

Exploring the role of sociotechnical systems to support deliberative localist decision-making

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ABSTRACT

The importance of civil society to our communities has always been socially significant but has an increasingly important economic and democratic function. The localism agenda of successive governments has pushed local authorities to devolve powers and responsibilities for community-level policymaking to civil society organisations while, at the same time, significantly reducing the funding required to adequately support such processes. Civil society groups are expected to fill the gaps left by local authorities without the skills, resources and experiences, or without the bureaucratic processes or participatory models of their erstwhile incumbents. At the same time, a crisis in democracy caused a growing mistrust of the political class has raised questions about the legitimacy of our political systems, and the aggregative logic of the internet, fuelled by nefarious politically motivated actors, has further obfuscated the boundaries between truth and knowledge. The thesis put forward in this dissertation is that in order for civil society to cope with the increased responsibilities that have been devolved to it while maintaining their civic and democratic duty, new and more extensive participatory forms of public engagement, and the sociotechnical systems to support such processes, are required—first, to foster inclusion and second, to realise the ethical, epistemic, democratic and civic virtues fostered through public deliberation about issues of shared concern.

Deliberative systems—the idea of a distributed talk-based model of democracy—forms the underlying theory that drives this research, both conceptually in the way it motivates design and practically in the ways in which it shares the participatory ideals of localism. This dissertation seeks to explore the use of sociotechnical digital artefacts (or, sociodigital artefacts) to investigate the ways in which deliberative democracy is enacted in instances of localism where ‘highly interested’ but ‘non-representative’ actors are collaboratively carrying out policy-making activities, taking decisions that affect the lives of their communities. This exploration takes shape over three case studies where I design, deploy, and evaluate the role of a sociodigital system intended to foster the qualities of deliberative democracy. In the final chapters I synthesise the insights from each study around a discussion on the interrelationship between HCI, localism, and deliberative democracy with a focus on the role of technology to support devolved decision-making.

For Ada, whenever I may find her

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I can’t thank Patrick Olivier enough for providing the opportunities and support to get out of my PhD and spend time in parliamentary and central government worlds. Without directly contributing to my dissertation, this experience helped shape my approach and understanding. On that note, I am grateful to Chi Onwurah, MP for Newcastle Central, and to Chris Webber at the Cabinet Office’s Open Innovation Team for welcoming me into their teams.

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DECLARATIONS

Community Conversational

In chapter 5, I discuss the design and development of *Community Conversational*. The software interface and technical aspect that supported the method for this were built by Alistair MacDonald, and published as proceeding in CHI.

Johnson, I. G., MacDonald, A., Briggs, J., Manuel, J., Salt, K., Flynn, E., and Vines, J. (2017) *Community Conversational: Supporting and Capturing Deliberative Talk in Local Consultation Processes*. In Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '17). ACM, New York, NY, USA, 2320-2333.
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3025453.3025559>

I thank my co-authors for bringing the work to publication, and for their permission to use the material. The fieldwork, data collection, study design, and analysis of data from this study and writing up of findings and analysis in chapter 5 of this dissertation is entirely my own work.

Neighbourhood Data

In chapter 6, I describe a case study in which I developed a data-rich prototype of my sociodigital platform. I express my gratitude to Aare Puussaar for collaborating with me on this project and in particular for collating the data for the map, as well as designing the graphics that represented the data. Research was published on this project in two CSCW papers:

Johnson, I. G., Puussaar, A., Manuel, J., and Wright, P. (2018) *Neighbourhood Data: Exploring the Role of Open Data in Locally Devolved Policymaking Processes*. In Proc. ACM Human Computing Interactions. 2, CSCW, Article 83 (November 2018).
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3274352>

Puussaar, A., **Johnson, I. G.**, Montague, K., James, P., and Wright, P. (2018) *Making Open Data Work for Civic Advocacy*. In Proc. ACM Human Computing Interactions. 2, CSCW, Article 143 (November 2018). <https://doi.org/10.1145/3274412>

I would like to thank Jen Manuel and Pete Wright for their permission to use the material generated, and Aare Puussaar and Jen Manuel for support carrying out research workshops and interviewing participants. The planning of this study, as well as the workshop methodology, interview schedules, and subsequent analysis of data and writing up of findings in chapter 6 of this dissertation represents my individual contribution.

Ambit

In chapter 7, I present Ambit – a re-designed system, based on *Community Conversational*. I would like to thank Dalya Al-Shahrabi for support on the development and trialling of this system.

This study was also published in CHI.

Johnson, I. G., Al-Shahrabi, D., and Vines, J. [in print] *From Creating Spaces for Civic Discourse to Creating Resources for Action*. In Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '20). ACM, New York, NY, USA.
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3313831.3376464>

I thank my co-authors, Dalya, and John Vines for their support in getting this to publication, and for their permission to include the data from this study in this dissertation. The performance of fieldwork, carrying out the workshops and interviews and other data collection and analysis, as presented in this dissertation is entirely my own work and contribution.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Setting a scene

The referendum vote on whether the United Kingdom would remain in the European Union was held on 23rd June 2016, but the events leading up to the referendum and what happened after were important factors in shaping my perception of democracy. It was widely acknowledged in the time leading up to Brexit that various forms of nonparticipation and self-exclusion from politics were growing, in particular across demographic lines leaving minority groups the most under-represented. This, among other issues of trust and lack of accountability from career politicians, led to criticisms of mainstream political parties for the lack of will to engage with minority groups, who were not voting. This vicious cycle of nonparticipation and exclusion of non-elites, manifest in policymaking, left a gap for the rapid growth of an anti-EU populist party: the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). The language and rhetoric of this party, ostensibly legitimised by an increase in vote share in the 2015 general election, dominated and spread into mainstream politics ¹. In an attempt to regain

¹ Although they won only one seat in Parliament, they did have big wins in the European Parliament, and the views they pushed became more on the agenda of mainstream politics.

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votes back from the populists who they had lost ground to, and to address a long-term internal party faction around the relationship of the UK to the EU, the governing Conservative party called a referendum. This saw dividing lines in the two mainstream parties, causing a dissolving of the type of guidance and messages that we have come to expect from general elections (see Offe, 2017). Within this space the *Remain* and *Leave* camps started campaigning, both appealing to emotional and fearful reactions from the citizenry. After the results, I witnessed within my social networks, both online and offline, and in the media, the start of a genuine rational debate about the issues, and matters concerning membership of the EU. It became clear afterward that dominant public discourse and media rhetoric was one of the realisation that misinformation and so-called 'fake news' as well as accusations of illegal and unethical use of personal data from social media platforms², may well have affected the outcome (e.g. Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). It also became apparent that the electorate split across demographic lines, in particular age, and largely this polarisation of the country remains the legacy of the vote.

As this happened, I wondered if ordinary citizens were exposed to a greater diversity of viewpoints, had access to more reliable information, and had spaces in which to debate issues with each other and perhaps also with political leaders and other experts, would we still feel the same about the outcome? Would we have voted the same way? Would we have wanted to vote on this at all? And more importantly, in 2019 after the Parliamentary crises, confusion, fear, and more unrest—as questions turn to how do we avoid this ever happening again and ideas about deliberative democracy become more mainstream³—how do we make democracy better?

Advances in technology held promises to democratise information, making it seem increasingly easy to imagine that solutions to decreasing democratic engagement could exist in innovative interconnected digital technologies. Digital technologies enable us to connect with people across geographic boundaries and within social platforms, with people like us, but also who all too often,

² See <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/mar/04/cambridge-analytics-data-brexit-trump>

³ For example, see <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/news/press-release-parliament-sends-30000-invitations-citizens-assembly-climate>, and <https://rebellion.earth/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/The-Extinction-Rebellion-Guide-to-Citizens-Assemblies-Version-1.1-25-June-2019.pdf> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-50264797>

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think like us. What may look like an online public sphere is often merely our pre-existing validity claims, prejudices and, beliefs, amplified and reflected back to us. What looks like an online information-society is too often a space for fake news, manipulation by those with the power to control it, and an all too easy means by which to discredit others and spread extreme and hateful rhetoric unchallenged and under the radar of lawmakers. These online worlds reveal more reason to feel disenfranchised than by the old meta-narratives and established institutions they are said to have displaced. This thesis, in some part, represents my curiosity to find an alternative way of enacting democracy and constitutional policymaking away from the online filter bubbles of political opinion fuelled by the aggregative logic of big data.

Despite not being *about* Brexit, this thesis is concerned with some of the tensions surrounding it, and while not being *about* online and social media I focus on the role of technology to promote new ways for communities to come together, where local politics and issues of local concern are formed, articulated, discussed and determined.

1.2 Introductory notes and chapter outline

I refer to 'civil society' throughout this thesis, as much as I do 'deliberative democracy'. First, I will clarify what I mean by these terms, both in how I understand them and how that understanding is instrumental to the way this research was designed and discussed. I also refer on several occasions to citizens. When using this term, I am specifically referring to 'ordinary citizens' by which I mean people living in communities that are not directly involved in politics or active in community groups. In many instances 'citizen' could be switched with 'resident', but I use 'citizen' to maintain consistency when making points about all of the research participants and stakeholders within the contexts I describe. The term citizen also conveys the idea that I place the insights in a national context with regards to the policies and legislative devices of localism that contextualise the studies.

1.2.1 Civil society and the public sphere

In describing and discussing civil society, as well as deliberative democracy, it is worth making a distinction with regard to the word 'civil'. One might associate 'civil' with the way by which one expresses or argues an opinion (as in 'civility'). It can be, for example, a conversational virtue that governs how disagreement is expressed. These points on expressing viewpoints are important to

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deliberative democracy, which I will explain next, but importantly the civil society I describe in this thesis and more specifically the civil society groups that are the focus of the case studies, refer to organisations, associations, charities, and other groups, both formal and informal that operate in civil society (Dean, 1996). However, I also understand and express civil society as the societal layer or stratum in which civil society groups function (Habermas et al., 1974; Flyvbjerg, 1998a). In simple terms, this civil society layer of society exists between individual citizens and formal political authorities (local and national governments). The reason I make this point is that the civil society groups I discuss are not intent on being civil, in traditional ‘civility’ terms. More specifically, the civil society I describe are non-profit organisations and social enterprises, primarily invested in interest-based (Hendriks, 2011) politics and influencing policy using rhetorical approaches and tactics (Chambers, 2009; Dryzek, 2010b; Grim & Hauser, 2002), and include those described also as ‘highly interested non-representatives’ (Bächtiger et al., 2010). This common form of community organisation is explained by Montpetit *et al* (2004) where the authors state that civil society groups may exert more influence from outside of government, where it is suggested that tensions are created by public officials’ expectations of the ‘public sphere’.

