

Just Neighbourhoods? Under-representation in Community-Led Planning activity

JN WORKING PAPER #1

Theoretical Framework (WP1a) - March 2024

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1. Introduction

“The cry of the poor is not always just, but if you don’t listen to it, you will never know what justice is.”
(Zinn, 1980, p.17)

This report, issued as a working paper, covers the basis upon which the project rests in theoretical terms and is linked to WP1b – Literature review. The coverage set out here stems from the Just Neighbourhoods? project first research objective; which is to explore understandings of social and environmental justice amongst communities in underrepresented areas. Therefore, the aim of this document is to establish the theoretical foundations of the research and thereby inform the methodology and subsequent analysis of the empirical findings. It is not intended as a theoretical contribution to the academic literature but we are hopeful that such a contribution will be possible towards the end of the project.

As such, this paper focuses on the following questions:

- How has planning theory engaged with issues of justice, and what forms of justice are we talking about? (e.g. spatial, environmental, social, procedural, outcomes based)
- What is the relationship between justice and participation? (i.e. in terms of inclusion, exclusion, scope, depth and learning/knowledge development)
- How do issues of justice (and injustice) relate to issues of power? (i.e. asking how power shapes injustice)
- How do issues of justice/injustice relate to issues of ethics? (i.e. how things are done and with what purpose)
- How have theories of justice engaged with the concept of scale? And how can ‘just’ policies be achieved at the local/neighbourhood scale?

The above and the literature are drawn upon to assist in considering the implications for the research project. Particularly in respect of three overarching questions that emerge (across questions of: knowledge/understanding, of process and of outcome), which we return to later:

- *How justice/injustice are considered at the very or hyper-local scale?*
- *How are priorities worked out (by communities) and how do they relate to questions of injustice or fairness?*
- *How do forms of CLP recognise or help to address injustice at that scale?*

2. Justice and planning

It is necessary to establish how justice has been conceived in the academic and policy literature to date. Justice is a complex concept, the nature of which has preoccupied theorists for millennia; our aim here is not to survey or evaluate these centuries of thought, but to explore how theories of justice have been discussed and applied specifically in relation to planning and community action (and with the above questions in view). This brings with it questions of scale, relative injustice, participation, knowledge, and power, which are discussed here directly in terms of their relationship to justice. We are developing a frame to help better understand how community-led planning (CLP) currently facilitates ‘justice’ for neighbourhoods in terms of conceptualisation, process, and outcome. Justice as applied to planning activity could relate to specific actions aimed to address *inter alia* questions of housing availability, of access to adequate greenspace or matters of air quality; matters that are in scope for spatial planning but which are geared towards tackling perceived and objectively recognised disadvantage / injustice.

Striving for justice is an intuitively attractive goal, and most would agree its importance, at least rhetorically. Leading planning theorists have long argued that planners should be concerned with justice (notably Harvey, Marcuse, Lefebvre, Fainstein, and Soja amongst others). Yet, as Marcuse (2012: p.141) has argued, if justice is a self-evident goal *for planning* it is not an assumption that should be made lightly. Planning is a social process that is the result of many actions by many actors – is it reasonable that all those involved in planning should strive for such an ambiguous, not to say loaded, goal? Or, rather, should it be a concern to avoid or mitigate injustice? Several normative arguments can be made for planning’s necessary concern with (in)justice, most of which return more or less explicitly to the need for **fair** distribution of the goods, services, and opportunities (and notably a key watchword of the ‘Levelling Up’ agenda) with which planning is concerned. A cursory look at the history of planning thought also amply demonstrates this concern and helps explain a burst of concern for justice, fairness and equity in planning since the 1960s (see Zapata and Bates, 2015; Krumholz and Hexter, 2018).

Fraser’s (2007) three-dimensional theory of justice involves the interconnected dimensions economic *redistribution* of resources, of cultural *recognition*, and of political *representation* and in examining urban policy and its outcomes using that lens Grange et al. (2024) argue that we might need to consider wider factors that contribute to the production of uneven development and injustice and to ensure that our focus is not entirely on cities.

Definitions: Justice as Process or Substance

So, if a concern for justice and **fairness** has pervaded planning theory outputs for decades but how do we actually define justice? This brings into view questions of absolute and relative justice which align with ideas of what is ‘right’ as opposed to questions of what is ‘fair’. Naturally, definitions of justice are contested on philosophical, logical, and practical grounds, but also based on status tradition, and self-interest (Marcuse, 2012: p.146). Justice is historically **contingent**, that is to say, socially constructed. As such, its meaning shifts over time. This can be

seen for example in how recent social movements, for example; the civil rights movement, the labour movement, the women's movement, the LGBTQIA+ movement, as well as the environmental movement that have all influenced collective understandings of justice and what is considered right/wrong or desirable/undesirable (and have generated their own sub-fields for research and accompanying justice-related labels e.g. 'environmental justice') and from there it logically proceeds to pose the questions of what **type** of justice are we, or is planning, concerned with?

