues, situations, bad situations and they want change, and they see it as an opportunity to make changes by coming together to discuss it* **Citizen13_C2**

Despite this, perceived lack of local representation was a strong running theme for interviewees, many of whom expressed disappointment that both the two-day event and the ongoing Steering Meeting were not well-attended by Townsley residents:

> *I would often observe a meeting and there was four people had come up from Edinburgh and there's basically four people on the Steering [Meeting] from… well one of them was me and I'm not really from Townsley. So, the balance there isn't good enough yet. There needs to be more outreach work.* **Citizen10_C2**
>
> *We were hoping to involve more of the local people, because it was actually in the park. And we just waited to see what happened. But it wasn't hugely well-attended… by locals.* **Citizen12_C2**

For some, this lack of local attendees was hindered by the perceived influence of *outsiders*. Having people come from outside, who have no experience of *living* in the area was regarded by some as a barrier to involvement for local people:

> *I only went along to one meeting of the [forum]… Most of the people there were not from Townsley, so I didn't actually feel that it was representative… I don't know how I felt about that. I felt that it might be another top-down thing, where you had people coming from outside, and certainly that's been said to me.* **Prof7_LocalRep_C2**

Certainly, observational data suggests that it is common for Steering Meetings to be attended by people who live outwith Townsley, including other parts of the Local Authority, Scotland and even Europe.

For a few interviewees, having supportive outsiders was viewed as a positive, and one which helped '*fatigued*' **Prof8_facilitator_C2** activists who were weary from battling against the continued industrialisation of the area:

> *It used to be like more [people from the Organising Group] than the people from Townsley… They're English or something, you know, or from other bits of Scotland… Most of them…they're speaking fonder of Townsley than what a lot of people in Townsley actually do, you know. And then I thought, it's really nice that they… think that they can save Townsley.* **Citizen9_C2**

However, for most, the under-representation of people who currently live in Townsley was of deep concern. Getting more local people involved formed the basis of the workshop for this study and it was recognised that not having adequate local representation ran the risk of undermining the '*authority*' **Citizen12_C2** of the Assembly as a whole:

> *I mean I don't live in Townsley… but speaking about the Declaration of Townsley, I'm a bit sceptical of calling it that when it's like not even written by that many people in Townsley, to say this is the Declaration of Townsley, when only like ten Townsley people actually had a hand in writing it. It seems a bit weird to me.* **Citizen14_C2**

Overall, it appears that there are contradictory narratives of inclusiveness in each PDP. Across both cases there are repeated intentions to involve people who are both typically marginalised from decision-making spaces and directly affected by the policy issues being discussed in the participatory process. Indeed, involving the 'affected public' is considered to bring *legitimacy* and *authority* to the overall process and its outputs. However, it appears that in both cases this is implied rather than realised. Despite both implicit and explicit assertions that both spaces represent particular, disadvantaged, publics, there is a distinct lack of transparency around *how* either process ensures, or understands, this representation.

For example, in the case of the Experts by Experience Panel, it is not clear how Panel members were selected from the initial cohort who applied, or how, if the recruitment was weighted towards the 'priority families', that the eventual Panel was not fully representative of people with children or caring responsibilities. Indeed, the fact that a cohort of

Panel members did not represent the 'affected public' in the context of Child Poverty appears to be obscured in the outputs of the Commission, rather than made explicit. Similarly in the context of the Townsley Peoples' Forum, whilst being representative of the 'local' community is central to descriptions of the PDP, the decision to have the process open to anyone who would like to attend, and as such '*outsiders*', undermines claims of representing the community. This appears to be exacerbated by very limited attempts to understand *who* is participating in either the two-day event or the ongoing Steering Meeting, with levels of inclusion often judged in shaky measurements, such as a show of hands ([Organising Group], 2023) or a '*feeling*'. This suggests that, across both cases, the *appearance* of inclusiveness is important but demonstrating its realisation perhaps less so (mirroring the Systematic Scoping Review, Chapter 4). Indeed, although data on the participating citizens is sparse, it appears that neither case fully achieves its inclusive aspirations to involve 'local' representatives or people with 'lived experience' of specific policy problems. These contradictory narratives of inclusion have a number of effects for the resultant discussions and the participating citizens, particularly in the context of *considered judgement*, explored in the following section.

7.3 Considered judgement

Considered judgement in the context of this study, focuses on understanding the role of evidence and expertise within each PDP. However, as above, there were some challenges with gathering robust data on the exact nature of what was presented to and discussed by participating citizens throughout the process (mirroring a disconnect highlighted in the Scoping Review, Chapter 3). This is, in part, thanks to the fact that both processes were relatively long term, meaning that tracking and understanding the individual inputs to each meeting was not possible, simply because the level of detail necessary was not commonly recorded by the convenors of either process. This reflects what is a

common thread across both cases: a lack of transparency around the intricacies of process design. In the above section, we found persistent ambiguity around who is participating, in this section the ambiguity continues, although it is now related to what exactly is being discussed. That said, despite these continuing challenges of transparency, the direct observations for each PDP provided a helpful window into how evidence and expertise was brought into typical meetings. This, coupled with interviewee data and wider documentary evidence reveal a series of differing narratives across the cases, particularly related to *who* is classed as an expert in each process.

For the most part, it appears that when formal evidence and expertise was brought into the participatory spaces, it was in the form of presentations from either the convenors of the process or from representatives of wider organisations and groups. In the case of the Experts by Experience Panel, this appears to mean presentations from the Secretariat, for example on the topic of Child Poverty or from other Scottish Government departments, often providing information on particular policy areas. In the case of the Townsley Peoples' Forum, presentations at the two-day event consisted of representatives from the Steering Meeting, as well as from the convenors, and representatives of local, national and international community-based organisations or services. In both cases it appears that the purpose of these formal presentations was primarily 'context-setting', i.e., intended to provide enough information on the topic to enable citizens to have a discussion, rather than aimed at providing a balanced spectrum of opinion and evidence about what is known on the subject:

> *[We] didn't really call it expert, but that's how those were, where they were slightly elevated in terms of the space that they were given… It wasn't necessarily, here's all the different arguments and then you go off and decide what you think… it was just adding a bit of context to different things* **Prof12_Facilitator_C2**

> *I don't know whether you have seen the presentation we did… with the Panel members. So, we kind of gave a quick context, how the [policy area] actually [works]* **Prof3_InstitutionalRep_C1**

Despite what appears to be a relatively light-touch approach to bringing in evidence to the PDPs, interview data suggests that the role of *expertise*, in particular, *was* important to many participants, with accessing accurate knowledge and information routinely described as crucial. This knowledge and information was not considered to come from external sources but instead via the participating citizens. Indeed, across both cases the participating citizens were characterised as the key experts in each case, albeit in different ways. For each case, this characterisation of *citizens as experts* produces a number of key themes, which connect to the previous discussion of inclusiveness and will now be detailed in turn:

- Lived expertise = highly valued, highly complex (Case 1)
- Truth-telling vs harmful narratives (Case 2)

7.3.1 Lived expertise= highly valued, highly complex

The narrative of *citizens as experts* is, perhaps unsurprisingly given its name, most explicit in the Experts by Experience Panel. As explored in Chapter 6, in this case, participating citizens are often described as providing crucial 'lived expertise', which fills a perceived *knowledge gap* in institutional decision-making spaces. Whilst the *function* of this expertise varies (again discussed in Chapter 6), what is consistent across accounts is the *high value* placed on this form of knowledge. Indeed, in keeping with common conceptualisations of *lived experience*, it is often described as a form of expertise which is both true and authentic (Blume, 2017; Parr, 2023), with knowledge gained through *living* described as key to effective decision-making:

> *When it's about poverty and inequality, especially people who live in poverty and inequality… there are people who are from the asylum seeking community, there are people who are single parents, there are people who are disabled, these are conversations I'm passionate about, because these are people who have to wake up in the morning, and they have to decide, okay, do*

> *I turn on my heating or do I make a cup of tea. So, this is not theoretical, this is something that is practical.*
> **Prof5_Commissioner_C1**

Indeed, across accounts, the lived expertise of the Panel members was considered central to its overall purpose and value. Despite this shared appreciation however, *lived experience* as a concept was also revealed to be highly complex, with often contradictory narratives in how it, and its role within PDP, was conceptualised by different participants.

For Panel members, *lived experience* implied that the group had a shared 'typicality' (Parr, 2023) through their experiences of poverty. This was often cited as ensuring that the space was '*safe'*, enabling members to share 'frequently upsetting' (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022e) experiences, without the fear of being judged, something which was a strong theme in the workshop discussions:

> *Feeling safe, sharing experiences without being judged*
> **Workshop_C1**

> *Sharing a space where people could open up* **Workshop_C1**

Interestingly, alongside appreciation of the 'shared typical' (McIntosh & Wright, 2019) of the group, Panel members also spoke, at length, about the group's diversity. Each Panel member was considered to bring their own specific 'lived expertise' to the group, and this diversity of perspective was highly valued, often described as creating an educative environment which enabled better collective understanding of poverty and inequality:

> *We would have lost out a lot if we've not had people from different backgrounds there, you know and there's a place for people who have the same experiences but having the same experiences but coming at it from a different context is really, really helpful for I think character building, for collective understanding and for recognizing where the gaps are in our system* **Citizen6_C1**

In interviews, it was common for Panel members to describe (often unprompted) a variety of different 'identities' when speaking about their

own ‘lived experience’. These ‘identities’ were multiple and intersecting, spanning across specific characteristics, axes of social difference and distinct experiences, as illustrated in Figure 12 below:

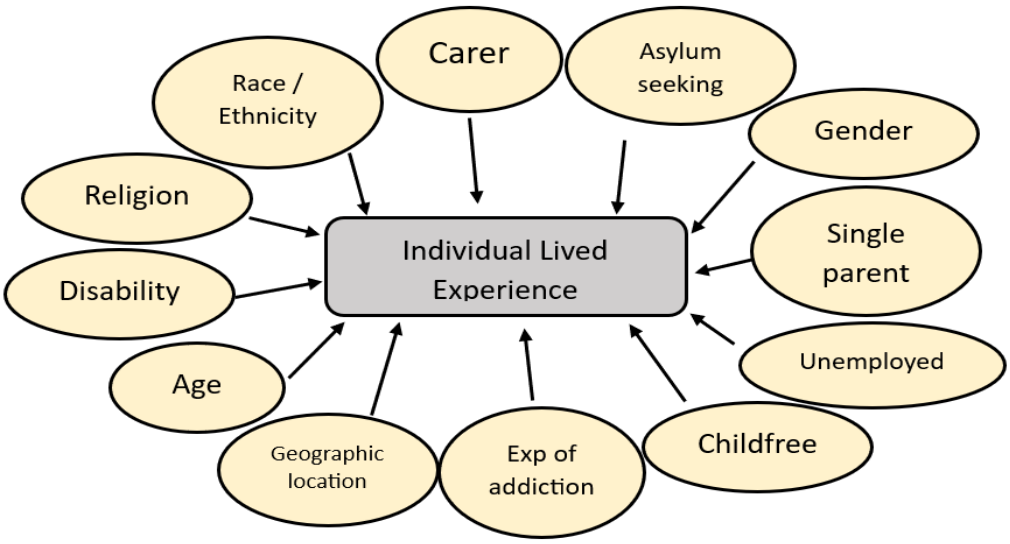


Figure 12: Different 'identities' described by Panel members

Indeed, *lived experience of poverty* was routinely conceptualised as non-homogenous and, at times, hyper-individual. The multiple identities and characteristics of Panel members were often described as unique or singular within the group, with each person representing their own particular suite of lived experiences, related directly to their personal circumstances.

This hyper-individuality appears to have, at times, operated as a *divider* within the group. One interviewee described the Panel as ‘*the poverty line up’* **Citizen2_C1**, whilst others detailed the necessity for each member to represent their own *lived experience* interests, at times in competition with the interests of other members of the group, particularly in terms of what the Panel as a whole would discuss and focus on:

> *[The Secretariat] brought a list of what would you like to speak about, and we all got to vote, on what direction we wanted to take*

> *the Panel and there was some, how would you say it… some very strong-willed people in the group that pushed one way. And there was another group of people that pushed another way… even now there's some members that feel the Panel didn't achieve anything because they didn't see results… they didn't see results in their life.* **Citizen7_C1**

In addition, in Panel member accounts of their own *lived experience of poverty*, there emerged differing, sometimes opposing, conceptualisations of what exactly constituted *lived experience* in this context. These conceptualisations tended to be fluid and can be largely grouped into the following categories:

- **Liv*ing*** experience – knowledge based on current, personal experience of poverty
- **Historical** experience – knowledge based on prior experience of poverty, not current, personal circumstances
- **Second-hand** experience – knowledge based on consultation with social and professional networks, not on personal experience
- **Wider skills** – knowledge based on prior/ current employment and volunteering history, which does not specifically relate to personal experience of poverty
- **Broader than poverty** – knowledge based on experience of marginalisation which does not specifically relate to personal experience of poverty

Indeed, there were clear tensions in how *lived experience* was understood by different members, with some members happy with a loose definition and others directly linking *lived expertise* to current, liv*ing* experiences of poverty, which if removed, entirely changed the perspective, and therefore the *expertise*, of the individual:

> *I've had a couple of [other] members saying things... I can't do this because I don't have that life experience and I have said, you know, you could do that … I could represent [other people] once they told me their information and that's what I was saying to the [other members]. You still can do it, but you just need to work on the information that's fed to you.* **Citizen3_C1**

> *[Things] that I didn't know myself or that wasn't going through myself or hadn't been through then I was asking other people or even things that I had been through [but wasn't experiencing any more].* **Citizen8_C1**

> *Unless you get up in the morning and you're you know you think Oh my God, I've got another … 10 days before I get any more money …And I can't just go and get an overdraft and I can't do all these things then actually. You know, these kinds of crises that for other people have, become, they are kind of academic crises…. You can understand that it happens but unless it's happening to you right there and then, then you don't know what it feels like. And even if ... you know you can say oh but I lived like that 20 years ago and this horrible thing happened to me then and I'll never forget it, actually time and circumstances do take the edges off it all* **Citizen4_C1**

This variation in understanding of the term *lived experience* was further complicated in its interaction with the policy problems and areas discussed during the Panel's lifetime. As highlighted in Box 1 above, despite spending a significant proportion of time discussing Child Poverty, some of the Panel members did not have children, a fact which some interviewees experienced as exclusionary:

> ***[****We] felt like we couldn't contribute towards [discussions about Child Poverty] and also didn't have the interest in the subject matter* **Citizen1_C1**

It appears as if, at times, the policy problems being discussed were disconnected from the every-day realities of at least some of the Panel members, and this precluded them from contributing:

> *I felt… I wasn't in that position… the tax situation… and I thought God, I was thinking because I wasn't working, I couldn't put anything in* **Citizen8_C1**

Similarly, sharing *lived expertise* which related to policy problems perceived to sit outwith the gift of Scottish Government was also viewed to be problematic. This was a strong theme in the workshop, with some members expressing concern that the Panel was taken '*off course*' by members discussing issues which had policy roots in Westminster. This appeared to result in some Panel members, whose circumstances were powerfully shaped by UK Government policies, feeling excluded from the discussions and unable to contribute or influence:

> *[Sometimes] in that Panel I don't talk…. Because if I talk, they'll say 'oh this is a Westminster case, it's not a Scottish government issue'…* **Citizen2_C1**

Given the experiential nature of the Panel directly encourages members to share their individual experiences, this appears to place Panel members in difficult or confusing positions where on one hand there is a heavy focus on their individual *lived expertise* but on the other their lived realities of poverty are not experienced (or described) in such neatly separated policy silos.

Indeed, the narrative of *citizens as experts* becomes complicated when considered through the lens of lived experience and what this means in the context of the Panel. Placing lived experience at the centre of discussions as the main, or certainly the most valuable, form of expertise appears to be problematic in the context of poverty, which is experienced by diverse population groups and cuts across a variety of different policy areas. For one interviewee, this highlighted a need for this form of expertise to be properly located within a broader matrix of knowledge and information. For them, there was a risk that the increasingly high value placed on experiential knowledge 'crowded out' (Bennett, 2022) other forms of expertise and the confidence to challenge views which were based on personal experience:

> *[About] that integration of different kinds of experience you know, lived experience, other kinds of experience and knowledge … how do you share some of that power in a way that that everyone feels able to challenge and I think that that's both ways so the Panel … can challenge the Commissioners and challenge what Scottish Government's saying… but also we have to be careful ... that we don't get sort of deference to lived experience, where …. no one feels able to bring in other kinds of knowledge and experience and say, well, there might be reasons why this wouldn't work and have that kind of conversation.* **Prof2_Facilitator_C1**

In short, in the context of *considered judgement* and the role which evidence and expertise plays in this PDP, we again end up with a variety of differing narratives. Whilst highly valued, lived experience is understood in fundamentally different ways, characterised by both a

'shared typical' (McIntosh & Wright, 2019; Parr, 2023) and hyper-individuality. This means that the concept of lived experience is operating as both a *cohesive* and a *divider* within the group at the same time. Indeed, in keeping with wider literature, this analysis demonstrates that *lived experience* is a highly complex concept (Blume, 2017; Meriluoto, 2018), which can be challenging to assimilate into policy decision-making and participation processes (Hill O'Connor et al., 2023; Smith-Merry, 2020; Stewart et al., 2020). In addition, it appears that ambitions to platform the expertise of the 'affected public' are undermined by a persistent disconnect between the policy problems being discussed and the lived realities of the 'Experts by Experience'. This disconnect results in participants feeling excluded from contributing, potentially reinforcing wider experiences of marginalisation, precisely the experience which this participation space, and wider *lived experience* work (Patrick, 2020), seeks to redress. It also appears as if the 'lived expertise' sought in the context of this PDP is largely prescribed, with the institutional context determining the form and type of lived experience which is permissible, or most compatible with the policy aims of the Commission (Meriluoto, 2018). Indeed, in applying 'credibility excess' (Davis, 2016), through asking Panel members to comment or input into policy issues which they have not experienced, their actual, lived narratives of marginalisation are potentially undermined, or ignored once more.

7.3.2 Truth-telling vs harmful narratives

This complicated picture of *citizens as experts* continues in the case of the Townsley Peoples' Forum, although in different ways, and for different reasons. In this case, citizens were also thought to be the key source of expertise but this knowledge was largely considered to be 'learned' rather than 'lived' (McKendrick et al., 2021). Often members of the Townsley Peoples' Forum, and local representatives, described

themselves as *information gatherers,* particularly around the redevelopment of the local park:

> *Well, I suppose, because the cause is a huge part of the [Townsley Peoples' Forum], saving the park. So, I guess, it would always be related to, right, have you heard about this? What are we going to do about this? Do you know all this? What's the information we need to know to object?* **Citizen12_C2**

> *The important thing was that we got word early, so we've had three and a half years before the planning process started, and we know all the facts. Like, it took a couple of years for us to get the FOIs in, get the answers to the FOIs et cetera, but we had that information before the planning process started.* **Prof7_LocalRep_C2**

This gathering and sharing of information was considered necessary thanks to what appears to be deep rooted and widespread distrust in information coming from either the Renewable Energy Transition conglomerate, institutional sources or, in some instances, the media and academia:

> *What we're trying to do is to make sure that the information is there is deliberated. It's truthful as far as something can be true, and then that is what is accessed by the population, not the soundbites for people with vested interest. You know, like [the Renewable Energy Transition]. Oh, yeah, we'll do this playpark for you. We'll do this and we'll do that, and it never happens.* **Citizen10_C2**

> *There's a lot of… misconceptions about what's going on …and… most of the information is coming from …the people who have got the money to pay and power media.* **Citizen15_C2**

Indeed, representatives from the Renewable Energy Transition particularly, and to a lesser extent local and national government, were regularly characterised as untrustworthy, as '*liars*', and therefore not reliable sources of information or expertise related to both Townsley and the proposed redevelopment of the local park.

> *The PR notion that there had been a concession to the community [a change to redevelopment plans for the park as a result of the local opposition] … was false.* **Citizen11_C2**

> *I said, this is corruption of the worst kind, and you and your party are trying to blame the victims of this process. Take ownership of*

> *it, you're corrupt. That's what I said to [the local MSP]… And I called them liars.* **Prof7_LocalRep_C2**

As a result of this deep distrust (which, in fact, extends far beyond the provision of knowledge and information, explored in later sections), citizens took on the role of *truth-tellers*, spending what appears to be significant time gathering and investigating information to be shared in the Townsley Peoples' Forum, with one interviewee describing this work as '*all-consuming*' **Citizen12_C2**, and another emphasising the need for citizens to upskill themselves in order to be able to influence effectively:

> *I think there are means of participating, but it involves sometimes a level of quite detailed knowledge about the system that you're trying to be involved with, which, it is complicated, I think, to be able to do that.* **Prof9_InstitutionalRep_C2**

Certainly, observational data from the Steering Meetings and the Townsley Community Council demonstrates that the citizens involved were able to talk at length and in granular detail about the planning processes within the local Council, previous industrialisation of the area and wider evidence, both in support of and against, the proposed Renewable Energy Transition development. There was a strong sense that knowledge and expertise coming *via* citizens was more likely to be believed and valued within these participation spaces. This is well demonstrated by that fact that at the two-day event, the majority of presentations came from people who were either members of the Steering Meeting or responsible for convening it. It is also evident in the reactions to input from representatives from local institutions (notably Renewable Energy Transition and the local Council), which were largely met with distrust or derision:

> *But to be honest, I think the guy [Renewable Energy Transition Representative] that came, full of shit, smarmy… saying he was green. If you cut him in half, he'd been green in the middle. And I'm like, aye right. Yeah, and I believe you. So, portraying himself as something he's not. So, why would you trust somebody like that? Why would you trust people that are going against the will of the community?* **Citizen12_C2**

> *Widespread laughter in response to a representative of the Townsley Community Planning Partnership stating that the partnership has a statutory function which means 'the Council has to listen to what people say'* **DirectObservation2_C2**

Instead, knowledge gathered and shared by citizens, and particularly citizens who were also Townsley residents, was thought to be an effective way to distil misinformation as well as misrepresentation or '*watered-down view[s]*' **Citizen15_C2** of the community:

> *People don't understand the language, we don't know about what possibilities are available, because of the constraints of what is being placed on us… so people can only get so much information on the mainstream. And those with the money are the ones that present their narrative rather than necessarily an objective look at need and risk. How do we then evolve as a group, you know, to better ourselves? You know, coming up with those ideas and solutions.* **Citizen15_C2**

This notion of differing narratives is reinforced in the way that the Renewable Energy Transition Masterplan characterises the relationship it has with the local community of Townsley. Whilst it does recognise 'mistrust within the community of local institutions and organisations' ([RET] Ltd., 2023c, p. 12), it also strongly implies that there is ongoing '*dialogue*' and partnership working between the organisation and community members – a narrative which sits in stark contrast to the perspectives shared here. Indeed, in the meetings observed, whilst it was common for distrust to be expressed with regards to information from institutional sources, input from citizens was widely taken at face value and accepted without challenge or discussion. On one hand, this representation of *citizens as experts* could be viewed as a disruption to typical epistemic practices, with 'lay' citizens recast as knowledge *producers* and *holders* rather than simply *receivers*. However, in the context of the Townsley Peoples' Forum this appears to have some additional consequences, which closely relate to inclusiveness and how knowledge, information and 'truths' about Townsley and the people who live there were shared, discussed and agreed.

As mentioned in earlier sections, Townsley is an area which experiences high levels of deprivation, particularly in the context of the Local Authority in which it is located, where it is regularly identified as one of the 'most deprived data zones' ([Anon] Health and Social Care Partnership, 2017; Shapovalova et al., 2023) with a high rate of child poverty (Community Planning [Anon], 2016). In addition, it is an area which has been disproportionately impacted by industrialisation, largely thanks to the oil and gas industry, which during its advent in the North East of Scotland in the 1970s claimed 'Old [Townsley], resulting in significant loss of homes and land from the area (Shapovalova et al., 2023). Since then, Townsley has witnessed a series of further industrial developments, including a sewage works, a rubbish incinerator and the redevelopment of the local bay into an industrial harbour. These developments, called '*dirty, nasty, smelly things'* **Citizen13_C2** by one participant, were routinely referenced across the data, in often angry terms about what interviewees viewed as a legacy of unfair decisions for the area:

> *The [proposed redevelopment plan of the park] was more or less an embodiment of what is wrong with Townsley, which [is] outside people coming in, saying, oh this is going to be for the greater good, we're going to take a bit of your lovely park in exactly the same way the start of the '70s they took away a big chunk of the old Townsley* **Citizen13_C2**

> *There's a real sense of it's a community that has had the stuffing kicked out of it because there have been multiple big infrastructural projects, sort of industrial projects happening and every one of them has been protested and every time they've lost.* **Prof8_Facilitator_C2**

> *… the vast majority of local people we spoke to felt unhappy about council decisions to site industrial infrastructure in their community over several decades* ([Organising Group], 2023, p. 1)

Further, Townsley was routinely described as a unique place with a '*strong sense of identity*' **Prof12_Facilitator_C2,** and an area which had been poorly treated by the Local Authority and other areas of the city:

> *Townsley's had the shit kicked out it* **Citizen12_C2**

> *We have been brow beaten and apathetic, and effectively abused as a community, a dumping ground for decades, and people need to know we can have better* **Citizen15_C2**

It is in conceptualisations of Townsley as a community and a place, that we meet some complexity in the characterisation of *citizens as experts*. Sitting at the core of this is how research participants *described* the community, descriptions which were often constructed via the repetition and reinforcement of, at times, harmful and stigmatising narratives about Townsley and the people who live there.

Indeed, despite repeated claims to challenge perceived injustices being experienced in the area, overwhelmingly, Townsley was described in negative terms by interviewees, in ways which reached far beyond deprivation and industrialisation. Townsley was often described a place with a '*bad reputation'* **Citizen12_C2**, associated with poor health and high levels of drug use:

> *I have a suspicion that [this Local Authority is] particularly bad, as far as… councils go, a little bit more snobbish, maybe, and I think just in a sense they just don't care about what happens to Townsley… I would say because it's got such a bad reputation. It's a place where people are dodgy, drug problems, I think.* **Citizen14_C2**

> *… it's widely publicised now that the life expectancy here is 13 years less than other places in the [Local Authority that are] wealthier. Now not everybody in Townsley is poor, you know… It's quite a mixed community really. But it gets that tag of being poor, because we have some real deprivation.* **Citizen12_C2**

These negative perceptions were repeated by both residents and non-residents in interview data as well as in meetings observed, suggesting that Townsley as a '*bad*' place is a pervasive narrative across the Local Authority. This sentiment is reflected in the artwork from the two-day event, detailing the 'challenges' facing Townsley, in Figure13 below. This artwork was used by the Steering Meeting members as engagement material, in the form of leaflets, after the event had taken place (identifiers have been replaced for the purposes of anonymity):

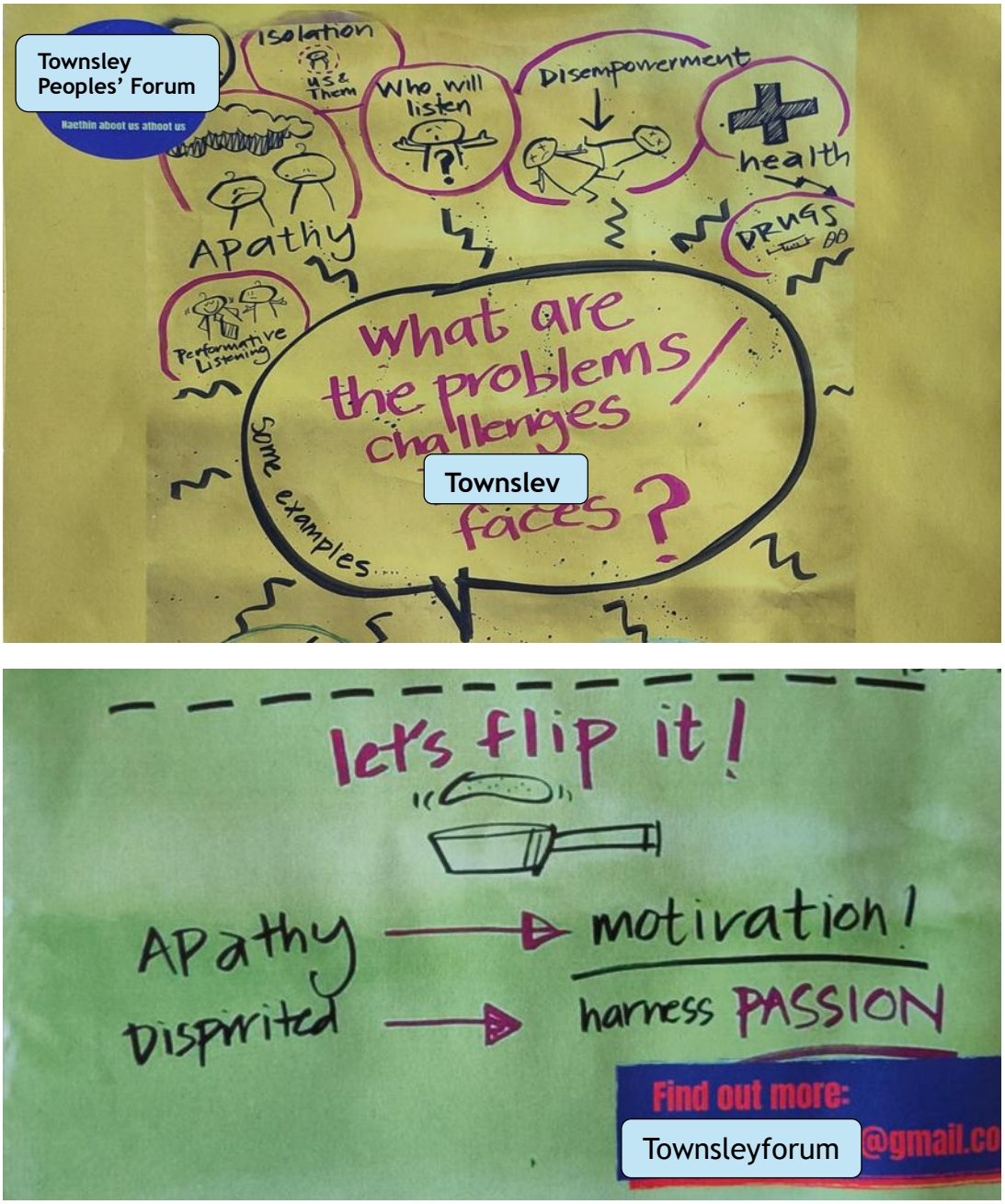


Figure 13: Artwork from the two-day event in Townsley, then used as engagement material

That an area which experiences high levels of deprivation and inequalities might be described in negative terms is perhaps not a significant finding (see for example, Butler-Warke, 2020; Halliday et al., 2021; Wacquant, 2007). However, what does appear to be significant, in the context of *considered judgement* and *citizens as experts*, is the way that this narrative influences how the *people* who live in Townsley were described and viewed.

As detailed, the lack of local representation at both the two-day event and the Steering Meeting was of deep concern to many interviewees. Indeed, 'getting more people involved' formed the basis of the workshop convened for this study (detailed in Appendix D). When asked to consider the reasons which might prevent local people from participating in the Townsley Peoples' Assembly, in interviews and in the workshop, there was a tendency to 'other' non-participating members of the community:

> *There was some community came, but we would have really liked more. But you've got to remember, a lot of them have chaotic lives.* **Citizen9_C2**

Routinely, *apathy* and general *hopelessness* were cited as the main, or most powerful barriers to getting involved, which were closely linked to experiences of poverty or deprivation.