The public sphere was first conceptualised by Jürgen Habermas (see Habermas, 1984; Kellner, 2014; Habermas, 1994) in what was an attempt to explain the relationship between the state and society. This conception of the public sphere alludes to a time when the bourgeoisie was more closely connected to the political class who represented them, and the resultant social exclusivity created a certain “coherence⁴” (Habermas et al., 1974). However, this understanding of a ‘public sphere’ is lost or at least eroded in recent times in which we live, understood in Habermasian logic as ‘social welfare state mass democracy’ (1974, p.54). In either case, the role of civil society in the public sphere is to mediate between the state and the citizenry in which the state should be understood as the executor of the public sphere but not part of it (Habermas et al., 1974, p.50). In my research, I understand civil society as an operationalisation of the public sphere made up of groups, associations, and other forms of active citizenship.

⁴ Reliant upon a higher standard of education, and therefore social class.

1.2.2 Deliberative democracy

Deliberative democracy, put simply, is a form of democratic governance that is reliant upon the deliberation of its members. For many years political science scholarship has produced a large body of work to distinguish between aggregative and deliberative decision-making (Cohen, 1989; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). For now, I will explain it as a way of ‘doing’ democracy in which mutual justification is central to decision-making, as well as a normative theory that seeks not to explain the way things are, but the way things should be. I will develop a more suitably detailed and specific definition and explanation of deliberation throughout chapter 3. However, at this early stage, I want to make clear the nature of this research from the perspective of deliberative democracy. My intention is not an assessment of the quality of deliberation already taking place in the public sphere, or the capacity to deliberate in civil society or at the local level of governance, nor is it an investigation into opinions on such by civil society actors. Rather, it is as an empirical study into the effect of deliberative technologies in instances of localism carried out by civil society groups at the local level.

1.2.3 The local and localism

Localism, once an umbrella term for a range of political philosophies that gave priority to ‘the local’, was legislated in the UK through an Act of Parliament in 2011 (DCLG, 2011). Under this Act, the localism agenda is better understood as a de-centralisation of Government powers and control to local authorities, and a policy device by which to devolve powers to communities and citizens (Lawton & Macaulay, 2014; Sturzaker & Shaw, 2015). The idea of localism is linked to the view that local communities are a “mediating layer through which responsible action, right living, and good welfare outcomes may be achieved” (Clarke & Cochrane, 2013, p.11). However, the aforementioned political notion does not always follow this disposition.

There is an important affinity between localism and deliberative democracy (Ercan & Hendriks, 2013), such as the shared goal to involve citizens in decisions that affect their lives. However, much deliberative democracy research is at pains to emphasise the need to ‘scale up’ deliberation (Goel & Lee, 2016; Bächtiger & Wegmann, 2014). This takes place through various forms including imagining deliberative democracy as a system (Ulusoy, 2014; Mendonça, 2013; Mansbridge, 2012). In this view, no component part of the overall system (e.g., a single forum such as a parliament or university

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seminar) need evidence all of the desirable elements of good deliberation; what matters is that those elements are sufficiently distributed across the system as a whole. This trend toward transformative institutional design (Johnson & Gastil, 2015), the conceptual shift to a ‘systemic’ understanding (Owen & Smith, 2015; Kuyper, 2015), and specific models to combine them, such as the ‘coupling’ of citizens and elites (Hendriks, 2016) point to a move towards the macro-level. However, the new structures of governance I describe in this thesis call for a renewed interest in the local level⁵ of governance and public engagement in matters of local concern. This does not deny the importance of systemic thinking; rather it is a means by which to operationalise the working theory of deliberative systems into a specific context. My ambition is to focus on citizen involvement, which is not only a legislative requirement of localism and many funding awards but also essential for achieving political equality and democratic legitimacy in instances of devolved decision-making processes governed by unelected citizen-representatives.

To explain these concepts and ideas further and set out a map for the thesis, the following sections will introduce the motivations for the research in terms of both the conceptual and contextual considerations that I expand upon in chapters two and three, respectively. First, by highlighting the importance of civil society actors' role in new structures of governance; second, the role alternative forms of participation can have in these new contexts; and third, by outlining the reasons for taking a deliberative approach. Following this, I present the research questions with justification and rationale for each. I will then outline the research approach and methods, which I attend to further in chapter three, and provide an outline of the thesis structure. Finally, this chapter summarises the contribution of the work and lists the prior publications that feature in some part, in this thesis.

1.3 A critical introduction to local-level policymaking

The localism agenda and subsequent Act of Parliament (DCLG, 2011) has led local authorities in the UK to adopt new structures of governance, where the relationships between the state, local government, and the citizenry have changed in a profound way (Lawton & Macaulay, 2014). This phenomenon has been described as a “double devolution” (National Association of Local Councils,

⁵ Also known as the micro-level of society when discussed in comparison with the meso-level which refers to structural or macro-level which refers to institutional aspects of society.

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2017), a “political parallel⁶” (Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2016), and a “hollowing out of the state” (Rhodes, 1994). In each case, these refer to a context where reduced spending and staffing in local government occurs at the same time as a political pressure to focus on supporting the devolution of responsibilities to citizen groups (see section 2.2). Increasingly, ordinary citizens are taking the role of the bureaucrat in localism initiatives, leaving the local authority with less influence.

However, one weakness of the ‘localist state’ is its openness to domination by one ‘type’ of citizen. Localism is criticised for dividing those into communities who have the time and resources and those who do not (Moir & Leyshon, 2013, p.2008). These weaknesses are bound up in another criticism of localism that points to a failure to create genuine democratic renewal, rather becoming an administrative practice⁷. Ercan and Hendriks (2013, p.434), criticise localism for being reduced to an exercise in bureaucracy, without enough focus on the potential to increase community involvement in local decision-making, making the argument that “localism needs to emphasise the participatory and not just the administrative, aspects of devolution⁸”.

Furthermore, those who do commit their time and resources often lack the skills and expertise required to engage communities in a meaningful way, compounded in some cases by a lack of social capital required to represent the views of the whole community, or the political will of this new ‘non-elected’ political class (Björgvinsson et al., 2010; Kuyper, 2016; Bang, 2004; Lawton & Macaulay, 2014; Bächtiger et al., 2010) to engage citizens in policymaking processes. It is within this paradigm that Lawton and Macaulay (2014) have criticised localism for bringing about a situation that not only supports, but actively encourages decision-making based on ill-informed bias, preferences, and information.

⁶ Support for it and resources are not equally distributed. The North East of England, where my studies take place, has suffered the impact of government cuts the hardest: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/patrick-butler-cuts-blog/2015/jan/14/council-cuts-burden-falls-again-on-north-and-inner-cities>.

⁷ I will give an explanation and justification for these claims in chapter 2

⁸ Based on insights from deliberative democracy theory and practice, which I will focus on in chapter 3

1.3.1 Civil society and deliberative policymaking

The place civil society holds in a deliberative democracy is debated and contested in the literature. Some scholarship has indicated that deliberative democracy research pays relatively too little attention (Dodge, 2014). This has meant it has not developed an understanding of the nature and purpose of civil society to enhance or detract from the deliberative quality (Dodge, 2015). In the past Dodge (2010, p.384) has argued that empirical work on deliberative democracy “takes its perspective from within government looking outward toward the public, while minimising the role of civil society”. Specifically, the role of deliberation in decision-making processes is consistently approached through the assessment of the deliberative nature, or not, of public officials and elected representatives to deliberate, often in Parliament or during election campaigns on television (Steenbergen et al., 2003; Lord & Tamvaki, 2013). In addition, a preoccupation with the creation mini-publics and institutional design that would enable ‘good quality’ or effective deliberation (Fung, 2008; Fung & Wright, 2003a) and focus is on the willingness or ability of public officials to design and implement deliberative fora for citizens to take part in (Fischer, 2006) has precluded dealing with the broader public sphere and the complexities of doing so (until the conception of the deliberative system). Notwithstanding, some evidence indicates civil society organisations make unique contributions to deliberative democracy⁹ (Dodge, 2010; Fischer, 2006; Hendriks, 2006), and confront specific challenges when considering deliberation as an entry point for influencing policy (Montpetit et al., 2004).

1.3.2 Barriers to deliberative localism

It is argued that deliberative democracy may hold answers for the criticisms of localism (Ercan & Hendriks, 2013; Dodge, 2010, 2015), but there are three questions this approach poses for civil society organisations in this context. First, the question of why to deliberate. This question is subject to much research and philosophising to the point where the many virtues are agreed by deliberative democrats. The effects can be categorised as those on the participants, such as changing citizens’ *civic capacity* through information, efficacy, and public spiritedness (Fishkin, 2009, p.139), and gaining a ‘solid sense of their own self-interest’ (Mansbridge, 2003, p.180). In addition, there are those effects

⁹ I will outline these in detail in the following chapter

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on the wider community, through public dialogue or actual policy. Second, the issue of whether ordinary citizens have the capacity to deliberate. Although I have already indicated that it is not the ambition of this thesis to answer this question, researchers have confidently answered, through empirical studies that ordinary citizens are able to deliberate effectively under the 'right conditions'¹⁰ (Ercan & Dryzek, 2015; Caluwaerts & Ugarriza, 2012; Caluwaerts & Deschouwer, 2014; Fearon, 2000; Elster, 1998; Fishkin, 2009; Holst & Molander, 2017). Third, whether civil society has the capacity to enable public deliberation. A noteworthy aspect of the experimental studies carried out in deliberative democracy is that the process of organising deliberative events that create these 'ideal conditions' is resource-intensive and expensive. Within the context of localist politics I position this research within, the problems of resources to facilitate deliberation is more pronounced. However, the value of deliberation should be of equally weighted importance.

To begin with, the unequal distribution of resources, in particular, those of time and money are more prominent and immediate in the echelons of local-level policymaking. There is a need for facilitation, to bring about fairness and in some instances for documenting proceedings. This comes in the form of an organising institution, or trained consultants (Fung, 2008; Fishkin, 2009). This is a problem for civil society groups, who have far fewer opportunities to fund such activities. This facilitation is also in danger of inconsistency when attempted by untrained volunteers¹¹. Another resource-heavy element of creating the 'right conditions' for deliberation is access to information. This creates barriers as a time burden for both organisers, and participants, as well as the financial capital required to bring this together¹². Finally, there is a democratic dimension to the conditions, related to the consequence (Dryzek, 2009; Curato & Böker, 2016) of such political engagement¹³.

¹⁰ These conditions are discussed in chapter 3 and include access to information, trust in experts, recruitment techniques, intergroup empathy, decision-making rules, etc.

¹¹ See case study 1, chapter 5

¹², See case study 2, chapter 6

¹³ See case study 3, chapter 7

1.4 A turn to the civic in HCI

For a long time, the participatory design and community informatics literature along with wider participatory research scholarship, has discussed, articulated and debated the challenges involved in working with community organisations and facilitating new practices and processes (Besselaar, 2005; Carroll & Rosson, 2007; Merkel et al., 2004). Issues such as these are becoming of increasing importance to the HCI scholarship on civic and community technology. Significantly, HCI researchers are no longer just deploying technologies for opinion gathering and consultation—rather, in many respects, they are aiming to support others in developing such practices¹⁴.