The historically contextual nature of justice makes it rather hard to approach substantive meanings of justice. John Stuart Mill's (1863) famous phrase: "justice, like many other moral attributes, is best defined by its opposite" still resonates. It appears that justice may be more easily identified by its absence and existing research more frequently discusses the **injustices** witnessed in the delivery of planning than the presence of 'full justice'. This difficulty has traditionally been avoided by focusing instead on **procedural** definitions of justice. A procedural definition of process asks whether the correct procedural requirements established by law have been followed, and if so, this is often deemed sufficient. For example, in the UK, statutory and judicial review processes relate to procedural injustices that may have occurred during the formulation of a development plan, or in processing a planning application. Clearly this is a narrow formulation and has attracted some criticism (cf. Chevalier, 2024) and planning has historically been concerned with wider conceptions of justice and the impact of spatial interventions on a wider public - as opposed to legal conceptions of (individualised) justice as it concerns judicial systems. Moroni claims that every theory of planning contains assumptions about justice (2020, p258).

The fundamental distinction between proceduralist ideas and the substantive can be traced back to Aristotle (see Marcuse, 2012: p.143, for a brief discussion). A procedural definition of justice cannot satisfy justice as a moral criterion, when unjust outcomes may still result. Indeed, planning practices have been critiqued for the same assumption that a 'just' process will result in a just outcome (Fainstein, 2010), and in turn extended debate over planning ethics has ensued with some input from Marcuse (1976, and see Hendler, 2018; Campbell, 2012) although we limited ourselves from expanding more fully into that field here.

In this vein of injustice, Marcuse (2012) discusses the example of racial injustice to illustrate the point: there can be little doubt that segregating a specific population, such as in a ghetto is wrong and unjust, but achieving agreement on what an integrated community - marked by equality of opportunity might look like is less achievable. As such, consensus about how to **reduce injustice** is more likely than on how to achieve 'full' justice (Marcuse, 2012: p.147). This presents a problem for planning: should its role be to attempt to do everything to prevent injustices, or should it strive for a positive conception of 'just' processes, plans, and places? Indeed, we will wish to explore what 'justice' might mean to the neighbourhoods that we will partner with and seek to understand how community-led planning can assist, if not deliver, or identify questions of localised fairness/equity as part of a situated account of how CLP forms are conceived, performed and actioned in the light of pre-existing issues of injustice. In precis how

community-led planning navigates such concerns and how or why questions of injustice are confronted or not

'The Justices'

The span of the concept of justice and perceived breadth of injustice, means that it is often narrowed by a prefix such as social, spatial, environmental, and so on. We have seen how planning is, or has been concerned with broader conceptions of justice than legal/procedural forms, and with questions of public interest (again with its own corpus of literature, see for example; Klosterman, 1980; Campbell and Marshall, 2002; Tait, 2016), as such which of the various prefixes best suit planning's interest in justice? Planning's historical preoccupation with space gives '**spatial justice**' a pre-eminent position in planning thought. This is seen particularly in the work of David Harvey (1973), while the work of Henri Lefebvre paved the way for social conceptions of justice to be taken up within planning through his interpretation of space as being constituted by social relations, rather than its territorial, physical, and demographic characteristics (Fainstein, 2014). As we expose later this opens a fissure when beginning to consider justice at **scale** rather than in terms of public vs individual interest, particularly given there will be differences in the assessment of what constitutes public interest rather than community interest / neighbourhood interest (Campbell and Marshall, 2006) or 'locally defined' public interest (Healey, 1997).

In terms of the **scale** of governance has proven to be a contentious topic in recent decades. The local scale has become increasingly important in that time, with various ideological claims made toward it (Wargent, 2021). Some theorists have argued that uncertainty about the role of scale can hinder meaningful engagement with planning (Natarajan, 2019). A core contention of this project is that justice can have a particular set of meanings at the local scale. Moreover, in order to realise the potential of community-led planning, we contend that we need to recognise the inherent limitations of both community action alone, and the value of isolated or 'discrete' interventions at the very local scale.

Adopting a Marxist analysis in *Social Justice and the City*, Harvey (1973) argued that space, social justice and urbanism must be considered together. For Harvey, as with others (e.g., Castells, 1972; Mitchell, 2003; Soja, 2013), the crucial question is how power relations affect urban outcomes, and how spatial relations reinforce injustice (Fainstein, 2014). Thus, categorical overlaps between issues are inevitable; spatial injustices are often linked to **environmental injustice** and are a subset arguably of **social injustice**. As such, social injustice also becomes a matter of environmental injustice, a longstanding question of how to meet socio-economic needs without going beyond environmental boundaries (Agyeman, 2008; Raworth, 2012). As Agyeman (2008) argues, environmental quality and human equality are inseparable, they provide a discursive frame and paradigm of 'just sustainability' that bridges between 'green' and 'brown' agendas, or 'ecological sustainability' and 'environmental health' agendas, respectively (McGranahan and Satterthwaite, 2000). With the rise in environmental concern, there is indeed a requirement for 'just sustainability' to become increasingly a consideration of planners.