> *At the moment, many people don't think they can make a difference, and I think a lot of people would be scunnered and struggling, you know, going to food banks and stuff like that. I mean, they're not interested in what it's going to be like for the future. They're interested in now, you know. I'm interested in the future for my kids and my grandkids. So, that's the main reason I'm involved with this.* **Citizen10_C2**

> *Well, I mean, Townsley's a very poor place, I think people are just very stressed out because of their poverty, and I also think that they don't have much faith that things could be any different.* **Citizen14_C2**

> *[People] almost just don't have what it takes to hope that things can change, so that hopelessness, I think, is a really, really big reason why people didn't come.* **Prof8_Facilitator_C2**

> *People are busy and perhaps historically disengaged (politically) and historically I think that time and again people have lost battles and are now somewhat inured to abuse.* **Workshop_C2**

Further, these characterisations sometimes went beyond a recognition that participation can be burdensome on disadvantaged communities towards more stigmatising narratives, with some regular (somewhat derogatory) assumptions being made about the people who live in Townsley. This included that there were generations of families who had never worked; that it was a '*dumping ground*' **Citizen15_C2** not just in terms of the industrialisation of the area but also in terms of the

populations who lived there, for example '*people with severe mental health issues, who've come out of prison, immigrants*' **Prof11**; and that it differed from other parts of the Local Authority, with the community described as '*downtrodden'* **DirectObservation1_C2**, '*looked down on'* **Workshop_C2** and '*despised by many people in wealthier parts of the city'* **Workshop_C2.** Underpinning these assumptions about the type of people who live in Townsley, was the idea that the residents lacked the necessary skills, knowledge and motivation to participate or even problem-solve – something which was often linked to their perceived lower socio-economic status:

> *The community is very low capacity…* ([Organising Group], 2023, p. 6)
>
> *[People] who live in Townsley haven't had the experience to know how things are done – the community does not have the capacity that wealthier ones do.* **Citizen11_C2**
>
> *[Sitting] down and discussing things in a democratic forum… it's a necessary skill I think that many of us have lost but in particular in areas like this. So, if I think of where I stay… if there's a problem with the street, you know, for instance with potholes or something like that, people will go to one person's house, and you'll sit down, or you work out a plan. But you know, you've got a street with architects and lawyers and accountants and… doctors, nurses and so on. So, you know, you're used to sitting down and working through a problem and thinking how you're gonna address this and then how you're gonna meet again… but that skill set is not necessarily here, and that way of doing things is alien.* **Prof11_LocalRep_C2**

These narratives strongly reflect what Levitas terms 'moral underclass discourse' (1998), where experiences of social exclusion are explained away as the consequences of the inherent personal failures of lower socio-economic groups (Carlisle, 2001).

In many ways, these narratives were regularly reinforced in the meetings observed and in the workshop. Townsley was described as a '*very difficult area*' **DirectObservation1_C2** to do participatory work, and community engagement characterised as a '*grind*' or a '*challenge'* **Workshop_C2**. Indeed, when asked to think about how the group might expand their

membership, there was a strong tendency to problematise the communities who live in Townsley rather than reflect on the ways that the Townsley Peoples' Forum might be exclusionary. The process relies on self-selection, with no support or targeted outreach for groups of people who might experience additional barriers to participation. In addition, it appears that the current Steering Meeting is populated by the 'usual suspects' (Hastings & Matthews, 2011), i.e., people who experience socio-economic advantage (Dalton, 2017). In this case the group appears to be largely white, older/ retired and well-educated. In addition, it is estimated that at least half of the members of the Steering Meeting and attendees at the two-day event do not live in Townsley. Whilst some interviewees appreciated help coming from 'supportive people from elsewhere in the city' ([Organising Group], 2023, p. 11), the fact that there is a high instance of '*outsiders'*, i.e., non-residents of Townsley, in attendance was identified by some interviewees as problematic:

> *The Peoples' Forum, because they were people from outside that didn't live in the area. So, we lost some people automatically with that.* **Citizen15_C2**

Despite this, narratives of widespread apathy, hopelessness and an inherent lack of capacity on the part of Townsley residents prevailed as the primary reason for non-participation in the Forum.

There were some moments of resistance to negative perceptions of people who lived in Townsley, for example people being described as '*friendly':*

> *I'll tell you, people here, they all speak to you going along the road. Nobody doesn't say good morning. Well, very, very few, you know. We do litter picks… we are really trying.* **Citizen12_C2**

And, particularly in the Co-production Workshop, some people's responses when asked to describe Townsley were resoundingly positive, including '*a great place'*, '*strangely mystical'*, and even '*the best place to live in [the Local Authority]'*. However, these instances were far outweighed by different narratives about the area. Instead, more commonly, when people expressed views and descriptions of the community, they were

often negative and presented as commonly known 'truths' about the area, which in the meetings observed, were routinely accepted without challenge.

This brings us to the complicated nature of *citizens as experts* in the context of the Townsley Peoples' Forum. On the one hand there is a strong narrative that the participating citizens are *truth-tellers*, thanks to their extensive investigating, gathering and challenging of (in)accurate information or rhetoric coming from institutional sources. Knowledge and expertise coming via the participating citizens appears to carry much more legitimacy and authority than that coming from wider (less trusted) sources. However, this guaranteed trust or belief in citizen contributions alongside, what appears to be a dearth of other forms of expertise and evidence, seems to leave the door open to harmful narratives about Townsley and in particular the people who live there. There is a lack of clarity between 'learned' knowledge (McKendrick et al., 2021) being shared within the group, and assumptions, or in some cases, prejudice and stereotype about people who live in areas which experience high levels of disadvantage, such as Townsley. This is exacerbated by the fact that the Steering Meeting membership appears to lack diversity and representation across the socio-economic spectrum. Whilst the dominant rhetoric is that the Townsley Peoples' Assembly is attempting to '*reclaim power'* ([Organising Group], 2023) for the community, this narrative is wholly undermined by persistent characterisations of people and place which are both stigmatising and harmful. Indeed, this undermining is further exacerbated via the othering and apparent non-representation of the diverse communities of Townsley.

7.4 Popular Control

Influencing policy decision making is a common aim of public participation and is often central to democratic innovations in particular (Smith, 2009). Despite this, impact at a policy level is considered difficult to both achieve and evidence (Fung, 2015; Goodin & Dryzek, 2006;

Russell, 2017). This thesis has a particular interest in PDPs which are *institutionalised* in some way, i.e., that are either funded and / or convened by a policymaking institution. One of the key findings from the Systematic Scoping Review (Chapter 4) was that, across the PDPs included, there appeared to be a lack of *built-in accountability* in the design of participation processes, with a general lack of transparency and narrative around how the outputs from each PDP had impacted on policy decision making. This led to persistent ambiguity and doubt as to whether the PDPs rendered any influence on the policy problems they purported to solve. For this reason, for each case, efforts were made to understand how, and if, the PDPs connected to and impacted policy decisions. As with the other democratic goods, this was not always an easy thing to track and understand, although in the case of *popular control* this was as much to do with a lack of transparency identified across the other 'goods' as it was with the recognised difficulty of understanding, what can be, messy and complicated, policymaking processes (Cairney & Kippen, 2024), which often have multiple points of influence (Vlahos et al., 2024). That said, it was possible to understand, to some extent, the policy journey of each PDP and an interesting picture can be built of how each interacted with the policymaking systems in which they were taking place and the, often common, ways that policy stakeholders conceptualised this interaction. The findings are grouped thematically and will now be discussed in turn:

- High visibility, low (policy) impact
- Historical injustice & profound power differentials

7.4.1 High visibility, low (policy) impact

As highlighted in Chapter 6, both the PDPs are connected to relatively high-profile policy areas: Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero. The Townsley Peoples' Forum is funded via Scottish Government's Just Transition Fund and the Experts by Experience Panel is part of a statutory Commission, with specific duties to scrutinise and advise Scottish

Government on actions it is taking to tackle Child Poverty. Perhaps thanks to these high-profile policy areas, both PDPs appeared to experience relatively high levels of *visibility*.

The broader project which the Townsley Peoples' Forum is part of is cited by Scottish Government as one of their key Just Transition projects, which promises a great deal of influence for the participating communities, including Townsley:

> *Communities have been equipped with the capacity and power to directly influence just transition in their area through projects such as NESCAN's pilot Just Transition Communities project*. (Scottish Government, 2023b)

It is important to recognise that this was the second such participatory process being held in the area, with the first one also focusing on the proposed Renewable Energy Transition development ([Anon], 2021), and a motion for debate already raised in Scottish Parliament specifically considering a 'Just Transition for [Townsley]' (Shapovalova et al., 2023) and the local park. Indeed, a local representative interviewed advised that the funding for the Just Transition Communities project was dependent on the inclusion of Townsley in the overall work of the project '*because [of] the political issues involved with [the Renewable Energy Transition development plans]'* and the need to address the '*hurt and disconnect that Townsley felt',* meaning the opposition to the redevelopment of the park was both long standing and well-known. In addition, the Townsley Peoples' Forum is cited in the most recent plan for the locality (Community Planning [Anon], 2024) and has been the subject of a number of newspaper articles and TV news segments related to its work (unreferenced due to anonymity). In terms of the Experts by Experience Panel, it is widely cited across the work of the Commission, and in some cases explicitly referenced by Scottish Government as a key mechanism through which they bring in 'lived experience' knowledge (Scottish Government, 2022c). The Panel also featured in TV news segments (Clements, 2023) and there were clear efforts by the Commission to platform the work of the Panel on its website (Poverty and

Inequality Commission, 2024). In addition, the invitation for one of the Panel members to present at an anti-poverty summit hosted by the then First Minister, Humza Yousaf, when he first came into office (Scottish Government, 2023a), is demonstrative of consistent exposure to and interaction with high level decision-makers, a point noted by interviewees and recognised in the Commission's own evaluation of the Panel, which included reflections from a Cabinet Minister (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022e).

So how then does this high level of *visibility* connect into policy decision-making? We have already established in the policy analysis in Chapter 6 that whilst public participation is characterised as key to effective decision-making in the context of both Just Transition and Child Poverty, the *ways* and *means* in which it influences and impacts policy decision-making is relatively unclear. This theme continues when considering both the Townsley Peoples' Forum and the Experts by Experience Panel in closer detail. Despite both participation processes being funded and cited by Scottish Government, there does not appear to be a clear route for the outputs of either PDP to be 'taken up in the policy process' (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006, p. 225). Indeed, it appears that neither PDP has any sort of formal guarantee or agreement from local or national government around *how* the contributions from citizens will be incorporated into policy decision-making spaces.

In the case of the Experts by Experience Panel, when asked to consider the impact of the Panel generally, there were some narratives which suggested it had regular and meaningful influence on decision-making within the Commission. Professional stakeholders often characterised the relationship between the Commission and the Panel as that of a '*partnership'* **Prof1_Commission_C1** or one where they worked in '*dialogue'* **Prof5_Commission_C1** with one another to reach collective conclusions. Indeed, some interviewees were able to identify a number of ways in which the contributions and participation of the Panel had

influenced or shaped the recommendations and outputs of the Commission or other empowered spaces they represented:

> *We'd never really have thought in quite that way [about particular policy problems].… maybe it does make quite a lot of difference to the policy recommendations if you if you engage properly in that process and in that way.* **Prof4_Commissioner_C1**

> *We actually used some of the things they were saying to probably nuance our messages a bit more just in terms of how that support could work and how it would be best targeted.* **Prof6_InstitutionalRep_C1**

This influence extended beyond tangible outputs, for example changes to a recommendation or policy proposal, to ways of working and a general approach to solving or discussing policy problems within the Commission:

> *It's changed a huge amount about the way that we work, and we think about things…. [the Panel] impacts on every aspect really of what we're doing as a Commission.* **Prof2_Facilitator_C1**

However, when it came to impact on Scottish Government policymaking, this was much more difficult for interviewees to describe and was particularly difficult for Panel members to identify. When asked to detail the impact on Scottish Government, some interviewees cited specific policy changes which had happened during the Panel's lifetime, notably the doubling of Scottish Child Payment. However, these same Panel members were doubtful as to whether this change was attributable to the Panel directly or to wider campaigning of anti-poverty organisations. Indeed, for most Panel members, it was challenging to give a definitive answer to how the Panel impacted on Scottish Government policy because of a perceived lack of feedback and formal response from Scottish Government to the Panel directly.

> *I don't believe that we got any feedback, well I didn't personally, I don't feel that we got any feedback from the Scottish Government.* ***Citizen7_C1***

> *I guess rephrasing that question slightly to say 'are there specific changes that you have seen that you can directly attribute to the Panel?' I think I would struggle to find specific examples of that.* ***Citizen6_C1***

Which brings us back to the common thread of (a lack of) transparency. It was consistently difficult to understand the policy journey of Panel member contributions. This was true across the policy documents and in participants' reflections. Even where the Panel *were* cited by Scottish Government as a key source of 'lived expertise' (Scottish Government, 2022c), the nature of this knowledge and how it was used was not detailed in any way. This combined with what appears to be limited feedback loops, suggests that the routes to policy influence for the Panel were, from the outset, fundamentally unclear, or perhaps even non-existent.

This ambiguity around mechanisms for achieving *policy* impact continues in the Townsley Peoples' Forum, although in a slightly different way. The main output from the two-day event was the Declaration of Townsley, detailed in Figure 14 below (as before, identifiers have been removed):

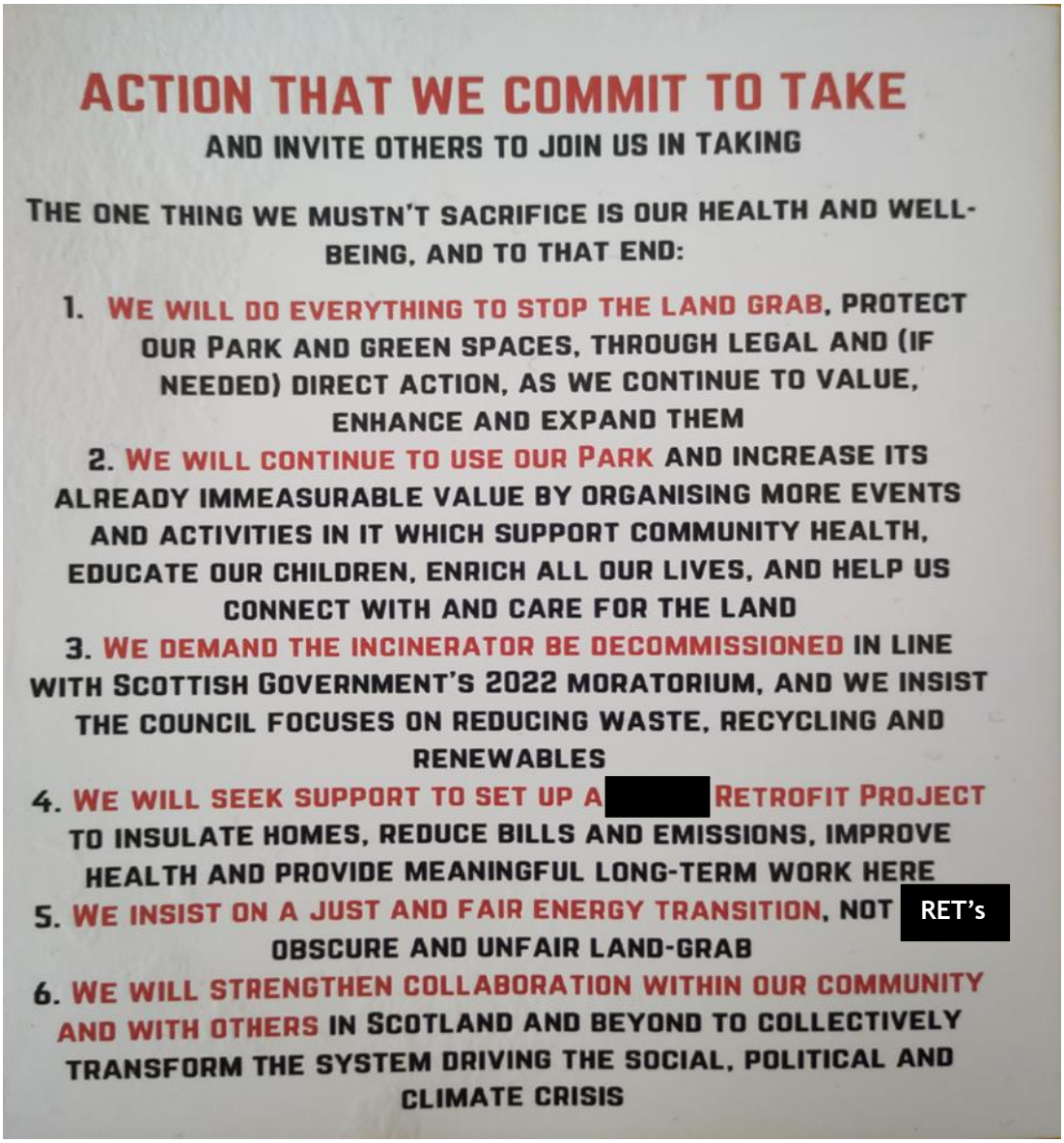


Figure 14: Declaration of Townsley, taken from engagement materials

There were indeed some high expectations for what the two-day event and the ongoing Steering Meeting could achieve, and this often centred around the idea that the participating citizens had to 'reclaim power':

> *[Get] together with other people and make things change for the better and maybe prevent things… which are doing harm… I guess it's like feeds into the sort of general mobilization… of people to actually go and do something. So that's one sense. I think the other sense is about actually is that first point of like pushing back to that sense of inevitability… this is just how it is… you can't do anything about it... And just questioning… it doesn't have to be like that.* **Prof12_Facilitator_C2**

> *… having that time to talk about… what works, what people want in in Townsley and how to make that happen and not be told that*

> *this is what's going to happen to them. So,* ***it's an inversion of power*** *that I think is really, really important. Emphasis added,* **Prof13_InstitutionalRep_C2**

This '*mobilisation*' appears to consist of citizens taking action rather than necessarily seeking to drive or inform *policy* action at a local or national government level (explored in Chapter 6). It is perhaps for this reason that, despite some of the actions clearly sitting within the gift of local and national government, many detailed in the Declaration above largely fell to the participating citizens to lead. This appears to create a significant disconnect between this participation process and policy impact at a Scottish or local Government level.

During the meetings observed there were some instances where individuals mentioned attending meetings with Scottish Government representatives, but this appeared to be only in passing. Indeed, one of the facilitators stated that in the design of the process they had purposefully not promoted or revealed the fact that it was funded by Scottish Government because of perceived issues with mistrust of the institution. Further, with regards to the key focus of the two-day event, the Renewable Energy Transition development, analysis of the 'Masterplan' for this cites the 'Local community' as key delivery partners throughout and strongly implies that there is an ongoing relationship between the organisation and community members ([RET] Ltd., 2023c). However, the Townsley Peoples' Forum is not mentioned by name, and it appears as if the significant objections to the '*land grab*' of the local park have been largely ignored. Similarly, in the Local Authority Committee meeting considering the submitted objections to the redevelopment, reference is made to the consultation events held by the Renewable Energy Transition to engage with the local community, but again no direct mention is made of the Townsley Peoples' Forum and its Declaration ([Anon], 2023). This lack of acknowledgement is perhaps reinforced by the statement of support from the then First Minister in the prospectus for the Renewable Energy Transition development:

> *The energy sector in the North-East of Scotland has contributed massively to Scotland over the past five decades and it's time now for the Government and the country to pay that back by ensuring that we support the sector as we accelerate to a net zero future. I'm delighted that the Scottish Government continues to support [RET] Ltd and the [Renewable Energy Transition], which is a hugely significant project not just for the economy of the North-East but for the future prosperity of our entire country.* ([RET] Ltd., 2023a, p. 5)

In addition, alongside recognition of the Just Transition Communities project, of which the Townsley Peoples' Forum is a part, Scottish Government also mentions the Renewable Energy Transition development as the other key Just Transition project they have funded:

> *[The Renewable Energy Transition] are supporting local energy supply chain businesses to decarbonise whilst unlocking private capital investment through the Supply Chain Pathway and Energy Transition Challenge Fund.* (Scottish Government, 2023b)

This suggests the objections and demands detailed in the Declaration of Townsley have not translated into any action, or indeed meaningful recognition, on the part of Scottish Government, the Local Authority or the Renewable Energy Transition conglomerate themselves. Indeed, seen in this light, it appears that the connection the Townsley Peoples' Forum has to institutional decision-making begins and ends via its funding from Scottish Government rather than the *'capacity and power to influence Just Transition in their area*' (Scottish Government, 2023b) as promised above.

Overall, across both cases there is a distinct lack of clear mechanisms through which either process was able to impact on policy decision-making. Despite high levels of visibility, identifying the routes through which the citizen contributions or outputs of the PDPs impacted on policy decision-making spaces proved difficult. Interviewees offered a number of different reasons, narratives and hypotheses related to this perceived low (policy) impact, which will now be explored in turn.

7.4.2 Historical injustice and profound power differentials

Underpinning what appears to be limited mechanisms to achieving policy impact were two strong running themes in interviewee accounts: historical injustice and the recognition of profound power differentials. Across both cases, interviewees spoke at length about the consistent mistreatment and exclusion of particular social groups, something which was often attributed to a perceived lack of recognition and representation in policy decision-making.

For example, in the Experts by Experience Panel, research participants referenced the longstanding mistreatment and misrepresentation of groups who experience poverty:

> *So often, you know, people living in poverty, that's what we're accused of having, we don't have aspirations… being completely disempowered, which is what living in poverty means for me, you know?* **Citizen4_C1**

> *When you've got no money, you're no longer part of society.* **Citizen_C1**

For some people, this societal exclusion was directly related to more specific experiences, with Panel members commonly sharing anecdotes of how and when they felt ignored or treated unfairly. This included the poor treatment or ignorance of people with disabilities; people from ethnic minority backgrounds; single parents; people with experience of addiction; and carers:

> *Time after time they [Scottish Government] say they want to support unpaid carers, but this is basically 'sod ye'.* **DirectObservation_C1**

> *How difficult it is for a single dad bringing up a little girl and how horrible the world can be out there.* **Citizen7_C1**

> *[What] I'm going through like the now... I'm still in the same GP surgery… my doctor, who is the top doctor, the one in charge… he just wasn't good at all. He was just, it was like 'past drug abuser' [signals hand as if being ignored/pushed away].* **Citizen8_C1**

> *[When] you become disabled, you become unequal and it's not your fault.* **Citizen3_C1**
>
> *I feel utterly invisible.* **Citizen1_C1**
>
> *This system creates a perpetual I'm going to use the word perpetual sledgehammer on some on persons of [the BAME community]… mostly the black community.* **Citizen2_C1**

In the Townsley Peoples' Forum this same sentiment of 'felt unfairness' (Irwin, 2024) was also found in interviewee accounts. Although in this case it was directly attributed to the treatment of Townsley, and in particular the sense that Townsley had become a '*dumping ground'* **Citizen10_C2** or '*sacrificial zone*' **Workshop_C2** for developments which other parts of the Local Authority or Scotland did not want. This was often coupled with the idea that people who live in Townsley were regularly ignored or dismissed, and had been for a long time:

> *I think it's years and years and years of not having a proper say. You know, getting sound bites from politicians, from council staff as well.* **Citizen10_C2**
>
> *We don't have choices as far as developments [go]… or we feel we don't have choices. Because we've fought everything from school closures, the harbour being built, we're always losing something to give someone else gain.* **Citizen12_C2**

These narratives of *historical injustice* appeared to be powerful and were often shared when asked about the capacity of the PDP to impact policy decision-making. Indeed, long-term legacies of feeling unheard, dismissed or mistreated at the hands of institutions influenced participant perceptions of *popular control* and whether their contributions or outputs from the PDP had any hope in impacting on eventual policy decisions. There was, across the participants, a running thread of cynicism and mistrust about the capacity or willingness of policymaking institutions to properly incorporate the views and experiences of citizens. This was underpinned by a general consensus, across both cases, that there is currently a lack of political will to listen to the needs and wants of citizens:

> *I'll tell you why they're not listening to it, because it doesn't affect them. You know, and if, if let's say for instance I was MP, MSP or*

> *whatever [and] I was on a huge salary. I hope I would care enough to think you what, yeah I'm OK, but these people aren't.* **Citizen5_C1**

> *They [Local Authority/Scottish Government] are abusing, and I start using that language, because they are. Because they are in a position to do something and if they're not doing it, and they're causing harm, that's abuse.* **Citizen15_C2**

Closely linked to this was widespread recognition of the profound differentials in power and influence which were perceived to exist in policy decision-making spaces. In the policy analysis in Chapter 6, public participation processes like the cases included here, were characterised as filling an *influence gap* in policymaking processes – a characterisation which failed to recognise the 'power and contestation' (Cairney, 2023) which often shapes how policy is developed. In contrast, interviewees were often able to identify different mechanisms through which they experienced, sometimes acute, inequalities in influence *within* the PDP, and which were thought to greatly limit the capacity of citizens to exert any real influence over decision-making.

In the Experts by Experience Panel, research participants often spoke about the distinct power dynamic which existed between the Panel and decision-makers within Scottish Government, something which was also a strong theme in the workshop convened for this study:

> *Meetings with Scottish Government were very rushed, and we were made to feel that we should feel grateful [for Scottish Government giving any time to the Panel]* **Workshop_C1**

> *Felt a wee bit 'them and us' and we [the Panel] are secondary* **Workshop_C1**

Indeed, the discussions held within the Panel were described as being powerfully shaped by the needs and wants of the institution, often more so than those of the participating citizens:

> *[If] the panel had been setting the working agenda… That actually it might have been much more inclusive of the priorities that people would write down on a blank piece of paper as opposed to inclusive of their views on something somebody had already written down the bullet points for.* **Prof4_Commissioner_C1**

> *It's the reality of the… political structures that we're working in… there is this culture of, OK gosh sounds to a bit like the Mafia doesn't it? It's kind of the culture of the unspoken, of what will be sanctioned and what will not, what will be endorsed and what will not. And again, that comes down to self-imposed constraints.* **Citizen4_C2**

Similarly, participants spoke of the need to '*re-strategise*' **Prof5_Commission_C1** and mould any suggested policy proposals or ideas to those which were most likely to be accepted by Scottish Government, or that most closely aligned to existing plans:

> *Sometimes what you are saying may not be in cognisance of what [politicians] want to hear…maybe your view is not the view they want, so as a Panel member when you … give out your policies, you pray it's … what they can marry into whatever they are planning to do.* **Citizen2_C1**

> *I think that the fact that the Commission is a public body you know … it can't just come up with anything that it wants in any space that it wants, it has a statutory remit and … that is a limit.* **Prof2_Facilitator_C1**

In these narratives, research participants are strongly reflecting the phenomenon of 'cherry picking' (Challies et al., 2021; Font et al., 2018) and 'tight-coupling' (Bussu, Golan, et al., 2022), whereby policymaking institutions exert strict control over the participatory process and adopt the outputs which fit most closely to decisions which have already been made, whilst ignoring any contributions which are deemed too complex or costly. For one participant this meant that the discussions and outputs of the Panel were always going to be constrained in ways which prevented the development of ideas and solutions which were '*radical'* or challenged status quo decision-making and ways of thinking:

> *[There] are times in our meetings, where people say things… there probably is a lot of people who actually agree with them, but the kind of reaction is… this is just too much. This is too critical of the Scottish Government, or this is too critical of the capitalist system, or too critical of the energy companies… Whenever something really does come from… a really challenging position, it's often… just not acknowledged… the way the way we deal with this is to just pretend that never happened.* **Citizen4_C1**

For another, these constraints were directly linked to the wider influences on political decision-making, which included the lobbying of powerful industries:

> *I don't think that politicians are free to make their own choices. I think there is way too much lobbying going on, way too much pressure from certain industries of not increasing taxes and things.* **Citizen1_C1**

These narratives of profound power differentials which constrain the PDP and the level of impact it was able to exert in policy decision-making spaces continued in the Townsley Peoples' Forum. In this case, research participants spoke at length about the fundamentally different, and competing, interests of the community versus those of the '*power cabal'* **Citizen11_C2** of the oil and gas industry and by proxy, Scottish Government and the Local Authority. Indeed, one participant described the power dynamic as a '*David and Goliath thing*' **Citizen12_C2**, with widespread agreement that the interests of the community were regularly superseded by other more powerful influences, such as people and organisations with wealth and power:

> *I think the Council, for a long time perhaps, very much prioritises what certain business groups are interested in, not just oil industry, I suspect it goes from before that. You know, they're interested in where the Chamber of Commerce is and things like that, so I don't think what Townsley people say really fits into the decision-making at all.* **Citizen14_C2**

> *I think part of the problem or issues that we've had, and the reason we've, kind of, come to this place where the globe is on the edge of disaster from a climate point of view, it's because people haven't had the power or the ability to counter the lobbyist, who have lots of money behind them and lots of skills.* **Citizen10_C2**

When asked about the likelihood of the Townsley Peoples' Forum being able to successfully prevent the development of the local park, the majority of interviewees stated that it was very unlikely, thanks to these profound power differentials:

> *You know in a conglomerate of [the Renewable Energy Transition], you've got [the Local Authority], you've got the Scot Gov. You've*

> *got everybody that's decision making about it, so there isn't that level of separation between the particulars and the decision makers. So, it's going to be exceptionally difficult.*
> **Prof10_LocalRep_C2**

Indeed, across both cases, despite stated intentions to provide citizens with an opportunity to influence decision-making, conceptualisations of *popular control* and the capacity of the PDP to influence policy decision-making are delimited by a perceived lack of influencing power. Popular control in the context of these two PDPs is instead characterised by a distinct lack of transparency and clarity on the part of institutions, most notably Scottish Government, in terms of how the processes were intended to interact with and influence policy decision-making. Indeed, both cases appear constrained by unclear, or what appear to be wholly undeveloped, mechanisms and feedback loops which connect to actual policymaking settings. Coupled with this is broad consensus, across research participants in both cases, that profound power differentials dictate whether or not the outputs of the PDP will exert any influence on policymaking. These differentials take the form of the aforementioned 'tight-coupling' (Bussu, Golan, et al., 2022) or 'cherry picking' (Challies et al., 2021; Font et al., 2018) on the part of policymaking institutions as well as recognition of fundamentally different competing interests, which are characterised by deeply unequal power dynamics, most notably between industry and community. It appears that experiences of historical injustice and 'felt unfairness' (Irwin, 2024), which for some research participants were experienced in acute ways, were not necessarily mitigated or removed via participation in either of the PDPs but instead indirectly reinforced.

7.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has explored the ways in which the democratic goods of inclusiveness, considered judgement, popular control and transparency were conceptualised across and within each of the cases. The challenges experienced when trying to collect robust data on who was participating,

the role of evidence and expertise and how each PDP connected to and influenced policy decision-making demonstrates a persistent lack of transparency related to process design and the consequences which flow from particular choices. It appears as if there is sometimes a significant disconnect between how a process is described and how that process plays out in practice. There are particular issues related to the representation of disadvantaged groups and the conceptualisation of the 'affected public' (Degeling et al., 2015) in each case. Whilst each PDP claims to provide a space for typically excluded groups to participate in decision-making, this is called into question by inadequate or unclear recruitment processes, exacerbated by a lack of clarity on the eventual demographic composition of each PDP. In the context of considered judgement, this presents a complicated picture where citizens are routinely characterised as experts but with varied, at times contradictory, understandings of the nature of this expertise and how it functions within the PDP. In addition, the high expectations attached to the use of PDPs within policymaking are also undermined by limited, or undeveloped, mechanisms through which the processes are able to connect into and influence policy decision-making. This perceived lack of policy impact is attributed to a lack of flexibility and openness on the part of Scottish Government and what appears to be legacies of 'felt unfairness' (Irwin, 2024), characterised by policymaking practices believed to be predominantly shaped by the unequal influence of those in positions of power and wealth.

This concludes the findings chapters from the dual case study. The following, and final, chapter will now pull together and discuss the findings from across the thesis, including detailing the identified recommendations from what has been learned here. It will also return to domain of health inequalities and consider in more detail the potential implications the learning from this study has for any 'democratic rejuvenation' to tackle their root causes (RQ4).

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion

8.1 Chapter overview

This chapter aims to pull together learning from across the previous chapters. Here, we return more squarely to the topic of health inequalities and consider RQ4: What can we learn from existing/contemporary examples of PDPs about the challenges and opportunities of a 'democratic rejuvenation' to address health inequalities? The first section of the chapter homes in on the challenges identified across the findings, picking up on specific and consistent disconnects between participatory rhetoric and the reality of the PDPs presented here, considering what this might mean for their role in policymaking to tackle health inequalities. The second section explores what opportunities there are for both research and policy actors interested in participatory policymaking and how the learning from this study might inform future work around public participation in socio-economic decision-making in the UK and Scotland.

8.2 Democratic disconnects: aligning participatory rhetoric and the reality of PDPs

Before embarking on a discussion of the findings of this thesis, it is perhaps helpful to provide a brief reminder of some of the suggested benefits of increasing public involvement in socio-economic decision-making, particularly those put forward by health inequalities theorists. In calling for a 'democratic rejuvenation', it has been suggested that democratic innovations might provide mechanisms to "[strengthen] the science, society and democracy nexus'… countering some of the unequal power relations inherent within democratic systems' (Bambra et al., 2021, p. 116). Whilst others suggested that deliberative fora in particular could potentially bridge the gulf between contemporary evidence and

knowledge and the resultant policy action in the UK, overcoming a 'policy stalemate' (Smith et al., 2022), which often casts the public as resistant to progressive policy reform (McHugh et al., 2023). Linked to this, theorists advocate for gaining a deeper understanding of lay perspectives on *solutions to* health inequalities (Fergie et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2021), particularly those who experience socio-economic disadvantage (Smith & Stewart, 2024; Smith & Anderson, 2018), as a means to not only better understand actual public opinion (Smith et al., 2022), but also to tap into experiential expertise which could enhance, evolve, and even challenge, contemporary research framings (Peacock et al., 2014; Smith & Stewart, 2024). All of these arguments and suggestions (of which there are more) are compelling, particularly in the context of widespread 'political dysfunction' (Fraser, 2022) and the 'crisis age' (Bambra et al., 2025) in which we find ourselves, characterised by deepening inequalities in health (Miall et al., 2022), which are having catastrophic consequences for disadvantaged groups across the UK and Scotland (Walsh & McCartney, 2024). Given the fact that public participation already exists within policymaking in the UK, and has for some time (Barnes et al., 2007), the purpose of this study was to understand, in more detail, what lessons current participatory practice could hold for any 'enhanced democratic participation' (Bambra et al., 2025) as a means to tackle health inequalities. Indeed, I believe this thesis serves as a cautionary tale for advocates of public participation in the context of increasing inequalities and provides helpful insight on some, potentially significant, challenges in participatory policymaking, which I will now explore in turn.