This is recognisable in Vlachokyriakos *et al*'s (2014) work on *PosterVote*, for example, where the ambition was to build platforms to be appropriated and deployed by activists, rather than researchers and designers deploying and evaluating them on their behalf. *PosterVote* raised questions related to the governance and ownership of the data collected and the influence of activists groups on the way people voted. Taylor *et al.* (2013) discussed the critical importance of building relationships with residents and lead community members through the duration of projects and ensuring skills and infrastructure are in place to sustain endeavours beyond the completion of the research project. These examples in different ways pose questions about the responsibilities of different stakeholders in civic technology contexts where decision-making is a primary concern. They also raise issues related to the role of the researcher in these contexts, and whether they have a responsibility to not just provide new tools with which to collect opinions of citizens through, for example, voting or deliberation, but also help organisations and individuals develop the skills, resources, capacity and practices to use these in a meaningful and sustainable manner (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018c; Disalvo et al., 2010; Asad & Le Dantec, 2015).

Within this canon, there has been a strong focus on increasing the capacities of civil society organisations to make sense of data (Ruijter et al., 2017; Puusaar et al., 2018) and act upon data they gather (Lindley et al., 2017; Alvarado Garcia et al., 2017). Similarly, on increasing the efficacy and literacies of citizens (Wolff et al., 2017; Bhargava et al., 2016; Matthews, 2016; D'Ignazio & Bhargava,

¹⁴ I have discussed these matters in detail in Johnson et al 2016

2015), to support relational models of civic engagement through storytelling (Erete et al., 2016), learning and skills development (Gascó-Hernández et al., 2018; Gordon et al., 2016), and collaborative sense-making practices (Asad et al., 2017; Balestrini, T. Diez, et al., 2015; Wolff et al., 2017; Balestrini et al., 2017).

1.4.1 Technologies for deliberation

The role of democratic deliberation is of growing interest in political science. Within technology design fields, notions of deliberative democracy have had the most resonance with through processes that are enabled by online platforms including social media (Semaan, Faucett, S. Robertson, et al., 2015; Semaan et al., 2014; De Cindio & Peraboni, 2011) or through the creation of purpose-built deliberation platforms (Xiao et al., 2015; Semaan, Faucett, S. P. Robertson, et al., 2015). For example, Semaan *et al* (2014) focused on motivations for participating in an ‘imagined’ online public sphere, with a focus on the idea that people re-appropriate and reconstruct social media to create their own spaces for political interaction relying on the idea of a “sprawling public sphere” across the internet (Dahlgren, 2005). Similarly, work has looked to integrate content from blogs¹⁵ and wikis¹⁶ to create more critical reflection in the imagined online public sphere (Lourenço, 2008). However, online deliberation that focuses on social media (e.g. Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Semaan et al., 2014), in particular, only partially and on a rather limited scale fulfils the ideals of deliberation¹⁷ (c.f. Min, 2007).

One of the primary arguments for online forms of deliberation is to reduce costs, and overcome the limits of geography (Price & Joseph N. Cappella, 2002; Min, 2007; Baek et al., 2012). However, this leads to two caveats in the form of the ‘digital divide’ and the ‘mode of communication’ (Fishkin, 2009, p.169). Therefore, in online spaces, those from lower socioeconomic or minority groups are less likely to participate (Baek et al., 2012) and an important element of communication that comes with face-to-face meetings is diminished. Moreover, wider issues of trust related to ‘e-participation’

¹⁵ A regularly updated website or web page, typically one run by an individual or small group that is written in an informal or conversational style.

¹⁶ A website or database developed collaboratively by a community of users, allowing any user to add and edit content.

¹⁷ See <https://participedia.net/en/methods/online-deliberation>

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(Scherer & Wimmer, 2014) and the recent propagation of algorithmic biases (Bozdag, 2013; Baeza-Yates & Ricardo, 2016) and misinformation during elections (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017) raises strong objections around the potential for online deliberation. More recently, there has been a move in HCI research toward supporting new modes of face-to-face civic engagement through technology design (Boehner & DiSalvo, 2016; Gordon et al., 2016) with a focus on community cohesion and relationship building (McCarthy & Wright, 2016; Asad et al., 2017; Erete, 2015). In the following, I outline my research aims, in line with these ideas.

1.5 Research aims and questions

Within this section, I outline the aims and research questions used to lead this research and inform the selection of cases that shape the investigation. The research questions build on conceptualisations and principles of deliberative systems theory and represent the investigation I carried out into the challenges related to consultation and political participation at the local level of governance.

The research questions seek to meet the aims of 1) developing an understanding of the everyday practices of civil society groups during instances of localism from a deliberative perspective, and 2) investigating how HCI methods and the design of sociotechnical systems and digital artefacts can contribute to promoting more deliberative practices in local consultation practices. In the following, I provide breadth and depth and operationalise the brief literature concepts I have introduced so far, by outlining particulars of each of the research questions.

1.5.1 What is the impact of sociodigital technologies to support democratic deliberation in local consultation processes?

The main research question that guides and frames the sub-questions outlined below, prompts an investigation into the role of technology in consultation processes carried out by civil society. In particular, the role sociotechnical digital artefacts (or, sociodigital artefacts) can have in promoting and facilitating talk-based processes—that engender the deliberative qualities set out in the normative theories of deliberative democracy—in an inclusive manner. This, in part, responds to the criticism of deliberative democracy that it is elitist and favours those in society that are educated with higher social capital.

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This research question focuses on investigating the possibilities and barriers for design interventions in this area, with a focus on creating an environment that encourages views to be expressed, that those views are expressed in a way that is focused and fair, and that others are encouraged to listen and take others viewpoints into account. It also encapsulates designing to foster and facilitate reasonableness in discourse (Esterling et al., 2015; Knobloch et al., 2013) that encourages engagement with facts and data (Müller, 2018), and to structure and capture public discussion, and the expression of views in a way that is consequential (Dryzek, 2000) for policymaking at the local level. As such, the following sub-questions highlight the specific investigative angles the research took in order to gain insights into this specific conceptual and contextual domain.

1.5.1.1 *Can sociodigital methods from HCI shape the logistics of public dialogue?*

This question is an investigation into the ways that interaction design methods might encourage elements of deliberative talk that rely on listening and expressing views in an appropriately deliberative manner in effect creating deliberative spaces. Within HCI and Participatory Design, there is a long tradition over the last few decades into designing the interaction between participants that is rooted in ideas of equality and fairness. For example, games have a strong lineage in design research with an emphasis on engagement and inclusion (Eriksen et al., 2014), and the idea of ‘civic games’ has had some consideration in political science research, particularly in engaging publics consultation processes. Much of this work, however, focuses on making existing democratic processes more engaging. There are far fewer examples of ‘civic games’ (Hirsch, 2010; Raphael et al., 2010) aimed at transforming civic engagement and improving the quality of engagement. Civic games tend to focus on the outcome of creating data and primarily exist as online platforms or mobile apps. For example, in town planning, there have been several ‘serious games’ designed to increase the level of input in consultation processes (Geurts et al., 2007; Wynn, 1985).

Games research has had much attention elsewhere, particularly in HCI, where it has been part of research projects investigating use in participatory governance (Poplin, 2012), participatory design, and co-creation (Brandt & Messeter, 2004; Brandt, 2006). Methods that emphasise ‘game’ elements, in particular, have the potential to re-configure power structures in a space, and between participants. Importantly, in a way that aligns with ideas from deliberative democracy of equality and inclusion,

games create a 'safe space' for discussion, constructing a magic circle (Edwards, 2012; Huizinga, 1951) where those inside are free from the prevailing power structures and social pressures from outside of the circle. With this question, I wanted to explore the way the methods for configuring participation from HCI might promote and provide familiar social cues for the structuring of discussion in localist 'dialogue-led' decision-making processes.

1.5.1.2 What is the role of sociodigital technology in enabling informed decision-making?

The idea of informed decision-making is often tied to notions of evidence-based policymaking, where the concept of evidence is intrinsically linked with data (Baack, 2015; Hakken, 2003; Sanderson, 2002). In deliberative democracy, the emphasis rather is on providing information to citizens to support their public deliberation around issues and concerns (Warren, 2007). In civic technology and public design fields, much work has promulgated that the availability of 'open data' creates potential opportunities for data-driven civic participation (Tenney & Sieber, 2016a). Much literature discusses the role of open data and its relevance to the civic stakeholders: decision-makers (Kitchin et al., 2017), civil society groups (Boehner & DiSalvo, 2016), and citizens in communities (DiSalvo, 2009; Michael & Lupton, 2016), which has led to a plethora of 'civic technologies' designed to aid community groups to make use of publicly available data. In deliberative democracy, the idea of the informed citizen is tied to the legitimacy of the process of democratic deliberation. However, the process of informing citizens is often costly to both the organisers and participants.

This research question explores the role of technology and data as part of deliberative spaces to inform citizens around matters of local concern. With this question, I explore the way technology-enabled information sharing and access to data might bring together citizens and civil society with information that might support the process of public consultation and informed decision-making.

1.5.1.3 How can sociodigital design support links between everyday talk and decision-making?

The question of technology interventions shaping policymaking has a long history, particularly around voting and online deliberation forums. However, the use of digital technologies to capture and make sense of everyday political talk has not received the same attention. Deliberative systems literature promotes the idea that everyday talk (Mansbridge, 1999) and everyday political talk (Conover & Searing, 2005) may be accepted as contributions to the overall system. This research

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question represents an investigation into this form of data capture and an endeavour to test how this form of data can have an impact on existing or emerging structures of governance. In other words, that community engagement leads to action, or that action is informed by engagement. Deliberation most often takes place in discrete deliberative forums, or minipublics, where outcomes are measured through quantitative assessment criteria such as DQI (see Steenbergen et al., 2003) or Q methodology (Niemeyer, 2011, 2012), and as such are not tested within the real world. Also, a longstanding concern of civic technology researchers is in lowering the barriers to participation but without a means to make the participation have any meaningful influence on decision-making. This 'black-hole' (e.g. Olivier & Wright, 2015) has been shown to have several negative consequences on both the efficacy of citizens and their trust in governing institutions and public officials (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018a; Harding et al., 2015; Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018b). This research question explores the ways sociodigital technology might support consultation to be consequential, by exploring the way technology might support civil society as “inducers of connectivity” (Mendonça, 2013) between citizens and policymakers.