There are numerous expressions and sources for **spatial justice** – including questions of scale and decision-making and inequality across and between places ('postcode lottery'; Pinch, 2012; Smith, 2014). There are uneven opportunities that are neglected by institutional design and exclusion (e.g. 'sink or swim' localism; Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012; Raco, 2016). Given that (spatial)planning is supposed to take a synoptic view of issues and how they may be tackled at scale the way that legitimate boundaries for planning impact on the degree to which injustice can be tackled are limited. However, by taking the perspective of looking at how planning activity (and those substantively controlling planning) try to address, avoid or are apparently ignorant of questions of social, environmental, spatial justice provides important lessons for future design and orientation, of capacity building and for delineating the roles and functions of various planning and other policy tools are. Through this approach we can certainly steer towards assessing how (community-led) planning tackles, ignores or is thwarted in contending with injustice. This brings us to a point where how and on what basis injustice may be assessed, as intoned by Sen's (2009) work.

Sen's idea of justice

The economist and philosopher Amartya Sen stands distinctly amongst the canon of political philosophy. In *The Idea of Justice* (2009), Sen queries the preoccupation with identifying a singular 'justice' or a set of principles, guidelines or institutions by which we might govern 'justly' (what he terms 'transcendental institutionalism'), arguing that it clouds our ability to discover present-day *injustice*. Sen does not abandon theories of justice entirely but instead reorients his endeavour to the discovery of the **practical implications** that help people move towards a *more just* world. In essence asking what is wrong / what is *unjust* about people's lives (and environment). Sen argues that in seeking some ultimate notion of justice, the possibility of making practical improvements which will reduce injustices may be eroded. The logical progression here is to understand the role that CLP (as means to mobilise and channel community action) can play in this endeavour.

Sen calls for a 'realization-focused **comparative approach**' that allows societies to strive toward consensus around the presence, and tackling of an injustice; either in process or outcome relative to others. The approach advocated by Basta (2016) is informed by Rawlsian concepts of justice and which centres on questions of **fairness** rather than utilitarian ideas (cf. Rawls, 1971) and by Sen's work on the same theme. The perspective obviates a need to engage too directly with normative theories, or those that seek to establish the nature of justice abstractly, instead the orientation is towards fairness and **equity** with a focus on comparative injustice. Such thinking can be closely tied to place / and disparities between places i.e. spatial injustice. This train of thought has led to the consideration of '**situatedness**' and how assessment of ethical decisions and the orientation of justice come together. Campbell and Marshall (2006) review justice in planning through this lens and argue that '*the concept of justice is central to a political activity such as planning*' (2006, p.239) and discuss how to reconcile political philosophy to questions of situated

judgement, i.e. how to make the best decisions informed by justice criteria in real world situations.

Sen argues that humans have strong inclinations towards fairness and an acute sensitivity for, and aversion to, injustice. In doing so, he moves away from utility-maximising *homo economicus* and the belief that humans act principally from self-interest, arguing that we are just as concerned with ameliorating injustice where we find it. Moreover, he argues that we are not moved by the realisation that the world is not ‘entirely just’ - this is naïve, and very few of us expect or anticipate such a position - but we *are* animated by the fact that we are surrounded by clear and remediable injustices that we want to address however we can. As we discuss some injustices are less apparent or require forms of knowledge (data, evidence) to make them clear if not ‘remediable’.

The desire to address injustice means, for Sen, that institutions are of relatively little importance. We do not need to devote undue effort towards creating ideal institutions that govern in a just manner, or else guide others to act in line with principles of fairness, since this quality is central to humans. There are corollaries here with planning thought that has historically tended to defend and perfect (and thereby reify) planning *systems*, equating the messy, plural and social process of planning with technical, bureaucratic, quasi-judicial procedures and regulation. For Sen, we need concern ourselves less with how to make planning systems, plans, tools or technologies more just, since the desire to root out injustice in our lives is self-evident. This corresponds with everyday experience of community engagement where, often, groups coalesce around issues they seek to remedy – the desire for affordable housing, resisting urban regeneration, securing community assets - before identifying the means by which they can do so. Following open discussion and rational argument, Sen argues that a ‘plural grounding’ can be achieved (what Rawls termed an ‘overlapping consensus’) even between those with disparate interests or conflicting values. We therefore need not concern ourselves with identifying entirely just social arrangements or any *a priori* theory of justice, communities identify injustice themselves. The view of Sen and to an extent Rawls, is that people, culture and human relations that play a critical role in addressing injustice. Of course, it is another matter when considering questions of knowledge, capacity and means to act or engage. This brings us to questions of justice and power / knowledge.