8.2.1 Public participation in policymaking = another fantasy paradigm?

A characteristic of the 'policy stalemate' (Smith et al., 2022) in the UK (explored in detail in Chapter 2) is a stubborn commitment to downstream, lifestyle-based policy interventions as a primary means to tackle health inequalities (Douglas, 2016), despite a heavy weight of evidence which suggests widespread upstream, macro action is necessary

to ‘level’ social gradients in health outcomes (Bambra et al., 2025). This proclivity towards *lifestyle drift* (Katikireddi et al., 2013; Whitehead & Popay, 2010) has been described as a ‘fantasy paradigm’, whereby ‘some policy actors and researchers have devised a parallel fantasy world in which proximal, downstream, easily tackled exposures are posited as potential solutions to health inequalities’ (Scott-Samuel & Smith, 2015, p. 418). A suggested driving force for this ‘fantasy paradigm’, is the political context in which policymaking is taking place, and in particular the influence of neo-liberalism in recent decades:

> … while it can be politically expedient for governments to engage with health inequalities, they cannot, within the confines of neo-liberalism, realistically propose actions that evidence suggests will effectively reduce them – such as tackling power inequalities, social status and connections or class inequality. (Scott-Samuel & Smith, 2015, p. 418)

I am purposefully highlighting this particular argument in relation to policymaking to tackle health inequalities for the reason that I believe the findings from this thesis point to the existence of another ‘fantasy paradigm’, only this time related to public participation in policymaking. This paradigm mirrors the one described by Scott-Samuel and Smith above and posits increased participation, particularly of disadvantaged groups, as a central mechanism through which social and political inequalities can be, or even *are being*, tackled, whilst largely ignoring the limiting political ‘confines’ in which such participation is taking place.

It is important to note that calls for a ‘democratic rejuvenation’ to tackle health inequalities are not blind to the limitations of increased public participation in policymaking. For example, recognising that democratic innovations are not a ‘democratic panacea’ (Bambra et al., 2021) or explicit acknowledgement of issues relating to representation and a potential lack of political appetite to connect to this type of public engagement (Smith et al., 2022). That said, recognition of these limitations is potentially drowned out by the overall positive rhetoric which tends to surround public participation in policymaking (Gaventa, 2016; Lee et al., 2015a), rhetoric reproduced in the accounts generated

in this study. Across the data, there are consistently high expectations associated with what public participation can (and does) achieve within policymaking spaces, expectations and claims which, given the modes of operation detailed here, I suggest, are 'fantastical'. Sitting at the heart of this are collective narratives which consistently describe participatory-deliberative processes as deeply influential on policy decision-making or as vehicles for transformative change. These narratives are strongly threaded through the Systematic Scoping Review and the Dual Case Study but are also repeatedly undermined in the findings of both. Indeed, there are two central disconnects which characterise this participatory 'fantasy paradigm': i.) consistent segregation from policy decision-making, and ii.) what appears to be a common disconnect from *rational-critical* (Bächtiger et al., 2018) debate which is informed by contemporary evidence and expertise. Both of these disconnects are evident across this thesis.

In the Systematic Scoping Review, the PDPs included all claimed to provide policy windows for citizens to input on decision-making across a wide spectrum of socio-economic areas. However, identifying the planned next steps or mechanisms through which this input might be actioned or listened to was challenging. Similarly, in some examples, it appeared that citizen input was tightly bound by the institution, ultimately confining the PDPs to downstream or process-based policy discussions rather than the more substantive, upstream deliberations advocated for above. The policy analysis for the Dual Case Study identified consistently ambitious claims about what public participation was intended to do, or was doing, within policymaking related to Child Poverty and Just Transition to net zero. However, these claims were undermined by limited detail on *how* public participation actually functions and connects to decision-making within these contexts. Furthermore, across policy stakeholder accounts, we saw similarly high ambitions for how the PDPs might influence, and even transform, decision-making which affects people's lives only for this to again be undermined by limited, or even non-existent, routes to connect into policy decision-making. Underscoring this apparent segregation is a stubborn lack of transparency around how evidence and expertise was

brought into the PDPs analysed in the Systematic Scoping Review and the Dual Case Study, suggesting that the hope that these types of participation processes might bring citizens into conversation with existing knowledge and theory around contemporary issues, such as health inequalities, is far from being realised. Indeed, where there is explicit acknowledgement of the type of expertise shaping the citizen discussions within PDPs, this often reflects a 'confusion of values' (Scott-Samuel & Smith, 2015) related to how this expertise is described, understood and received (explored in more detail below). These repeated patterns of promised or claimed policy influence versus segregation from policymaking and contemporary evidence and expertise, I suggest, produce another 'fantasy paradigm'. Here, we find collective expectations for public participation processes to achieve significant policy impact, however this does not seem possible or likely given the usage presented here. Indeed, whilst it may be 'politically expedient' for Governments to be seen to work in participatory ways, these high expectations appear disconnected from the current role(s) of public participation in policy decision-making.

So, what does this mean for a 'democratic rejuvenation' to tackle health inequalities? Potentially, rather a lot. There are three interconnected themes across this thesis which shape and feed into this proposed 'fantasy paradigm', which I will now discuss in relation to health inequalities theory and literature:

- *Disrupted narratives around the purpose of PDPs within policymaking*
- *Reproduction rather than redress*
- *Missing narratives of power*

8.2.1.1 Disrupted narratives around the purpose of PDPs within policymaking

A key question explored in this thesis was related to the *purpose* of PDPs within policymaking, and indeed one of the most consistent findings across both the Systematic Scoping Review and the Dual Case Study was a

series of disrupted narratives around what these participation processes *were doing* within policy decision-making, which go beyond the high expectations described above. These narratives fragmented across 'shaping' policy-decision-making, tackling wicked issues such as poverty and inequality, filling perceived knowledge and influence gaps in institutional settings, producing experiential evidence to inform policymaking and 'reclaiming' community power, towards potentially less desirable functions such as educating or responsibilising citizens and legitimising rather than reforming existing institutional decision-making.

Aside from being potentially impossible to realise all of these, at times contradictory, aims via one process alone (Geissel, 2012), these disrupted narratives around the purpose of PDPs clearly reveals the 'uneasy tension' (Stewart et al., 2020) between different approaches to policymaking, and particularly between participatory and evidence-based policymaking, approaches which do not necessarily always have the same aims or outputs (Cairney, 2020b). For some theorists this points to a broader conflict in the underlying aims of some public participation processes (Bua & Bussu, 2021; Hill O'Connor & Bennett, 2025). This relates to whether the intention is for the process to be *democracy-driven*, which 'attempts to bring social movements into the state… reclaiming and reinventing participatory structures… a more transformative ambition to advance social justice and deepen democracy' (Bua & Bussu, 2021), or *governance-driven*, i.e., 'an elite-led form of participation, where the aim is, on the one hand, to address the legitimacy crisis of institutions and experts and, on the other hand, to improve policymaking by involving new voices and interests and accessing new sources of information' (Bua & Bussu, 2021, p. 717). This tension resonates with the differences between participatory and deliberative democracy (Escobar & Bua, 2025) detailed in the literature review (Chapter 2) and is reflected in the disrupted narratives around purpose which we find here. This provokes an interesting question in the context of some of the arguments put forward for increasing public participation as a potential means to tackle health inequalities – namely, is it a *democratic* rejuvenation which is sought or,

in fact, an *evidentiary* one? This is a particularly salient question in the context of the identified 'policy stalemate' between knowledge and evidence around health inequalities and (lack of) associated policy action. Smith et al. advocate for investigating deliberative fora as potentially 'useful tools to inform policy discussions in representative democracies' (2022, p. 148), but what does *inform* mean? Is the intention to explore how democratic innovations might better *evidence* (informed) public opinion on macro-policy action or how they might provide mechanisms through which citizens can gain greater *influence* on decision-making at a macro-policy level? Both endeavours would have value but the distinction between the two is important.

There is also an important point to pick up on here related to PDPs functioning as a form of evidence production, particularly in the context of experiential evidence. Some of the literature which advocates for greater recognition and understanding of the lived experiences of socio-economic disadvantage highlight the value this 'lived' knowledge can bring to existing theories surrounding health inequalities (Fergie et al., 2025; Mackenzie et al., 2017; Peacock et al., 2014; Smith & Stewart, 2024; Smith & Anderson, 2018), with some asserting a requirement 'to relinquish an attachment to a hierarchy of evidence that pays low regard to qualitative research' advocating for 'researchers and policymakers [to work] *with* the communities most negatively affected by Scotland's poor health outcomes to better understand their experiences and to co-develop policies and interventions' (Smith & Stewart, 2024, p. 17). Indeed, there has been a recognised 'participatory turn' in research settings alongside that happening in institutional spaces:

> … there is currently a prominent, cross-sector view that the inclusion of citizens in policy making and in research improves social policies and services, leading to the creation of new policy-making spaces that centre citizens' experiences. (Hill O'Connor & Bennett, 2025, p. 5)

For many theorists this apparent collective push towards understanding and incorporating 'lived experiences', although potentially desirable, is

not without challenge (Blume, 2017; Hill O'Connor & Bennett, 2025; McIntosh & Wright, 2019; Meriluoto, 2018; Parr, 2023; Smith-Merry, 2020; Stewart et al., 2020). Indeed, Hill O'Conner & Bennett (2025) argue that the term 'participatory', whether being used in a research or policy context, is an 'unsettled concept' (p. 2), and this push towards employing more citizen-centred forms of evidence, in particular those focused on 'lived experience', has produced 'a complex and often messy space' (p. 14). Certainly, some of this messiness is reflected here.

If a primary function of PDPs is to produce experiential evidence, as suggested in the WPR policy analysis and reflected in many policy stakeholder narratives, particularly from those in Case 1, the *synthesis* and *reporting* of this type of evidence in the examples here is of very low quality. Indeed, experiential evidence is often presented in the form of, largely un-synthesised, individual quotes (which appear to be primarily legitimising institutional decision-making) or baldly summarised suggesting that 'lived experience' of disadvantage is one-dimensional and easily homogenised, again for what appears to be the purposes of legitimation. In addition, the complexity uncovered in how the term 'lived experience' was understood as well as the ways in which the lived realities of some citizen participants *disconnected* from the policy areas being discussed strongly suggests that, despite being described as 'Experts by Experience', some citizens were in fact providing 'evidence' on issues of which they had no prior or current experience. This appears to undermine the participating citizens' actual lived narratives of disadvantage as well as call into question whether the outputs of this PDP can be considered as valid evidence. This finding is concerning, particularly for health inequalities researchers who advocate for a deeper understanding of lived experiences of disadvantage. In a 'series of 'conversations' with policymakers, stakeholders and researchers' related to participatory policymaking in Scotland, Bennett (2022) found a belief that:

> … the use of participatory instruments negates the need to commission or use qualitative and participatory research evidence –

> for example, an experience panel where policymakers can ask service-design questions or quickly gather views. (p. 2)

This belief appeared to 'crowd out' (Bennett, 2022) high quality qualitative research, replacing it with reliance on broader public participation processes, such as the ones investigated here, as a means to understand and connect to 'lived experience'. This means that increasing use of PDPs within policymaking settings is potentially *devaluing* engagement with qualitative research evidence. Indeed, this thesis suggests that rather than being better understood, 'lived experience' in the context of PDPs can be manipulated and instead squeezed into policy silos to suit the needs of the policymaking institution rather than, as theorists suggest, policy actors '[doing] more to listen and learn from disadvantaged communities, including paying attention to existing qualitative research' (Smith & Stewart, 2024, p. 16).

These disrupted narratives give shape to the participatory fantasy paradigm which I am proposing. Multiple claims related to what PDPs are doing within policymaking spaces appear to disintegrate on closer inspection. This disintegration of purpose quickly filters out the high ambitions associated with public participation and appears to leave problematic outcomes in their place: legitimation of existing institutional decision-making and a potential shifting away from high quality qualitative research evidence, neither of which are desirable in the context of tackling health inequalities. Indeed, we now move on to consider in more detail how PDPs might also (unintentionally) reinforce rather than invert wider (unequal) hierarchies of knowledge and power.

8.2.1.2 Reproduction rather than redress

There is an uncomfortable truth presented in this thesis: public participation processes can reproduce rather than redress social and political inequalities. This chimes with some of the critiques of public participation cited in the literature review (Chapter 2) but feels particularly salient in the context of policymaking to tackle health inequalities. The hope that public participation mechanisms, such as

democratic innovations, might redress (in some way) power imbalances within political decision-making (Bambra et al., 2021) is directly challenged by this exploration of PDPs in the contemporary UK-Scottish context. Indeed, this *reproduction rather than redress* manifests in two key ways in the PDPs analysed.

The first relates to how policy problems, and their subsequent solutions, are constructed and understood. This thesis has been explicitly located within a *political economy* framing of health inequalities (Bambra et al., 2025). It was for this reason that Whitehead's typology of interventions to tackle social inequalities in health (2007) and Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' approach (2009) were central to the conceptual framework. Understanding the policy context in which PDPs were operating and understood was crucial and a key part of this was considering how complex issues, such as health inequalities, were framed within participation settings. We have already established that a common theme across the processes investigated was a *disconnection* from contemporary evidence and expertise and it appears that this disconnection, at times, resulted in the repetition and reinforcement of stigmatising narratives, which often surround communities who experience socio-economic disadvantage, something Levitas terms 'Moral Underclass Discourse' or MUD (1998). The fact that these MUD narratives emerge in PDPs is perhaps not wholly surprising, studies have shown that problematic discourses about marginalised and disadvantaged people are pervasive (Tyler, 2020) and have long been deeply embedded in policy decision-making (Crawford, 1977) as well as in how people think about themselves and the world around them (Peacock et al., 2014). What is concerning here is that PDPs, rather than providing a space to challenge and counter some of these narratives, appear to, at times, uphold problem constructions which locate the genesis of issues, such as health inequalities, at the doors of communities most affected. We see this in the (often unacknowledged) confused smorgasbord of recommendations produced by some PDPs in the Systematic Scoping Review, leaving the door wide open for policymakers to 'cherry pick' (Challies et al., 2021;

Font et al., 2018) those which fit with existing plans and dominant ideologies. Similarly, other examples in the Review are, by design, tied to discussions of downstream interventions reflecting explicit commitment to *lifestyle drift* (Katikireddi et al., 2013; Whitehead & Popay, 2010) on behalf of the policymaking institutions. In addition, we find prominent narratives of 'educating' and responsibilising citizens to take action or live differently in the policy analysis and within some policy stakeholder views, with some particularly harmful and stigmatising narratives related to people and place threaded through Case 2.

This is perhaps where one 'fantasy paradigm' meets another. Indeed, it appears that PDPs may serve to *strengthen* existing policy drifts towards individual and lifestyle-based interventions rather than provoke more upstream action. It is here that the central disconnect from contemporary evidence and expertise appears the most problematic. Hopes that democratic innovations might provide 'constructive discursive spaces' (Smith et al., 2022, p. 129) which could bridge gaps between publics, evidence and politics (Bambra et al., 2021) are fatally undermined in the PDPs analysed here by the piecemeal and limited approach to bringing contemporary knowledge end evidence *into* the participation spaces. Without this careful attention to the framing of *causes of* and *solutions to* policy problems, such as poverty and inequality, dominant, unevidenced and individualist, narratives around their genesis, at times, appear to prevail. This also highlights a specific risk associated with this type of political participation, particularly for groups who experience socio-economic disadvantage, where entering a participation process may involve revealing stigmatised identities which are repeatedly othered, or even demonised, within that process. This suggests that 'researchers [and, crucially, policy actors] working with public understandings of health inequalities ought to pay more attention to unpacking evolving public discourses that shape the ways in which people think about health and its determinants' (Fergie et al., 2025, p. 17). This 'unpacking' needs to find its way into any associated participatory work with citizens, with

particular attention given to how any (expected) harmful narratives related to identity will be navigated within the participation space.

The second aspect of *reproduction rather than redress* identified here relates to political inequality. In the policy analysis, public participation was often described as filling perceived knowledge and influence gaps in policy decision-making by claiming to bring in different, often unheard, voices. This rhetoric appeared in the Systematic Scoping Review also, often characterised as 'representativeness', with PDPs striving to at least appear inclusive, whilst often providing little to no detail on participating citizens, meaning it is difficult to know how much or how little political inequality was reproduced or redressed in each process. Similarly, in the Dual Case Study, both PDPs claimed to provide spaces for marginalised groups to participate, however, as the analysis demonstrated, these claims were undermined, even when the data on participating citizens was limited. This point is particularly relevant in Case 2, where observational, workshop and interview data appeared to suggest that participating citizens reflected the 'usual suspects' (Hastings & Matthews, 2011), i.e., people who are both time and resource rich, rather than necessarily representing disadvantaged groups. This suggests that despite claiming to 'reclaim power' for the citizens of Townsley, instead typical unequal patterns of political participation were being reproduced, with voices of advantage potentially drowning out those who are typically 'unheard'. The social patterning of political participation is well known (Dalton, 2017) but is particularly problematic in the context of a 'democratic rejuvenation' to tackle health inequalities. Indeed, although certainly not exclusive to these policy areas, it appears particularly present in participatory policymaking around climate change and Just Transitions in the UK (Boss et al., 2023; Middlemiss et al., 2023). This perhaps provides a sense check for theorists who increasingly advocate the value of considering (and tackling) planetary and human health as deeply interconnected issues (Brand-Correa et al., 2022) – the combination of these complex policy areas may accidentally produce different types of interested participating citizens and, as such, steeper

social gradients of political participation within PDPs. Similarly, the potential amplifying of political inequality, witnessed in Case 2, mirrors findings of a study reviewing downstream policy action, such as health promotion activities, which demonstrated that these types of interventions can unintentionally widen inequalities (Lorenc et al., 2013), given the lifestyle-based changes advocated for are much easier for people living in advantaged circumstances to make (Smith et al., 2016). In short, political participation, of any kind, is unequal and socially patterned (Dalton, 2017), meaning that participatory-deliberative processes which (however unintentionally) reproduce these patterns may widen rather than reduce political inequality (McCartney & Popay, 2025): 'Structural social and economic inequalities thus often operate to exclude or marginalize the voice and influence of some groups while magnifying the influence of others' (Young, 2000, p. 34).

These repeated instances of *reproduction rather than redress*, feed into this wider participatory 'fantasy paradigm'. Indeed, there are two key claims undermined here. The first is that public participation processes provide spaces for the informed interrogation of policy problems by citizens. The second is that they also provide mechanisms through which a greater diversity of views and opinions, particularly of 'unheard' groups (Lightbody & Escobar, 2021), might influence policy decisions. Neither of these claims are fully realised in the examples analysed in this thesis. Instead, we see the reproduction of harmful and stigmatising narratives, serving to reinforce existing policy dogma on how to tackle health inequalities as well as the reproduction of socially patterned political participation which appears to reinforce hierarchies of influence rather than invert them. Indeed, keeping on the subject of influence, we now move on to consider different forms of power within PDPs and how they operate within the policy systems in which they are taking place.

8.2.1.3 Missing narratives of power

There is a particularly fantastical notion about public participation presented in the Systematic Scoping Review, the policy analysis, and in

some policy stakeholder reflections: that the *existence* of a participatory process in and of itself organically negates existing patterns of political influence or the 'unequal bargaining power' (Davis, 2016) of privileged individuals and organisations within policymaking within the UK. This overly simple narrative of how public participation interacts with political and policymaking systems ignores the other various, pervasive and powerful influences on decision-making and the mechanisms through which they are facilitated. I suggest that there are three, interconnected, *missing* narratives of power in this common conceptualisation of public participation, and democratic innovations more broadly: narratives of commercial, institutional and epistemic power. These repeated silences related to how, and importantly why, particular decisions are made, have some unexpected consequences and provide the final strand of our participatory 'fantasy paradigm'.

The first missing narrative of power relates to commercial interests, and more specifically 'the political and economic power of industries (such as tobacco, processed food, alcohol, plastic and fossil fuels)' (Ralston et al., 2023, p. 1). Although long recognised as powerfully shaping health, alongside wider *social* determinants of health, some theorists argue that the *commercial* determinants of health (CDOH) 'are frequently understated, not made explicit, or simply missing' (Maani et al., 2020, p. 661) from many dominant health inequalities frameworks. This missingness is also reflected in the equalising narrative of public participation described above. Indeed, the various 'exercise[s] of corporate power' via successful 'political lobbying, marketing, promoting self-regulation and multistakeholder governance, corporate social responsibility initiatives, funding scientific research, and influencing political and public discourse of policy issues' (Ralston et al., 2023, p. 2) is unacknowledged, particularly in the policy framings of public participation unearthed here. Despite this, citizen participants in both Case 1 and 2 referenced the perceived negative, but powerful, effect of industry in policy decision-making often asserting that their influence far outweighs that of citizens within Government decision-making, reflecting

‘the ways in which specific commercial actors such as transnational corporations can… influence policies and regulations’ (Maani et al., 2020, p. 661), in a way that citizens simply cannot. It is this steep imbalance in influence which is missing from some of the narratives of public participation found here. This lack of recognition of commercial power within policy decision-making renders the idea that the simple existence of citizen-centred processes could negate long standing and deeply ingrained power dynamics between corporations and institutions highly unlikely.

Which brings us to institutional power. This thesis purposefully sought to understand *institutionalised* participatory-deliberative processes, so it is perhaps surprising that I have identified this as a *missing* narrative of power. In the Policy Stakeholder Panel convened during the development for this project, members were animated by the potential of exploring what they described as the ‘black box’ of policymaking through gaining better understanding of how participation processes interact with the policy systems in which they are taking place. Given the seniority of the membership as well as their proximity to Government, the fact that policy decision-making was still considered so unclear and obscure is telling. The idea of an institutional ‘black box’ (Easton, 1965), characterised by complex and fractured policymaking processes (Vlahos, 2021), is of course not new, but in the dominant narrative of public participation discussed here, the specific ways that ‘institutional contexts shape political legitimacy and accountability’ (Ralston et al., 2023, p. 1) are largely unarticulated. Indeed, there are two key silences in how this institutional power operates: i.) how institutions facilitate and mediate the commercial power described above (Ralston et al., 2023), and ii.) how institutions exert, manage and control epistemic power (Kerr, 2023).

For the first, there is a relatively simple but explicit example: the dual representation from Scottish Government around their policy decision-making to progress a Just Transition to net zero. Both the corporation-led Renewable Energy Transition and the citizen-centred project Just

Transition Communities are referenced side by side as key projects, despite, in the context of the Townsley Peoples' Forum at least, sitting in direct opposition to one another. There are stark levels of difference in the amount of funding each is afforded as well as the level of political licence – the Renewable Energy Transition for example details explicit, personal support from the then First Minister where the Just Transitions Communities project does not. This, alongside the repeated claims of 'multistakeholder governance' which sit at the heart of how public participation is constructed in the policy framings of Just Transition to net zero well demonstrate how institutional and commercial power interacts:

> [Corporate] actors can occupy privileged positions and have decision-making power, which does not necessarily relate to their agency, but is rather mediated by institutions. Moreover, institutions often exhibit 'path dependency', meaning that decisions made when an institution (or policy) is created, shape possible/ feasible future decisions and make reversal of decisions difficult. (Ralston et al., 2023, p. 3)

This point is particularly salient in the example above, where it appears Scottish Government is ticking a legitimising participatory box (via Just Transitions Communities), whilst it effectively sides with the corporate power of the (already institutionally funded and politically supported) Renewable Energy Transition conglomerate, presenting a near perfect example of an institutional democratic smokescreen both facilitating *and* obscuring the actual mechanisms of commercial influence.

The second missing narrative of institutional power relates to how it exerts, manages and controls epistemic power, i.e., knowledge practices and production within policymaking spaces. The most visible way in which institutions do this has already been mentioned: the phenomenon of cherry picking (Challies et al., 2021; Font et al., 2018) where institutions essentially pick and choose which policy recommendations from PDPs will be actioned and which will be ignored, often according to existing plans and status quo decision-making. However, epistemic power is exercised in ways beyond cherry picking, notably in Case 1. This PDP aimed to invert typical unfair practices in relation to knowledge production, where

disadvantaged citizens were recast as ‘Experts by Experience’. This can be understood as an explicit attempt to remedy some of the imbalances between different forms of knowledge (for example placing experiential expertise alongside technocratic or scientific knowledge) as well as attempting to take aim at unequal patterns of influence within policymaking spaces and beyond. However, even in this apparently favourable context, the institutional rules and norms appeared to prevail and continued to uphold typical epistemic hierarchies, where despite being described as ‘experts’, the Panel members’ input was almost always mediated by the Poverty and Inequality Commission or Scottish Government. These empowered institutional spaces essentially dictated the *type* of expertise required, effectively reducing their lived realities to sources of information, which, if believed (rightly or wrongly) to sit outwith the gift of Scottish Government, were sometimes deemed irrelevant. Similarly, the push for Panel members to consider their lives in light of predetermined policy silos also appeared to (accidentally) pit members off against one another in terms of whose interests might be discussed or prioritised. This hyper-individual focus meant that ‘lived experience’ sometimes operated as a divider within the group rather than bringing people together over common issues. This finding matters for policymaking to tackle health inequalities. One of the three ways that Bambra et al. (2025) suggest ‘enhanced democratic participation’ might ‘level’ social inequalities in health is via social pathways:

> [D]emocratisation builds social solidarity and social support, and helps foster a sense of social connectivity that facilitates and enables policies that reflect population interests (as opposed to policies that reflect elite interests at the cost of others). (Bambra et al., 2025, p. 50)

It appears that this outcome of increased democratisation is not guaranteed, even in processes which are explicitly exploring a ‘shared typical’ (McIntosh & Wright, 2019). Indeed, for Young, there are inherent problems within democratic processes which aim to ‘privilege unity’:

> Differences of class and/or occupation importantly separate experience and culture in most societies. Under circumstances of

> pluralism, appeals to supposedly shared understandings may be completely fair; on the other hand, they may exclude or marginalize some groups. (2000, p. 41)

Certainly, in Case 1, it was the *differences* between the group which often became amplified in policy stakeholder interviews. Indeed, the backdrop of 'unequal bargaining power' (Davis, 2016) alongside the neoliberal logics of individualism appeared to powerfully shape how 'lived experience' operated as a form of knowledge within this participation space: 'Fairness [was] no longer about redistribution or equality - the eye [was] drawn down and sideways and fairness becomes about what you deserve in relation to others in the same social position' (Peacock et al., 2014, p. 178). It is for this reason that casting the Panel members as 'Experts by Experience' reflects a 'confusion of values' (Scott-Samuel & Smith, 2015). On the one hand it appears that the typical 'expertocracy' (Lightbody & Roberts, 2019) of institutional decision-making is being inverted to open the door to new forms of knowledge and expertise. Whereas on the other, this expertise is wholly delimited by the organisation in terms of what is admissible within this context, and even, at times, (accidentally) weaponised within the Panel in terms of who's knowledge holds value.

There is also another point to pick up, one highlighted in the policy review, and which connects to and extends understandings of epistemic power: the role of wealth privilege (Kerr, 2023, 2024). In the context of this thesis, we see repeated efforts to engage with disadvantaged groups as a primary means through which social and political inequalities might be redressed. However, this persistent focus on disadvantage, potentially obscures understanding of *advantage*, and the ways in which existing hierarchies of knowledge and power, i.e., 'tracker privileges' (Medina, 2011), are consistently upheld in policy decision-making, even where there are participation opportunities for disadvantaged citizens. This reflects something called 'wealthed ignorance' (Kerr, 2023, 2024), and is particularly well demonstrated in a study analysing how single mothers are received and communicated with as part of a UK parliamentary

committee versus the ways in which a group of individuals with wealth exceeding £20 million interact with Government (Kerr, 2023). The difference is stark and deeply unfair: wealthy individuals are afforded back doors facilitated by officials as well as privacy on the topics discussed and their identities, whereas single mothers are asked to provide public testimony on intimate aspects of their lives whilst being tacitly undermined by the frivolous and undermining ways which politicians receive them (Kerr, 2023). This is evidently *not* what health inequalities theorists are advocating for when suggesting that better engagement with disadvantaged groups and the knowledge they possess is important and necessary. But the findings detailed here do detail a significant risk: that the accessing of experiential knowledge in policymaking settings *can be* divisive or exploitative, often requiring significant *epistemic labour* (Pohlhaus, 2017) of disadvantaged individuals whilst asking very little of their advantaged counterparts. In short, institutions hold the reins of epistemic power: how different 'knowers' (Fricker, 2007) are brought into, understood and responded to within policy decision-making is powerfully determined by their 'institutional contexts (and the ideas, rules and procedures that constitute them)' (Ralston et al., 2023,p. 3).

The fact that these narratives of power are *missing* means that these unequal relationships and the conditions which shape them remain un-problematised. Indeed, a consequence of this 'missingness' is the tacit problematisation of disadvantaged groups, often termed 'inward gaze' (Popay et al., 2020), which focuses 'on the characteristics, conditions and often behaviours of the most disadvantaged groups' (McCartney & Popay, 2025, p. 44), in this case any perceived non-participation. This ultimately perpetuates a fantasy that having the *opportunity* to participate is enough to neutralise inequality, if only disadvantaged groups would take it up. In Scott-Samuel and Smith's 'fantasy paradigm' (2015) they argue that 'a dominant 'policy paradigm' prioritising economic growth restricts the ability of policy actors to imagine alternative, more equitable scenarios' (p. 418). Here, I suggest there is a parallel. The same 'logics of

capitalism and neoliberalism [which] constrain pursuit of health equity' (Ralston et al., 2023,p. 4), also constrain the capacity of public participation processes, in and of themselves, to significantly shift decision-making towards more progressive and redistributive policies. This would require PDPs to at once invert multiple and interconnected dynamics related to commercial, institutional and epistemic power, which given the segregation from policy decision-making demonstrated here alongside the repeated invisibility of these narratives of power, appears at least unlikely, if not entirely fantastical.

8.2.1.4 Reimagining a new participatory paradigm

Before concluding the discussion of the participatory 'fantasy paradigm' identified in this thesis, it is important to state that even though I am describing this paradigm through a health inequalities lens, I am not suggesting that health inequalities theorists are the architects of this fantasy realm. Rather there is a much wider, strongly held, shared and collective belief in the promise and current function of public participation. Indeed, the idea that public participation is an 'intrinsic good' (Kerr, 2023; Smith-Merry, 2020; Stewart, 2016) appears omnipotent, existing across research, citizen and policy settings, and can sit in contrast to what it is actually doing or enabled to do in practice. And herein lies the fantasy. This overly simplified, celebratory narrative ignores the complexity of the policymaking systems in which public participation is taking place, including the rules, norms and dominant ideologies which inform those systems, their inherently unequal power dynamics, and the uncomfortable truth that *sometimes* public participation processes reproduce rather than redress social and political inequalities. The challenges identified here provide a sense check for any 'democratic rejuvenation' to tackle health inequalities. However, whilst some of the difficulties uncovered are significant, and in some cases unexpected, they are not necessarily insurmountable. Instead, I suggest (along with Scott-Samuel and Smith), there is a need to *'[re]imagine'* the 'kinds of institutions and structures that would be likely to help enable a fundamental reduction in [health] inequalities' (emphasis added, 2015, p.

430), including the role which public participation might play within that. The ‘fantasy paradigm’ I have described here is constructed across research, citizen and policy settings, meaning that it can be *reconstructed* within those settings too. I will now move on to consider some of the opportunities identified across this thesis for future work around public participation in socio-economic decision-making and the ways in which we might reimagine a new, more realistic, participatory paradigm.

8.3 Opportunities for research and policy

It might be surprising to learn, after all of this, that I am an advocate of public participation in policymaking. Despite the challenges revealed above, I believe that meaningful public participation is a crucial component of functioning governments and societies. Indeed, we currently have numerous contemporary examples in the UK, and beyond, of what happens when people do not feel listened to: divisive politics find currency (Bächtiger & Dryzek, 2024) and as collective trust in our shared institutions erodes (OECD, 2024), efforts to tackle inequalities ‘wane’ (Bambra et al., 2025) or even shift sharply into reverse (Walsh & McCartney, 2024). Although evidently challenging, I agree with health inequalities theorists that overcoming any ‘policy stalemate’ in the UK requires a rethink of how the public are brought into decision-making and it is clear from qualitative research that engaging with the expertise and knowledge of disadvantaged groups is a necessary step in understanding how to design and implement policies which advance social justice values rather than reinforce existing inequalities. That said, the reality of the PDPs investigated here suggests that any advocacy for public participation must be conditional. Indeed, there are three key ways in which I think we need to reimagine participatory practice in the context of increasing inequality.