1.6 Research approach

This thesis is formed of three empirical case studies set up to explore the ways sociodigital systems and design methods might support 'deliberative talk' in localist decision-making processes. In investigating the issues and concerns around localism, civil society, and deliberative democracy I situate a conceptual framework, in which the normative theory of deliberative systems forms a theoretically-driven ‘point of departure’ (Charmaz, 2014). I started from the argument that more deliberative forms of democratic engagement should be privileged by civil society when taking on engagement responsibilities in new structures of governance. My review of deliberative systems research in chapter 3, underpins the conceptual framework I have developed throughout the research. This approach takes three broad concepts from the normative deliberative systems literature to study how they play out in civil society during instances of localism. In doing so, I take an abstract idea about how democracy ‘could be’ and use this to design processes (see Figure 4-2). I took a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to understand social phenomena related to existing practices within the emerging structures of governance highlighted and critiqued in chapter

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2. I implement the conceptual framework (discussed in chapter 4) as an analytical lens from the concepts (introduced in chapter 3) which function as evaluative standards. In adopting a case study approach, I was able to understand the evaluative standards in context across all studies. Each case study context represents an instance of devolved decision-making in new structures of governance brought about by localism (see chapter 2). The groups I collaborated with varied within these strict criteria, from a parish council and QUANGO (quasi-autonomous non-government organisation) in case study one to a collection of charities, then a group constituted around a national funding initiative in case studies two and three, respectively. Elements of PAR are apparent in the approach explained in the case studies, in that the ‘intervention’ is an action “to effect desired change as a path to generating knowledge and empowering stakeholders” (Huang, 2010, p.93), and the research is the evaluation of the impact this has on the socio-political system under examination, as well as an analysis of what the technology intervention reveals into the publics and systems involved in that particular democratic process. In the case studies, I continue a tradition of bridging research methods from social science and participatory methods from HCI.

1.7 Thesis structure

I shape the thesis structure around these three case studies, starting with a two-part literature review before setting out my methodological and conceptual framework in chapter 4. This precedes three case study chapters followed by a discussion of the findings and insights from across the case studies and a concluding chapter in which I reflect on my research questions.

The literature review outlines the two main bodies of work. Chapter 2 establishes contextual considerations that are necessary to frame an understanding of the research findings and motivation for the thesis. Chapter 3 sets up the concepts and political theories that act as the starting point and guiding light of the research. Chapter 4 introduces my conceptual framework. I use a conceptual framework from deliberative democracy research in order to structure and frame my research data, collected through participant-observation.

Chapter 5 is an initial exploration into the role of civic technology design in dialogic decision-making spaces. This first case study is an investigation into the use of simple game mechanics – such as turn-taking prompt cards and moving tangible markers – to facilitate conversation and political discussion

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between ordinary citizens to elicit matters of local concern for decision-making. The initial analysis of this study (analysis of data from observations) pointed to issues related to participants dominating the conversations, unequal participation, and opportunities to express views, participants going 'off topic', and examples of pressure group tactics pushing the agenda. In response to this, I designed an intervention for the same decision-making group to utilise in their consultation processes. This intervention involved using a tangible interface and collaborative tabletop ideas through the creation of plastic markers and prompt cards that were designed to facilitate conversation about 'place'.

Chapter 6 reports on the second case study, where I focus on the issue of the legitimacy of the views of citizens as valid and meaningful claims of matters of concern for local decision-making, and decision-makers. As such, the focus for the second study was to incorporate 'data' into the deliberative space. First, the inclusion of data was seen as something that could 'couple' claims with information that is considered 'evidence' to legitimise citizen views during dialogic consultation processes at the local level. Second, following the literature on deliberative democracy, this type of information could make citizens 'informed' to promote conversation that shows deliberative qualities. The research data for this study – observation and field notes from workshops and meetings, audio and video recordings of four workshops, and interviews with 10 civil society group actors involved in devolved decision-making – was analysed, like the first case study, to group together meaning and establish the type of data that those involved in devolved policymaking found relevant, meaningful, and appropriate to inform decision-making and the role of data in facilitated deliberative workshops.

Chapter 7 focuses on developing the consultation processes to accommodate and promote the creation of 'data' that are more likely to be understood, useful, and most importantly, actionable for policymakers. This involves learning from previous studies and how learning from previous analyses points to important areas of focus for developing dialogue-driven decision-making processes around matters of local concern. The data for this study from observations, workshops with residents, and interviews with my collaborators is analysed and thematically arranged to show the practices of this civil society organisation and their use of the sociodigital system.

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Chapter 8 offers reflections on civil society, digital technology design, and deliberative democracy from across three case studies. I shape this through a discussion on technologies for deliberative localism. I also offer insights from across the case studies that seek to reflect on the wider learning from deploying sociodigital systems with civil society groups and the interplay between theory and everyday practices. Finally, chapter 9 returns to the research questions and limitations of the PhD.

1.8 Summary of contributions

With this thesis, I have bridged between deliberative democracy research and HCI and applied this to the context of localism. The ideal of citizen participation is integral to localism. I use the design and deployment of civic technology to bring ideas from the normative theory of deliberative democracy to local-level decision-making. As such, I have contributed a new perspective for designing for and evaluating participation in democratic processes at the local level, and outline framework to set out a structured way to think about values in civic technology design.

Deliberative democracy scholarship gives a set of standards. I applied these standards to understand current practices in localist decision-making and then to the design of situated technology. Using the lens of deliberative democracy, I adopted ethnographic approaches to data collection, followed by a participatory action research approach to the design, deployment, and evaluation of novel consultation technologies in real-life settings where civil society groups are carrying out policy and decision-making in their communities. Deliberative democracy research has a strong tradition of setting evaluative standards for civic participation centred more recently on values of inclusion but does not have the tools and methods to apply this in the real world¹⁸. Through this approach to understanding the role of civil society and the potential for deliberative localism through digital design, I have highlighted a range of issues and opportunities for civic technology in HCI and contributed to deliberative democracy research by providing empirical studies into the deliberative potential of civil society in real-world scenarios.

This thesis also contributes HCI and digital civics in the following ways: (a) offers new knowledge and insights around the opportunities for digital technology to enable deliberative approaches to

¹⁸ Several experiments in democratic deliberation reliant on creating conditions that are high costs, etc.

decision-making in civil society; (b) provides insights from case studies into the everyday practices and experiences of civil society with data and technology; (c); contributes a sociodigital artefact and system to support deliberative policymaking; and, (d) constructs a conceptual framework that provides a structured way to think about values in sociotechnical design for civic purposes.

1.9 Publications associated with this PhD

Parts of this thesis have appeared in some part in the following publications and commissioned reports:

Johnson, I. G., Al-Shahrabi, D., and Vines, J. (2020). *From Creating Spaces for Civic Discourse to Creating Resources for Action*. In Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '20). ACM, New York, NY, USA.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3313831.3376464>

Johnson, I. G., Puussaar, A., Manuel, J., and Wright, P. (2018) *Neighbourhood Data: Exploring the Role of Open Data in Locally Devolved Policymaking Processes*. In Proc. ACM Human Computing Interactions. 2, CSCW, Article 83 (November 2018). <https://doi.org/10.1145/3274352>

Puussaar, A., **Johnson, I. G.,** Montague, K., James, P., and Wright, P. (2018) *Making Open Data Work for Civic Advocacy*. In Proc. ACM Human Computing Interactions. 2, CSCW, Article 143 (November 2018). <https://doi.org/10.1145/3274412>

Johnson, I. G. (2018) *Participation as Collaboration: the Case of Data-driven Policymaking*. Accepted position paper at The Changing Contours of “Participation” in Data-driven, Algorithmic Ecosystems: Challenges, Tactics, and an Agenda workshop, CSCW 2018.

Elstub, S., **Johnson, I.G.,** Puttick, R., and Wilkinson, M. (2018) *Assessing the Potential of Mini-Publics to Promote Evidence Uptake in Social Policy and Practice*, Newcastle: Newcastle University. 2018. (included in Nesta publication): <https://www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/publication/evidence-vs-democracy/>

Johnson, I. G., MacDonald, A., Briggs, J., Manuel, J., Salt, K., Flynn, E., and Vines, J. (2017) *Community Conversational: Supporting and Capturing Deliberative Talk in Local Consultation Processes*. In Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '17). ACM, New York, NY, USA, 2320-2333. <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3025453.3025559>

Johnson, I. G. (2017) *Value Added Tasks: Reflecting on Decision-Making with Communities*. Accepted position paper at Values in Computing workshop, CHI 2017
http://www.valuesincomputing.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/johnson_value_vic2017.pdf

Elstub, S., **Johnson, I.G.,** and Puttick, R. (2016) *Overcoming Inequalities in Participation in Participatory Budgeting in Edinburgh*, Newcastle: Newcastle University.

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Johnson, I. G. Vines, J., Taylor, N., Jenkins, E., and Marshall, J. (2016) *Reflections on Deploying Distributed Consultation Technologies with Community Organisations*. In Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '16). ACM, New York, NY, USA, 2945-2957. <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/2858036.2858098>

2

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

2.1 Introduction

In the opening chapter, I gave a short critical introduction to the socio-political context for my research. In this chapter, I will add more detail and description of the issues of localism and the role of civil society. This will pave the way for a review of literature that sets out a response from deliberative theory to such issues in chapter 3. It is important to the understanding of the case selection and methods deployed in this research to appreciate the political, social, and community-level factors that create the specific contexts for the research. My research question, that seeks to investigate *the impact of sociodigital technologies to support democratic deliberation in local consultation processes*, outlines a specific scenario, brought about by social and political circumstances, in which I investigate the role of digital technology, and its function to support, capture, and legitimise local deliberative consultation processes. As such, those in the role of unelected representative and their practices of local consultation are considered a 'symptom' of a socio-political context. Moreover, the specific dilemmas in this context form the motivation for technology design in this stratum of democratic practice where my case studies take place. The first context that requires explanation is the socio-political context of the Localism Act (2011), and its

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effect on the everyday practices and lived experiences of civil society groups in the UK. The second context, which I outline in the latter stages of this chapter, draws focus upon the sociotechnical innovations and civic technology development that I position as, and is increasingly framed as, a response or reaction to this context.

I begin this chapter by discussing the context of UK devolution and the shifting role of civil society in new structures of governance, providing a brief socio-historical perspective on the policies that frame the context. Following this, I will outline Neighbourhood Planning and Participatory Budgeting as the most popular and tangible instances of localism (Moir & Leyshon, 2013), and localist politics and the actors involved in organising and evaluating such processes. After this, I present the criticisms and challenges of localism in the UK in the form of pragmatic issues such as the deficiencies of civil society in carrying out their newfound duties, and more fundamental philosophical incredulity related to political legitimacy. Then, I will give an overview of what I have previously characterised as the ‘civic turn’ in human-computer interaction research¹⁹, emphasising the literature sometimes conceptualised as ‘public design’ (DiSalvo et al., 2014), giving context to the paradigmatic shift in civically engaged technology research (Balestrini, Rogers, et al., 2015), that I will go on to describe as an epistemological re-focus from ideas about e-democracy to a ‘digital civics’ research agenda (following Olivier & Wright, 2015; Vlachokyriakos et al., 2016; Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018a). I conclude this chapter with an introductory discussion of dialogic consultation practices, highlighting the positive role democratic deliberation might have in the context outlined in this chapter. I will frame this discussion through research from political science (Ercan & Hendriks, 2013) and the importance of civil society for deliberative democracy (Dodge, 2009), as propagated in the political science and social science literature. I do this to first, introduce deliberative democracy and its relation to the conceptual framework I situate throughout the development of my thesis and second, to emphasise the benefits of deliberation in the specific context upon which I draw focus in this chapter.