3. Justice and Power

At the centre of the question that this section addresses is a concern with both power and of empowerment and how this intertwines with justice - terms that sustain a huge amount of discussion in the social sciences generally and in and across many policy fields. So, this section unashamedly engages in a closer interrogation of what might be meant and what is actually involved in ‘giving’ power or ‘empowering’ communities. According to Marcuse the distribution of power is itself the key determinant of the extent of justice in a society, and certainly in planning practices (Marcuse, 2012: p.155) and for us this provides an important conceptual link.

The issues of power; who ‘has it’, how it is exercised and to what end, cannot be underestimated here because power is not actually ‘something’ that can be ‘given’ or ‘taken’. In order to confront this usefully and have a stronger chance of designing policy and CLP approaches that maximise chances of success, we require a much greater understanding of power and then, it follows, to act to ensure this conceptualisation is applied to policy and community-based action. Moreover, that such understandings are shared and act to enable injustice to be confronted.

Clearly neighbourhoods that have been identified as ‘left behind’, or otherwise ranked high on the indices of multiple deprivation, experience numerous problems, both of relative disadvantage but crucially of critical capacities, including hope, that are necessary for ‘empowerment’ to be rendered meaningful and effective. Issues of effecting meaningful empowerment, particularly in places where socio-economic indicators imply extra challenging conditions, mean that a clear and shared understanding of structuring factors – including how power operates – become pre-requisite.

The idea of empowerment given that it implies a ‘transfer’ of power, or at least some enhancement in the ability to exercise power. Therefore, addressing the question of how power circulates can help make sense of measures devised to empower and understand what actually happens in place and through CLP.

Power analysis and action: the faces of Power

Much of the discourse that has dominated localism has involved the idea of ‘taking back control’ and that such a process requires the ‘empowerment’ of community actors. More recently an overt claim to community power has been articulated but power is not simply ‘something’ to be given or taken or held by any given group. There are many elements that need to be aligned for the exercise of power to be effective in shaping better quality of life and quality of place. An understanding of theories of power can assist thinking about effective change and help secure an influential role and conditions for neighbourhoods to flourish. This section provides a brief review of power to aid thinking here.

It appears to be a positive step to seek to highlight and keep in view gaps, barriers and opportunities for progressive action. Each new suggestion may also be sense checked and ‘placed’ into its system context i.e., that the responsibility for change may lie predominantly with other actors or scales (local government, national government, housing association, health service etc) and be enabled considering the three elements or axes of the power cube.

Power over, power in, power who and power through

When considering power there has been considerable attention paid to how power is exercised or experienced (for example; Haugaard, 2020; Clegg, 1989). What is clear is that power is more than a question simply of one party having ‘power over’ another (i.e. the ‘first face’ of power).

Ideas of power as something that is used ‘over’ others involves a narrower conceptualisation of power and views action as being synonymous with cause and effect; such that power is an observable cause of movement towards an end result and that this can be reduced to the ability of ‘actor A’ to influence ‘actor B’ to act either in the interest of actor A or otherwise against the actor B’s default interest. That is to say, how one group or actor can compel (by whatever means) another to follow a particular course. Power over can be expressed through authoritative power that compels or prohibits, some clear examples relate to legal restrictions on the content / scope of neighbourhood plans (see later, or in terms of say, formal restrictions on local government spending).

This view of power retains considerable prominence in much of the day-to-day discourses about power and how power is used. The pluralists (e.g. Dahl, 1961) critiqued the elite model of power, emphasising the observable interplay of power within competing groups in society. This view placed its emphasis on the observable interplay of power within those groups. Lessons derived from that view include how power is contested and brokered and acknowledges that it is not simply ceded to one party or another. Instead, negotiations and trades form a basis for decisions to act in particular ways. Further elaborations of power assert that power is pervasive and as such knowledge, **communication**, resources and social capital (and **relations** – see below) all play a role in effecting power. These iterations of theory give a clear indication about how policy and governance reform can reflect an informed viewpoint by addressing education, transparency and co-production (the knowledge and human capital axis), and by enabling interaction and (community) organisation to enhance social capital.

By the 1960s what became known as the community power debates saw more attention being paid to power theory in the social sciences. Bachrach and Baratz (1962) argued that power was not just about decision-making but also non-decision making and the use of various resources that can stymie or prevent change. This forms the focus for considering how actors are enabled to realise the second face: ‘power to’. This speaks to policy and governance concerns to ensure that appropriate resources (and actors) are brought into alignment to help realise a goal. This could relate, for example, to mandating specific action from local government.

These considerations acted to sustain thinking about power for some time, with attention given therefore to the variety of resources needed to empower. The concern with ‘power over’ and ‘power to’ was joined by a third and fourth face of power. The third face concerns how power is experienced and exercised through relations and the last how power is embodied or absorbed. All of these affect behaviour and act to mediate power and change outcomes. Lukes (1974), incorporating Gramsci, in argued that power was also at work through ideology – shaping agendas and interests through ‘ideational’ power. This draws attention to how power is at work through the promotion of particular ideas about how change should be enabled and this acts to shape agendas and interests and to promote (and undermine other) options. This highlights the need for communities to understand how agendas are manipulated.