8.3.1 Public participation = one, necessary, piece of a much bigger jigsaw

The first is how we think about how public participation interacts with social and political systems. I have detailed how collective high expectations surrounding PDPs produce a participatory 'fantasy paradigm', fantastical, in part, because of their disconnection from policy decision-making. In order to *reimagine* participatory policymaking, public participation needs to be better 'embedded' within political and policy systems (Bussu, Bua, et al., 2022). This thesis has very much zoomed into PDPs, which, of course, is helpful in understanding how public participation operates and functions within institutional settings, but it is also necessary to zoom out and consider how public participation might (better) interact with broader policy decision-making within particular political contexts. Indeed, contemporary advocates of participatory and deliberative democracy argue that there has been a significant focus on how PDPs are designed (resulting in a now vast literature on process), however it is now time to turn attention to how these processes are built *into* institutions (Bussu, Bua, et al., 2022; Russell, 2017; Scottish Government, 2025). To this end, Bussu et al. advocate for viewing participation, and particularly democratic innovations, as 'assemblage', i.e., 'non-linear' and sitting in complex interaction with political systems (2025):

> … understanding democratic innovations as assemblages encourages us to acknowledge the impracticality of evaluating the impact of participatory initiatives in isolation, based on their design, and pay attention to interactions… within the socio-economic, political, and cultural context in which they exist. (Bussu et al., 2025, p. 5)

This point is particularly helpful in the context of policymaking to tackle health inequalities, and any anticipated 'democratic rejuvenation'. In their recent work exploring the 'policy and politics of reducing health inequalities', Bambra et al. provide four different, geo-political examples which demonstrate common ''levellers': types of policy change that were

evident in all four case studies of success' (2025, p. 118), with 'enhanced democratic participation' identified as one of these key levellers. This work asserts:

> … that *combinations* of policy change that address disadvantage are likely to be required if significant reductions of health inequalities are to be achieved. In short, single policy changes are unlikely to get the job done, and given the unique historical and contextual specifics of every country, there may not even be a 'magic' combination of policies. (Bambra et al., 2025, p. 118)

Instead, it is necessary to consider 'the 'big picture' of how *different mixtures* of macro-policy change impact overarching health patterns' (emphasis added, Bambra et al., 2025, p. 3). It is this focus on a combination of mechanisms which is helpful here. This study demonstrates a need to challenge simplistic and overly celebratory narratives of public participation and instead view participatory processes as often fluid, but necessary, components of much bigger systems. This requires better understanding and articulation of how policy, practice and legislation which promotes increased public participation within policymaking interacts (positively or negatively) with the wider decision-making of institutions, particularly around the other 'levellers' identified by Bambra et al. (2025): welfare state expansion, improved healthcare access and reduced income inequalities. Indeed, it is through consideration of how public participation operates in concert with these other key policy domains (or not) that the likelihood of it playing a role in reducing social inequalities in health might be better understood.

The case of Brazil provides an excellent example. One of the four case studies highlighted by Bambra et al. (2025) as a potential 'health 'miracle'' for 'simultaneously improving population health and reducing health inequalities' (p. 35), it has also been widely celebrated for its participatory endeavours, producing perhaps the most exported form of participation internationally: participatory budgeting (Cabannes, 2004; G. Smith, 2009). Indeed, participatory budgeting (PB) 'has evolved from experiences in Brazil to a global movement with thousands of processes around the world' (Escobar & Katz, 2018, p. 2). This export has drawn

critique (Pateman, 2012), even from those who advocate its democratic and social justice potential (G. Smith, 2009; O'Hagan et al., 2020). Indeed, there are concerns that the 'the political and bureaucratic implications of PB' as well as the necessary, and significant, 'institutional reorganisation' (G. Smith, 2009, p. 66) which went hand in hand with PB in Brazil are often missing from international iterations (Pateman, 2012), which is the important point here. Bambra et al. highlight the ways that PB, alongside other in-depth democratic reforms, including institutional 'support for non-governmental organisations, trade unions and civil society organisations' (2025, p. 51) worked *in conjunction* with wider policy action to tackle inequalities across a wide range of determinants such as healthcare access, income, education, housing and commercial industry. Indeed, distilling PB away from these other institutional reforms (as is the case in many international examples) fails to recognise its crucial 'productive interaction' (Bussu, Bua, et al., 2022) with broader, simultaneous policy action. This highlights the need for any 'democratic rejuvenation' to tackle health inequalities to better understand 'the [*various*] governance mechanisms that enabled this mixture of policies to be successfully implemented' (Bambra et al., 2025,p. 52), rather than focus on one participatory strand in isolation.

There is also one last point to make here. This thesis has purposefully explored institutional participatory-deliberative processes, but this 'invited' (Cornwall, 2008) form of participation is not the only one available to citizens:

> The centred image of deliberative democracy implicitly thinks of the democratic process as one big meeting at the conclusion of which decisions are made… Society is bigger than politics and outruns political institutions, and thus democratic politics must be thought of as taking place within the context of large and complex social processes. (Young, 2000, p. 46)

Indeed, in the Brazil example above, social movements, particularly those happening around trade unions, played a significant role in the re-democratisation of the country as well as in garnering widespread (albeit potentially time-limited) public support for the significant institutional

reforms which followed (Bambra et al., 2025). Social movements are 'organised, non-governmental collectives… viewed as critical for dismantling top-down power structures and bringing about social change' (Kapilashrami et al., 2025, p. 84). Given the invisible narratives of power identified in the conceptualisation of public participation in this thesis, relying solely on institutional forms of public participation seems unlikely to '[address] the economic mechanisms and power dynamics that drive social inequalities' (McCartney & Popay, 2025, p. 46), instead potentially 'creating disincentives for [necessary] vibrant and imaginative protest and resistance' (McCartney & Popay, 2025, p. 44). Although 'uninvited participation is rarely welcome' (Stewart, 2016, p. 126), perhaps that is the point. Stewart asserts that 'the 'awkward' publics who insist on exerting their agency in unsolicited ways are 'participating' as much as those who act in invited ways' (2016,p. 128), and indeed can potentially yield citizen power in a way that those operating within the confines of institutionalised mechanisms cannot. Indeed, Escobar and Bua (2025) advocate for 'decentring' elite-driven democratic innovations to consider the multiple and varied forms of participation available to citizens:

> Decentring democratic practice thus entails understanding and advancing the varied sites where people participate in shaping the decisions that affect their lives. It means recognising the potential of democratic innovation beyond centralised institutions and narrowly defined political sites – a lens that limits capacity to distribute power and effect change. (p. 9)

In addition, they argue for '[r]esisting isomorphism… sustaining diverse processes and resisting monocultures (i.e., cultivating just one kind of democratic innovation)' (Escobar & Bua, 2025, p. 23). Understanding *this* space, where democratic innovations potentially transcend typical typologies and connect into different forms of public participation, including both invited and claimed iterations, appears important in the context of tackling inequalities. Indeed, specific investigation of how social movements might support, disrupt or challenge institutionalised forms of public participation and any associated policymaking seems a necessary gap worth filling.

In short, there appears to be a need to reimagine public participation as one necessary piece of a much bigger jigsaw. Rather than viewing participation processes as one pivotal mechanism it is necessary to broaden our understanding of how such processes *interact* with the wider social and political systems in which they are taking place, and in particular whether and how they operate *in conjunction* with wider policy decision-making and social movements within those systems.

8.3.2 Root the design of PDPs in the context of inequality

The second facet of reimagining a participatory paradigm relates to process design. Although above I have argued for more focus on the 'embeddedness' (Bussu, Bua, et al., 2022) of participation within institutions, that does not mean abandoning any consideration of how the design of participation processes plays out and in particular how such design interacts with increasing social and political inequality. This remains an important area of study and practice, and one which this thesis holds some specific lessons for.

The first is a pressing need to reframe representation. Across the PDPs investigated there appears to be a collective effort to demonstrate inclusiveness, something which although repeatedly claimed, is rarely, if ever, realised. This points to the essential impossibility of any one process achieving 'full participation' (G. Smith, 2009) and is particularly salient in the context of 'representing' disadvantaged groups. Theorists assert that 'research and policy needs to better grapple with the depth of poverty, the intersectional nature of inequalities and the roles that history, narratives… and policy implementation each play in shaping Scotland's health outcomes' (Smith & Stewart, 2024, p. 5), I suggest that this grappling must also happen in the designing of PDPs. Indeed as Smith and Stewart (2024) argue, we need to reconceptualise representation via explicit recognition of the 'heterogeneity' of the groups and people who live 'along a continuum of disadvantage' (Edmiston, 2022, p. 387). This requires clarity on *who* is participating, as well as, crucially, detail on

why those particular groups were sought. Alongside this, there is a need to properly acknowledge that is highly unlikely, if not impossible, to represent the many axes of difference and commonality which intersect in people's identities and experiences. This does not mean that designers of PDPs abandon any hope of inverting typical patterns of participation. Although complicated, it is still possible to design processes that are inclusive (at least as much as possible) and which pay particular attention to barriers which may be experienced by particular groups (see for example, Fraser, 1990; Lightbody & Escobar, 2021; McCoy & Scully, 2002; Young, 2000). What I am suggesting is that the *reality* of representation is brought to the fore in place of the *appearance* of representation: a collective pretence that PDPs are meaningfully tackling democratic deficits helps nobody. Linked to this, is the need to better articulate the *purpose* of public participation within policymaking spaces. The disrupted and varied narratives around what PDPs were doing, or intended to do, significantly shaped the participatory fantasy paradigm found here. It appears necessary, at the point of design, to be able to say, in as granular detail as possible what a participation process is hoping to do, which may require asking some potentially difficult questions. Is it about producing 'evidence artifacts' (Hill O'Connor & Bennett, 2025) for the consideration of policy actors? Is it an opportunity for citizens to actively shape public policy (Lafont, 2015), if so how will it do this? Is it about 'market testing' (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006) existing policy proposals? Is it about turning the gaze inwards and considering the ways that the behaviour of disadvantaged groups might be improved and remedied (Popay et al., 2020)? Is it primarily to legitimise decisions which have already been made (Fung, 2015)? Or one of the many other functions (both desirable and undesirable) that public participation might be serving within policy decision-making. This honest articulation of purpose is crucial to any reimagining of public participation in the context tackling health inequalities.

Which brings us to a final, connected, point on process design: the role of contemporary evidence and expertise, and more specifically the role of

research within increased public participation in policymaking. Deliberative fora are often underpinned by particular ideals, of which *rational-critical* debate informed by a spectrum of evidence is key (Bächtiger et al., 2018):

> … a democracy designed without successful attention to this kind of public will formation could easily be reduced to a democracy of manipulated sound bites and misled opinions. Even if the elections for candidates, parties and ballot measures are competitive and people have a choice, it may be no more thoughtful or authentic a choice than one between brands of soap or cigarettes. (Fishkin, 2018, p. 3)

In this thesis there is an identified disconnect between contemporary evidence and expertise and the PDPs, which in turn suggests a potential disconnect between real-world public participation in policymaking and broader research. It appears that in order for PDPs to provide 'constructive discursive spaces' (Smith et al., 2022, p. 129) where publics can be brought into conversation with existing knowledge and theory around health inequalities, real world participatory processes need to better connect to the plethora of research and knowledge produced in the UK and beyond. Indeed, there is evidence that when presented with a range of research-informed policy proposals to consider in a deliberative setting, problematic individualising narratives were challenged through engagement with evidence: 'the impact of [these individualised] discourse[s] on discussions was moderated through deliberative engagement with accounts from expert witnesses' (Smith et al., 2021, p. 8). This suggests that it necessary for designers of PDPs to be consciously and purposefully rooting the discussion and facilitation of policy problems, particularly those which connect to inequality, within existing knowledge and theory *about* inequality. Similarly, there is clearly a need to better attend to existing qualitative research within the planning and delivery of PDPs. This might go some way to prevent the potential 'crowding out' of qualitative research witnessed here, where engagement with a participatory process is considered an adequate replacement for high quality, although, as such, potentially more complicated, qualitative research. Indeed, the *complexity* of the task at hand when designing

PDPs necessitates meaningful partnership working and knowledge sharing between research and policy actors. It appears necessary to recognise that participatory-deliberative processes '*entangle*' a spectrum of stakeholders from 'across diverse sector[s], organisation[s] and interests' (emphasis added, Bynner et al., 2023, p. 739), and that academic expertise is a crucial component of any knowledge brokering that takes place in their design and delivery. Finally, there is a specific point to pick up on how experiential expertise fits into any 'hierarchy of knowledge' (Hill O'Connor & Bennett, 2025) within PDPs and in particular to understand how the participatory turn in policy settings has impacted on the use, and regard, of qualitative research which seeks to understand lived experiences of disadvantage. I have presented the arguments for increasing public participation within policymaking *alongside* those which advocate for 'grounding both diagnosis and prescriptions for a more equal future in the experiential knowledge of people living with experience of social and economic disadvantage' (Smith & Stewart, 2024, p. 17), but they are perhaps not as complementary endeavours as they might appear. This reflects a

> … knotty issue when discussing lived experience, that is, how to distinguish between lived experience as an *output* (such as the statements made to a committee hearing, or a research report), and the use of lived experience in a *policy-making process* of which the knowledge is nurtured, shared and (in some cases) generated with power holders. (Hill O'Connor & Bennett, 2025, p. 14)

Indeed, it appears as if there is some work to be done to '[explore] the interactions and tensions' (Hill O'Connor & Bennett, 2025, p. 16) in how experiential knowledge is accessed and understood, and in particular the role which qualitative research plays within this.

In short, the design of participatory-deliberative processes needs to be rooted in the context of inequality. This means proper consideration of the purpose of the process, which in turn should shape how representation is conceptualised and implemented, underscored by acknowledgement of any (likely) limitations to both. Linked to this, the design of PDPs needs to be better connected to existing knowledge and

theory around inequality, particularly that produced in qualitative work. This necessitates productive linkage between research and policy settings, with particular attention required to explore how 'lived experiences' of disadvantage are understood, accessed and synthesised in different contexts.

8.3.3 Centring power and privilege

The third and final strand of this reimagination of participatory policymaking relates to power and privilege. I have identified *missing* narratives of power in the participatory fantasy paradigm described above - in order to reimagine participatory practice, these need to be exposed, acknowledged and challenged. Many of the PDPs investigated in this thesis locate their policy ambitions as tackling particular problems, which are often connected to poverty, inequality. I suggest than in order to effectively tackle these issues, imbalances in power and privilege need to be centred within PDPs (and beyond), with greater problematisation of *advantage* rather than *dis*advantage (Kerr, 2024): 'it becomes important to understand how and why some people got rich and maintain that wealth, and who ultimately pays for that to be maintained, in order to effect change' (McCartney et al., 2021, p. 34). Indeed, it appears necessary to re-orient ourselves towards understanding privilege (in all its forms) and making explicit the mechanisms which uphold and produce inequality. By this I do not mean that we stop trying to understand the deleterious impacts of inequality or that we stop any efforts which seek to redress democratic deficits. Instead, alongside and intertwined with these endeavours, I suggest we need to gain a critical understanding of how those with existing influence on policymaking operate and maintain such influence.

The centring of power and privilege in the context of health inequalities is not a new idea, indeed there are theorists who have (convincingly) made the case for thinking about power, in particular, as a fundamental cause (Friel et al., 2021; McCartney et al., 2021; Popay et al., 2020). It is

one of those cases which is particularly helpful here. McCartney et al. (2021) 'propose a framework for identifying important sources of power, and the spaces in which they operate, as well as the positions and the forms of power relationship involved' (p. 21). This framework, intended as a blueprint for further development, could provide a helpful vector through which PDPs might be better understood, or even practically, perhaps better designed in the context of tackling health inequalities. Taking in sources of power including economic, knowledge, culture and belief, collective organisations or the state, using this framework to articulate the spaces, positions and forms of power which operate and influence policy decision-making might shed better light on those mechanisms of unequal influence but also, crucially, where the opportunities for inverting those might lie:

> These regimes [of inequality]… are fundamentally the products of continuously intersecting socio-political processes of power and domination – but also of resistance, challenge and empowerment which help to create the possibility for change. (McCartney et al., 2021, p. 33)

Indeed, this framework could be applied to better locate PDPs within the wider social and political systems, potentially achieving the 'embeddedness' (Bussu, Bua, et al., 2022) advocated for above or, conversely, provide insight into how and why participation processes might become segregated from or manipulated within those same systems.

Alongside this, there appears to be a need to home in on knowledge production in the context of PDPs, and in particular a specific focus on epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice is 'about [the] ways that members of marginalized groups may be wronged in their capacity as knowers due to prejudicial stereotypes' (Saul, 2017, p. 235). Fricker (2007) identifies two forms of epistemic injustice: *testimonial*, i.e., where 'identity prejudice' powerfully shapes the credibility afforded to particular knowers (or not), and *hermeneutical*, i.e., where there is a perceived shortfall in the resources available to particular groups 'for interpreting

and making sense of experience' (Kerr, 2024, p. 156). These different forms of injustices combine to produce 'epistemic oppression… when particular knowers are precluded from making an impact, not just *with* shared epistemic resources, but also *on* shared epistemic resources (Pohlhaus, 2017,p. 14). Indeed, in the context of policymaking to tackle health inequalities, and any potential 'democratic rejuvenation', theories of epistemic injustice may have a lot to offer. Advocated for by prominent participatory theorists as a potential vector through which to evolve institutional participatory practice, and particularly democratic innovation (Escobar & Bua, 2025), unpicking and exposing specific inequalities in knowledge production, synthesis and understanding as they are experienced in policymaking settings might go some way to understanding how such imbalances might be redressed (the example of how individuals from different income brackets interact with the UK Government, cited above, provides an excellent example of this in action, Kerr, 2023, 2024). Epistemic injustice also helps shed light on the 'tracker privileges' (Kerr, 2024; Medina, 2011) which operate, often invisibly, allowing some knowers to be consistently valued above others, and therefore consistently hold increased influence in decision-making:

> … in a process of concatenation, credibility deficits and excesses translate into forms of *relational* inequality within policymaking institutions, where some people are afforded the opportunity to contribute in meaningful and influential ways, while others are not. This unlocks forms of political privilege that can shape legislation and, ultimately, influence distributive inequality. (Kerr, 2024, p. 157)

This in conjunction with a specific and articulate focus on other forms of power, as advocated by McCartney et al. (2021) in their framework, perhaps provides a helpful starting place for articulating the spaces, positions and pathways of power as well as how unequal systems of decision-making and influence repeatedly produce policies which have deleterious effects for many whilst at the same time privileging the interests of others:

> Identifying more concretely how power inequalities pervade societies, and recognising the limitations of current democratic processes, is therefore vitally important if health inequalities are to be successfully addressed. (McCartney et al., 2021, p. 27)

This centring of power and privilege, and all of the limitations and confines it presents to PDPs, potentially provides a useful toolkit through which to reimagine institutional structures which might then be able to 'take serious aim at inequalities in wealth, power and political voice' (Smith & Stewart, 2024, p. 17).

In conclusion, there are three, interconnected, areas which are ripe for exploration and investigation in the context of a 'democratic rejuvenation' to tackle health inequalities. A central focus is required on understanding how to locate and embed any participatory processes within the broader social and political systems in which they are taking place. Indeed, future work should pay specific attention to how public participation interacts with policymaking, particularly those areas identified by Bambra et al (2025) as pivotal in reducing inequalities in health: welfare state expansion, healthcare access and income inequality as well as the role of social movements in provoking (progressive or regressive) policy action. In considering how PDPs are *built into* institutions, it is important that any focus on the design of processes is not lost. Proper articulation of the intended purpose of PDPs, which is rooted in reality rather fantasy, is required and this purpose should determine how representation and inclusion is conceptualised within the process. This involves confronting the fact that representativeness is inherently complicated. Linked to this, the design of PDPs needs to be linked in 'productive interaction' (Bussu, Bua, et al., 2022) with contemporary evidence and expertise and this requires strong linkages between policy and research settings, with a particular need to consider how 'lived experiences' and voices of disadvantage are represented and understood within different contexts. Finally, frameworks which centre power and privilege appear necessary vehicles through which to better understand, and potentially even better design, public participation

processes in ways in which might increase their likelihood to contribute towards action which tackles rather than reinforces inequality.

8.4 Chapter summary: thesis contributions

This thesis sits alongside other work which explores public participation in policymaking, notably other studies which consider the how it interacts with inequality (Kapilashrami et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2015b). Employing a rigorous multi-method approach, it provides original insight into the role of public participation in the context of tackling health inequalities and highlights some specific challenges, both expected and unexpected. It provides specific theoretical contributions, notably through the development and application of a three-fold conceptual framework as well as through the proposal of a participatory 'fantasy paradigm'. This helpfully links up knowledge and theory around policymaking to tackle social inequalities with current participatory practice and the rhetoric which surrounds it, providing a fresh perspective through which to consider how the two might combine. That said, there is a strong focus on challenges, gaps and issues. Whilst this is useful (and reflective of the practice investigated here), in keeping with contemporary thinking around health inequalities, I believe it is necessary to move beyond 'describing the problem' towards articulating what a fruitful 'democratic rejuvenation' might look like. Indeed, there are some clear opportunities for future research as well as implications for policy identified in this thesis. Sitting at the heart of these is the reimagination described above. This includes reconceptualising public participation as a key feature of wider systems of decision-making which are influenced by the social, cultural and political climate in which they are located. Linked to this is the need to root the design and delivery of participatory approaches within the context of inequality and all of the challenges that this might present. In order to do this, critical reflection is required on how different forms of power operate and the ways in which they are facilitated in political systems, with a particular focus on epistemic injustice and knowledge production within policy settings. In addition to

this there is also a requirement to actively seek out stories of success, which as Bambra et al. (2025) demonstrate, do exist. Indeed, understanding where public participation has positively interacted with efforts to reduce inequalities seems necessary, and given the plethora of participatory examples in the UK and Scotland, there are certainly some successful examples to be found.

Appendix 1: Searches and results, Systematic Scoping Review

EconLit Searches (EBSCO)

S7	**S5 AND S6 limited to 2007 onwards**	1,353
S6	TI (((poor or lived-experience or public or citizen* or communit* or lay or household* or low-income or stakeholder*) N3 (participat* or deliberat* or "decision-making" or community or democra* or involve* or partners* or citizen* or panel or assembl* or neighbourhood* or jury or juries or collabor* or forum or committee or co-governance))) OR AB (((poor or lived-experience or public or citizen* or communit* or lay or household* or low-income or stakeholder*) N3 (participat* or deliberat* or "decision-making" or community or democra* or involve* or partners* or citizen* or panel or assembl* or neighbourhood* or or jury or juries or collabor* or forum or committee or co-governance)))	17,252
S5	**S1 OR S2 OR S3 OR S4**	67,034
S4	TI (Policy N3 (social or making or public or economic or decision making socio-economic or inequalit*)) OR AB (Policy N3 (social or making or public or economic or decision making or socio-economic or inequalit*))	52,731
S3	TI (Democr* N3 (economic or innovate* or deliberat*) OR AB (Democr* N3 (economic or innovate* or deliberat*)	1, 656
S2	TI (Insecurity N3 (financial or economic or job or income) OR AB (Insecurity N3 (financial or economic or job or income)	804
S1	TI (Income N3 (insecurity or poverty or depriv* or security or inequalit* or austerity)) OR AB (Income N3 (insecurity or poverty or depriv* or security or inequality* or austerity))	13, 601

SOC Index searches (EBSCO)

S7	**S5 AND S6 limited to 2007 onwards**	1, 532
S6	TI (((poor or lived-experience or public or citizen* or communit* or lay or household* or low-income or stakeholder*) N3 (participat* or deliberat* or "decision-making" or community or involve* or partners* or citizen* or panel or assembl* or neighbourhood* or jury or juries or collabor* or forum or committee or co-governance))) OR AB (((poor or lived-experience or public or citizen* or communit* or lay or household* or low-income or stakeholder*) N3 (participat* or deliberat* or "decision-making" or community or involve* or partners* or citizen* or panel or assembl* or neighbourhood* or or jury or juries or collabor* or forum or committee or co-governance)))	45,357
S5	**S1 OR S2 OR S3 OR S4**	68,647
S4	TI (Policy N3 (social or making or public or economic or decision making socio-economic or inequalit*)) OR AB (Policy N3 (social or making or public or economic or decision making or socio-economic or inequalit*))	58,748
S3	TI (Democr* N3 (economic or innovate* or deliberat*) OR AB (Democr* N3 (economic or innovate* or deliberat*)	2,654
S2	TI (Insecurity N3 (financial or economic or job or income) OR AB (Insecurity N3 (financial or economic or job or income)	1,409
S1	TI (Income N3 (insecurity or poverty or depriv* or security or inequalit* or austerity)) OR AB (Income N3 (insecurity or poverty or depriv* or security or inequality* or austerity))	6,981

MedLine Searches (EBSCO)

S7	**S5 AND S6 limited to 2007 onwards**	2,580
S6	TI (((poor or lived-experience or public or citizen* or communit* or lay or household* or low-income or stakeholder*) N3 (participat* or deliberat* or "decision-making" or community or democra* or involve* or partners* or citizen* or panel or assembl* or neighbourhood* or jury or juries or collabor* or forum or committee or co-governance))) OR AB (((poor or lived-experience or public or citizen* or communit* or lay or household* or low-income or stakeholder*) N3 (participat* or deliberat* or "decision-making" or community or democra* or involve* or partners* or citizen* or panel or assembl* or neighbourhood* or or jury or juries or collabor* or forum or committee or co-governance)))	83,039
S5	**S1 OR S2 OR S3 OR S4**	50,282
S4	TI (Policy N3 (social or making or public or economic or decision making socio-economic or inequalit*)) OR AB (Policy N3 (social or making or public or economic or decision making or socio-economic or inequalit*))	43,228
S3	TI (Democr* N3 (economic or innovate* or deliberat*) OR AB (Democr* N3 (economic or innovate* or deliberat*)	259
S2	TI (Insecurity N3 (financial or economic or job or income) OR AB (Insecurity N3 (financial or economic or job or income)	1,975
S1	TI (Income N3 (insecurity or poverty or depriv* or security or inequalit* or austerity)) OR AB (Income N3 (insecurity or poverty or depriv* or security or inequality* or austerity))	5,567

Sociological Abstracts (PROQUEST)

S5	**Limit English and UK**	3, 035
S4	**Limit to 2007 onwards**	140,195
S3	**S1 AND S2**	261,656
S2	ab (poor or lived-experience or public or citizen* or communit* or lay or household* or low-income or stakeholder* or participat* or deliberat* or “decision-making” or community or democra* or involve* or partners* or citizen* or panel or assembl* or neighbourhood* or jury or juries or collabor* or forum or committee or co-governance) or ti (poor or lived-experience or public or citizen* or communit* or lay or household* or low-income or stakeholder* or participat* or deliberat* or “decision-making” or community or democra* or involve* or partners* or citizen* or panel or assembl* or neighbourhood* or jury or juries or collabor* or forum or committee or co-governance)	676,898
S1	ab("income insecurity" OR poverty OR depriv* OR security OR inequalit* OR austerity or "financial insecurity" or "economic insecurity" or "job insecurity" or Democr* or "economic democracy" or "democratic innovations" or "deliberative democracy" or or "participatory democracy" or policy* or "social policy" or "public policy" or economic or "decision making" or socio-economic or inequalit*) OR ti("income insecurity" OR poverty OR depriv* OR security OR inequalit* OR austerity or "financial insecurity" or "economic insecurity" or "job insecurity" or Democr* or "economic democracy"	445,475

	or "democratic innovations" or "deliberative democracy" or or "participatory democracy" or policy* or "social policy" or "public policy" or economic or "decision making" or socio-economic or inequalit*)	

Grey Literature

BASE Database Search **TOTAL RESULTS: 1,772**

Key terms search (limited to UK & 2007 onwards)

- Democratic innovation – 945; **references put forward: 70**
- Income Insecurity – 56; **references put forward: 0 (all related to food insecurity)**
- Participation – 731; **references put forward: 39**
- Deliberative – 40; **references put forward: 4**

Other search terms:

poverty / socio-economic policy / decision-making / lived experience

Checked the first 100 results of each search and most resulted in:

- largely irrelevant studies
- too many studies to go through (+ 20,000), with the first 100 not meeting criteria

In total docs put forward for next selection: 107

Websites

Scottish Government **TOTAL RESULTS: 2,458**

Initial Search:

- Publications
- Topics:
  - Communities / third sector – **Results: 1651 (all docs)**

In total docs put forward for next selection: 17

Next searches:

- **Economy**
- **Constitution/ Democracy**
- **Money and tax**

Limited to consultation analysis/ report, strategy /plan, impact assessment, progress report, independent report, research and analysis**: 798, put forward: 5**

Social Security Scotland

- Lived experience panels: 9 results, **1 put forward**

UK Government website proper **TOTAL RESULTS: 966**

Searches in Research and Statistics and Policy Papers and Consultations

Key word:

- **Participation** in:
- Welfare – results **72**, **put forward 2**
- Government – results **319**, **put forward 3**
- Money – results **81**, **1 put forward**

Topic search:

- **Poverty and social justice**, policy and consultations: **13** results, **1 put forward**
- **Community and society,** policy and consultations: **444** results, **3 put forward**
- **Social Action,** policy and consultations: **37** results, **0 put forward**

JRF **TOTAL RESULTS: 422**

Key word searches:

Participation, 2007 onwards: 195

Decision-making, income and benefits, 2007 onwards: 227

Studies put forward: 10

IPPR **TOTAL RESULTS: 315**

Key word searches:

Participation – 156 results, **3 put forward**

Citizens – 109 results, **3 put forward**

Democratic innovation, economy – 34 results, **3 put forward**

Citizen's Jury, economy – 16 results, **1 put forward**

Participedia.org **TOTAL RESULTS: 263**

Limited to UK CASE STUDIES – 263, **17 put forward**

Involve **TOTAL RESULTS: 81**

All publications and projects: **2 put forward**

COSLA **TOTAL RESULTS: 320**

Key words:

- Participation

Topic area: **communities**, results **40**, **put forward 2**

Topic area, **local government finance,** results **20, put forward 0**

Topic area, **environment and economy**, results **260**, **put forward 2**

Local Government Association **TOTAL RESULTS: 327**

Key words in publications:

- Participation: results **49**, **put forward 3**

Publication by topic area:

- Devolution, economic growth, business and finance rates**:** results **65, put forward 1**
- Welfare reform, communities**:** results **35, put forward 0**

Case studies by topic area**:**

- Devolution, economic growth, business and finance rates, communities, welfare reform: results **178, 0 put forward**

Appendix 2: Inclusion / Exclusion Criteria, Systematic Scoping Review

Include	Exclude
From 2007 onwards / UK based	Pre-2007 / non-UK
Participatory-deliberative processes	
Participatory and deliberative process including but not exhaustive to: • Workshops / focus groups • Community forums, events, activities • Consultations (which invite some form of citizen input) • Deliberative polls • Citizen panels, juries, assemblies • Citizen representation on planning partnerships / advisory panels / steering groups	Participation in aggregative / representative democratic functions, for example: • Voting in elections • Participating in political parties • Political campaigning
Examples of direct & hybrid democracy. For example: • Community planning partnerships populated by statutory, third sector and community members/ citizens (hybrid)	Examples of purely associative democracy. For example: • Steering /strategy groups populated by representatives of formal community groups and organisations or third sector representatives
The participant selection / invitation falls into one of the following categories: • Lay stakeholders • Random selection • Open, Targeted, Recruiting • Open, self-selection • Diffuse, Public Sphere	The participant selection / invitation *only* falls into one of the following categories: • Expert Administrators • Elected Representatives • Professional Stakeholders

Include	Exclude
Policymaking	
The example is connected to policymaking via: • Embedded in the decision-making process • Direct contact w institution or policymakers • Lobbying • Invitation This includes examples where the process is convened in a third sector or research setting.	The example does not connect to policymaking or policymakers in any way.
Examples of participation in policymaking spaces which are *invited* and *closed*.	Examples of participation in decision-making spaces which are *claimed*.
Policy domain	
Falls under the term 'income-related policy', including but not exhaustive to: • The policy area connects to an aspect of income insecurity, notably the amount of income and the reliability of that income • Macro-economic decisions related to tax, spending, debt and social security • Local authority level decision-making related to tackling poverty, community planning, pathways to access entitlements • Broad governance arrangements of institutions which impact on how income-related policy decisions are made	Falls into an adjacent policy area such as: • Healthcare policymaking • Service planning (which does not connect to increasing adequacy and stability of income) • There's no tangible connection to income insecurity

Appendix 3: Potential cases for Dual Case Study, as discussed by the Policy Stakeholder Panel

1. Minimum Income Guarantee Experts by Experience Panel

- Lived experience
- 10-15 people with lived experience of poverty or financial insecurity
- Feeds into: MIG Steering Group, 2 x members nominated to attend each meeting

2. Poverty and Inequality Commission Experts by Experience Panel

- Lived experience
- Circa 20 members with lived experience of poverty
- Feeds into: Poverty and Inequality Commission with dedicated participatory / support officer

3. Just Transition Fund Participatory Budgeting in North-East

- Participatory Budgeting
- 10-year £500 million fund for the North-East
- £1million for PB, range of exercises to take place early 2023

6. Scottish Parliament Citizen's Panels

- Mini-public
- Scottish Parliament have convened series of Citizens Panels to feed into parliamentary committees
- Previous topics: COVID-19 and parliamentary engagement

5. Community Wealth Building in an LA setting

- Mix of approaches
- There are examples across Scotland (and beyond) of Local Authorities developing CWB Strategies, which focus on democratising the economy

4. Citizens' Juries across Aberdeenshire

- Mini-public
- Series of citizens' juries held over the past couple of years on topics ranging from children to food poverty

8. Wild Card

- Another lived experience space or example you know of?
- Another mini-public / democratic innovation?
- Look beyond Scotland?