¹⁹ See Johnson et al. (2016)

2.2 An agenda for localism

This section outlines localism as an old political idea and as a recent legislative device, before providing two examples of localism in practice. In the UK, powers of decision-making and responsibilities for public consultation that were previously held by central government are increasingly devolved to local authorities. In turn, local authorities are looking to resident and community groups to take over certain decision-making and administrative responsibilities. Acts of Parliament, including the *Localism Act* (2011) and *Community Empowerment Act* in Scotland (2015), commit local governments to actively engage communities and residents in the allocation of public funding and other policymaking devices, such as writing land-use policies for their community.

In setting out a context for my studies, it is worthwhile to draw distinctions between the ideology of 'localist politics' and the legislative devices of the *Localism Act* (2011) or *Community Empowerment Act* (2015). As I have set out in the previous chapter, the *Localism Act* is enshrined in law in England and is enacted through specific policy devices (such as community orders and neighborhood planning) ostensibly enabled through infrastructural and support and access to resources. Long before these acts of parliament, localist politics has existed as a 'popular ideology' which Brownill (2017, p.23) argued has "become the defining motif of UK Government since 2010". Historically, within the UK context, *Big Society* and the so-called *Northern Powerhouse* are examples of politically-motivated ideological examples of 'localist' politics (Evans et al., 2013; Moir & Leyshon, 2013; Sturzaker & Shaw, 2015; Lawton & Macaulay, 2014). However, it was not until 2011 that these ideas were operationalised and legislated through an Act of Parliament.

Since 2011, local authorities have been motivated to organise, document, and support civil society organisations and residents in carrying out the mechanics of localism through providing trained civil servants to give time and advice and through the use of public buildings and resources. Likewise, communities are encouraged and supported to take over the management of land and buildings (such as libraries or swimming pools), through the 'community right to bid' scheme or 'Community Right To Build Orders' that gives community organisations first refusal on a sold building or permission to build on specific land, respectively (DCLG, 2011). In addition, the 'right to reclaim' and 'right to challenge' orders enable communities to force local authorities to sell under-utilised land or

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take over public services – both of which raise “obvious questions about resources and financing” (Brownill, 2017, p.29), which I will return to throughout this chapter.

This recent legislation follows a transnational, ideologically driven, and political shift towards localist decision-making. For example, India's *Panchayati raj* system (Johnson, 2003; Vyasulu & Vyasulu, 1999; Blair, 2000) of hyper-local governance is a three-tier system of governance below the state-level, including at the micro or lowest level of authority, a representative from a village, elected by members of that village, or collection of villages in cases where each is too small. They have responsibility for community buildings, and libraries as well as schools and roads. The *village panchayat* also has devolved power to solve minor disputes in the village. In Europe, the *Bydelsråd* experiment in Copenhagen (Hoff et al., 2001; Bäck, 2002) is an example of a grassroots, but government-enabled, form of neighbourhood-level governance. A further example is the participatory governance exercises that originated in Pôrto Alegre, Brazil (Novy & Leubolt, 2005; Wampler, 2011), a progressive social program of fund-allocation addressing extreme socio-economic disparity (World Bank, 2008). The global popularity of PB has resulted in similar systems of public consultation that have been carried out across Europe and America (Gomez et al., 2013, 2016; Russon-Gilman, 2013; Sintomer et al., 2008).

However, of the legislative devices enabled by the Localism Act, the most commonly practiced are the devolution of land-use policymaking through the introduction of the Neighbourhood Plan, and a form of fiscal devolution through which the responsibility for the allocation of funds is held at the community-level. In this chapter, I focus on these two as exemplars of localism in action. Both neighbourhood planning and participatory budgeting (or community fund allocation) are forms of localist politics and community-level consultation that are particularly interesting cases in responding to the research questions of this study. First, they form a basis for an investigation into the ways participation is configured [RQ 1], in particular around ‘place’ (Shkabatur, 2014), and the way local matters of concern interface with government policymaking [RQ 2] – raising questions around the ways translation between arenas (Mendonça, 2016, 2013; DePaula, 2004; Dodge, 2010) might act out [RQ 3], and the way local level representation, or ‘claims to represent’ (Mendonça, 2008) occur in such instances.

2.2.1 Neighbourhood planning

Neighbourhood planning is the most widely implemented of the legislative devices attached to localism in the UK, representing the most significant instance of localism in recent years (Wargent, 2018). It was introduced by the UK Government of the time as having the potential to “*play a major role in decentralising power and strengthening society*” (Conservative Party, 2010). By 2017 around 2,000 neighbourhood plan initiatives with local and community level groups and citizens were in progress (Brownill & Bradley, 2017). To introduce it in its simplest legislative form, neighbourhood planning is a tier of land use policymaking at the hyper-local level. Structurally, the neighbourhood plan is a policy document that feeds into a Local Plan (local authority level of land-use policy), which in turn feeds into central Government planning policy (national level strategic land-use policy) as part of a three-tier system (see Figure 2-1).

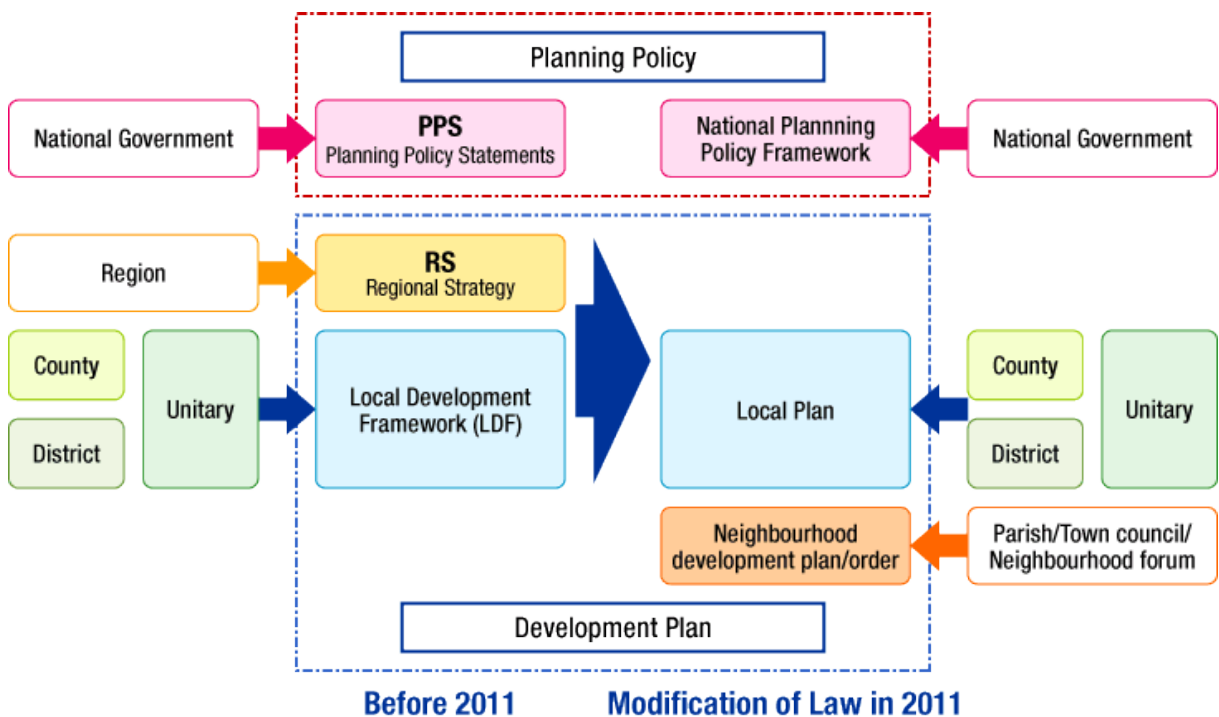


Figure 2-1 The UK planning structure, before and after the Localism Act, 2011 (source: Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism <https://www.mlit.go.jp/>)

In the past, a regional level of planning existed between the local and national level, however after this was removed in 2010 and there remained only two levels (local and national) until the introduction of the Neighbourhood Development Plan, as part of the Localism Act (2011), which re-introduced a third-tier, this time below the local authority level.

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Neighbourhood planning embodies the notions of empowerment and grassroots democracy that are bound up in ideas of localism. In particular, the localism of neighbourhood planning can be summarised as the creation of spaces for economic growth and the creation of the “citizen-planner”, which in turn creates spaces of empowerment, and ‘remakes’ the formerly technocratic process of planning as a collaborative and non-professional activity (Brownill, 2017, p.29). However, there is a need to “critically consider how the national and local are connected, the degree of formality and/ or flexibility in such arrangements, and the implications for local discretion” (Pemberton, 2017, p.195) or the extent to which processes are top-down or bottom-up. Critically, even since the Neighbourhood Planning Bill (DCLG, 2017, 2011) the planning system as a bureaucratic practice has remained largely unchanged, leaving those who work within planning to call for processes that encourage greater citizen deliberation over issues (Sykes, 2003; Baker et al., 2007).

Each of the propositions of the localism of neighbourhood planning has contradictions and challenges within. For example, the idea of the citizen-planner²⁰ relies on the assumption that ordinary citizens are capable of undertaking a range of activities including 'surveys, consultation, needs assessment and building an evidence base' (Brownill & Bradley, 2017, p.33). This apparent competency concern is fundamental to localism to the extent that without it the legitimacy of the ideology falls well short.

Questions around the capacity of communities to develop robust neighbourhood plans, and the role of professional planners in this process is a key concern of scholars and practitioners in planning. For example, Healey, a seminal author, and champion of more collaborative models of planning has called for:

“greater clarity about the institutional constraints on the development of collaborative forms, [...] social techniques to facilitate them, [...] the role which planners should play and the ethical implications of how they should conduct themselves in complex, facilitative roles” (1998, p.1543).

More recently, McGuinness and Ludwig (2017, pp.98–100) have investigated these concerns in a study of two of the earliest neighbourhood plans in England. Despite reporting on one positive aspect of the process related to the development of networks in the community and a raised sense of civic

²⁰ A term used to describe ordinary citizens taking on the role of professional planner

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efficacy among some citizens²¹, they found issues relating to attendance (and participation) at meetings, a lack of skills within the community, and issues in the process of ‘capacity building’ of citizens, which alongside the professional facilitator’s role caused issues of trust for communities in the process. Concerns such as these are not new. In the 1990s there was a warning from scholars in planning that, rather than “celebrating the capacity of individuals in social situations to invent ways of going on and meeting the challenges that confront them, [we should instead be] deeply conscious of the constraints which limit what individuals can do” (Healey, 1998, p.1543).

In addition, the concerns above are compounded by issues of funding, insufficient or inconsistent support from local government (Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2016), and a mismatch between the expectations of community-participants and what the neighbourhood planning process could achieve (McGuinness & Ludwig, 2017, pp.104–107). These issues have in some part contributed to a realisation on the part of policymakers, researchers, and technology designers of the potential, and the need, to innovate in this space.

2.2.2 Participatory budgeting

Another common form of devolution of powers to community-level decision-making as ‘an instrument of Localism’ (Moir & Leyshon, 2013) is through community fund allocation. Unlike some arrangements where civil society groups apply for funding related to a community issue like in the studies I report here, more broadly, Participatory Budgeting (PB) may be characterised as scenarios where the initial funding allocation to the civil society groups is dependent upon community engagement and consultation.