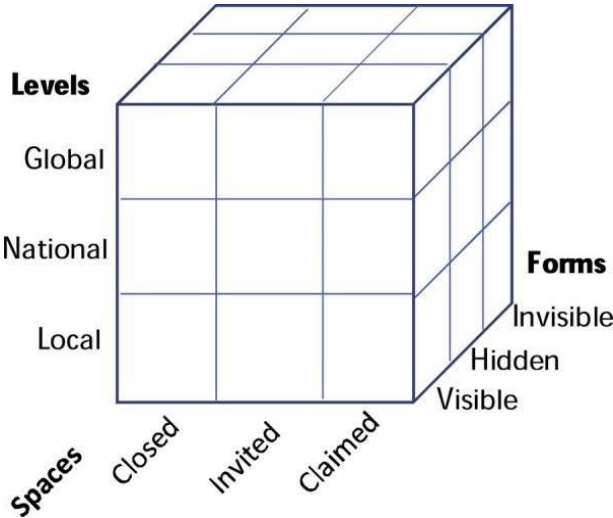
Haugaard (2020) argues for a fourth face of power (after Foucault), where the emphasis for this aspect of power is where and how social subjects construct themselves in response to their context (and this is what is meant in Gaventa’s ‘internalised power’ element, as below). Such power is inculcated and as acts to limit ambition and undermine the will to challenge or develop alternatives. This is important for neighbourhoods and members of the community in thinking through the context for policy How does power create conditions in any particular place?

This form of power is where actors internalise practical knowledge of social reproduction and their behaviour reflects this. The fourth face of power emphasises the idea that power is not ‘held’ by individuals and not produced by conscious agency but rather as Foucault argued ‘*it is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere*’ (1978: p.93). This cumulation of thinking about power leads to examinations of power / empowerment / disempowerment in context.

Participation is widely concerned to be a normative good, and often concerned – more or less explicitly – to ideas of inclusivity, fairness, representation, distribution and so on. It is well-established that public participation can increase claims to social justice by increasing the democratic legitimacy of decision-making processes and thereby promoting accountability and transparency (Abbot, 2020; Brownill and Parker, 2010). How such participation (here as expressed through CLP activity) is often less overtly designed with questions of power in mind Gaventa’s (2006) ‘power cube’ (see Figure 1), is of considerable use in this context given that:

Power strategies that only focus on one element, or one dimension, often simply reproduce or strengthen power in another. Transformative change happens when social actors (movements, civil society organisations, donors) work across all aspects of the cube, necessitating the emergence of coalitions and networks of actors, which themselves are affected by power dynamics’ (Gaventa, 2019: p.117).

Figure 1: The Power Cube



(Source: Gaventa, 2006)

This view resonates with key aspects of the WP1b literature review (themes of *co-production*, *relations* and *resources*). Gaventa's power cube is a representation of how power operates at scale, in spaces and in different forms. As a result, this explains how different interests can be marginalised from decision making. His work also suggests strategies needed to increase inclusion (and the effectiveness of local action) and participation as a form of exclusion has also been a critical concern of scholars (see Aitken, 2010; Beebeejaun, 2006). Indeed, the necessary connection between democratising planning and delivering social justice can be problematic with critiques of governmental planning as unjust dating to the 1970s (Fainstein, 2010). Historically, the existence of relative disadvantage has awoken more commitments to justice than periods of prosperity (Marcuse, 2012: p.146). Our interest in under-represented communities also falls into this category.

The three continuums of Gaventa's 'power cube': *Spaces* (i.e., how arenas of power are created); *Places* (i.e. the levels and sites of engagement), and thirdly *Power*, and the degree of 'visibility' of power forms, which are stressed. While we concentrate on power here the relevance of the place and space aspects are also acknowledged (via ideas of situatedness, context and setting). In terms of the different arenas or 'spaces' in which decision making takes place these may be understood as:

- a) *'Provided' ('closed') spaces* - which are often controlled by an elite group.
- b) *'Invited' spaces* (possibly due to external pressure, or an attempt to increase legitimacy) - some policy-makers create 'invited' spaces for outsiders to engage.
- c) *'Claimed' spaces* - these can provide the less powerful with a chance to develop their agendas and create solidarity without control from power-holders.

We are interested in all three 'spaces' and in reality spaces in practice may be a mix of the three types. Gaventa also distinguishes the degree of visibility of power by drawing on three forms of power, comprising:

- a) *Visible power* - as the power negotiated through formal rules and structures, institutions and procedures;
- b) *Hidden power* - the controls over decision making, and the way certain powerful people and institutions maintain their influence over the process and often exclude and devalue concerns and agendas of less powerful groups.
- c) *Invisible (or internalised) power* - how individuals are influenced in thinking of their place (and agency) in society and this explains why some are practically prevented from questioning existing practices and outcomes (i.e., a product of extant power relations).