7. Scottish Government's Citizens' Assemblies

- Mini-public
- Planned Citizen's Assembly on Local Taxation
- Previous assemblies on the future of Scotland and Climate Change

Appendix 4: Topic Guides for in-depth interviews

Sample topic guide (citizens)

Experience of the participatory process:

- Exploring motivations for participation, including how they got involved
- Exploring the interviewee's understanding of the purpose of the process
- Understanding expectations of what the process would achieve, including at a personal and institutional level
- Exploring any barriers experienced to participating as well as how these were / could be addressed

Connecting to the policy problem

- Exploring the policy area and how this connected to the PDP
- Exploring how different ideas, solutions and evidence were brought into the participatory space, including how 'experts' were identified and defined
- Exploring interviewee perceptions on the impact of the process, including at the policy / institutional level
- Exploring how the work of the PDP connects to health and wellbeing

Format

- Exploring how PDPs outputs were produced
- Exploring how decisions were made within the process and how easy it was to be heard
- Exploring reflections on the process design, what enabled / prevented equal participation and communication

Challenges and benefits from the interviewee's perspective

- Exploring the benefits of this type of participation
- Exploring any challenges related to this type of participation
- Exploring different conceptualisations of inclusion and representativeness, including what these terms mean in the context of participation

Open space

- A chance to share any final reflections, thoughts and opinions

Sample topic guide (professionals)

Experience of the participatory process:

- Exploring how the interviewee connected to the PDP
- Exploring the interviewee's understanding of the purpose of the process
- Understanding expectations of what the process would achieve
- Exploring any decisions related to the design of the process, including recruitment and format

Connecting to the policy problem

- Exploring the policy area and how this connects to the PDP
- Exploring how the PDP's contributions were received and/ or incorporated
- Exploring how different ideas, solutions and evidence were brought into the participatory space, including how 'experts' were identified and defined
- Exploring interviewee perceptions on the impact of the process, including at the policy / institutional level
- Exploring how the work of the PDP connects to health and wellbeing

Challenges and benefits from the interviewee's perspective

- Exploring the benefits of this type of participation
- Exploring any challenges related to this type of participation
- Exploring different conceptualisations of inclusion and representativeness, including what these terms mean in the context of participation

Open space

A chance to share any final reflections, thoughts and opinions

Appendix 5: Direct Observation Protocol

Direct Observation

Case: _____

Date: _____

Location: _____

Facilitator/ Chair: _____

Attendees:

_____
_____
_____
_____

External Speakers:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Participation equality: how easy is it for people to express their views? How often are people interrupted?
Respect: Is the environment a respectful one? If so, how is this achieved? Are there any examples observed of explicit respect or disrespect?
Constructive politics: how are decisions made? Is consensus achieved, if so, how? What other types of communication / discussion is observed?
Other observations of interest?

Observation protocol	
Space and Objects	**Participants**
Space: the physical place or places How people engage with the space, move around the room? Where do they sit?	**Actors: the people involved** How people present themselves – identities, group identities, expertise **Experiences: reflections on lived experience** What experiences do people share in relation to the issues discussed? How do people relate the ideas/concepts/opinions expressed to their everyday lives? Note nodding and non-verbal signs of agreement related to evidence presented.
Progress	**Interaction**
Act: single actions that people do Who does and says what? How individual remarks, or actions impact the group	**Participants** How do people engage? • consensus building • opinion leaders • groups forming • points of conflict • public conversations vs private interactions

Timing: How does the day progress, important time markers etc	**Facilitation** How people engage with facilitators What are the barriers to participation? **Evidence** How people engage with evidence providers/experts? Responses to people with specific expertise? Types of questions?

Appendix: 6 Co-production workshops planning and write up

Case 1: Co-production workshop

This workshop took place on 27th June 2023, online. The workshop was split into two sections:

- **First half:** reflective session with Panel members only (N=11), aiming to identify a suite of 'lessons learned' to share with the Commission and Secretariat.
- **Second half:** sharing the lessons learned and themes from discussions with members of the Commission (N=4) and the Secretariat (N=4).

In preparation for the workshop, some additional questions were attached to the final survey done with Panel members:

- ***Relationships within the Panel:*** How did the Panel communicate with one another? Including format of meetings, how discussions took place, decisions were made and interaction between the Panel members.
- ***Relationships with the Commission:*** How did the Panel communicate with the Commission? Including reflections on working directly with the Commissioners and the influence of the Panel in any Commission outputs, such as reports, advice or scrutiny provided to Government.
- ***Relationships with Scottish Government:*** How did the Panel communicate with Government? Including reflections on the Panel's influence on Government policy, interactions with ministers and officials and any Government responses or feedback to Panel recommendations / contributions.

The main themes from Panel member responses are detailed in the tables below. The initial reflective session with Panel members consisted of a presentation of the main themes from their survey responses, followed by

small group discussion on what stood out for Panel members. Each group fed back a couple of key points which are also detailed below. Thanks to time, there were only two breakout discussions, meaning the small group reflections on Relationships with the Commission and Scottish Government are combined.

In the second half of the session, Panel members were joined by members of the Commission and the Secretariat. The session consisted of a Vote of Thanks exercise (detailed below), a brief overview of previous discussions, followed by individual reflections from each Panel member. The Commission and the Secretariat then shared their own responses and reflections, followed by closing remarks from the Chair. Please see below for the key themes.

Relationships within the Panel

Theme	What Panel members appreciated	
Creating connections	Learning from one another	Creating bonds and connections
Non-judgemental and safe space	Safe and honest space	A place to open up and share experiences
Listening to and valuing one another	Mutual respect, support and understanding	Having a voice
Format and content of meetings	Information and contact before meetings	Professional facilitation

Theme	What Panel members would change	
Creating connections	2 x panel members stated they would not change anything about relationships within the Panel	
Non-judgemental and safe space		
Listening to and valuing one another	Ensuring all communication is inclusive and everyone understands	Make sure all voices are heard and no one dominates
Format and content of meetings	Have more meetings; have shorter meetings	Professional facilitation

	The Panel decides what to work on collectively – have a set plan	More direction in meetings
	Have ways to communicate with each other outwith of meetings	Create smaller sub-groups based on what people are interested in

Feedback from small-group discussions, important points shared by each group:

Building up trust and relationships within the panel

Being able to continue those relationships and not lose contact – via Whatsapp group

Working groups were productive and meant we were able to get a lot of work done

The diversity of the group and having people from different parts of the country and their different experiences

More frequent, but shorter meetings

More flexibility in meeting times for people with caring responsibilities

Keeping everyone on the same path

More direction and stricter oversight

Better management of time to ensure that quieter panel members can contribute

Small cohort who took the panel off course, keeping on remit, i.e., Scottish Government

Meeting more face to face although recognise that this is costly and challenging

Meeting schedule matching panel availability

Relationships with the Commission

Theme	What Panel members appreciated	
Working directly with the Commissioners	Working as a team	Working as equals
Feeling that our input and contributions were valued	Being asked for regular input into reports and outputs of the Commission	Feeling listened to and appreciated
Open and informed communication	Approachable and empathic	Receiving full briefings about the work of the Commission
Commission is a genuine conduit to Government	Being invited to participate in meetings with Government officials	Suggestions and input from the Panel were put forward to Government

Theme	What Panel members would change
Working directly with the Commissioners	2 x members stated they would not change anything about relationships with the Commission
Feeling that our input and contributions were valued	More contact with Commissioners was the main thing which Panel members would change, with the following suggestions: • More contact in general throughout the process • More contact during the initial stages of the Panel • Regular, dedicated joint meetings with the Panel • One Commissioner attends every Panel meeting
Open and informed communication	
Commission is a genuine conduit to Government	

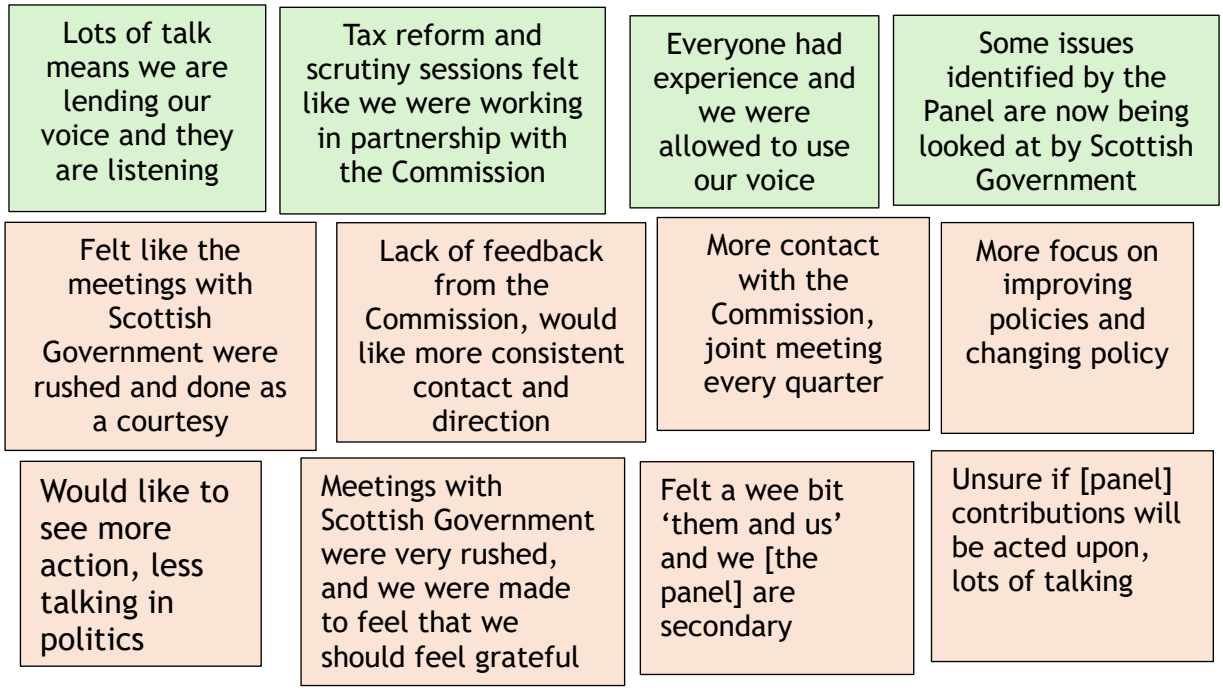
Relationships with Scottish Government

Theme	What Panel members appreciated	
Taking the time and being interested	That SG officials took the time to listen /talk to us / get involved	That SG officials were interested in our views
Opportunity to influence	Having opportunities to speak directly to ministers/ attend meetings	
Reciprocal relationship	When Panel members requested input from Scottish Government it was good and detailed	
Providing challenge	Hope that hearing first hand experiences prompted ministers to stop and think about the real-world impact of policymaking	

Theme	What Panel members would change	
Taking the time and being interested	Unclear responses from Government	More time, everything felt rushed
Opportunity to influence	Not sure that the input of the Panel changed the mindset of Scottish Government officials	More meetings with officials from a variety of Government levels

Reciprocal relationship	Clearer responses to Panel contributions	More regular and timely communication
Providing challenge	Providing more robust challenge to Government – don't be 'too nice'	

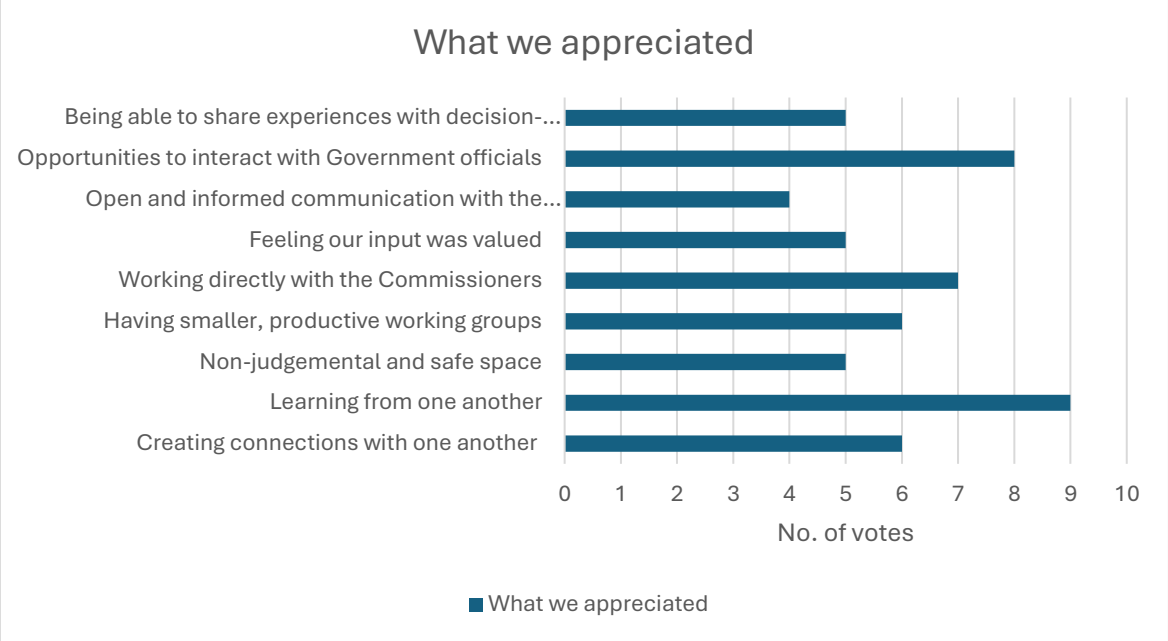
Feedback from small-group discussions, important points shared by each group:

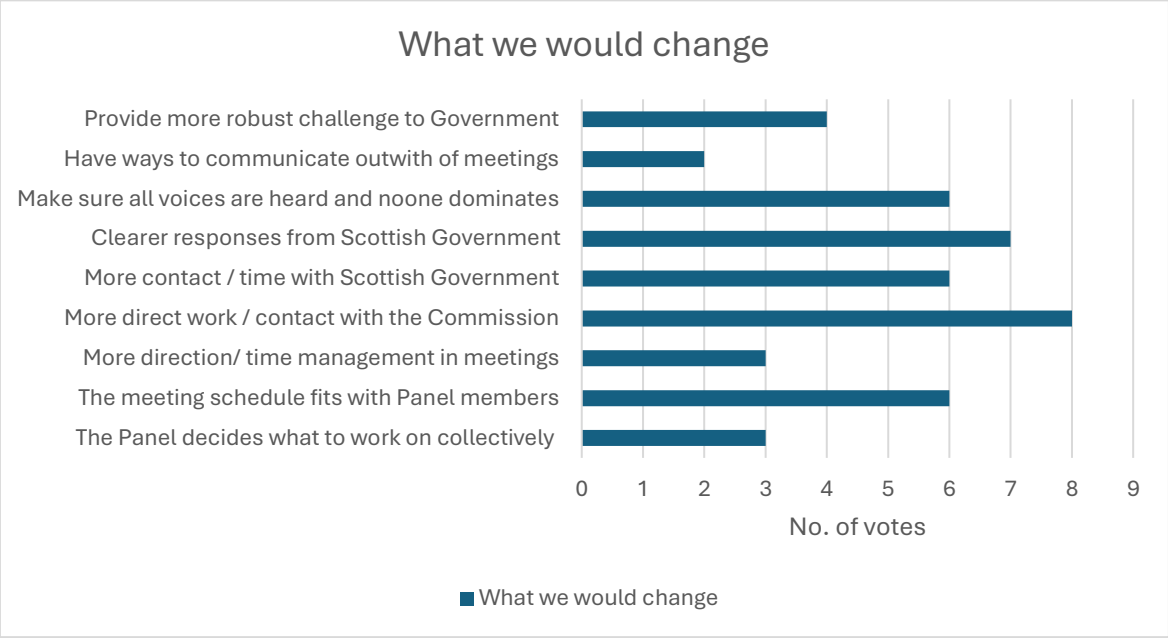


Voting exercise

After the small-group discussions, Panel members were then asked to vote on the key themes. Each Panel member had to choose their top five themes under the following headlines: *What we appreciated* and *What we would change*. The key themes used in the voting exercise were developed from the survey responses and adapted in-session according to the feedback and comments from Panel members. It is important to note that this exercise required much more time than the session allowed, it also involved using an online voting platform which was new to the group. More time would have permitted more in-depth discussion around aspects which the group thought were important as well as more time to prioritise and reflect on any lessons learned to share with the Commission and the Secretariat. That said, there are some clear themes related to learning from another, working directly with the Commission and Scottish Government and how the Panel receives any feedback to its

recommendations and input. The results of the voting exercise are detailed below:





Case 2: Co-production workshop

Townsley Peoples' Forum: Session Plan (shared with attendees in advance)

Time: 45 mins *Date: Saturday 10th February, 45 minutes*

This session will form a part of the data collection for the case study of the Townsley Peoples' Forum. The aim is to have some conversations

about topics which are useful to both members of the Forum and the wider research project.

After some brief discussions at two of the January meetings, some initial ideas were provided by Forum members about most useful topics. This included:

- How are other people running assemblies and what are they getting out of them?
- Just hearing back from her on what she's found - and having a report that we're able to share?
- Does she have any questions for us?
- What she's going to be using her report for?
- How does what we've done compare with the other group?
- What has been in common in what we've said about the community - what do her fresh eyes say about our situation?
- Clarity that we're not representing 'the people of Townsley'
- Using the session as a way to invite more people along
- Thinking about ways to involve more people who live in Townsley, including social media
- Considering what 'community-led' means for the Forum

Some of the above will be answered in the final report from Anna and other suggestions have been used to design the session. Below is a brief plan based on those ideas.

As this forms part of the data collection for the project, Anna is requesting that everyone completes a consent form, just like for the interviews. Anna will go over this at the start of the session.

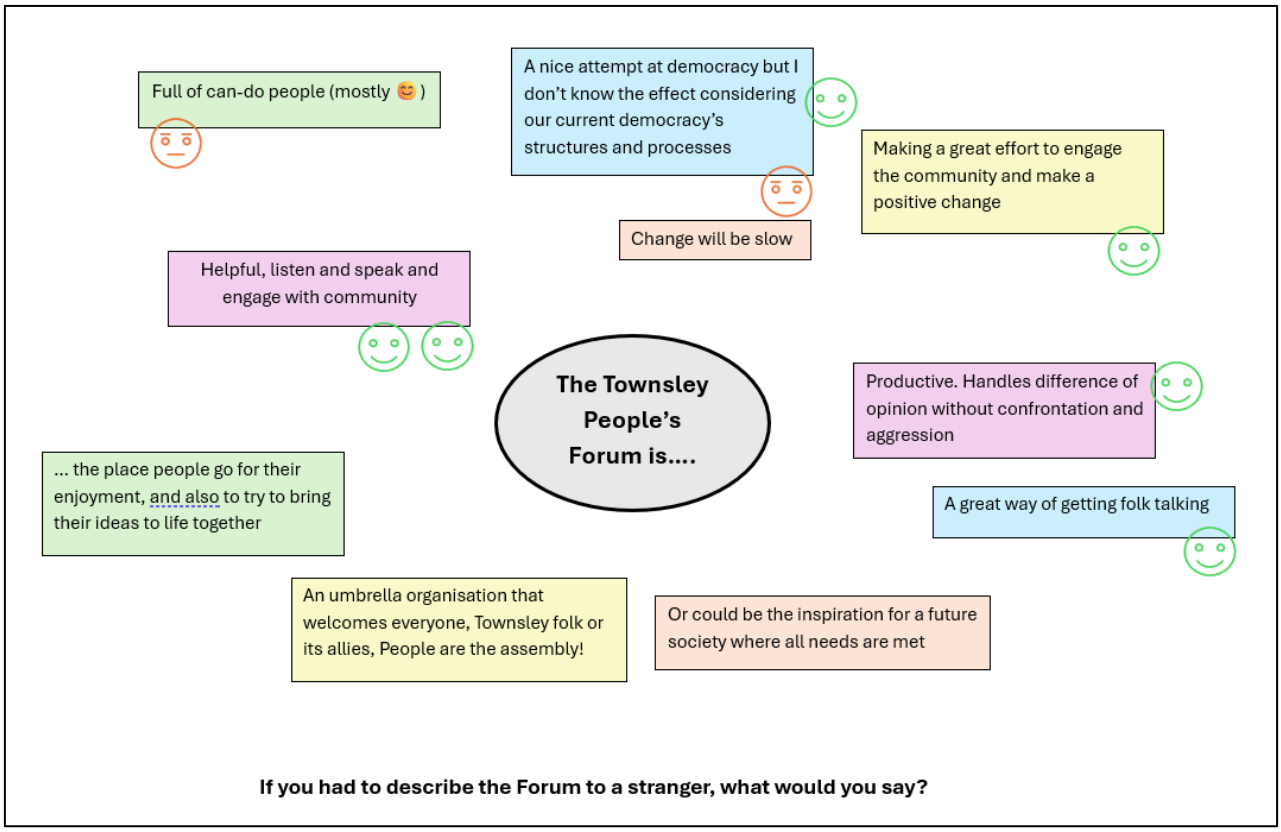
Really looking forward to coming along next week! Any questions at all, please just give me a shout: xxxxxxxx @student.gla.ac.uk / [phone number]

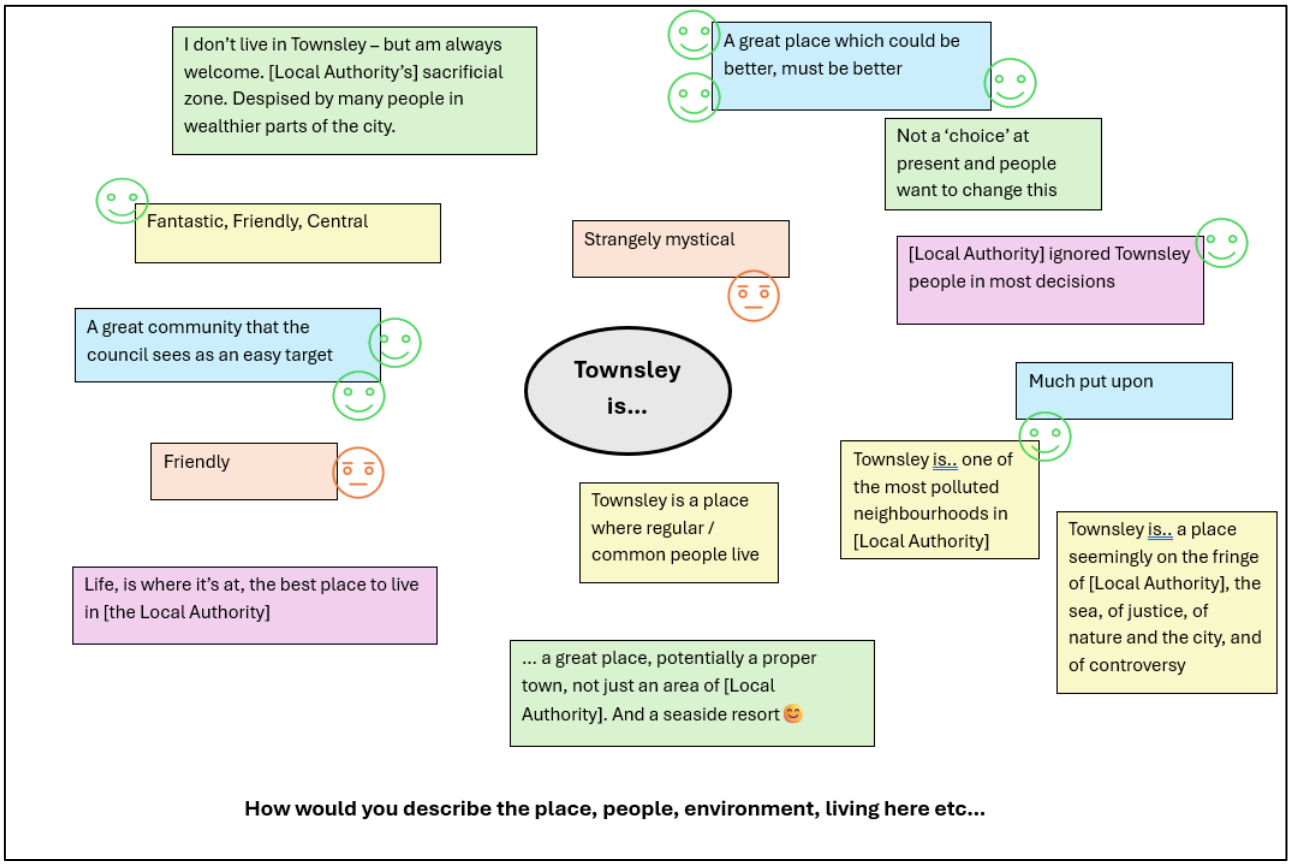
Brief Session Plan

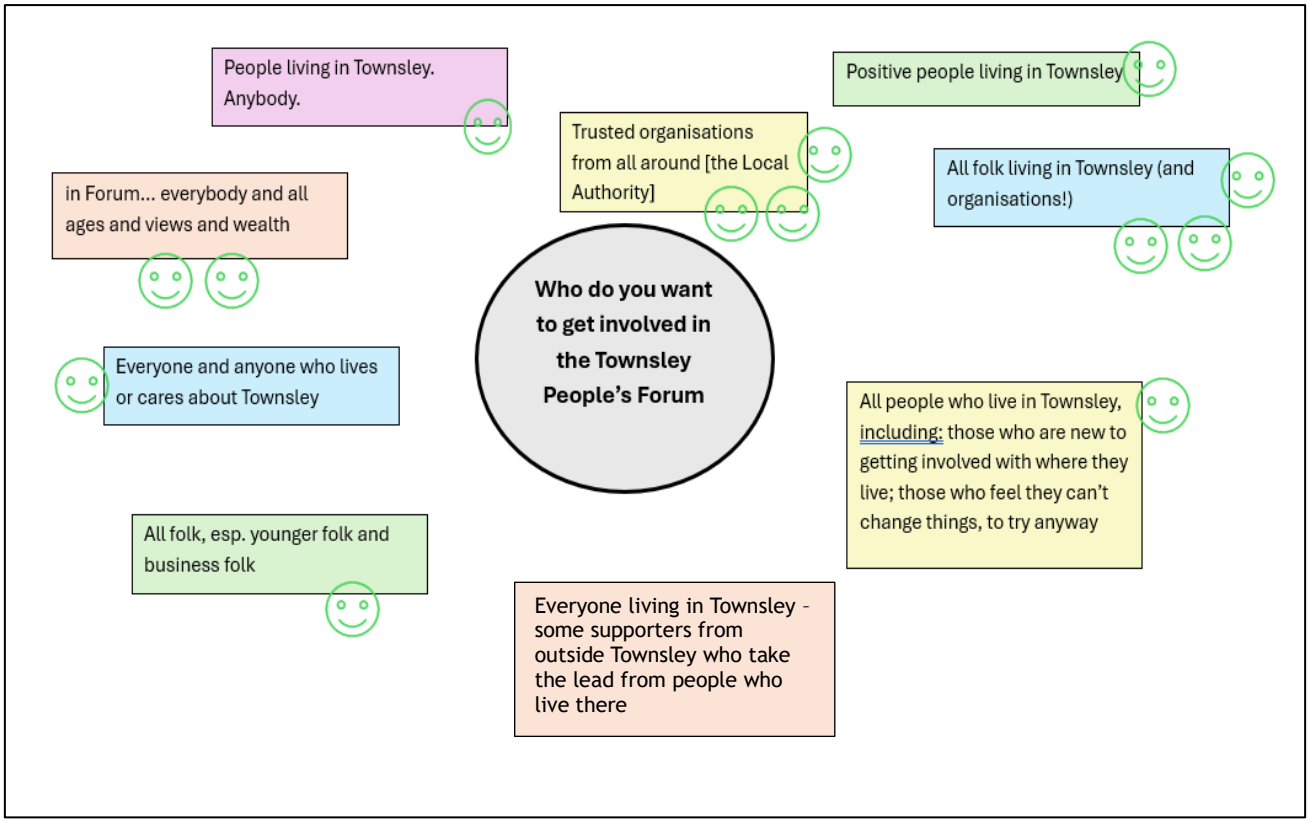
Consent Forms *5 minutes*	Give out, advise that time is tight so if everyone can have a quick read and sign then we can get started. Advise we will have some time at the end to think about wider questions. Also, that time is tight, it is likely we're going to have so much more to say about the topics today. See this as a start of ongoing conversation.
Chalk Talk *10 minutes*	Going to have a think about getting more people along to the Assembly. The first exercise we're going to be up and about doing a chalk talk. The only rule is – no talking.

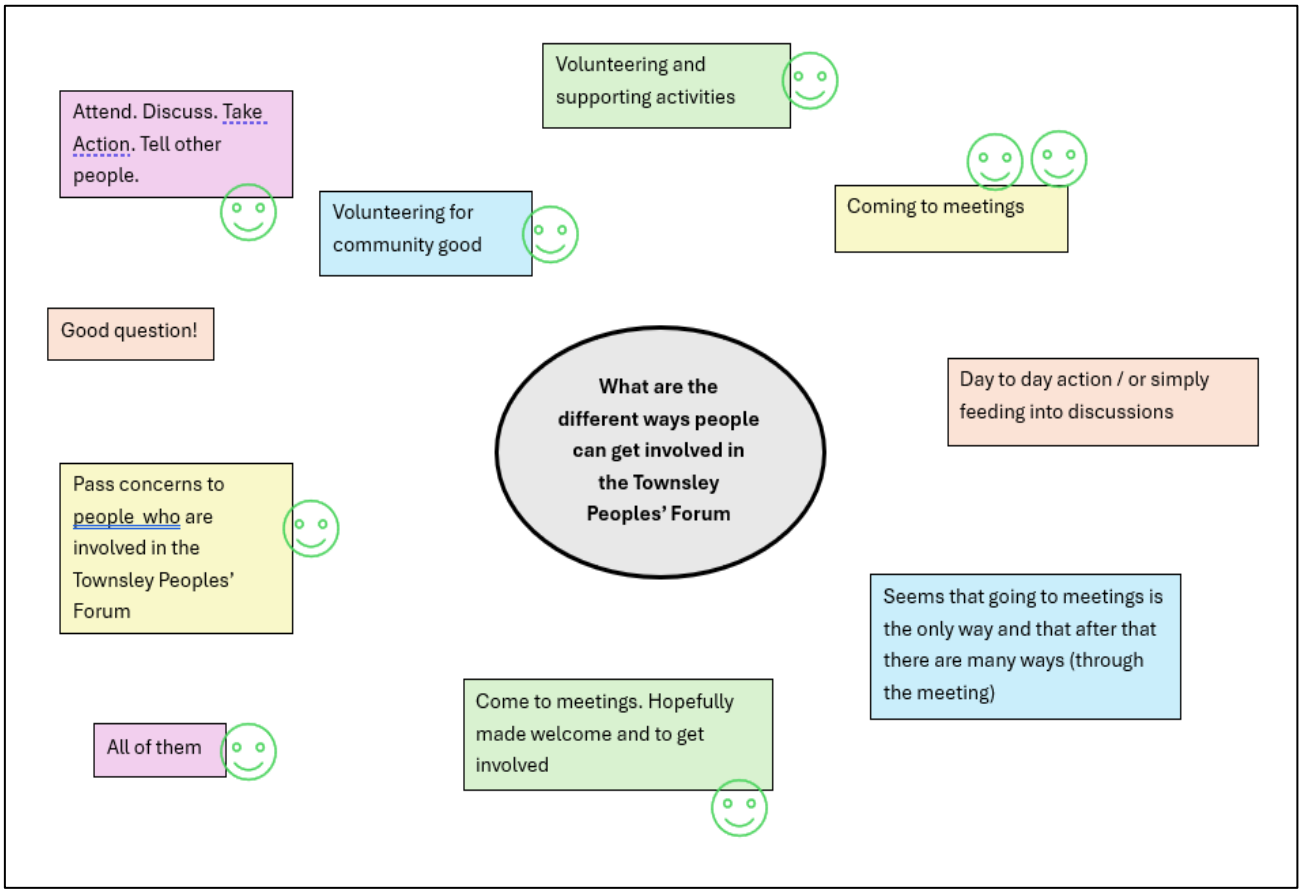
Who, what, why of getting people involved.	Everyone has a pen, some sticky cards and some stickers. You'll have some time to walk around and answer the questions. There's no such thing as a wrong answer. It's not only about answering, it's also about reading what other people have said. If you see something which you agree with you can add a smiley face, or if it's something you don't agree with add a yellow one. You can also reply and interact with other people's comments. So for example, if you agree /don't agree with something – say why.
Reflection exercise *5 minutes*	Whole group: What did you learn, anything new? Any surprises? Anything that's really common?
What can we do discussion: part 1 *7 minutes*	In small groups (x 3), think about the responses to 'what stops people from getting involved in TPF?'. Put them into two categories: - We can do something about this (right now) - We can't do anything about this (yet) Everyone happy? Anyone disagree?
What can we do discussion: part 2 *15 minutes*	Back in the same groups, look at 1 thing from the 'we can do something about this (right now)'. Brainstorm what the group could do, write down any ideas you have on small post it notes to share with the group. 2-minute warning time. Come and put up your ideas to share with the group. Groups feedback one at a time.
Final Check in / close *3 minutes*	Bring session to a close. Advise that the learning from today will be included in the final report. There will be a long version and short version. It is likely to be April by the time it is ready to share, and AB is happy to come along to chat it through with the group after that.