PB is a form of direct democracy in which citizens make decisions on the allocation of funding. It has been hailed as a means by which to achieve inclusion. For example, in an analysis of one of the first, and best known PB exercises in Pôrto Alegre, this form of community engagement was found to be “an exemplar of the manifold possibilities of achieving democratisation and social inclusion through participation” (Hernández-medina, 2010, p.514). Specifically, in this context, PB was successful in

²¹ These insights were from interview data and were reported by facilitators and those who chaired the neighbourhood forum, and not necessarily the ‘ordinary citizens’ whose experiences of the neighbourhood planning process are less reported (c.f. Bradley & Brownill, 2017).

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producing a significant decline in corrupt behaviour and malpractices by bureaucrats, a reduction in ‘clientelism’ through pressure applied by a more ‘demanding and informed population’ on councillors and potential candidates, and a redistribution of resources achieved through allocations in the budget (Hernández-medina, 2010, p.515)²². PB has been shown to have positive consequences for those who take part and for the wider society. Baiocchi’s (2014) discussion of the Pôrto Alegre budget stresses the importance of the relationship between the PB exercise and the larger political regime and civil society. He describes a “virtuous cycle” that has led to PB’s increasing success over time.

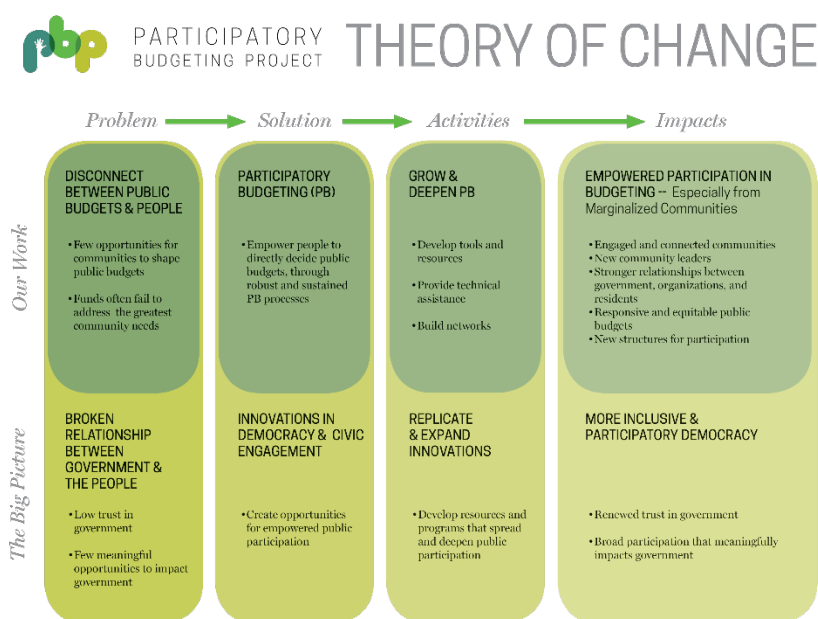


Figure 2-2 PB process as outlined by the Participatory Budgeting Project (see <https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/mission/>)

The allocation of community funds has a long tradition as a focus of study, both as a form of direct democracy and a method of community empowerment, often bound up in ideas of social change (see Figure 2-2). PB has travelled beyond South America, where broadly speaking it has been driven by strong social movements backed by political parties on the left (Wakeford & Singh, 2008, p.62) into

²² I.e., positive impact for the wider community (see chapter 3)

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Europe and North America, as well as some parts of Asia. It has many shapes and forms and is used to involve citizens in not only the allocation of funds but in setting budgets²³.

In making the journey across the globe it has lost some of the emancipatory effects found in Brazil (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014; Boulding & Wampler, 2010). For example, a PB exercise in Madison, Wisconsin was stated to be a success in being more ‘participatory’ despite failing when put against the normative criteria of ‘Empowered Participatory Governance’. However, it did “increases participants’ knowledge of city government and how to influence it” (Krantz, 2003, p.230) as well as fostering, albeit temporary, networks between community leaders.

In the UK, there are examples of PB from Dundee²⁴ and Edinburgh²⁵, in Scotland, and in England much praise has been given to the efforts of Durham County Council²⁶ in the same region as the studies in this thesis. These initiatives typically make only a small amount of the overall budget, from a specific budget available for citizens to decide upon²⁷. They are also characterised by a framework for allocating funds built around community organisations and other civil society groups applying for funding, which citizens then decide the winner. In New York City (NYCPB) Council Members choose to join the PB initiative, giving at least \$1 million from their discretionary budget to the PB process. Council members choose to be involved or not, however, many pledged to take part in PB as part of their campaign to be elected²⁸ indicating there was a strong public will for such initiatives. In England, the National Lottery funding body, through the Big Local initiative, has allocated £1 million to 150 Local Trust organisations²⁹. This model works similarly with citizen involvement in the allocation of funds coming through an opportunity to vote on existing project ideas by civil society

²³ For example, in Newcastle upon Tyne, the City Council used an online tool “My Newcastle?” to engage citizens in the numbers around reducing the budget for the council. When each element was changed, for example increasing taxes, or reducing social care budget, users would see potential negative news stories.

²⁴ <https://www.dundeedecides.org/>

²⁵ <http://www.leithchooses.net/>

²⁶ <https://pbnetwork.org.uk/durham-wins-lgc-local-council-of-year-award/>

²⁷ For example, in Dundee, £1.2 million of community infrastructure funds shared across 8 wards

²⁸ See Elstub, et al., 2016, p.20

²⁹ See case study 3, chapter 7

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organisations or applying for small funding pots to carry out community projects of their own. In the next section, I will present the main criticisms of localism with an emphasis on the localism of PB and neighbourhood planning.

2.3 Criticisms of localism

Despite the democratic promise of social renewal that localism brings, it is not without criticism. The concerns that plague localism as a concept is not simply a question of whether it is good or bad. It is complicated by the diversity of views about it (Brownill, 2017, p.21), coupled with the prevalence of the term's use, which is "couched in political rhetoric and conceptual uncertainty" (Gallent & Robinson, 2013, p.23). As such, the following section discusses criticisms of localism and localist politics, from a range of perspectives to set out the relevant broad social, political, and conceptual contexts that frame my case studies and wider socio-political processes under which any insights are best understood.

The first section refers to the issues caused by budget cuts at the local authority level impeding their ability to support localism on the ground, which is directly related to the uneven distribution of skills and expertise in civil society to enact localism. The next three sections approach these issues from a higher level of abstraction, first focusing on the issue that civil society operates within localist politics as unelected representatives, holding power without legitimacy to do so, then the link between engagement and action is discussed as a limitation of localism (in many respects as a symptom of the previous issues I discuss before it). Finally, I discuss localism as a form of soft paternalism.

2.3.1 A lack of support from the local authority

The first way I will problematise the idea of localism is to see the devolution of powers and responsibilities to civil society and citizen groups to reduce unsustainable costs. In recent years, the UK—like many European nations—has subjected to a period of 'austerity' and shrinking local authority budgets, especially for community-based resources. Public buildings and spaces (e.g. libraries, swimming pools, and parks), services that enable care in the community, and public health initiatives, have until recently been widely provided by local authorities in the UK (DCLG, 2006, 2014).

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Devolved decision-making is often presented as helping to promote democracy, but if one considers the significance and effects of the underlying economic drivers for these policies it is particularly problematic³⁰. Within political decision-making, these economic factors create a “political parallel” (Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2016) in which local authorities are expected to support community groups and civil society while cuts to their budget mean they are less able to do so, resulting in a loss of political control.

This loss of political control is discussed elsewhere as a ‘hollowing out of the state’ (e.g. Rhodes, 1994) through privatisation and loss of function to third party agencies. In practice, local authorities have become increasingly reliant on civil society and the voluntary sector. Often these external agencies are large organisations with resources and the ability to provide skills and training to employees. In such cases the local authority will put out a contract to tender and organisations will bid to carry out the service on the local authorities’ behalf.

“Participatory decision-making requires money to organise the process and financial, operational and legal capacity to implement its results.” (Abers, 2003, p.202)

Local authorities are accused of using the policy devices of localism as an alternative to the cost-heavy responsibility of managing and maintaining community resources. Instead, they favour the low-cost option of supporting opportunities for communities, social innovation companies, and local groups to take over community assets, and community engagement around the future of such assets (such as buildings) and other community resources (Brownill, 2017, p.29).

While this is problematic in itself, it is not the concern of this work. What is most concerning within my thesis is those instances where civil society and citizen groups take up positions in what local authorities would consider democratic services³¹. For example, those instances of localism that are bound up in the allocation of public funds or writing of policy, led by those who volunteer their time (see section 2.3.3). In the article, *Civic Association that Work*, Andrews *et al.* (2010)—while recognising the importance of contextual factors and availability of resources—found that the civic

³⁰ See <https://datajusticelab.org/2018/12/06/data-scores-as-governance-final-report-published/>

³¹ Simply, activities that involve residents in policy or law-making, as opposed to providing a service such as adult social care.

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associations with 'more committed activists, that build organisational capacity, and that carry out activities, and whose leaders work independently' are more effective across several measurements. In other words, civil society must have committed and effective members. However, the lack of support, both practically and politically, from the local authority leaves civil society organisations in a position where they are required to learn from doing.

In sum, the Localism Act (2011) presents an opportunity to 'empower' communities and citizens, while relieving civic authorities of unsustainable costs, but a lack of support and guidance from local authority to support civil society in engaging publics in consultation and other forms of public engagement on issues is a concern.

2.3.2 Uneven distribution of skills and knowledge

Alongside a lack of support from local authorities for civil society to enact localism, the ability, skills, and resources of civil society and civic associations to engage in effective public engagement and facilitate participatory forms of governance is also a concern. One argument, as I have set out above, is that local authorities rely on civil society and citizens to make up for their incompetency. As Fung (2006, p.67) described:

“[Elected representatives and administrative officials] may lack the knowledge, competence, public purpose, resources, or respect necessary to command compliance and cooperation. Whether the direct participation of citizens in governance can remedy one or other of these deficiencies depends in large measure on who participates”

In this scenario, as Fung has indicated, the availability of skill and resource is not equally distributed. In instances of neighbourhood planning, this caused inclusion issues as some more affluent areas are better positioned to take on the role of "citizen-planner". Some groups simply do not have experience of consultation or engaging communities. Others, in more deprived socio-economic areas, are given extra financial support³². However, the representativeness and inclusion apparent in such 'forums' serious questions about democratic legitimacy (Brownill, 2017, p.33). Reflecting on a case study from participatory budgeting in Brazil, Wampler (2011, 2008) suggested that bureaucrats (in the local authority) are unwilling to hand over control to those who they do not perceive to have practical

³² The organisation 'planning aid' provides this support (see case study 2), but there funding and ability to offer support is also decreasing.

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expertise. Moreover, this can be augmented by the lack of skills and resources from within Government to support and act upon the results of participatory processes. Another important factor in the type of support local authorities provide for localism is related to the political context. For example, political parties that are aligned with particular ideologies.