The power cube, while helping to frame action via reference to power, does not on its own explain power. For this a further step and more explanation of the 'faces' of power is needed – an insight on this is given below. However, before proceeding the power cube dimensions and elements do highlight that such issues are not only complex, but that neighbourhood scale

activity alone will not be enough to address broader or deeper issues of justice/injustice. Such a reflection brings into view how the research will need to engage with what neighbourhood scale actors see as within their reach; what scope and purchase can community-led planning have potentially or actually?

The issue of how power is absorbed or embodied reflects and accounts for a need to (re)design policy and governance that reflects localised conditions – again locally co-produced solutions that are also cognisant of the other faces of power become an objective here. Moulaert, *et al.*, (2016), argue that four key but linked factors shape power:

- *Agency* – the role of individuals, both in terms of their own action but in working with others, are critical in asserting agency effectively (this aspect is key and links with questions of knowledge, skills and time)
- *Structure* – the structures that both constrain and enable action (agency) and are difficult to change in short term or by individuals alone.
- *Institutions* – in essence the rules of the game and the way that human-devised arrangements shape political, economic and social interaction (both informal and informal)
- *Discourse* – and how people, places and action are envisioned, written, and spoken about and in turn act to organise relations of power.

These are important conceptual building blocks for efforts or packages that claim empowerment as a key objective in enabling injustice to be tackled, and bearing in mind that solutions need to be contextually specific, multi-dimensional and focus on:

- *Effects of existing power distribution and use* – who, what and through what means is power over etc being exerted (on a topic or issue by issue basis)
- *Resources* – including agency, knowledge
- *Relations* – including communication and intermediaries
- *Context* – that the factors above placed into the specific situation of a neighbourhood.

While such arguments may appear abstract there has been an increase in the recognition of understanding on power dynamics in policy circles. The IDS have written extensively on power and on the power that facilitators hold (see Pettit, 2012), and the Sheila McKechnie Foundation (SMK, 2021) have argued that more ‘acts of imagination’ both on the part of the state and local communities are required, so that we can design new processes of governance and service delivery. For them the focus on process sees them rely on “reciprocity and listening to the lived experiences” of residents. How that imagination is to be nurtured and realised is critical of course and facilitation and support in a variety of ways seems pre-requisite. There will be a need to assess how such imagination (or innovation) is oriented to effective change and is keyed into and clued-up on the existing resources (and barriers).

Justice, power and knowledge: what is it that neighbourhoods want? And how is that reckoned?

Sen's theory when applied starts to show that some areas need bolstering – how do communities come to know and understand injustice? Some are hidden or at least not clearly apparent or visible – lack of affordable housing for example. Second, the quantum of issues (injustice) as well as the scale or magnitude – how do communities select what issues to address? And what discussions about tractability of action take place– will it make a difference?' these need to be kept in view and form part of the research objectives.

Such questions present some quite fundamental questions that need to be posed in relation to what issues and needs are recognised and what can be addressed through CLP efforts. In straightforward terms - what is it that neighbourhoods want? What do they know they want and how? There are two different approaches to answering this; the first is based on pre-existing knowledge, experience and understanding, while the second relies on inducing answers from communities themselves.

Expressions of justice are bound up in questions of **knowledge**. Recently, planning scholars have become interested in Miranda Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice, which she argues takes two forms: testimonial and hermeneutical. What lessons can we draw from this? A long history of testimonial injustice is apparent, but this is more easily/immediately addressed; hermeneutical injustice is more persistent and arguably more interesting. Such justice involves situations that occur 'when the intelligibility of communicators is unfairly constrained or undermined, when their meaning-making capacities encounter unfair obstacles, or when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair advantage when it comes to making sense of their social experience' (Medina, 2017: x). This begs the question - do (professional) planning/planners possess the ability/language/understanding to incorporate other forms of knowledge?

A simplistic answer is that neighbourhoods themselves can and should answer for themselves and indeed, initiatives such as neighbourhood planning (NP) were geared to offering the opportunity to say what they wanted - albeit only in terms of planning and development (and an extensive literature discussing the limits and issues with the bounding of NP (see Parker *et al.*, 2015; 2017; 2023 and WP1b - Literature review report). Yet the research on this tool also indicates that NP offered *some* scope and some degree of control. It appears to be that an overarching desire in CLP activity is for community planners to feel some actual influence over decisions and outcomes at the neighbourhood scale.