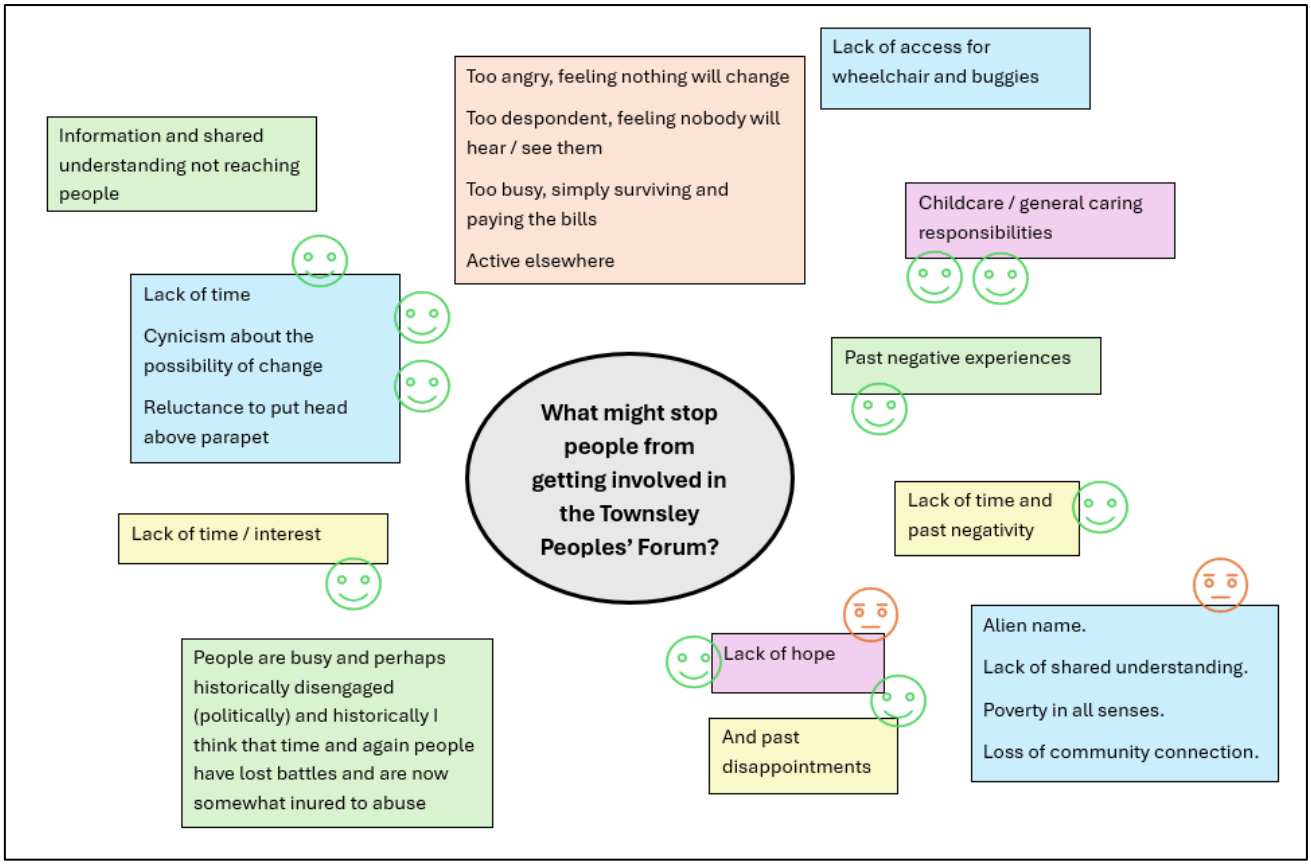
Chalk Talk Responses:






Who do you want to get involved in the Townsley People's Forum
People living in Townsley. Anybody.
Positive people living in Townsley
Trusted organisations from all around [the Local Authority]
All folk living in Townsley (and organisations!)
in Forum... everybody and all ages and views and wealth
Everyone and anyone who lives or cares about Townsley
All people who live in Townsley, including: those who are new to getting involved with where they live; those who feel they can't change things, to try anyway
All folk, esp. younger folk and business folk
Everyone living in Townsley - some supporters from outside Townsley who take the lead from people who live there


What are the different ways people can get involved in the Townsley Peoples' Forum
Volunteering and supporting activities
Attend. Discuss. Take Action. Tell other people.
Volunteering for community good
Coming to meetings
Good question!
Day to day action / or simply feeding into discussions
Pass concerns to people who are involved in the Townsley Peoples' Forum
Seems that going to meetings is the only way and that after that there are many ways (through the meeting)
Come to meetings. Hopefully made welcome and to get involved
All of them



Discussion exercises

This part of the session was, unfortunately, rushed thanks to a lack of time and very busy agenda for the group on the day I went along to do the session. The group identified some practical barriers for people to coming along alongside the post-it notes above, which included:

- People are exhausted
- People have different types of availability
- People might feel anxious attending new groups
- People are not interested or do not care

In the second discussion round the group were invited to place the barriers from the Chalk Talk into two groups: We can something about this right now / We can't do anything about this (yet). Attendees placed all of the barriers into the first category and suggested some of the following for attracting new members:

- Gently gently, to not over promise
- Celebrate all successes
- Childcare
- Timing of meetings, e.g., lunchtime
- Interest: many streams of activity which have an impact on people
- Outreach: website, notices, anything else

- Improve shared understanding, conversations and engagement where the people are now.
- Make sure there are clear roles for new members who come along
- Make attempts to engage with the local school

Any of the practical suggestions made about the design of the process, however, were often overshadowed by discussions which focused on bigger issues such as lack of hope, past disappointments and poverty, with broad consensus that Townsley was a highly disengaged area making it a ‘grind’ and ‘challenge’ to do any kind of participatory work. The write up for this workshop is included in the stand-alone report produced for the group, detailed in Appendix 8.

Appendix 7: Stand-alone Reports

For each case an agreement was made that a stand-alone report would be submitted to each group. I agreed to do this in a timely manner, and as such, each report was produced on the basis of individual analysis of each case, rather than the cross-case analysis which is included in the Findings Chapters above. For Case 1, it took much longer to secure professional stakeholders to interview, as a result I did two reports, one focused on citizen reflections and then another follow-up focused on professional stakeholders. For Case 2, only one report was submitted with no follow-up. Due to the subsequent disengagement of the group I did not know if another would be required /desired. Each is included as submitted below, with Case 2 anonymised or redacted as appropriate.

Case 1: Stand-alone Report

REPORT 1: OVERVIEW OF PANEL MEMBER VIEWS

This report details key insights from one part of the PhD Project: *Participation in socio-economic decision-making*. The research project is a multiple case study, which aims to explore and understand participatory-deliberative processes for policy stakeholders through the lens of socio-economic decision-making in two different contexts in Scotland: one local and one national. This report relates to emerging themes from the first case study and data collection undertaken with the Poverty and Inequality Commission's Experts by Experience Panel. Data collection is ongoing for this case study, the themes detailed here relate specifically to Panel Member reflections. The purpose of this report is to share pertinent learning and insights directly with the Commission, and its Secretariat, as well as Panel members. Further analysis of the data collected (including cross-case analysis) will take place between autumn 2023 and spring 2024. This means any conclusions drawn at this stage of the project, while interesting and hopefully helpful, must be regarded as tentative.

BACKGROUND

The Poverty and Inequality Commission has demonstrated a clear commitment to involving people with lived experience of poverty and inequality across its work and, in particular, in its advice and scrutiny to Scottish Government. Indeed, in its Strategic Plan 2020-2023, the Commission stated its overarching principle was one specifically focused on involving 'experts by experience':

Amplify the voices of experts by experience to make sure they are part of identifying issues, developing and designing solutions, and scrutinising progress (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2020, p. 6)

This principle is evident across the Commission's website and policy outputs but is perhaps most clearly reflected in the establishment of its Experts by Experience Panel (from now on, the Panel). Running from August 2021 - June 2023, the Panel brought together a group of 16 citizens from across Scotland with different experiences of poverty and inequality to support the Commission in its work.

The Commission and its Secretariat appear strongly committed to continuous learning about how its first Experts by Experience Panel worked for the people who participated as well as identifying any lessons for future Panels. This is evident in the built-in survey evaluations conducted with Panel members throughout its lifetime, the one to one, bespoke, support provided to Panel members and through the Commission's participation in the external PhD research project: *Participation in socio-economic decision-making*. This report details some of the key insights from the research project. As data collection is still underway, this report focuses primarily on Panel member views and will not include input from professional stakeholders. This is because the pool of interviewees from the Commission and Scottish Government is very small and therefore the risk of breaching anonymity is high. *(Please see Appendix A for more information on the theoretical background of the research project [not included in this thesis])*

The Experts by Experience Panel – *at a glance*

The Poverty and Inequality Commission is a statutory public body in Scotland which was established in 2019 with the following duties:

- Provide advice and scrutiny on the Child Poverty Delivery Plans
- Comment on progress to meet child poverty targets as set out in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017
- Advise Scottish Ministers on any matter relating to poverty and inequality, including the impact of policies and the use of resources in reducing poverty and inequality
- Monitor the progress in reducing poverty and inequality in Scotland
- Promote the reduction of poverty and inequality in Scotland (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2019)

The Commission currently has 7 members from across public, third sector and academic senior roles. In its most recent strategic plan, it identified the following overarching principle to guide its work:

Amplify the voices of experts by experience to make sure they are part of identifying issues, developing and designing solutions, and scrutinising progress (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2020, p. 6)

In August 2021 the Commission established its Experts by Experience Panel (from now on the Panel), a group of 16 people recruited from across Scotland who have lived experience of poverty and inequality. Funded until June 2023, the Panel's main role was to support the Commission to provide advice, scrutiny, and advocacy sometimes directly to ministers and the Commission members. Meeting on a monthly basis, during its lifetime the Panel contributed to key outputs of the Commission, including:

- Advice to Scottish Government on its Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-202, and advice to Scottish Government on the cost-of-living crisis
- Commission responses to Low Income Winter Heating Consultation and Draft Rented Sector Strategy Consultation
- Scrutiny to Scottish Government on their Child Poverty Delivery Progress Report 2022-2023

The Panel also identified their own priorities related to their experience of poverty and inequality resulting in the following outputs:

- Submission to the Adult Disability Payment: Mobility Component Consultation
- Submission to Social Security Scotland's draft regulations on the new Carer Support Payment
- Submission to the Scottish Affairs Committee's call for evidence on the cost-of-living crisis in rural communities

In addition to this, Panel members participated in thematic, cross-sectoral working groups (for example one focused on Tax reform). The Panel also produced a number of blogs for Challenge Poverty Week 2022, appeared in BBC and STV features about the Panel as well as regularly attending meetings with ministers and presenting at

larger meetings and events, such as the Poverty and Inequality Commission's AGM and, notably by request, the Scottish First Minister's recent anti-poverty summit in May 2023 (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2023c).

METHODS & ANALYSIS

This project forms part of a multiple case study, as such, there have been a variety of different sources of qualitative evidence sought:

- **In-depth interviews**: Panel members (N=8) met with the researcher for about an hour to talk about their experience participating in the Panel.
- **Direct observation**: Observational data collection through attending a typical meeting of the Panel. This took place on 18.04.23.
- **Co-production Workshop & Survey**: Workshop convened with Panel members (N=11) to reflect on the participatory process and co-produce a suite of 'lessons learned'. This workshop was immediately followed by a joint session with the Panel members, members of the Secretariat (N=4) and members of the Commission (N=4). Prior to this workshop, Panel members (N=15) completed a survey about their experience, including some questions about this project, detailed below. Their responses were used to inform the workshop. (*Please see Appendix 6 for more information)*
- **Documentation:** Analysis of the policy and administrative documents which both precede and follow the Panel, considering how the Panel is conceptualised and identifying evidence of Panel influence.

The data collection has been taking place since April 2023 and is due to end in December 2023. As demonstrated in the description of the Panel above, the work of the Panel members has been varied, engaging with a wide variety of policy areas. It is outwith the scope of this project to investigate every policy area the Panel discussed individually, therefore the decision has been made to focus on Child Poverty given 'the

Commission has specific duties under the Child Poverty Act, meaning it has the legal responsibility of providing advice and scrutiny to Scottish Ministers' (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021e, p. 3), a fact specifically highlighted in the Panel's Terms of Reference.

The data collection has been informed by common questions, which were explored in the in-depth interviews and formed the basis of survey questions posed to Panel members about their experience:

- ***Relationships within the Panel:*** How did the Panel communicate with one another? Including format of meetings, how discussions took place, decisions were made and interaction between the Panel members.
- ***Relationships with the Commission:*** How did the Panel communicate with the Commission? Including reflections on working directly with the Commissioners and the influence of the Panel in any Commission outputs, such as reports, advice or scrutiny provided to Government.
- ***Relationships with Scottish Government:*** How did the Panel communicate with Government? Including reflections on the Panel's influence on Government policy, interactions with ministers and officials and any Government responses or feedback to Panel recommendations / contributions.

Whilst the data collected comes from a number of sources, much of the discussion here focuses on Panel member reflections, particularly those shared in interviews. The interview pool is relatively small, meaning the risk of breaching anonymity, i.e., being able to identify people from their contributions, is high. For this reason, all of the interviews have been transcribed into standard English and any identifying features or characteristics mentioned have been removed or anonymised in direct quotes.

ANALYSIS

In order to pull together the different threads of evidence gathered, a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify initial codes

and key themes across the data. This forms the first part of analysis for the PhD project as a whole, which has a broader conceptual framework through which data will be synthesised. For this reason, the key insights presented here are largely descriptive. Further analysis, including cross-case, i.e., bringing in data from a different participatory process, will take place between autumn 2023 and spring 2024.

KEY INSIGHTS

16 key insights have been identified across the following three categories:

- **Purpose of the Panel**, including reasons and motivations for joining
- **Inclusion**, including how 'lived experience' is understood
- **Impact of the Panel**, i.e., what did it achieve?

Each Panel member interviewed brought their own unique perspective of being on the Panel. The themes which emerged reveal both commonalities and differences from person to person. There is no single experience, opinion or theme which can adequately sum up the work of the Panel and its individual members. However, where commonalities and differences have been identified, so too are potential lessons for future participatory exercises. It is hoped that these insights will inform the Commission's 'continuing journey towards truly sharing power and co-producing [its] advice and recommendations' (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2023d, p. 3) with people with lived experience of poverty and inequality.

Purpose of Panel

In every interview, members were asked to describe the Panel and talk about their motivations for joining. There was relative consistency across the responses, particularly regarding motivations for applying to be part of the Panel. Expectations and hopes for what the Panel would achieve were high, with every Panel member stating a desire to directly influence

or change Scottish Government policy or 'make a difference' in some way to their life or the life of their family and friends:

I want things to change in the years to come, for for things to be better for [my children] because I can see it getting harder and harder. You know I have lived the life that I have and I've had to watch every pound and it it's been difficult bringing [my children] up. I don't want [them] to go through what I've been through. **Panel Member 5**

[I hoped] we could really feed into government policymaking and that we would see some kind of responsive reaction to that in terms of starting to see what that change looks like. **Panel Member 6**

I was hoping that [it] would make change in the Scottish Government **Panel Member 7**

Despite this focus on policy or societal change, the *purpose* of the Panel is described somewhat more conservatively. Its purpose is routinely described as primarily educational, often conceptualised as reciprocal 'learning relationships' between panel members, between Panel members and the Commission and between Panel members and Scottish Government:

- *Learning between panel members*

Learning from other Panel members was highly valued in the interviews, in the survey data and in the co-production workshop. For many, this appears to be one the most tangible outcomes from the Panel. One of the reasons it appears to be valued so highly is that Panel members learned about experiences which were different to their own, and, importantly, which challenged pre-conceived ideas about why 'other' people experience poverty.

It's done a lot of mythbusting for me, and especially you know, because there being a lot about poverty in the media and I've been able to put faces to those situations. I I think I'm able to empathise a lot better as to what the challenges are. **Panel Member 6**

There's all these little things, you know, that I didn't quite understand that kind of made me realise a lot more about poverty and why people end up in poverty and can't get out of poverty. So, it's been really educational from that point of view **Panel Member 1**

- *Learning between the Panel and the Commission*

Panel members also describe learning about different policy areas via the Secretariat, notably in relation to Child Poverty, which formed the basis of their initial meetings. Whilst conceptualisations of the relationship between the Panel and the Commission vary (explored in later sections), its reciprocal educative function appears common across the data:

[the Panel's Purpose is] to tell the Commission about issues relating to poverty and inequality that they feel are important; the Commission can also bring important issues to the Panel **Terms of Reference** (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021e)

I think some things came as a shock to [the Commission] about certain things. Like things came to us panel members as a shock when they showed us figures for poverty – we didn't know the things they gave… to us, that we weren't aware of **Panel Member 7**

- *Learning between the Panel and Scottish Government*

The final 'learning relationship' between the Panel members and Scottish Government is largely presented as one sided, i.e., the Panel are educating Scottish Government (officials, elected members) rather than the other way around. This learning is often, if not always, described as crucial for effective policymaking:

[the Panel's purpose is] to help the Scottish Government when they are making plans when they are making policies concerning poverty, because you can only get the real result from those who are in it, you can't get the result from someone that has not experienced poverty, somebody that has never lacked. You won't get the real answer from that person. **Panel Member 2**

You know it's it's for me and people like myself and the other 15 members to kind of just voice our thoughts and for it to go through to MPs, MSPs, decision makers. You know to improve their decision making, improve policies in the future …. Instead of them just sitting in offices and making decisions about our lives… we're able to tell them this is where you're going wrong. **Panel Member 5**

This teaching relationship with Scottish Government links to another clear theme which emerged across the data: institutional decision and policymakers are routinely described as naïve to the real-world impact of policies, and in particular to the realities faced by Panel members.

They seem to be living in their own little bubble… these officials here. No, I don't think they have a clue about the real-world **Panel Member 1**

This perception of decision-makers as lacking in on-the-ground understanding and knowledge appears strongly in the interviews but is also reinforced implicitly in policy documentation, particularly in advice and scrutiny published by the Commission:

The knowledge and expertise of people with direct experience of poverty will be crucial in making sure that actions set out in the Delivery Plan will work in practice. Their involvement can help ensure that policies and actions are designed and respond to the reality of people's lives. (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022c, p. 21)

In addition, the idea of officials not being aware of real-world circumstances was explicitly reinforced in observational data, in the presentation from Scottish Government officials stating that engaging with people with lived experience had been 'eye-opening' in terms of their understanding of the policy area in which they worked.

Which brings us to another key theme regarding the purpose of the Panel: whether the Panel functions as a *collective decision-making* space or an *evidence-producing* one. The overarching principle which runs through the Commission's work implies the former:

*Amplify the voices of experts by experience to make sure they are part of **identifying issues**, **developing and designing solutions**, and **scrutinising progress*** (emphasis added, Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2020, p. 6)

The Panel most clearly performs this function in the outputs which come directly from the group, notably in responses to wider consultations or calls for evidence, produced by smaller working groups of Panel members:

- Submission to the Adult Disability Payment: Mobility Component Consultation
- Submission to Social Security Scotland's draft regulations on the new Carer Support Payment
- Submission to the Scottish Affairs Committee's call for evidence on the cost-of-living crisis in rural communities

In these responses, the discussions of Panel members and their resulting conclusions are clearly detailed, although they do appear to primarily form an evidence-producing function. When asked to describe decision-making within the group, most interviewees were relatively happy with how decisions were made, often citing the use of surveys both during and

outwith the meeting, with the use of smaller sub-groups highly valued in survey and interview data.

However, the conceptualisations of what the Panel *is doing* tended to vary and, at times, veer towards descriptions of evidence provision rather than collective decision-making:

we then hand that information over to [the Secretariat] and they take it back, from us and say well, look, this is the information because we're coming from different angles and different experiences **Panel Member 3**

it would be a combination of our experiences versus do we think what's being proposed is OK and if something isn't being proposed, what would we suggest as being our options and they would then be collated at the end of the discussions and that would then be fed back through to Commissioners and the Scottish Government. **Panel Member 6**

Observational data suggests that Panel contributions in meetings tended to be hyper-individual rather than collectively agreed. For example, during the meeting observed, the feedback from Government seemed to be in response to individual questions and reflections rather than fully deliberated recommendations or contributions from the Panel as a whole. Analysis of the advice and scrutiny provided by the Commission to Scottish Government also appears to use Panel contributions, mostly in the form of individual direct quotes, to evidence, or justify, the recommendations being made by the Commission, rather than representing a coherent narrative of the deliberations, and subsequent decisions of the Panel as a collective. Indeed, some Panel members describe their function as primarily one which supports and legitimises the decision-making of the Commission, specifically through sharing their individual lived expertise:

Better when you have people with lived experience coming out to talk. It also helps [the Commission], you know **Panel Member 2**

I also think it was beneficial for them just to sense check their thinking and to make sure that they are actually representing the views of people in the community **Panel Member 6**

it's to give the Commission a, kind of legitimacy and that it is actually doing something that's genuine and authentic…. It's there so that the voices of people who aren't usually listened to or heard, and it's also to to make the Commission look good **Panel Member 4**

It is important to note that there is no value judgement being made here in the analysis about whether or not the Panel functions as a collective decision-making space or an evidence-producing one. The purpose here is to highlight where there may be differences in perspectives, experiences and conceptualisations. It is also important to note that there may have been times when the Panel *did* function as a collective decision-making space, but these moments have not been captured in the data collection of this project, a point explored in later sections.

In short, the purpose of the Panel is conceptualised in a variety of ways across the data, with some emergent themes related to how it was understood by Panel members and presented within policy documents and outputs of both the Commission and the Panel itself:

Key insight 1: Expectations for what the panel would achieve were high, the main motivation for joining was to influence Scottish Government policy, or wider society.

Key insight 2: The Panel serves a primarily educative function, often conceptualised as reciprocal 'learning' relationships between Panel members, the Commission and Scottish Government.

Key insight 3: Institutional decision and policymakers are routinely described as naïve to the real-world impact of policies, and in particular to the realities faced by the Panel members.

Key insight 4: The Panel is largely conceptualised as a space for producing 'lived experience' evidence, rather than a collective decision-making space, and this 'lived experience evidence' is used to legitimise decision-making within the Commission.

Inclusion

The concept of inclusion was very important to Panel members interviewed. When asked how this word was understood, Panel members talked at length about the importance of this concept in participatory spaces, often citing inclusion as the most important component of participation. Conceptualisations varied on a theme, with most

interviewees defining inclusion as involving everyone, involving everyone who is directly affected by the problems being discussed and involving people who are particularly marginalised from decision-making spaces. Panel members had a comprehensive understanding of the time and resource required to ensure participatory spaces are considered 'inclusive', often providing specific examples of barriers which have to be navigated and removed for people from certain groups. These included cultural barriers, such as shame and embarrassment associated with disclosing experiences of poverty, practical barriers such as the provision of digital devices and accessibility of venues and personal barriers, such as managing the intense pressures experienced as a result of living in poverty. The barriers faced by some groups, including those represented on the Panel, were considered fundamental, and in at least one case insurmountable. That said, across the data, there is a deep appreciation for the support and efforts of the Secretariat, in particular, in working with Panel members one on one to remove or mitigate any barriers to participation:

you can't fault the Secretariat for the support they've given us because they've been... marvellous **Panel Member 1**

Renumeration for Panel members' time is also regarded as crucial, both in terms of recognising and valuing their contribution but also, for some, as a vital form of income:

[renumeration] has been a really good thing because if I hadn't had that and that's what I'm gonna miss coming forward after the Panel ends. It's like a voucher, I mean 50/60 pound voucher once a month, twice a month. It's a God send to me, somebody who's already struggling. It's a godsend to go and spend it in a supermarket and buy some food for my kids and myself. You know, so that has been really, really important for each and every one of us and I can definitely say it for myself it has been, it's gonna be missed. It's been like an income for me **Panel Member 5**

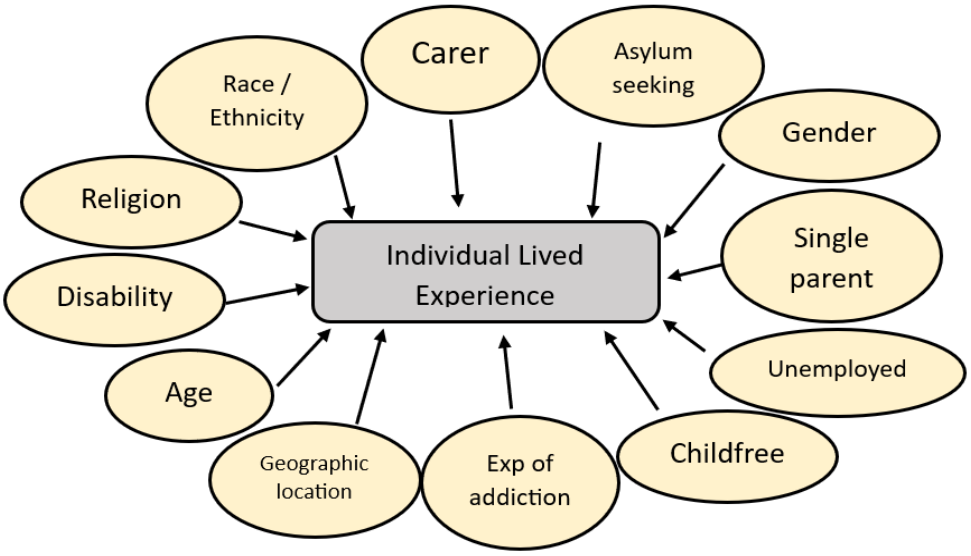
Indeed, conceptualisations of inclusion almost always connected directly to the fact that the Panel was specifically a space for people with lived experience of *poverty*. Each panel member brought their own specific 'lived expertise' to the group, and this diversity of perspective

(demonstrated in Figure 1) was valued highly, creating both an educative environment and increasing the potential representativeness, and therefore legitimacy, of the panel as whole.

we would have lost out a lot if we've not had people from different backgrounds there, you know and there's a place for people who have the same experiences but having the same experiences but coming at it from a different context is really, really helpful for I think character building, for collective understanding and for recognizing where the gaps are in our system ***Panel Member 6***

being in the panel, you realise that it's actually... it seems to be a group of people from all walks of life and all ages. And it's hard to describe poverty, it's just, it's not something you choose to go into. It just happens without you even knowing **Panel Member 7**

Experience of poverty is routinely conceptualised as non-homogenous and, at times, hyper-individual. The various identities and characteristics of Panel members are often described as unique or singular within the group, with each person representing their own particular 'lived experience' community, related directly to their personal circumstances:



The Poverty and Inequality Commission state simply 'when we say experts by experience, we mean people who have lived experience of poverty and inequality' (2023c). However, despite there being a clear consensus on the *importance* of lived experience as a knowledge type, both in relation to inclusion and to effective policymaking, there are differing, sometimes opposing, conceptualisations of what exactly constitutes 'lived

experience' in this context. These conceptualisations tended to be fluid and can be largely grouped into the following categories:

  - **Liv*ing*** experience – knowledge based on current, personal experience of poverty

- **Historical** experience – knowledge based on prior experience of poverty, not current, personal circumstances
- **Second-hand** experience – knowledge based on consultation with social and professional networks, not on personal experience
- **Wider skills** – knowledge based on prior/ current employment and volunteering history, which does not specifically relate to personal experience of poverty
- **Broader than poverty** – knowledge based on experience of marginalisation which does not specifically relate to personal experience of poverty

There are clear tensions in how lived experience is understood by different members, with some people happy with a loose definition and others directly linking 'lived expertise' to current, liv*ing* experiences of poverty, which if removed entirely change the perspective of the individual:

I've had a couple of [other] members saying things.. I can't do this because I don't have that life experience and I have said, you know, you could do that … I could represent [other people] once they told me their information and that's what I was saying to the [other members]. You still can do it, but you just need to work on the information that's fed to you. **Panel Member 3**

things that I didn't know myself or that wasn't going through myself or hadn't been through then I was asking other people or even things that I had been through [but wasn't experiencing any more]. **Panel Member 8**

unless you get up in the morning and you're you know you think Oh my God, I've got another … 10 days before I get any more money …And I can't just go and get an overdraft and I can't do all these things then actually. You know, these kinds of crises that for other people have, become, they are kind of academic crises…. You can understand that it happens but unless it's happening to you right there and then, then you don't know what it feels like. And even if .. you know you can say ohh but I lived like that 20 years ago and this horrible thing happened to me then and I'll never forget it, actually time and circumstances do take the edges off it all **Panel Member 4**

This variation in both experience and understanding of the term 'lived experience' is further complicated in its interaction with the policy problems and areas discussed during the Panel's lifetime. This is particularly evident in its focus on Child Poverty, with some interviewees stating that this was not an area in which they had any knowledge, experience or even interest:

You know one of the big problems we had at the beginning is that we spent way too much time on talking about children and the child poverty issues. Many of us don't have children and aren't that interested. So, you know, we felt like we couldn't contribute towards that and also didn't have the interest in the subject matter **Panel Member 1**

It appears as if, at times, the policy problems being discussed were disconnected from the every-day realities of at least some of the Panel members, and this precluded them from contributing:

I felt .. … I wasn't in that position… the tax situation… and I thought God, I was thinking because I wasn't working, I couldn't put anything in **Panel Member 8**

Similarly, sharing 'lived experience' which related to policy problems perceived to sit outwith the gift of Scottish Government was also viewed to be problematic. This was a strong theme in the co-production workshop, with some members expressing concern that the Panel was taken 'off course' by members discussing issues which had policy roots in Westminster. This appears to result in some Panel members, whose circumstances are powerfully shaped by UK Government policies, feeling excluded from the discussions and unable to contribute:

sometimes in that panel I don't talk…. Because if I talk, they'll say 'oh this is a Westminster case, it's not a Scottish government issue.' **Panel Member 2**

Given the experiential nature of the Panel directly encourages members to share their individual experiences and stories, this perhaps places Panel members in difficult or confusing positions where on one hand the focus is on individual experience of poverty but on the other the policy problem being discussed is disconnected from that experience or that experience is precluded from the discussions. This perhaps highlights the need for a clearer definition of 'experts by experience' and how this

particular knowledge type connects to the policy problems which were brought to and discussed by the Panel.

This section details some emergent themes related to inclusion, which appears to be a key concept for Panel members. Emerging themes include removing barriers to participation, which are at once varied and fundamental, recognising the non-homogenous nature of poverty, providing a clear definition for 'experts by experience' and considering how policy problems connect to the lived realities of Panel members:

Key insight 5: Inclusion is integral to participation, achieving an 'inclusive' process involves dedicating time and resource to mitigating or removing cultural and practical barriers.

Key insight 6: Experience of poverty is non-homogenous and hyper-individual.

Key insight 7: Despite consensus on the importance of lived expertise as a knowledge type, there are differing conceptualisations of what exactly constitutes 'lived experience'.

Key insight 8: The policy problems being discussed by the Panel are not always connected to Panel members' lived realities and this can act as a mechanism of exclusion within the participatory space.

The impact of the Panel, i.e., what did it achieve?

When considering the impact of the Panel, it is helpful to apply different lenses. How impact was perceived across the Panel members varies depending on the type of impact being described. It is therefore necessary to talk about impact across three categories: Personal, Commission-level and Institutional.