“The political context influences the degree of institutional reform, which results in particular governance structures, which then have particular effects on civil society, which in turn act back upon the political context and the governance reform process” (Krantz, 2003, p.231).

Lawton and Macaulay (2014, p.82) have argued that the new structures of governance brought about through the policy legislation of the Localism Act, 2011, restrict opportunities for citizens to become 'expert citizens'. Bang (2005) made the argument that liberal democracies are characterised by new or different forms of participation, not an increasing political apathy. As such, citizens participate on their own terms, rather than the terms established by the state. The issue with this is that it leaves those who Bang refers to as 'laypeople' excluded from the process, not disinterested. This has been empirically tested by Li and Marsh (2008) in *searching for expert citizens and everyday makers*, through analysis of empirical data from the UK Home Office Citizenship Survey. Their analysis agrees with Bang's key argument that moves away from the dominant political theory idea of the early part of the century that characterises citizens as apathetic to political regimes and processes³³.

Whether the drive for citizen participation is to make up for lack of competencies elsewhere or compensate for lack of resources, it remains integral to the enactment of localism and the democratic legitimacy of local decision-making. However, the uneven distribution of citizen capacity raises concerns about the democratic legitimacy of localism and emphasizes the importance of understanding civil society's ability to carry it out, in the absence of local authority support.

2.3.3 Unelected representatives and claims to represent

Related to the above, a by-product of localism is the proliferation of 'unelected representatives' who lack competencies to carry out legitimate processes and the creation of a new political elite of expert

³³ N.B. due to a decline in voter turnout and party membership, however, Momentum, and Brexit, etc., have also challenged these ideas

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citizens (Bang, 2004, 2005) who have the necessary expertise for exercising power and influence in 'elite networks' (Li & Marsh, 2008, p.16).

One concern is that civil society groups do not know how to deal with such a broad array of ideas or viewpoints. For example, Papadopoulos (2012, p.134) found that:

“Civil society actors involved in cooperative governance may suffer from external accountability deficits. Not only is it well known that the more interests are broad and diffuse, the more obstacles there are to their organisation, but also that even when organisations claim to represent such interests, they are seldom accountable to the populations whose concerns they allegedly voice”.

Mansbridge, when presenting ideas on the theory and practice of participatory democracy for an edited book on empowered participatory governance (2003, p.178) stated:

“The temptations at the higher level are always to promote the interests of the whole even when they differ from the interests of the part, and to impose the vision – and sometimes, consciously or unconsciously, the interests – of the “experts” or of sectors that are more powerful at the higher level, suppressing the experimentation, vision, and interests of the local participants. The temptations at the lower level are to promote the interests of the part even when they differ from the interests of the whole, and to impose the vision – and sometimes, consciously or unconsciously, the interests – of the most active or most powerful at the local level, ignoring the needs of the less powerful, other locales, or the whole.” (Mansbridge, 2003, p.178)

Mendonça (2008, p.119) introduced 'representation' as a dynamic concept, linking to ideas of 'legitimacy' and the 'claim to represent'. Specifically, he asked if representatives could be 'legitimate' in the absence of, first, a clear mechanism of authorisation such as an election, and second no institution of accountability, and a clear sense of who they should be accountable to.

In other words, the question of how or under what conditions civil society groups may make the legitimate claim to represent is unclear. If the temptation for civil society groups at the local or community level is to promote the interests of minority groups or their most active members they should be understood as an interest group, often operating from outside of, and at times against the various committees and levels of governance within local authority³⁴. This is integral to the way civil society groups act to protect the interests of their community, who are “alienated from a political system which does not allow them an ... effective voice” (Li & Marsh, 2008, p.248). It is also suggested that civil society groups do not represent individuals, rather they *act in defence* of ideas, interests, and

³⁴ Civil society is supposed to be independent of government (e.g., mitigating risk of co-optation).

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values, in specific spheres of participatory decision-making (Mendonça, 2008, p.121). There is an underlying idea here that civil society represents certain ideas and interests in empowered arenas amplifying voices from citizens or acting in their defence in decision-making spheres. As such, it is the role of civil society to act as conduits for matters of shared concern in the communities they make claims to represent, through which—it is argued—they build their legitimacy. As Mendonça (2008, p.128) has indicated, civil society, as unelected representatives, build legitimacy through “the public exchange of arguments in different discursive arenas.”

To encapsulate this section so far, governments do not have the political will, nor the resources or capacity, to train or tutor civil society to replace services and engagement activities (that promote citizen involvement and participation) they no longer have the capacity to carry out themselves. In addition, national and local governments may rely on citizen participation to make up for their deficiencies and localism relies on civil society to be conduits of this participation. Civil society's relationship with government is also dependent upon the extent of ‘coupling’ (see Hendriks, 2016) that goes on, which in turn depends on the way the group functions (against or with the state), and achieves democratic legitimacy through whose interests it seeks to represent (most active in the community, or need of less powerful). These deficiencies of localism on the ground are likely to lead to situations where citizens lose faith in localism to work for their communities, or for those in civil society who claim to represent their interests. This leads to a lack of engagement in the process that causes an emphasis on the paternalistic nature of localism (see 2.3.5) augmented by no clear connection between engagement and action (see 2.3.4).

2.3.4 Links between engagement and action

Studies have found that very few proposals gleaned from participatory processes are acted upon by local authorities, and instead, ideas are “cherry-picked” to suit existing policy plans (Font et al., 2018). This represents a ‘disconnect’ between empowered and public arenas. A symptom of which is that citizens experience a ‘participation gap’ (Acik, 2013), where their engagement in localism does not lead to expected outcomes. This is often referred to as a missing feedback loop (Jacobs, 2010), and it is linked to longer term disenfranchisement with political processes. Krantz (2003, p.234) through

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the lens of neighbourhood planning practices, stated that the damaging effects of poor immediate consequences, may have an undesired effect on future work between civil society and citizens:

“While the outcomes of these interactions between ordinary citizens and city staff “experts” have immediate consequences for how democratic the resulting neighbourhood plans are, they may also have important implications for the long-term impact of the NSC program on civil society, and thus for the dynamic of further reform.”

Chambers stated that Habermas’s ideas of the ‘feedback loop’ is flawed because existing elites—government officials or expert citizens—have control over the agenda and allow ordinary citizens a minimal role, and their role in such processes does not require any engagement: “epistemic elites come up with the agendas, ideas, and policy positions and democratic publics ratify or repudiate the agendas but do not generate or really engage with them” (Chambers, 2017, p.266).

In this section so far, I have outlined criticisms of the idea of localism and the ideologies of localist politics that localism embodies. They have been a lack of skills by those in new roles, a lack of support and political will from government, and crises of legitimacy caused by a lack of feedback and accountability. Finally, to develop the context and criticism of localism further, I will investigate the critique of localist governance as a form of soft paternalism.

2.3.5 Governmentality and governing through

Brownill suggested that localism, as an ideological device, has come from an attempt to ‘govern *through* community’ (by which political problems and their solutions may be framed in particular ‘localist’ ways), and where the local is a place where experiments in ‘better government’ are carried out in a national context of “cultural and political fragmentation” (2017, p.20) of society in England. This criticism of localism where it is presented as a form of ‘soft paternalism’ shifts the focus to political power structures, linked to the concept of *Governmentality* (Lemke, 2002; Foucault, 1978). Foucault explained governmentality as manipulation of power wherein government can force its will, enacted through the actions of citizens, through the design of engagement opportunities, and by shaping the nature and timing of engagements. For example, neighbourhood planning has been criticised for creating a top-down form of coercion disguised as grassroots, in order to gain support or ‘consent’ for previously contentious policies. They are accused of using the impression of being community-led, while “creating a ‘virtuous circle’ where communities ‘consent to development

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because they feel ownership and can integrate it into a vision” (Brownill, 2017, p.31). In other words, the ultimate aim of government is to achieve pre-determined outcomes (see Moir & Leyshon, 2013, p.1006) through a soft-paternalist approach: “public actors often need to include policy-takers [or ordinary citizens] as co-producers of binding decisions in order to generate the identification with decisions that is necessary for acquiescence and compliance” (Papadopoulos, 2012, p.133).

The participatory forms of policymaking that characterise localism, are driven by an agenda that seeks (on the surface at least) to make governance processes and administrative bodies more open, inclusive, and accountable, by making citizen participation more direct. However, the ideological or intellectual roots of such forms of participation differ in how they are eventually enacted. It should not be taken for granted that citizens’ viewpoints and feedback on consultation have any binding policy effect, or indeed that it can succeed without the political will.

“Politically, the attempt to transfer power to fora in which “ordinary people” have influence usually means taking power away from those that both have it and also possess the ability to resist such changes.” (Abers, 2003, p.202)

Localism presents diverse and conflicting possibilities while having different political and actual meanings. While it is important to understand localism as complex and fluid, rather than a set of political dichotomies (Brownill, 2017, p.21) an awareness of the wider political factors is just as important to understanding the internal weaknesses and deficiencies. This is particularly relevant when taking an approach that seeks to build the capacity for localism. In the next section, in order to show how technologies might help foster the conditions for localism, I give a brief introduction of ‘civic technology’ and ‘public design’ that has the aim of supporting civil society.

2.4 Technologies for civil society

Many issues, such as the gap between engagement and action, and lack of skills and resources in civil society are framed as problems that can be overcome by the use of digital technology (Gigler, Bailur, et al., 2014). In this section, I introduce civically engaged technology design (see Balestrini, Rogers, et al., 2015), outlining what I mean when I refer to ‘civic technology’ and how this relates to particular forms of civic engagement. In particular, I discuss civic technology that is characterised by a focus on supporting civil society groups in instances of localism related to local place-based policymaking and decision-making around the allocation of community funds.

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I will start by providing some examples of this form of civic technology scholarship, loosely defined as “the design and use of technology to support both formal and informal aspects of government and public services” (Boehner & DiSalvo, 2016, p.2970). These emerging landscapes for HCI research, that I have characterised previously as a ‘civic turn’, typically require extensive working with and within communities (Taylor et al., 2013; e.g. Le Dantec & Fox, 2015), and often come laden with ideals around supporting new forms of democracy and participation in civic life. Furthermore, it involves placing greater emphasis not on just designing sociotechnical systems to collect public opinion on matters of concern, but to design systems *for* citizens, civil society groups and local government to illicit views in their communities.

2.4.1 Civically engaged technology design

Within social computing and design fields such as HCI and CSCW³⁵, there is a flourishing interest in the configuration of sociotechnical systems to support civic engagement and community action, as well as an increased focus upon developing digital platforms for community decision-making. Alongside studying the role of technology in relation to issues of civic importance, there has been increased attention paid to conducting in-the-wild studies of systems in community and civic contexts (Le Dantec, 2012; Taylor et al., 2013). Going back over 15 years, projects such as *Civic Nexus* (Merkel et al., 2004) and *CiVicinity* (Carroll et al., 2011), and the work conducted at the Civic Media Lab at MIT³⁶, have highlighted the benefits of closely collaborating with communities to create systems that connect local actors and transform practices in voluntary and community sector organisations.