Power and Localism applied: the case of neighbourhood planning

There has been a frankly unrealistic expectation that communities can all muster knowledge and understanding alone (see Mace and Tewdwr-Jones, 2019 on CLP and bounded rationality). If we

take Neighbourhood planning (NP) in England as a prominent case in point (and see WP1b), it was heralded as radical and ground-breaking - offering people in England the chance to author a statutory (land use) plan for their own neighbourhood. The Localism Act (2011) and specifically NP was underpinned by a series of claims about empowerment; involving a now familiar refrain of ‘taking back control’. The agenda was outlined by Eric Pickles as Secretary of State at the then Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG):

If you want people to feel connected to their communities. Proud of their communities. Then you give people a real say over what happens in their communities... it will continue the overhaul of the planning system: to put the community back in charge of how their area develops... We want to make sure people can take control and take responsibility in their street, their estate, their town. Solving problems and taking action for themselves. With neighbourhoods, people working together, as the basis for the Big Society (Eric Pickles, June 2010: no pagination).

Allied to this the definition and purposes of NP were set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), as first iterated in 2012, to give:

...communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and deliver the sustainable development they need. Parishes and neighbourhood forums can use neighbourhood planning to set policies through neighbourhood plans to determine decisions on planning applications...Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to ensure that they get the right types of development for their community (DCLG, 2012, para. 184).

Given the claims and rhetoric since its inception in 2010 and formal basis in the 2011 Localism Act, Neighbourhood Planning (NP) has prompted a substantial amount of attention. Ideas for the iteration of NP have not paid regard to questions of power (cf. Tait and Inch, 2016), or apparently been organised with recourse to a more developed understanding of relations of power in planning. However, the degree of control afforded has been critiqued heavily. Despite criticism and mixed evidence, the policy still commands political support despite, the above and given multiple ministerial changes over the past 12 years.

Overall, there has been little systematic assessment of neighbourhood planning, using a power in application lens, or as far as can be discerned, to neighbourhood governance *per se*. Parker, Sturzaker and Wargent (2022: p.101) ask questions about the realism of expecting neighbourhoods to self-help, given the complex and long-run issues faced. They ask for a more ‘frank conversation about what is achievable at the neighbourhood scale and what “levelled-up” neighbourhoods might look like in the context of wider efforts to rebalance the UK’s economic geography’. Governmental commitments to “strong community infrastructure and social capital” involves a recognition that this is often weakest “in the most deprived places”. However, the desire to put communities “in the driving seat to level up” cannot be the only strand of policy intended to ‘level up’ (DLUHC, 2022: p.214). Indeed, it has been argued that systemic change is needed to deliver lasting improvements to ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods. So, neighbourhoods themselves may play a part but in combination with what else, who else and on what basis? Thus, mapping the realistic

contours of CLP across the UK and NI is another aspect of the research design to be woven into the approach to our primary data collection

It has become more widely evidenced that NPs were being created by those with **capacity** rather than a particular need to derive benefit from participation; that is driven by conditions of supply (and more propitious power distribution) rather than latent demand. This has been accompanied with ongoing pessimism about the ability of neighbourhood planning to promote local regeneration in the most deprived areas, particularly those that lack market interest and development opportunities informed by a recorded higher take-up in affluent and rural neighbourhoods (Parker and Salter, 2017), with just under 95% of NP activity taking place in parished areas. It is against this backdrop that urban take-up has been low and overall take-up of the policy dropping-off (Parker *et al.*, 2020).

There are more fundamental concerns about the ability of neighbourhood planning and its being overlaying on **complex social fabrics** – a particular concern here given not only the focus on ‘left behind’ areas but also the contexts of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Colomb (2017) found evidence that instigating a neighbourhood plan could divide rather than unite neighbourhoods and social groups, as well as fuel local conflicts, particularly in highly diverse and heterogeneous urban areas. Common goals and aspirations seem obvious rallying points to help cohere agency and neighbourhood action. Work looking at London specifically (Publica, 2019) had a focus on urban and deprived areas and a set of factors were identified to assist in promoting take-up including; better support, bespoke funding and better integration of NP with wider policy and governance.

Wargent and Parker (2018: p.390-1) argued that neighbourhood planning would have to be oriented in the future to address the following:

- More equitable plan-making (i.e., geographic distribution);
- Deeper co-production (principally between local government and communities);
- Promote greater social inclusion;
- Improved quality and value added to planning policy;
- Help in the reconciliation of hyperlocal and strategic concerns; and
- Be characterised by enhanced community control.

Where there are examples of **innovation**, and putatively addressing injustice, as a positive outcome of NPs (e.g., interest in community-led initiatives such as community land trusts, self and custom-build projects, ‘co-housing’ and other models being one form these appear to be exceptions rather than the rule and conjecturally will have sprung from conditions that have aligned to allow them to emerge. While this highlights that giving people rights to do is not the same as enabling and having regard to the dimensions of power that shape actor behaviour and outcomes. Such examples merit further attention, and particularly where they have emerged in areas of objective disadvantage. Past research (see WP1b – Literature review) has acknowledged

a major obstacle to confident and effective neighbourhood governance is that people are uncertain about the effectiveness and value of options open to them and how to pursue and maximise their potential. Established processes and ways of working may be alien to participants and this links to questions of **education / skills / training** and the development of capacity to act, but also to understand where and why action is useful and important. It is recognised that social infrastructure is needed and to ensure that there are individuals in the most deprived or 'left behind' communities with the confidence and capacity to participate (i.e., 'agency gaps'). However, organising frames are also good as they provide reference points for communities, and community sector actors working with neighbourhoods, in order to organise, orientate and effect progressive change. This brings us back to power and how it may be understood and be exercised in and for neighbourhoods and to address questions of injustice.