Personal impact

Every interviewee was asked what they thought the panel has achieved? Whilst the responses in relation to the Commission-level and Institutional impact are mixed, every interviewee detailed (in some way) a positive personal impact. It appears as if, on a personal level, the panel has been deeply meaningful for its members. There are three key themes from

these positive personal experiences: personal upskilling, visibility, and feeling heard or listened to:

life's not easy for everybody in their own way, everybody's got difficulty somewhere. But for them to just take that little bit of time to say: 'Just keep going… just keep going.' But that made a massive difference to me. Massive. **Panel Member 7**

my own goals have been fulfilled because I wanted to be able to put something on my CV. I have learned new skills. I wanted to challenge all the preconceptions I've had in my head about poverty and disability and whatever inequality and I've met all of those things, you know, I've learned a great deal. **Panel Member 1**

I'm always really keen to learn new things and this was an opportunity to learn about cycles of poverty that yes, I've experienced and to be able to kind of contrast my experiences with other people, but also to learn about an area which is really hot topic at the moment and to learn about parts of that that I have no experience of. So there was, there was a little bit of kind of self-upskilling as well. **Panel Member 6**

it's giving me… a sounding board .. a platform to, you know, voice my life, the struggles I have. And you know, like I say, get closer….. to the decision makers and letting them hear. They can hear what I've got to say and the struggles I have. **Panel Member 5**

Indeed, even where Panel members identified a number of things they would change, these reflections often sat alongside reflections about how much they enjoyed and valued their experience as a Panel member. Similarly, most interviewees detailed onward pathways or planned next steps in terms of how they will continue as a participant on different panels or in different policy areas, suggesting that their experience as a Panel member has, on a personal level, increased their democratic agency.

However, not all personal impacts detailed were positive. Whilst in the minority, there is evidence that some experiences of the Panel had a negative personal impact also:

I've become utterly despondent because of this panel. **Panel Member 1**

This appears to be directly related to whether or not Panel members felt their contributions and experiences had been listened to or heard. This appears in observational data also, where feedback from Scottish Government was perceived very negatively by the Panel as a group,

leading to expressions of feeling ignored or deeply under-valued by Scottish Government. This perhaps highlights inherent risks of participation, particularly for people who already feel marginalised. Whilst the Commission is committed to 'amplifying the voices of those who are often unheard' (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2020, p. 6), it appears that participation can further compound and deepen feelings of marginalisation if participants continue to feel ignored or unheard within the process.

Key insight 9: On a personal level, the impact of the Panel appears to be profound for most interviewees, with all describing, in detail, positive personal experiences as a result. There are three key themes from these experiences: personal upskilling, visibility and feeling heard or listened to.

Key insight 10: Participation carries inherent risks for individuals, not all personal impacts are positive and where negative impacts are described, whilst in the minority, they are significant and appear to involve feelings of deeper marginalisation.

Commission-level impact

The Commission's own evaluation has already highlighted that Panel members would have liked more direct contact with the Commissioners and Commission as a whole (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022e). This was a strong theme in the co-production workshop also, it was the most popular change which Panel members would make in their final voting exercise, with some Panel members choosing to highlight this directly to the Commissioners in the follow-up discussion. There were also other, more positive, conceptualisations of the relationship between the Panel and the Commission. Some Panel members viewed the relationship as one of equals, one which was reciprocal, and one where the Commission made genuine efforts to listen to and involve Panel members:

Panel members and the Commissioners… it's a relationship of where, whatever they bring on the table, we meet at 50/50 **Panel Member 2**

I think it was a really strong and robust relationship. I think the Commissioners, you know, genuinely did what they could to.. make sure that people were involved **Panel Member 6**

the Commissioners were quite good at listening to what we were saying and then taking that back. **Panel Member 3**

Some tensions emerge when considering the impact of the Panel *on* the Commission's work and vice versa, particularly when thinking about agenda-setting. There are varied perceptions around who set the agenda of the Panel, with some people thinking the Commission needed to provide 'more direction and stricter oversight' whilst others feeling like the Commission, and its statutory status, limited the Panel in terms of what it could talk about and the types of issues which were deemed acceptable or not:

In terms of setting the agenda… we've had a little bit of in terms of we can talk about… refugee… issues facing the traveller community or we can talk about the proposed changes to attendance allowance. It's those kind of ***either-ors****. It's not actually, could we talk about a way of really challenging some of the rhetoric that comes from the Scottish Government and from the Westminster Government …Would we ever be given those kinds of options? No we wouldn't …. So, if the Commission is deciding that this is, this is the kind of priorities, then the panel will be looking at the things that the Commission has decided (emphasis added)* **Panel Member 4**

In some cases, Panel members were happy with the 'either-ors' described above and felt the decision-making within the Panel about what would be discussed was fair. There is also clear evidence of Panel members bringing their own issues to the group, for example individual blogs produced and the smaller sub-groups which developed consultation responses based on Panel members' experiences and ideas. However, the idea of Panel discussions being limited by the Commission appears to extend beyond agenda-setting, with some members expressing concerns that suggested solutions which were deemed too overtly political, challenging or radical were ignored or under-developed. There are two potential reasons which emerge for this: a perceived discomfort with progressive or radical ideas and a chronic lack of time to properly discuss the complex topic areas brought to the Panel.

I think one of the big problems is that everything is crammed into just those two hours.
And. It's just impossible. You know, it's there's so many problems, so many issues that were brought to us. Either through government doing

consultations they wanted answers to, or the Commission working on something particular that they wanted our input. **Panel Member 1**

there are times in our meetings, where people say things and I think there, there probably is a lot of people who actually agree with them, but the kind of reaction is… this is just too much. This is too critical of the Scottish Government or this is too critical of the capitalist system, or too critical of the energy companies. What that person says, it's never remarked on, and then it's just moved on. Whenever something really does come from, you know, sort of a really challenging position, it's often, it's often just not acknowledged… the way the way we deal with this is to just pretend that never happened **Panel Member 4**

It is difficult to make an assessment of how this translates into the policy recommendations, suggestions and ideas of the Panel, particularly in terms of their key focus of Child Poverty. Analysis of the advice and scrutiny provided by the Commission reveals a clear commitment to incorporating Panel member views into the recommendations and explicit acknowledgment of the joint working between the Panel and the Commission which led to the outputs. This is most clearly evident in the advice provided to Scottish Government for the 2022-2026 Child Poverty Delivery Plan (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022b). However, there is only one document which explicitly details the influence of the Panel in *changing* or *evolving* the recommendations made by the Commission (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022e). Commissioners who attended the co-production workshop were keen to communicate to the Panel members the profound impact their input has had on the Commission, and on themselves individually, during the Panel's lifetime. Similarly, interviewees routinely cited suggestions, recommendations or ideas made by the group, so this lack of narrative in the policy documentation appears to obscure or at the very least under-report the specific outputs from Panel discussions, and as such their eventual impact on the Commission.

Key insight 11: There are a variety of conceptualisations of the relationship between the Panel and the Commission, including a partnership of equals, a reciprocal working relationship or symbolic.

Key insight 12: Tensions emerge when considering who sets the agenda of the Panel and whether or not the Commission needs to provide more direction or more freedom for Panel members

Key insight 13: Policy problems and solutions are not deliberated fully thanks to a lack of time and a perceived discomfort with radical or challenging ideas.

Institutional impact

Despite the high expectations and hopes for what the Panel would achieve, the impact of the Panel on an institutional level, i.e., on Scottish Government, was, for most interviewees, difficult to describe. For many, the *visibility* of the Panel and its *proximity* to Scottish Government were important, things which were often viewed as having the *potential* to impact on policy at some point in the future. Certainly, in the policy documentation analysis, the Panel are visible and cited across the work of the Commission, and in some cases explicitly referenced by Scottish Government as a key mechanism through which they bring in 'lived experience' knowledge (Scottish Government, 2022b), although the nature of this knowledge and how it has been used is not detailed in any way. In addition, the invitation for one of the Panel members to present at the recent anti-poverty summit is demonstrative of consistent exposure to and interaction with high level decision-makers, a point noted by interviewees.

When asked to detail the impact on Scottish Government, some interviewees cited specific policy changes which had happened during the Panel's lifetime, notably the doubling of Scottish Child Payment. However, these same Panel members were doubtful as to whether this change was attributable to the Panel directly or to wider campaigning of anti-poverty organisations. Indeed, there was a small cohort who believed that any perceived success with regards to the Panel's asks of Scottish Government

were likely down to pre-existing policies or plans rather than any particular response to Panel contributions:

The only evidence I have [of impact] is that Scottish Government has put up the child payment from what it was … But I don't think that is down to us. I think that is pressure from various poverty organizations that work together to put pressure on the Scottish Government **Panel Member 1**

sometimes what you are saying may not be in cognizance of what [politicians] want to hear…maybe your view is not the view they want, so as a panel member and when you … give out your policies, you pray it's … what they can marry into whatever they are planning to do. **Panel Member 2**

I'm not sure whether, the reason that Scottish Government is going to support [Panel contributions], is because it kind of fitted with their mindset anyway of what they wanted to do and actually what we were doing was again this.. thing about giving legitimacy and reinforcing what was already going to happen. **Panel Member 4**

For most interviewees, it was challenging to give a definitive answer to how the Panel impacted on Scottish Government because of a perceived lack of feedback and formal response from Scottish Government to the Panel directly.

I don't believe that we got any feedback, well I didn't personally, I don't feel that we got any feedback from the Scottish Government **Panel Member 7**

we've seen a lot of information flowing from the panel to the Scottish Government and but just because of the time scales around things and a lot of the feedback that we've had is verbal **Panel Member 6**

There were a number of reasons provided for this lack of response from Scottish Government, including the slow pace of change within government, which does not match the urgency of the problems being experienced by Panel members, and a distinct lack of political will.

the further you move away from being completely disempowered, which is what living in poverty means for me, you know? … The further you get away from that, the less burning it becomes, you know, that change has to happen now. **Panel Member 4**

I don't think there's political will to make a difference. **Panel Member 1**

Meetings with Scottish Government were very rushed, and we were made to feel that we should feel grateful [for Scottish Government giving any time to the Panel] **Co-production workshop small group feedback**

Indeed, across interview, survey and workshop data, Panel members expressed a strong desire to better understand the journey of their contributions within Scottish Government and to ultimately have clearer responses to any recommendations and suggestions:

So you're telling us you've taken our views on board. So you're you're going about doing whatever you are with those views. Tell us what's happening at each stage, give us an end result **Panel Member 5**

This perhaps brings us back to an earlier point related to the outputs of the Panel discussions. As discussed, there is not always a coherent narrative of the deliberations of the Panel and their subsequent *collective* recommendations or suggestions. This is particularly true of their contributions related to Child Poverty and links back to whether the panel functions to produce evidence based on individual experiences or as a collective decision-making space. This point was highlighted by Scottish Government officials in the previous evaluation:

the Commission should consider risks around [Ministerial meetings] becoming an occasion for unrelated, personal experience based, individual questions or discussion, and the benefits of instead tying these into a broader theme or purpose (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2022e, p. 34)

Whilst it seems unfair to question whether Panel members should bring in their own personal experience when representing an 'Experts by Experience' Panel, there is perhaps a salient point with regards to tying together the individual experiences and perspectives of the Panel members into a broader narrative and distinct policy output. This would not necessarily remove the other issues highlighted by Panel members related to a lack of urgency and political will on the part of Scottish Government, but it may provide a more formal policy input and a potential mechanism through which to access or at least request a more formal response from Scottish Government.

Key insight 14: The visibility of the Panel and proximity to Scottish Government decision-makers is valued.

Key insight 15: There is a perceived lack of policy impact at Scottish Government level, this is connected to a lack of urgency and political will or whether the contributions of the Panel correlated with pre-existing policy plans.

Key insight 16: Both the input and contributions of the Panel and the subsequent responses from Scottish Government can appear opaque. There is a strong desire for clearer, more formal responses and recognition from Scottish Government.

Overall, the impact of the Panel is at once profound and unclear. On a personal level the Panel appears to have been deeply meaningful for its members. However, when considering its impact on the Commission and Scottish Government, perceptions of Panel members are more mixed, often reflecting complex understandings of relationships between the Panel and the more 'empowered' spaces it fed into. Impact at Scottish Government level is challenging to identify, with Panel members expressing a strong desire to better understand the policy journey of their contributions. This appears to be complicated further by, at times, unclear narratives of the recommendations, suggestions and ideas developed and submitted by the Panel as a whole.

CONCLUSION

This report details an overview of Panel member reflections on being part of the Experts by Experience Panel. Whilst a variety of sources of evidence have been brought in, it is important to note that the reflections detailed here come from half of the Panel (N=8), meaning they are not necessarily reflective of everyone who participated (N=16). Similarly, this analysis does not include reflections from professional stakeholders. Data collection is still underway, and it is hoped that the analysis will eventually include institutional perspectives. There will be a follow-up report updating and incorporating their reflections at a later date.

The insights shared here demonstrate complex understandings of public participation and in particular public participation where participants have 'lived experience' of poverty. There appears to be a gap between what Panel members hoped the process would achieve and how its actual purpose was described. The educational aspect of the Panel was valued highly as was the diversity of experiences brought to the forum by its individual members. Indeed, the personal impact of Panel appears to have been profound across interviewees.

However, there appear to be differing conceptualisations of what constitutes 'lived experience' in the context of the Panel and how this connects to the policy problems being discussed. Further complications emerge when considering the impact of the Panel on the 'empowered' spaces it fed into, with varying assessments of its relationship with both the Commission and Scottish Government. It is well-documented that citizen participation in policy and decision-making spaces can be difficult to achieve in a way that feels meaningful for both members of the public and policymakers (Dean, 2017). It is hoped that the insights shared here will inform the next iteration of the Panel as well as provide a mechanism for sharing learning with the existing Panel members who very kindly shared their time, thoughts and reflections with the researcher.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to all of the Panel members who participated in the research and opened the doors to their participatory space.

REPORT 2: Update report for the Poverty and Inequality Commission: Professional insights

This report details interim 'professional insights' in relation to interviews with professional stakeholders who interacted with the Experts by Experience Panel (from now on, the Panel). The people interviewed fall into the following categories:

- Members of the Poverty and Inequality Commission
- Members of the Secretariat
- Representatives of Scottish Government or wider statutory bodies who interacted with the Panel (from now on, 'empowered spaces')

In total, six professional stakeholders were interviewed. Given the risk to anonymity is high with such a small number of interviewees, the decision has been made to refer to everyone as 'professional stakeholders' (PS) as well as not providing any detail on how many people from each category were interviewed (with one exception, detailed in the acknowledgements section).

This report is an update to the previous Key Insights report submitted in autumn 2023 which focused on Panel member perspectives. The 'professional insights' detailed here predominantly relate to interview data although, where appropriate, other sources have been pulled in (i.e., from policy documentation, direct observation or the co-production workshop - please see the first report for more detail on the research methods). The analysis follows the same structure as the previous report. The aim was to identify themes which were similar or different to those which emerged from the Panel member interviews. As such, the insights are grouped according to the following categories:

- **Purpose of the Panel**, i.e., what was it set up to do?
- **Inclusion**, with a particular focus on lived experience
- **Impact**, i.e., what did it achieve?

In total eight 'professional insights' are detailed. Each interviewee brought their own unique perspective to the research and whilst accounts and opinions vary, there are some clear parallels with the Panel member reflections as well as some additional themes. Rather than simply repeat the findings of the previous report, where there are connections to the original 'Key Insights', these have been identified either in text or in brackets. It is intended that this report be read alongside the first.

Purpose of the Panel

The conceptualisations of what the Panel was set up to do both align and differ from the Panel member reflections. Some professional stakeholders expressed similar high expectations for what the Panel would achieve, stating they hoped it would 'genuinely influence' policy or 'ensure the voices of people are heard… in the corridors of Scottish Parliament'. These aims are also reinforced in documentation related to the Panel and the Poverty and Inequality Commission, most notably in the Commission's overarching priority to 'amplify the voices of experts by experience' (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021a), with the wish for the Panel to inform policy and decision making also evident in other documents and statements:

The Poverty and Inequality Commission believes that people with experience of poverty – experts by experience – should be at the centre of decision-making about poverty and inequality ***Terms of reference*** *(Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021b)*

As with the Panel member reflections however, these hopes were often qualified with more pragmatic descriptions of what the Panel was doing, or able to do, in practice. One of the key attributes of the Panel, for the professional stakeholders interviewed, was the experiential knowledge the members brought into the Commission or other empowered spaces. In agreement with Panel member views, having *lived experience* of poverty was highly valued as a knowledge type, with interviewees regularly describing it as 'crucial' or 'important' for effective policymaking. One of the main reasons provided for this was the fact that this experiential knowledge is not present in typical decision-making spaces related to poverty, and as such, the Panel was filling an institutional *knowledge gap*. This gap was often characterised as a lack of understanding of the real-world impact of policies and chimes closely with key insights highlighted in the previous report (K.I. 2, 3):

The more that they hear, the more, hopefully, the policies will relate to what's real, really happening on the ground rather than what politicians imagine is happening, you know because there's always that gap between what you intend and what the actual reality is. ***PS 1***

the kind of questions that panel members asked aren't necessarily the same ones that the Commissioners would ask… you know there would be gaps there of things that we might not have thought about had panel members not been part of that discussion ***PS 2***

In addition, the incorporation of *lived experience* was also perceived as bringing legitimacy and validity to the outputs of the Commission or other empowered spaces. A number of reasons were provided for this, including that the Panel provided a real-world 'sense check' of existing recommendations and that this 'different layer of information' increased the 'strength', 'robustness', relevancy or reliability of any policy proposals. This was underpinned by recognition across interviewees that evidencing the involvement of people with *lived experience* is an increasingly common priority, or in some cases a requirement, for Scottish Government when considering potential policy options:

the fact that had been through that process [engaging with the Panel] probably strengthens those recommendations in the eyes of the government and officials I suspect PS 6

Indeed, in the review of policy documents published by Scottish Government related to tackling child poverty, there are repeated statements which reinforce this view, with experiential knowledge cited throughout as a key component in policy development:

we have placed the highest importance on hearing from those with experience of poverty and supporting them to inform responses to reduce poverty at a community, local and national level (Scottish Government, 2022c, p. 60)

Despite consensus on the importance of *lived experience*, there was some variation across professional stakeholders about how this knowledge functioned within the Commission or other empowered spaces. For some, the Panel was primarily performing an *evidence-producing* function, where individual experiences were *'being recorded… being documented'* and engagement with the Panel formed part of a broader *'evidence base'* of which lived experience was one component. It was common for interviewees to place engagement with the Panel in a wider matrix of other sources of evidence including broader research, stakeholder

engagement and impact assessments. However, for others it was less to do with formal evidence or data gathering and more to do with the different perspective or lens which people with lived experience of poverty can bring to policy problems, and which ultimately '*enriched*' both the discussions and conclusions of the Commission or other empowered spaces:

I think you know they were very powerful anecdotes, but you need lots of them to get data and in some ways, what was more compelling I think was people's reaction to evidence because of their own greater understanding of things being different and that then prompting a better analysis by a broader group of people ***PS 4***

There were also some concerns raised about how expertise from the Panel was integrated with other forms of knowledge and evidence. For one interviewee, there was a risk that viewing Panel member contributions as evidence alone increased the likelihood that this form of knowledge would be relegated to anecdotal and not seen as 'proper expertise'. Whereas for another, there was a risk that the increasingly high value placed on experiential knowledge crowded out other forms of expertise and the confidence to challenge views which were based on personal experience:

about that integration of different kinds of experience you know, lived experience, other kinds of experience and knowledge … how do you share some of that power in a way that that everyone feels able to challenge and I think that that's both ways so the panel … can challenge the Commissioners and challenge what Scottish Government's saying… but also we have to be careful ... that we don't get sort of deference to lived experience, where …. no one feels able to bring in other kinds of knowledge and experience and say, well, there might be reasons why this wouldn't work and have that kind of conversation ***PS 2***

It appears there is a spectrum of understanding around the purpose of the Panel and what it was set up to do. Across accounts, the Panel is perceived as filling an institutional *knowledge gap* related to the real-world impact of policies as well as providing legitimacy and validity to policy proposals and recommendations made by the Commission or other empowered spaces. However, whilst the provision of experiential knowledge related to poverty is central to conceptualisations of the

Panel's purpose, there appear to be different views on how this knowledge both functions and is categorised by interviewees:

> **Professional insight 1**: *Lived experience* is highly valued as a knowledge type. It is often described as an intrinsic good which fills a *knowledge gap* in institutional decision and policy spaces. (Links to K.I.1, 2, 3,7)
>
> **Professional insight 2**: The incorporation of lived experience voices is perceived as bringing legitimacy and validity to the recommendations of the Commission or other empowered spaces. (Links to K.I.4)
>
> **Professional insight 3**: There are different conceptualisations of how lived experience *functions* as a knowledge type as well as how it interacts with other forms of expertise. (Links to K.I.4)

Inclusion

As with Panel member views, inclusion was considered a core concept in participation spaces, which was both integral to the Panel but also a significant challenge in practice. Interviewees identified a suite of barriers which people may experience when participating. These varied from those identified by Panel members and included limited time and the inability to commit to a long-term process, consultation fatigue, lack of confidence, complicated application processes, digital exclusion and specific accessibility needs related to understanding and reading information. As detailed in the previous report, the support provided by the Secretariat was highly valued by Panel members. This was echoed in professional stakeholder interviews who highlighted the important role of the Senior Participation Officer in both convening and maintaining the Panel:

there was an application process, and [the] participation officer was very much about, it was about [them] supporting people in that process as well. And so, it wasn't just kind of go away and put an application ***PS 2***

it's harder than people would imagine to recruit people to give an ongoing commitment to something like this. So, I'm really pleased that we've still got 16 out the original 19, still active and after two years I think that's quite an achievement in itself. ***PS 1***

Interviewees were asked to consider inclusion in a broad sense and what that might mean or look like in participation settings. *Diversity*, i.e., having people from a variety of different backgrounds and experiences was key for professional stakeholders, although this was often stated with the caveat that *full representativeness* was not possible to achieve in one participation process:

in a wider sense it's making I would think it's about making sure that all sort of groups in society are, all have a voice within that … it's inclusive in terms of I suppose the characteristics of the group ***PS 6***

you can't reasonably expect it to be representative… it would be probably a silly thing to ask … to get something that is, you know, genuinely politically and socially representative much though you might want it to be more diverse ***PS 4***

One the key findings from the previous analysis was that having *lived experience* was understood in different ways by Panel members. There is not the same variation in conceptualisations from professional stakeholders. Overall, people tended to talk about *lived experience* as having either *current* or *sustained* experience of living in poverty, whilst descriptions of inclusion and diversity were often linked to population groups most likely to live in or be vulnerable to falling into poverty:

when it's about poverty and inequality, especially people who live in poverty and inequality… there are people who are from the asylum seeking community, there are people who are single parents, there are people who are disabled, these are conversations I'm passionate about, because these are people who have to wake up in the morning, and they have to decide, okay, do I turn on my heating or do I make a cup of tea. So, this is not theoretical, this is something that is practical ***PS 5***

Indeed, for the most part interviewees tended to describe people with *lived experience* as the 'affected public', i.e., those directly impacted by the policy issues being discussed. Panel members were often defined as the *recipients* of policies, or as people who were able to detail the 'human and… social impacts' of policy implementation, which otherwise would not be known:

I just think that the people who are, you know, at the end point of where policies are delivered, should be involved in forming those policies in the 1st place ***PS 1***

So, it was all about… almost the stresses and strains within the system that we were trying to get to get to the bottom of and …. some of the challenges the individuals were facing when you were speaking to the Panel, they were going into a detail about how they were living. ***PS 6***

Furthermore, when speaking about the recruitment process, some interviewees spoke about the need for it to be 'targeted' to ensure that people were able to bring specific knowledge related to specific policies. This is perhaps most evident in relation to child poverty where interviewees routinely cited the importance of having the *priority families* represented on the group. It is not possible to make an assessment of whether the Panel's final composition reflected this intention as whilst the Commission's outputs state that the Panel was 'diverse in terms of their identity and experiences of poverty and inequality' (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2024), it was not possible to access information related to those characteristics. This is for understandable reasons related to data protection and consent. However, it perhaps brings us back to the previous report's finding that the policy problems being discussed by the Panel were not always connected to their lived realities. This highlights a potential tension between *ambitions* to convene a Panel of the 'affected public' who are experiencing the specific policy problems being discussed and the challenge of convening a Panel which reflects the diversity of population groups who experience poverty.

Overall, inclusion is a central concept in relation to the Panel and wider participation processes. Ensuring diversity and representation of people most likely to experience poverty was crucial for professional stakeholders although there were recognised challenges in achieving this:

Professional insight 4: Diversity is crucial in participation spaces, however full representation is very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve within one panel. (Links to K.I.5, 6)

Professional insight 5: Conceptualisations of *lived experience* vary between *current* or *sustained* experiences of poverty. In addition, members of the panel are often described as the 'affected public', i.e., those who are impacted by the policy issues being discussed. (Links to K.I.7, 8)

Impact

In the previous report, Panel member views were mixed in relation to their overall impact on both the Commission and Scottish Government. Professional stakeholders had slightly different perspectives on impact although also reflected some of the same concerns as those expressed by Panel members. All interviewees expressed a desire for the relationship between the Panel and the Commission or other empowered spaces to be meaningful and reciprocal, and one that moved beyond typical 'consultation':

[the Commission] bring certain skills and experience to the table … [the Panel's] input is just as valuable as ours, so that you know that they definitely feel included in that sense, that they're not just brought in from outside, wheeled in and then wheeled away out again at the end at the end of the process… they're there as partners ***PS 1***

Interviewees often characterised the relationship between the Commission and the Panel as that of a 'partnership' or one where they worked in 'dialogue' with one another to reach 'collective conclusions'. Indeed, despite the reservations of some Panel members that there was little or no evidence of impact, professional stakeholders were able to identify a number of ways in which the contributions and participation of the Panel had influenced or shaped the recommendations and outputs of the Commission or other empowered spaces:

We'd never really have thought in quite that way.… maybe it does make quite a lot of difference to the policy recommendations if you if you engage properly in that process and in that way ***PS 4***

we actually used some of the things they were saying to probably nuance our messages a bit more just in terms of how that support could work and how it would be best targeted ***PS 6***

This influence extended beyond tangible outputs, for example changes to a recommendation or policy proposal, to ways of working and a general approach to solving or discussing policy problems within the Commission or other empowered spaces:

it's changed a huge amount about the way that we work, and we think about things…. it impacts on every aspect really of what we're doing as a Commission ***PS 2***

When it came to detailing impact at a Scottish Government level, it became more complicated for interviewees to detail or identify specific examples. There were a number of reasons provided for this which included the slow pace of change within policymaking and perceived limitations of what is possible within the current resources and remit of Scottish Government:

I think there will always be room for improvement, but we have to be mindful about what capacity and resources we have and what's the best use of public money ***PS 3***

it's always really hard because in policy terms, things tend to play out in the longer term rather than the short term, I think you know [the Panel] have definitely influenced our recommendations to government. ***PS 1***

It was recognised by some interviewees that the Panel may have found it 'frustrating' or 'difficult' to accept or understand when their suggestions or ideas were not translated into policy action at Scottish Government level. For some, this was directly related to the statutory status of the Commission or other empowered spaces. Whilst the *proximity to* and *visibility* of the Panel in 'high level' decision-making spaces was described as 'powerful' and valued across interviewees, it was also described as a limitation on what could be discussed or recommended by the Panel, the Commission or other empowered spaces:

I think that the fact that the Commission is a public body you know … it can't just come up with anything that it wants in any space that it wants, it has a statutory remit and … that is a limit ***PS 2***

This limitation was not specific to the Panel but extended to the professional stakeholders themselves, who also described having to consider specific remits and boundaries when putting forward policy proposals:

you have to re-strategise and think, okay… what is it that we can really do, plus the Scottish Government is such a massive entity. Sometimes I don't even know who is who, what is happening, you know, so I imagine you're taking people off the street who are living in poverty, and expect them to, kind of, navigate that. Sometimes it can feel so abstract, like you're here, you're so close, but yet you're so far. ***PS 5***

In addition, there were concerns raised that the statutory agenda of the Panel was determined by the Commission's existing priorities rather than vice versa and that this may have resulted in different outcomes than if the Panel had had a 'blank page' to start with:

if the panel had been setting the working agenda for the Commission … That actually it might have been much more inclusive of the priorities that people would write down on a blank piece of paper as opposed to inclusive of their views on something somebody had already written down the bullet points for ***PS 4***

On the whole, there are mixed narratives when it comes to impact. There is certainly evidence from interviewees that the Panel contributed to and influenced recommendations and outputs produced by the Commission or other empowered spaces. In addition, their influence extended to ongoing ways of working and problem solving. As with Panel member views, impact at a Scottish Government level is more complicated to identify. The proximity to statutory decision-making is at once regarded as both empowering and limiting in terms of what the Panel, Commission and other empowered spaces could discuss and recommend:

Professional insight 6: There is a clear desire for the relationship between the Panel and the Commission or other empowered spaces to be as meaningful and reciprocal as possible. (Links to K.I. 11, 12)

Professional insight 7: Specific policy change as a result of the Panel's participation is challenging to identify. However, the Panel appears to have directly influenced ways of working, discussions and resultant recommendations of the Commission or other empowered spaces. (Links to K.I. 15, 16)

Professional insight 8: The institutional setting and proximity to decision-makers is valued although this is also described as a limitation on what can be discussed and recommended by the Panel, the Commission and other empowered spaces. (Links to K.I. 13, 14, 15)

Conclusion

This report details some of the insights from interviews with professional stakeholders. There are some clear parallels with Panel member reflections, as well as some additional themes. The Panel, and participation processes like this, are largely described as an intrinsic good which bring vital experiential knowledge into policymaking spaces related to poverty. This *lived experience* is highly valued although there appear to be different understandings about how this knowledge functions within the Commission or other empowered spaces. For some interviewees this raises important questions about how different forms of knowledge, evidence and expertise are integrated in participation settings where complex issues like poverty and inequality are being discussed. Professional stakeholders appear to define *lived experience* as people who are 'affected' by policy issues and, as such, are able to provide intel or perspectives related to how policies are implemented and impact on their day to day lives. However, it is unclear how this translates into the eventual demographic composition of the Panel.

Impact at a Scottish Government level is difficult to identify and whilst the Panel is considered empowered in some ways via its proximity to high level decision-makers, it is also described as limited in terms of what the group could discuss. The impact of the Panel appears to have been most powerful in *shaping or informing* recommendations produced by the Commission or the other empowered spaces who engaged directly with the Panel. In addition, exposure to working with the Panel appears to have influenced general ways of working and how interviewees think about particular policy problems related to poverty.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all interviewees for taking the time out of very busy schedules to contribute to the research.

One interviewee requested to be acknowledged by name in the reporting:
Yvonne Blake, Poverty and Inequality Commissioner

Case 2: Stand-alone Report

Photo redacted for anonymity

What was the research about?

From October 2023 - February 2024, a researcher from the University of Glasgow worked with members of the Steering Meeting of the Townsley Peoples' Forum. The purpose of the research was to build a case study of the Townsley Peoples' Forum, exploring these questions:

- **How are participation processes, like theTownsley Peoples' Forum, used?** How do different people (citizens, Government, Local Authority, third sector etc.) understand the problem it is seeking to address and how it is trying to do this?

- **How are these processes experienced?** What enables or blocks different people from being included (or from including themselves), and from enabling participation to be a transparent, inclusive process which provides opportunity for citizens to influence decisions which impact their lives?

The research was part of a bigger PhD project investigating public participation in socio-economic decision making.

The study is broadly looking to understand how the public are involved in decision and policymaking which impacts on their lives. The research is focused on different types of participation, how they work and how different people experience them. It has a particular focus on participation processes which connect to social inequalities and the role participation could play in reducing those inequalities.

The researcher is based in the University of Glasgow at the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit. For more information on the unit, you can check out our website: www.glasgow.ac.uk/sphsu

The Townsley Peoples' Forum - at a glance

In November 2022, [Anon] were funded by Scottish Government's Just Transition Fund, via NESCAN as part of the Just Transition Communities Project, to convene and support a Peoples' Assembly in Townsley. This assembly took place in May 2023.

The two-day Assembly was informed by an initial 'Engaged Listening' exercise, consisting of conversations with local people about the key issues they were facing in Townsley. As a result of this exercise and two public meetings held for local residents, the following question was developed for exploration at the Assembly:

How can Townsley reclaim the power and resources to make the community a healthy place to grow up in? ([Anon], 2023)

Townsley is an area of [Anon] which has been subject to significant redevelopment related to both the oil and gas industry and renewable energy. There is a current redevelopment plan for the main green space in the area: Townsley Park. This redevelopment, spearheaded by a private-sector led consortium known as the Renewable Energy Transition, is also funded via the Scottish Government's Just Transition Fund. There is long standing and strong opposition from residents of Townsley to the development of the park, as demonstrated by an earlier Assembly held in 2021 and ongoing campaigning work.

This issue became the main focus for deliberations at the Assembly in 2023, which produced The Declaration of Townsley as its main output, including a list of actions which the attendees committed to. The 2-day event was attended by around 150-200 people alongside an ongoing Steering Meeting with around 15 members who supported the organisation of the Forum itself and the subsequent implementation of the actions and commitments detailed in the Declaration.

The Steering Meeting currently meets at least twice a month and is supported by [Anon] and a part-time community development worker (also funded via NESCAN). Current activities are wide ranging and include the development of a local retrofit project, ongoing community events, supporting the set-up of an outdoor classroom, and developing a local website for groups and organisations.

What did the research involve?

The researcher initially met with members of the organisation funded to support and convene the Townsley Peoples' Forum. After this, a research proposal was submitted to the Steering Meeting for consideration and agreement. The data generation for the project took place from November '23 - February '24. There were four different methods used to understand and explore how the Townsley Peoples' Forum is/ was experienced.

Stages of engagement

One to one interviews x 14

The researcher met and spoke to:

- 9 x members of the Steering Meeting (including 2 x members of the organising group funded to convene the project)
- 5 x representatives of local organisations, services and groups

Direct observation x 4

The researcher attended and observed the following meetings:

- 3 x Steering Meetings (2 x in-person; 1 x online)
- 1 x Townsley Community Council Meeting

Workshop x 1

The researcher facilitated a workshop at the Steering Meeting on 10th February focused on getting more people involved.

Review of related documents

In addition to speaking to people, the researcher also reviewed any documents which related to the Townsley Peoples' Forum. This included:

- reports on the 2-day assemblies held in 2023 and 2021
- local info, such as locality plans and RET
- national info, such as Just Transition plans

What did the research find?

The data generated across this research project reveals a variety of perspectives and experiences of the Townsley Peoples' Forum. Each person interviewed brought their own thoughts, ideas and opinions. There is no single narrative which can sum up the work of the Forum and its individual members and partners.

In order to pull out the key themes, the researcher conducted a *thematic analysis*. There are 10 key insights which have been identified across the following two categories:

- What is the Townsley Peoples' Forum?
- Who are the Townsley Peoples' Forum?

It is hoped that the insights and learning shared here will be interesting, and potentially useful, for the future work of the Forum.

What is the Townsley Peoples' Forum?

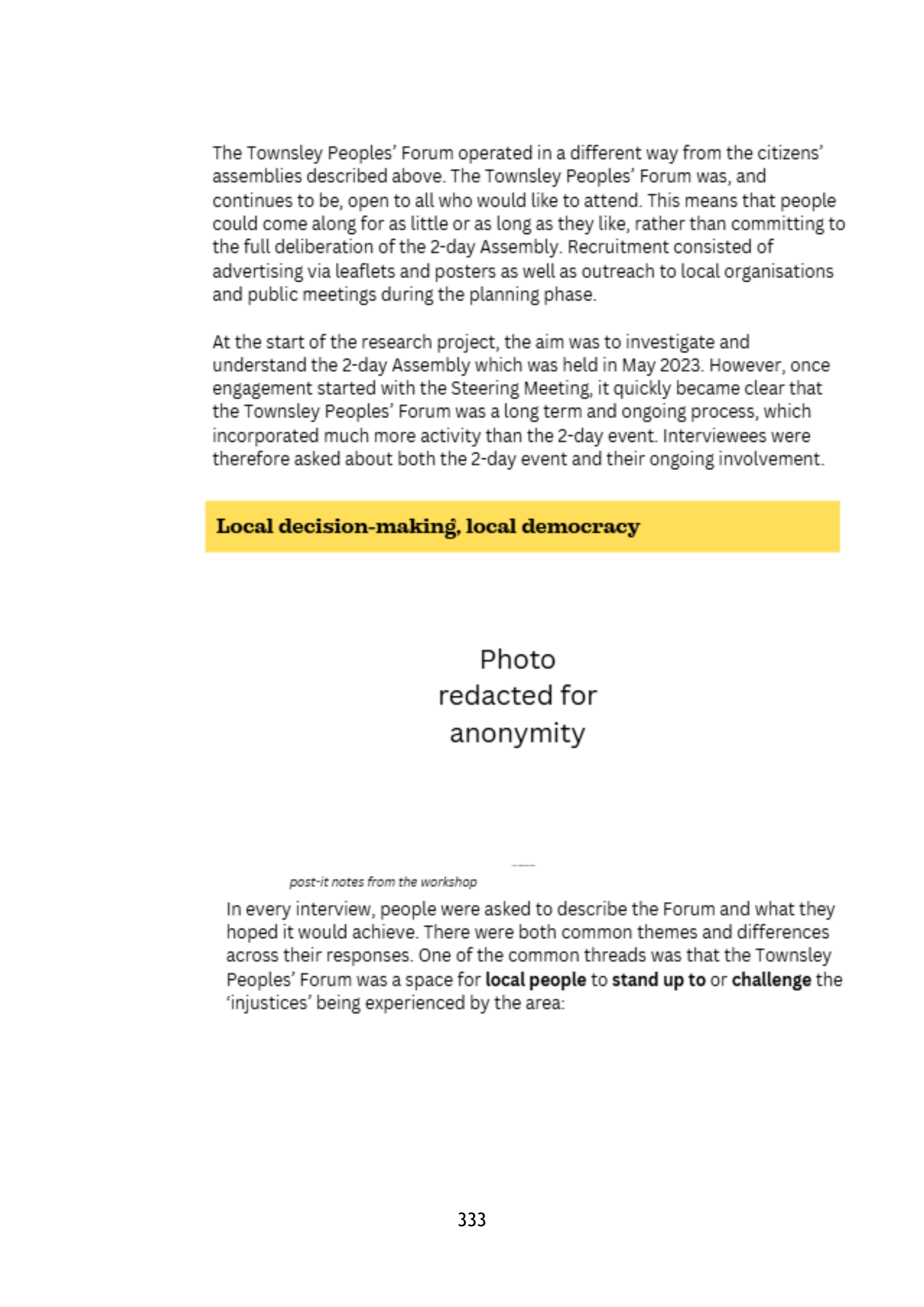
A quick note on assemblies.....

Citizens' assemblies are increasingly used as a democratic decision-making tool for countries around the world. Typically, although certainly not always, a citizens' assembly brings together a cross-section of the population of a particular place. Often this group is intended to be *representative* of that place, meaning people from different backgrounds are purposefully recruited.
The Assembly is normally set a specific question or task. They then spend some time considering evidence and expertise related to this topic and then deliberate to reach a conclusion or produce a suite of recommendations. Citizens' assemblies can take many different forms and are used in lots of different contexts. This website has lots of different case studies of how this form of participation has been used around the world: Participedia.

The Townsley Peoples' Forum operated in a different way from the citizens' assemblies described above. The Townsley Peoples' Forum was, and continues to be, open to all who would like to attend. This means that people could come along for as little or as long as they like, rather than committing to the full deliberation of the 2-day Assembly. Recruitment consisted of advertising via leaflets and posters as well as outreach to local organisations and public meetings during the planning phase.

At the start of the research project, the aim was to investigate and understand the 2-day Assembly which was held in May 2023. However, once engagement started with the Steering Meeting, it quickly became clear that the Townsley Peoples' Forum was a long term and ongoing process, which incorporated much more activity than the 2-day event. Interviewees were therefore asked about both the 2-day event and their ongoing involvement.

Local decision-making, local democracy



post-it notes from the workshop

In every interview, people were asked to describe the Forum and what they hoped it would achieve. There were both common themes and differences across their responses. One of the common threads was that the Townsley Peoples' Forum was a space for **local people** to **stand up to** or **challenge** the 'injustices' being experienced by the area:

I would say it's local people who probably have had enough of local issues, situations, bad situations and they want change, and they see it as an opportunity to make changes by coming together to discuss it and find ways forward to change
Steering Meeting Member 4

This is a group that I feel it's trying to connect with the people and the groups in Townsley to have one voice, one loud voice that is going to stand up against what is being done in Townsley
Steering Meeting Member 1

The main purpose of the Forumwas often described as **problem-solving**, a place where people come together to discuss the issues faced in Townsley, as well as potential solutions:

It is a group of mainly Townsley folk trying to put the world to rights, telling people what... not only what was wrong with Townsley but solutions for improving our life
Steering Meeting Member 5

A key element of this problem-solving was the opportunity to **connect** with local people in order to discuss, collaborate and work together:

Townsley Peoples' Forum is..... a great way of getting folk talking
Workshop response

You know, for me, it's a tool to connect.
Steering Meeting Member 4

Sitting alongside these descriptions, was the idea that the Townsley Peoples' Forum was a **decision-making space**, and for many people, this was its primary purpose. Often this was described as a *replacement* for existing unequal and unfair decision-making processes (for example within local and national government) and democratic systems which were seen to be not fit for purpose nor serving the interests of 'ordinary people':

I think the best way to describe it is actually we.. totally recognize the way of making decisions in our, in society, particularly Western society is basically finished... it is just not fit for purpose anymore. And I think that is... that total acceptance that the way we do things generally... the way we do things from a local level to a government level, to even an international level is basically, yeah, we think it's had its time.
Steering Meeting Member 9

For some interviewees, the expectations for what the Forum would achieve were very high. This included fundamentally changing existing local democratic arrangements, tackling poverty and unfair working practices or 'transforming people's lives' through the activity of the Assembly:

> we'll be providing something that people really need and that's materially changing the community and I think that's like such an opportunity to make it really meaningful for people
> Steering Meeting Member 7

However, interview and workshop data suggest others have different expectations of what the Assembly will achieve, stating that **collaboration** and **awareness of local issues** were more achievable outcomes for the work of the group:

> collaboration, people that work together. And I think, you know, that is happening now. So, the Assembly is not going to deliver any democratic change, and it's certainly not going to stop the [RET], but the people that have joined, have taken part, they've discussed what Torry wants, in their vision, and they've taken something from that and they're moving that forward. And people can see that. Steering Meeting Member 4

> In theory it makes people more aware, but whether we've had any impact on the powers that be or the ways that decisions are made, I would question.
> Steering Meeting Member 5

Key insight 1: The Townsley Peoples' Forum is largely seen as a problem-solving, or decision-making, space for local people to stand up to and challenge injustices being experienced in the area.

Key insight 2: There are differences in what people believe the Assembly can achieve / is achieving. Some people have very high expectations focused on community/ societal transformation, whilst others see collaboration of local people around local issues as the key outcome.

Decision-making *within* the Forum

Given decision-making is considered a core component of the Forum, every interviewee was asked about how decisions were made within the Steering Meeting and the 2-day event.

For the most part people were relatively happy with how decision-making took place. One member described the space as 'life-affirming' and it was common for people to share positive reflections in general of how decisions were/ are made. 'Consent decision-making', where decisions are agreed if they are deemed 'good enough for now, safe enough to try', was cited by some who considered it an effective way of reaching decisions as a group, as it allows for differences in opinion:

we can't agree all the time, and just to sort of, you know, we don't battle it out, but we speak it out, you know, and see what their point of view... It's not wrong to be...that you don't agree with it. ***Steering Meeting Member 1***

However, there were some concerns raised that decision-making, particularly in the run up to the 2-day event, was too slow and focused too much on *how* to make decisions, rather than on making decisions as a group:

[the planning process] involved many, many nebulous meetings. And there was a lot of focus on what sort of questions to ask and we spent an awful lot of time there on some would say the theory... how should we reach a decision ***Steering Meeting Member 6***

In addition, there were concerns raised that it was not always clear where and when decisions were being made and by whom. This included decisions about the 2-day event, such as the location of the tent, but also about the current timing and schedule of the Steering Meeting:

because some people use certain platforms and other people don't, you're having a large amount of conversation happening and all of a sudden, by the way, this is happening. And people are like, I didn't know about that. What's that? How has that come about? ... I think the communication could have been better with those who were involved in the creation of the People's Forum ***Steering Meeting Member 8***

This is reinforced in the Narrative Report of the 2-day event which recognised that:

shared train journeys to and from Aberdeen in particular became places where we would plan our meetings in detail before, and (sometimes radically) change plans based on what we had just experienced... But it ... ran the risk of leaving [Steering Meeting] members behind ***(Narrative Report, p.13)***

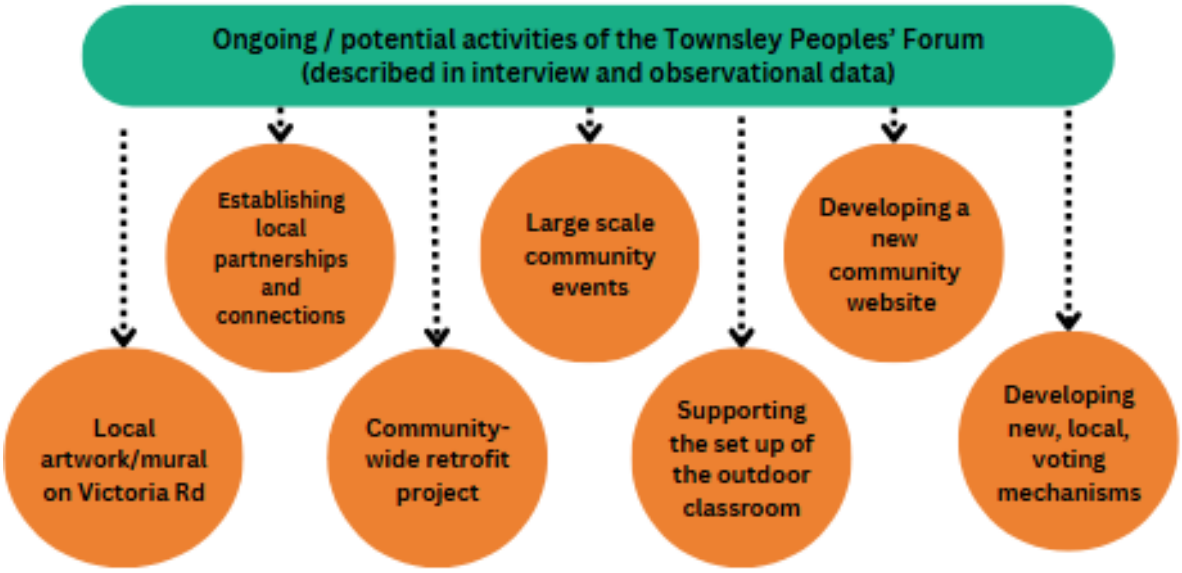
Similarly, observational data shows that there is a vast amount of activity being undertaken by the current Steering Meeting Members and that this necessitates additional meetups and communication outwith the running schedule of bimonthly Steering Meetings. This means it was sometimes hard to pinpoint or directly observe decisions being made by the Steering Meeting as a whole. This, along with the use of different communication platforms, perhaps explains how some Steering Meeting Members might feel out of the decision-making loop.

Key insight 3: There are lots of positive reflections on how decisions are made within the Forum, although some felt it was a slow process in the run up to the 2-day event.

Key insight 4: Some concerns were raised about the use of lots of different communication platforms as well as where decisions are being made and by whom. This related to the planning of the 2-day event and the current schedule and timings of Steering Meetings.

Lots to celebrate, lots to do....

Since the start of the research project, there has been an enormous amount of activity observed as part of the work of the Forum. The aims and ambitions of the group are far-reaching and incorporate a vast array of ongoing projects and potential ideas.



Whilst some of the activities listed above are only at the ideas stage, others are in the process of being developed and actioned. In addition, the researcher only observed a handful of meetings over a couple of months, it is unlikely this report captures all of the different activities being undertaken by the Forum.

This is a lot of activity for one group of people (estimated to have around 10-15 members), and it appears as if there is a small cohort of members who are taking on a significant, potentially unsustainable, amount work.

One of the successes of the Forum shared by interviewees was the continued involvement and participation of a few local people who were viewed as being the **driving force** behind a lot of the Forum's local engagement and activity. Whilst this was largely viewed as a net positive, observational data suggests that some members are at risk of being overwhelmed, or becoming 'tired, scunnered'.

I'm at overload
Observational data 4

I'm frazzled
Observational data 1

This risk of 'burn out' for activists or people participating in local projects was highlighted by other interviewees, who viewed this as a risk, not only to the health and wellbeing of individuals, but for the Forum as a whole:

there may be one or two people who are very motivated and you know if something happened to them, if they fall ill or if they move out of the area or whatever, what then happens? So, it's about retaining that resilience within the Forum, which is, which is difficult, it's challenging Local representative 5

Indeed, there was recognition across interviewees that the group needed new members to support their work, which is, in part, why the focus of the workshop for this research was thinking about how to get more people involved.

Key insight 5: The Townsley Peoples' Forum has a vast array of very ambitious acitvities and plans, which potentially outweigh their current membership.

Key insight 6: There appears to be a small cohort of members who are driving the work of the Forum. This is viewed as a positive but appears to mean some individuals are at risk of burn out.

Who are the Townsley Peoples' Forum?

As mentioned, the Townsley Peoples' Forum comprises of ongoing activity as well as a 2-day event held in May 2023. It is estimated that around 150-200 people attended the 2-day event and there are around 10-15 current members of the Steering Meeting. There is no data collected for the characteristics of people attending the Steering Meeting or the 2-day event, meaning it is not possible to make any comment on the diversity of the either group. However, in interview, observational and workshop data, the group membership and further local engagement were strong, running themes for research participants. The reflections and key points are detailed below.

Representation of Townsley residents

A key concern for many of the research participants was the number of current Townsley residents who are / were involved in the ongoing Steering Meeting and the 2-day event. Many interviewees expressed 'disappointment' at what they saw as limited attendance of Townsley residents at the 2-day event:

We got all the regulars and a few other volunteering regulars from other groups but actual brand-new people from Townsley who hadn't been involved before, we were very, very poor on that. Steering Meeting Member 5

We were hoping to involve more of the local people, because it was actually in the park. And we just waited to see what happened. But it wasn't hugely well attended…by locals. Steering Meeting Member 4

It is estimated that 'around half the people at most meetings (and certainly at any one point in the Assembly) were from Townsley'. For a couple of interviewees, the estimated representation of Townsley residents on both the Steering Meeting and at the 2-day event was not a concern.

I'm relatively pleased with the number of real locals who are in the group. I say it, I think it's more than half Steering Meeting Member 7

However, for most interviewees the lack of involvement from Townsley residents undermined the 'legitimacy' and 'authority' of the group:

I mean, I don't live in Townsley, so...but speaking about the declaration of Townsley, I'm a bit sceptical about calling it that when it's like not even written by many people in Townsley, to say, this is the declaration of Townsley, when only like ten Townsley people actually had a hand in writing it. It seems a bit weird to me Steering Meeting Member 6

I'd often observe a meeting and there was four people had come up from Edinburgh and there's basically four people on the Steering Group from...well, one of them was me, and I'm not really from Townsley. So, the balance there isn't good enough yet. So, there needs to be a lot of outreach work. Steering Meeting Member 2

A big part of this was the influence of **outsiders**. Having people come from outside, who have no experience of *living* in the area was regarded by some as a barrier to involvement for local people:

the People's Forum, because they were people from outside and that didn't live in the area. So, we lost some people automatically with that. Steering Meeting Member 8

I only went along to one meeting of the assembly... Most of the people there were not from Townsley, so I didn't actually feel that it was representative... there were some very good Townsley activists there, but the majority of people there were not from Townsley, so... I don't know how I felt about that. I felt that it might be another top-down thing, where you had people coming from outside, and certainly that's been said to me. Local representative 1

Certainly, observational data suggests that it is common for the Steering Meeting to be attended by people who live outwith Townsley, including other parts of the Local Authority, Scotland, and even Europe.

For some, having 'friendly' and supportive outsiders was viewed as a positive, and one which helped 'fatigued' activists who were weary from battling against the continued industrialisation of the area.

It used to be like more [Anon] people than the people from Townsley... They're English or something, you know, or from other bits of Scotland... Most of them...they're speaking fonder of Townsley than what a lot of people in Townsley actually do, you know. And then I thought, it's really nice that they want to be, you know, think that they can save Townsley Steering Meeting Member 1

Indeed, Townsley was routinely described as a **unique** place with a 'strong sense of identity' and an area which had been poorly treated by the Local Authority and other areas of the city:

Townsley's had the shit kicked out of it
Steering Meeting Member 4

We have been gaslit, we have been browbeaten and apathetic, and we have been effectively abused as a community, a dumping ground for decades, and people need to know that we can have better
Steering Meeting Member 8

Townsley is...[the Local Authority's] sacrificial zone. Despised by many people in wealthier parts of the city
Workshop response

Given **local people** considering **local issues** is central to descriptions of the Townsley Peoples' Forum, the balance of outsiders, who have potentially very different life experiences, to residents is clearly important. There are some examples of this affecting how the group functions and make decisions. For example, one occasion where a decision was deferred only to Townsley residents in the group, although this appears to have happened only once:

we said this is not for people outside of Townsley to make a decision about. Townsley people, you have to decide. And so, they had a circle a sort of an inner circle where they talked about it ... I think an important thing was like that there are things that that only people who live there should be talking, should be deciding about
Steering Meeting Member 7

Other examples include members of the group who do not live in Townsley reporting taking on 'observer' roles or feeling 'reluctant to be too active a contributor'.

In preparation for the workshop, the researcher met with the Steering Meeting to consider helpful topics. Getting more people involved and the concept of *community-led*, and what this might mean in the context of the Forum were key areas of interest. This seems an important topic given some of the plans of the group, in particular the community-wide retrofit project, which would require significant buy-in and participation of residents. Indeed, this research suggests there are different understandings and expectations of what *community involvement* might look and feel like for the Forum, suggesting it's a topic which needs further exploration by the group as whole.

Key insight 7: A few people are happy with the current representation of Townsley residents, whilst the majority of research participants would like more local people involved.

Key insight 8: The balance of outsiders to residents is seen as a potential barrier to local involvement and lack of local representation is considered to potentially undermine the legitimacy and authority of Assembly.

Getting more people involved

There is already a lot of thought and energy going into to increasing local involvement in the Townsley Peoples' Forum. This includes through establishing local partnerships and the convening of regular community events.

At the workshop and interviews, people were asked who would you like to be more involved in the Forum? Alongside more **local people**, **young people** and **people from ethnic minority background**s were the key groups which the Forum members would like represented on the group.

We also explored what might stop people from getting involved in the Townsley Peoples' Forum. Responses for this were wide-ranging as detailed in the table below:

Barriers to involvement
Loss of hope, apathy, 'what's the point?', not interested
The stresses and impacts of poverty
Lack of time, caring/ working responsibilities
Lack of accessibility for people with disabilities, not enough confidence, nervousness

It was common for people to focus heavily on **loss of hope** and **apathy** as the main, or most powerful, barriers which prevented local people getting involved in the Townsley Peoples' Forum. These were often seen as difficult, if not impossible, to overcome, with local engagement regularly described as a 'grind' or a 'challenge'.

However, the interview, workshop and observational data suggests that there may be other, more practical, barriers to involvement for local people.

Digital exclusion	One interviewee reported being unable to attend some meetings as a result of no internet access. In an area with higher levels of income deprivation, this is unlikely to be a unique experience. ***I think [having your voice heard] is harder now…I don't have the internet at home… So, that makes it very difficult***

It appears as if the main way to get involved with the Forum is to attend the Steering Meetings. The meetings take place in-person, once a month, on a Saturday for 4 hours and online, one evening a month, from 6.30pm-8pm. This does not include the additional work undertaken by members in between times. This is a huge time commitment and likely immediately excludes people with caring /working responsibilities.	**Time commitment**

Finding a role within the group	*Nervousness* and lack of confidence were suggested as potential barriers to involvement in recognition of the courage required to attend a new group. In addition, where people have come along for one meeting but never returned it was suggested that there was *not a clear role* for them, as everybody was 'too busy doing'.

Key insight 9: There is a lot of existing engagement activity happening. However, people would like to have more young people and people from minority ethnic backgrounds involved.

Key insight 10: Loss of hope and apathy were considered the main barriers to local involvement although other, more practical, barriers related to digital exclusion, big time commitments and finding a role within the group were also identified.

Suggestions and ideas

There were lots of different ideas and suggestions provided at the workshop session for how some of the barriers to involvement might be overcome. There was recognition that this work can be very difficult and slow moving, and this is frustrating for existing volunteers and activists who maybe feel like they're banging their head against a wall. Unfortunately, there is no short-cut to community engagement, it takes time, energy and resource to do well. Below are some of the suggestions from the workshop, alongside some additional resources and ideas.

Look for invisible barriers. This tool is really helpful for thinking about barriers faced by different groups, it gets you thinking about stuff you would maybe never have considered.

Develop a Communication Agreement outlining what tools the group uses for what purpose and what to do if someone doesn't have access to that. **Link into existing digital inclusion work**, which might support people with no access to the internet or devices: **place-based digital inclusion**.

Make use of social media platforms. This could provide some low-level participation opportunities. From anything to vote on the name of our new project to what soup should we make for our event, it can be very useful for connecting with people.

Have some conversations about burnout and self care. A resource has been attached which might help support conversations about capacity and how the group can support one another.

Access training, advice and support. There are lots of different organisations who can help you develop a manageable engagement plan. Here is one about community organising and another about community-led activities.

Develop some volunteering roles, which you can recruit specifically for. These national and local organisations will be able to help with this.

Have dedicated 'welcome buddies' for every meeting. When new people come, it's their job to show them the ropes/ get them a cup of tea /make them feel welcome.

Get out and about. Community development and engagement activities happen all across Scotland, in all sorts of communities. A visit to another project might be really interesting and helpful. This organisation might have some ideas about where to go.

It is important to note, that all the activities above require time and energy from the existing group, some of whom are already very stretched and 'already doing so much'. Therefore any conversations about further engagement have to be realistic and go hand in hand with reflecting on the capacity of the group.

A massive thank you to all the research participants, especially the members of the Steering Meeting for welcoming the researcher into their space and sharing their thoughts and reflections. It is hoped this report is interesting, and potentially useful, for the future work of the Forum.

This report was written for the Townsley Peoples' Forum by Anna Baillie in April 2024

Appendix 8: Operationalising the WPR Analysis

WPR Questions & Practical Texts	**Case 1 - High-level Policy docs** - PIC Strategic Plan 2020-2023 - PIC CP Advice on SG's CP Plan 2022-2026 - PIC CP Scrutiny on Progress 2021-2022 - PIC CP Scrutiny on Progress 2022-2023 - SG Fourth Year Progress Report 2021-22 - SG Best Start, Bright Futures CP Delivery Plan 2022-2026 - SG Every Child, Every Chance CP Delivery Plan 2018-2022	**Case 2 – High-level Policy docs** - JT Commission: A national mission for a fairer, greener Scotland 2021 - JT Commission: Making the Future 2022 - SG Draft Energy Transition and Just Transition Plan January 2023 - SG response to JT Commission: A national mission for a fairer, greener Scotland 2021 - SG Net Zero Public Engagement Strategy
Question 1: What's the problem represented to be? What is being proposed to change? What are the principles which guide this change?	DOMINANT PROBLEM REPRESENTATION: *Throughout the development and delivery of 'Every Child, Every Chance' we have placed the highest importance on hearing from those with experience of poverty and supporting them to inform responses to reduce poverty at a community, local and national level (Scottish Government, 2018a, p. 60)* *Amplify the voices of experts by experience to make sure they are part of identifying issues, developing and designing solutions, and scrutinising progress (Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2021a, p. 6)* **The problem is represented as policymaking without incorporating 'lived experience', in this case read 'of poverty / disadvantage' or 'of the effects of the policy' is**	DOMINANT PROBLEM REPRESENTATION: Identifies four key ways to ensure a JT: 1. Pursue an orderly, managed transition to net zero that creates benefits and opportunities for people across Scotland. Delivery of this must be a national mission 2. Equip people with the skills and education they need to benefit from the transition 3. *Empower and invigorate our communities and strengthen local economies* 4. *Share benefits widely and ensure burdens are distributed on the basis of ability to pay*

	***ineffective*, as it excludes an essential knowledge type: lived.** **The problem representation is that without mechanisms to involve / incorporate LE as a knowledge type, the effects produced by particular policies cannot be truly known/ understood / acknowledged.** **Problem is the non-participation of disadvantaged groups, which leaves an institutional knowledge gap.**	*By 2030, regions and communities will be empowered to participate in the energy transition in a way that meets their needs….. By 2030, Scotland will have thriving local energy economies….with a focus on supporting opportunities in vulnerable and deprived places and communities (Scottish Government, 2023b, p. 23)* **The problem is represented as policymaking which is not democratic and does not involve people 'affected' is *unjust*. This injustice is linked to poor wellbeing and wider inequality.** **Involving people *affected* by policy will mitigate / even remove injustice / inequalities related to influencing decision-making.** **The problem of inequality almost eclipses the problem representation of achieving net zero. This will be a byproduct of tackling inequality.** **Problem within the problem is that previous transitions have not been managed well. You must participate to benefit.**
	Overlaps, shared key parameters and perspectives (Q.6): Both see lack of involvement of 'affected' publics in decision making as part of the problem representation, the 'dominant' problem. More participation = better policies. Participation = influence (perhaps only way to influence). Both cite a negative impact from this lack of involvement, either ineffective, poor decision-making (of governments) and /or unfair outcomes which foster inequality. Participation (of affected publics) = solution to inequality. Institutional ignorance (both wilful and naïve?) = unfair, ineffective policymaking. Underpinning this is the fact that poverty and inequality exist primarily because of poor choices (made by institutions). Important to note, both problem representations identify sometimes silo-ed windows for participation and input. In PIC, the Commission clearly locates LE knowledge and participation as an integral,	

	overarching theme, however SG docs tend to focus on specific policy domains, for example: childcare/ care experienced. For JT, the window for input and influence is specifically *local*, and in many ways reactive to decision-making, or a pre-decided direction of travel.
	Differences (Q.6): The 'affected' public is conceptualised a little differently. In the case of the PIC, the 'affected' public are seen as knowledge producers, as 'experts' who bring a particular *lived* expertise rather than simply people who are recipients of policy impacts. In the JT literature it's much broader, most commonly 'community/ communities', and in this context, they are not necessarily seen as 'experts', rather people who may bear the brunt (negative impact) of unfair, unequal policies which have historically been developed without their involvement or input.

WPR Question	Analysis / findings – across Case 1 & 2
Q.1 **What's the problem represented to be?** What is being proposed to change? What are the principles which guide this change?	Policy goal: increased citizen participation in policy decision making, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is a seen to resolve in a *democratic deficit* in two ways: 1. Fills a **knowledge** gap: institutions / policymakers/ politicians do not possess the 'right type' of knowledge, in particular first-hand /lived experience of policy impacts. 2. Fills an **influence** gap: citizens and communities do not have adequate representation in policymaking spaces and require mechanisms to give them a 'seat at the table'.
Q.2 **What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?**	• Policymaking without direct involvement of people with first-hand / lived experiences leads to policy programmes that are: - ineffective / not fit for purpose - unfair / unjust • There is no / limited current representation of people who experience / have experienced disadvantage in policy decision making roles: institutional naivety / disconnection and 'ruling class'. • Direct citizen participation is the sole / best way to understand policy impacts / rectify poor decision-making • Citizen participation can solve a matrix of issues at once • Citizens/ communities speak with one voice • Democratic deficit = people who experience disadvantage are politically inactive, do not have opportunities to influence / input

Q.3 **How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?** This includes the genealogy, i.e., history, genesis of the presuppositions.	The key concepts included in this WPR analysis: citizen participation, democracy, policymaking, lived experience are detailed and explored in the preceding literature review chapters as well as woven into the findings and discussion.
Q.4 **What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?** Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be conceptualised differently? What is ignored within this representation?	• Power & politics: the wide-ranging influences on policymaking which determine whether policy ideas are entertained/ implemented, beyond PDPs. Linked to this is *competing interests*. • The role of socio-economic advantage and how people who experience this via wealth or business exert influence on policy. • Mechanisms for involvement: how, why, when, who and where citizens are / were / will be able to participate in policy decision-making, some detail but largely limited (particularly in relation to how citizens *were* involved in the production of the plans/ reports) Detail on the outcomes and outputs of citizen participation where it has occurred, not a complete silence – some information provided but appears piecemeal / very broad
Q.5 **What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the problem?** Are there any dividing practices?	• Lived effects: - Tokenism, no clear, transparent routes to influencing policy decision making for citizens. - Status quo policymaking arrangements intact, no real devolution of decision making. • Subjectification effects: - Higher participatory expectations placed on people who experience disadvantage to educate policymakers / deliver policy change. Responsibilising narrative: epistemic injustice - Citizens as 'knowers' or 'problem-solvers' on one hand but on the other, this is undermined by policymakers characterised as 'listeners' / limited detail of the problem-solving/ homogenisation of citizens (who experience disadvantage) into one group • Discursive effects: - Relegation of citizen input to 'local' or highly service specific - Citizen participation = providing testimony, not finding solutions, boundary-ed input

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