The role of different **forms of democracy** (direct, participatory, deliberative, representative), as well as changes to process measures over policy design and prioritisation are placed in the frame of assessment when power is used as an explicit analytical lens both to establish **legitimacy** and to assure accountability. Neighbourhoods and support organisations will need to be alive to the circuits of power. The above has stressed a need to ensure conceptual coherency and policy integration to bear on empowerment strategy in the light of power theory and highlighting the issues with one current tool.

Institutional design and process with justice in mind

We have established how our interest in justice is closely related to the play of power as well as knowledge. We have also seen that planning's concern with justice is wider than legal/procedural conceptions; our concern must be with both the process and outcome of (participatory) planning, and how the two relate. Whilst it is reasonable to assume a more 'just' process will result in a more 'just' outcome, it is not necessarily so or that such advances are enough on their own. This has long been a preoccupation of participatory research, where cases concentrating on creating more just processes (often framed as more *democratic* processes) are more abundant than cases concerned with outcomes and more substantive forms of justice. Our focus is therefore on both process *and* outcome, and the role of citizens and communities in this CLP activity.

A rich vein of literature explores the role of communities in securing just cities. An early intervention was Altshuler's call for community **control** (Altshuler, 1970). The case for an environment that is less about 'taking control' per se has been strengthened by experience in England with neighbourhood planning and across varying degrees critical degrees of autonomy and emergent co-production in view here, as well as assessing the extent of 'power awareness' and how adept communities are at recognising and navigating contours of power will be of interest to the research.

Some apparent acts or measures that claim empowerment potential can leave communities with significant **burdens** – ongoing responsibilities that can weigh heavy (as well as other personal

responsibilities) and could precipitate some sort of civic implosion or individual withdrawal. Support an enabling environment counts for so much in those circumstances and therefore the integrated nature of an enabling environment is one guiding consideration, and this acts as a supplementary to the otherwise abstract thinking of Sen, as discussed above.

As a result, our view is that a cultural dimension and an institutional framework that does usefully provide support and knowledge enhancement for communities is likely to be important, and specifically also for the volunteer cadres that do so much to bridge structure / institution / agency gaps and attention to this is needed (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). In linking to such considerations it is notable that the Local Trust paper *Trusting people, shifting power* (2022) coheres around principles of:

- *Devolution* to neighbourhoods – applying a subsidiarity principle
- *Transfer of power* – bearing mind the above unpacking of power.
- Investment in *capacity building* – again, with careful thought to questions of power / empowerment
- *Budget* responsibility – but with support so that such responsibility does not overbear and burn up capacity
- *Navigability* - easy to understand system / and associated tools and support.

4. Implications for the research

Given that the aim is to justify our focus on CLP in terms of justice we have considered how justice has been approached as well as the dimensions and exercise of power. In essentialising this paper we can highlight the key aspects covered with the key motifs drawn out here involving questions of: **power, injustice, knowledge, resources** and **scale**. Added to this are questions of **control** of agendas and how **institutional arrangements** enable or close-down such parameters given the existence of formal and informal / invited and ‘claimed’ spaces for forms of CLP.

It is clear that a long association has been recognised between power-justice and **knowledge**. How this is reflected in neighbourhood decisions and non-decisions will form an important area of concern in terms of what knowledge and understanding are shaping decisions in CLP, what support is drawn-in, what is missing. Similarly, how **priorities** emerge and what **burdens** are involved on those active in CLP. Additional and reinforced by WP1b (Literature) findings - concern for **local specifics** and **context** and questions of what is relevant to a particular area is important, which may be affected by the existing social relations of fabric of a neighbourhood. Such concerns also link into theoretical assertions about exercising **situated** judgement and how particular priorities and innovation are conceived and then assessed by researchers. Questions of legitimacy and how democratic **accountability** is organised or induced is of interest.

Given all of the above, this review (and that of WP1b Literature review) has led to three main overarching questions:

- **Understanding:** *What do communities understand as (in)justice? (Procedurally / outcome / in empowerment terms?)*
- **Process:** *How are priorities worked out (by communities) and how do they relate to questions of injustice or fairness?*
- **Outcome:** *How do forms of community-led planning address issues of hyper-local injustice?*

As such the research should help in uncovering how justice is understood and confronted via Planning at the hyper-local scale and what barriers exist and have been overcome, or have possibly stifled community efforts to plan to tackle injustice. The coverage of the literature review (WP1b) will also aid further detailed recognition of factors and issues that have featured in prior research on CLP world-wide.

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