This form of collaborative work is typified by an awareness of the importance of handing over sociotechnical platforms to community organisations to oversee the process of decision-making at a local level. A common characteristic of the ‘civic turn in HCI’ (Johnson et al., 2016, p.2946) is that it is founded and reliant upon collaboration with public authorities (Le Dantec et al., 2015; Golsteijn et al., 2016; Gallacher et al., 2015), community social change organisations (Vlachokyriakos, Comber, et

³⁵ As described in the introduction chapter Human-Computer-Interaction (HCI), also known as CHI and CSCW (computer-supported collaborative working), which also covers ‘social computing’ are academic and practice-based disciplines of computing science with influences and contributions from psychology, social sciences, and design.

³⁶ <https://www.media.mit.edu/groups/civic-media/overview/>

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al., 2014; Asad & Le Dantec, 2015), campaign groups (Crivellaro et al., 2014), or charities (Le Dantec, 2012).

There has been a growing tendency to deal with issues to do with civic action, engagement, and participation, particularly around gathering feedback at a civil society level. For example, research in this domain has examined how social media services are appropriated for information sharing (Starbird & Palen, 2012), activism (Lee & Hsieh, 2013), protest (Veenstra et al., 2014), action (Hansen et al., 2014), civic discourse (Crivellaro et al., 2014), and political deliberation (Porwol et al., 2013; Semaan, Faucett, S. P. Robertson, et al., 2015; Semaan et al., 2014). Away from online platforms, or the re-appropriation of existing social media, there is a field of study into the potential for in-situ technology in public spaces to increase civic engagement. For example, ongoing work in Oulu, Finland, has articulated the value of interactive public displays in engaging members of the public in commentating and giving feedback on planning proposals (Goncalves et al., 2013). In Lancashire, England as part of the *Bespoke* project, Taylor et al. (2012) deployed their *Viewpoint* technology as a simple means for local government representatives to set questions for community members to respond to. The ambition here was to promote wider participation, and a sense of increased efficacy, for community residents. Koeman, Kalnikaité, and Rogers (2015) took an approach to distribute voting boxes at multiple locations around communities in the South of England. Again, like Taylor et al. (2012), they harness lightweight forms of engagement to promote participation in opinion sharing—however, they took a further step in visualising the results on a location-by-location basis, as well as in a ‘neutral’ ground, which promoted wider discussion around the contrasts and divisions within the community itself. Further work in this space has included the creation of tools to help communities express local matters of concern through a voting platform (Vlachokyriakos, Comber, et al., 2014).

Other designs of voting technologies to facilitate local consultation and decision-making include *Factful* (Kim et al., 2015), an online platform to support discussion and fact-checking related to a participatory budgeting exercise. Examples of the use of technology interventions in town planning (sometimes known as e-planning) and management include an online platform that enables citizens to view live planning proposals on a map and encourages public comments through a questionnaire

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on key issues (see Saad-Sulonen, 2012). Mobile technologies include a mobile app for cyclists to ‘crowdsource’ route data to support planning using their personal devices in Atlanta, USA (Le Dantec et al., 2015). Similarly, a smartwatch app that utilises GPS location data to prompt users when they are in an area with active planning proposals to request comments (Wilson et al., 2019), and a project using digital technologies to support citizen participation in town planning in Helsinki using public displays (Saad-Sulonen & Horelli, 2010). Each of these examples aims, through different means, to enable more inclusion in localist decision-making, through purpose-built online platforms that encourage engagement, or mobile technologies, but both require an active visit to a website or downloading an app to a personal device, which relies on an existing amount of social capital (Asad & Le Dantec, 2017; Moss & Coleman, 2013). Alternatively, examples such as the screen in Helsinki that in-situ interventions such as public screens, can be successful but studies have found where devices are placed in a community have an impact on the extent to which they enable inclusion and more participation (Johnson et al., 2016; Goncalves et al., 2014), and that there may be no motivation to interact (Hosio et al., 2014).

A different type of civic technology work prioritises a methodology that favours modes of participation that permit more experience-based and dialogue-based interactions. As civic technology work has made this shift to move beyond aggregative modes of democracy there has been a recognition and welcome focus on the importance of face-to-face community engagement (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018c; Asad et al., 2017). For example, the *Jigsaudio* project enabled participants to draw an image and record a voice message related to how they felt about their local environment (Wilson & Tewdwr-Jones, 2019). Similarly, a technology-enabled object that travelled around a community and asked participants to share memories (Crivellaro et al., 2016), and walking tours (Crivellaro et al., 2015). These studies draw on ideas bound up in the epistemology of *everyday politics* (Boyte, 2004) in that they seek to find the value in the knowledge that exists before the work begins through understanding the existing practices and values of the people and organisations in situ, and that the framework of understanding new knowledge to be done through the process of collaboratively carrying out the research.

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Many studies in HCI report on the ethical and methodological issues of creating projects that sustain beyond researcher involvement (Balestrini et al., 2014; Chamberlain et al., 2013; Saad-Sulonen et al., 2012). For example, Le Dantec and Fox (2015) the importance of creating *productive* partnerships and highlight the different subjective perspectives the researcher must occupy throughout the research project (researcher, confidant, collaborator), and the need to develop research plans together with community partners, as ways to “work to keep the work going”. Agid and Chin (2019, p.86) proposed that the value of such studies “must be understood in terms of how it generates capacity to make [*ways of being that challenge the way things are*] and how that is made useful by people on the ground.”

2.4.2 Engaging with data in civically engaged technology design

Within the growing field of civically engaged technology design outlined above, there is an increased interest in the ways data have become more central to decision-making processes (Wolff et al., 2016) and an effort on building data literacy (D’Ignazio & Bhargava, 2015; Bhargava et al., 2016; Matthews, 2016). *Datascape* (Wolff et al., 2017) was designed to support citizens to better understand the relationship between data, and the environment from which it is derived. Through a board game prototype, the authors explore the idea of using a map as a filter for open data sources, enabling users to access data by location. In the prototype of the game developed for the *Datascape* study, participants are asked to choose where they would like data to be collected based on a perception of ‘missing’ data. There is a long tradition in participatory design research and co-design around participatory games as a means of engaging citizens and facilitating collaboration (Brandt & Messeter, 2004; Eriksen et al., 2014), and in civil society contexts, such as urban planning consultation (Poplin, 2012). There are several examples of structured games for consultation, both online and offline. Despite varying in context, effectiveness, and purpose, all share common characteristics and share a common genealogy.

Short of designing game mechanics, several studies focus on making engagement with data more interactive. These include *VoxBox*, (Golsteijn et al., 2015) where a sociotechnical system prompted participants to submit responses to traditional questionnaires through a series of tangible surfaces such as levers, buttons, and other more playful interactions, where responses to questions

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engendered the movement of items in the physical space. Similarly, the *Sens-us* project (Golsteijn et al., 2016) reported on a design artefact where submitting traditional responses to UK Census questions was made playful using actual switches, buttons, and dials embedded in a colourful console.

There have also been studies developed to induce curiosity around big data, for example, the *Datacatcher* study (Gaver et al., 2016) deployed hand-held devices GPS-enabled devices that streamed messages about the area they were in. The *Data-in-Place* project (Taylor et al., 2015; Lindley et al., 2017) looked to investigate the meaningfulness and contextual significance of data with a combination of digital technologies in residents' homes and shared spaces in one street. Researchers in this space have more recently explored the idea of a 'data commons', for example, Balestrini *et al* (2017) investigated a shared resource for citizen-generated data, where sensors were deployed in homes of residents to tackle issues of damp housing in a UK city.

The research and design studies in HCI like those highlighted above have shaped engagement with data around citizen sense-making, citizens gathering data, new ways of generating, and collecting data about the environment and places where people live. The studies I have discussed in this section have an agenda that focuses on supporting citizens to understand their own environment and sense of place where participation is configured through an engagement with data. Much of this work is motivated by a hypothesis that citizens fail to recognise the utility of available data. In an investigation into this issue, Erete *et al* (2016) led calls to support relationships and facilitate communication between civil society groups and experts in data science, where data is used to support citizens' everyday experiences they share through practices of storytelling. In the reporting of their study on data collected by cyclists using a purpose-built mobile application, Le Dantec et al. identify the roles that that data played at an urban planning event. The findings from this study suggest that data was viewed "not as a means of fact-collection, but a space for discourse, discussion, and argumentation." (Le Dantec et al., 2015, p.1726). Although privileging data, the studies above show an increasing tendency to support dialogue, which shows an understanding of the issues of civil society that are sensitive to both the language of evidence-based policymaking, but also the

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importance of storytelling and dialogue in supporting meaningful citizen involvement in policymaking processes.

This idea that discourse and discussion play a more central role in policymaking echoes the position of political science scholars who call for more ‘deliberative’ processes, particularly more contemporary pluralistic conceptions of deliberative democracy theory that aim to foster everyday talk (Hauser, 1998; Mansbridge, 1999) as part of policymaking (Fischer, 2006; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Mansbridge, 2012). Dryzek (1990) has argued that policymaking is better understood as “a process of deliberation which weighs beliefs, principles, and actions under conditions of multiple frames for the interpretation and evaluation of the world.” In terms of technological design, what it means to participate in the socio-politics of data and place, as articulated by Crivellaro *et al* (2016, p.2967), who challenged civic technology and sociotechnical system designers to:

“look for ways to keep the disparate stories going, to enable spaces where heterogeneous actors and collectives can be related to one another, not to cement oppositional grounds (us and them, etc.), but where partial accounts and differences can be recognised, understood as assets, and worked with.”

Civic technology design that supports community organisations often works at the interface between citizens, civil society and government, and investigates the tensions at play when ordinary people interface with data and formal policymaking processes. As the civic turn in HCI has matured it has developed an increased recognition of the importance of opening up policymaking processes to be more inclusive while maintaining a meaningful link between the form of participation and consequence of participating. As technology designers have worked more closely with civil society and citizens, they have become more sensitive to their existing practices and their place in a wider socio-political system. With this comes a greater need for understanding the benefits of different forms of participation in terms of process, structure, and outcome (Goold *et al.*, 2012), and a greater reflection on the role of civil society in wider socio-political processes and within collaborative research studies.

2.5 Reflecting on the contextual considerations

There are two broad areas of concern outlined in the criticisms of localism I have set out in this chapter. The availability of scarce resources and the distribution of power. But how these might be better supported by technology design is unclear. In understanding the role of civil society, it is important to understand, in the first instance, how they function within a wider socio-political system. The challenges in the context of localism are, as follows:

1. A lack of support and guidance from local authority;
2. An uneven distribution of experience and skills;
3. The danger of creating a new political elite, that does not address issues of inclusion in local democracy;
4. No clear connection between engagement and action, as well as no way of translating consultative outputs into actions for policymakers;
5. And, a lack of engagement in the process that causes an emphasis on the paternalistic nature of localism.

It is clear that the civic technologies designed in this space, that I outline and describe in this chapter, do not always specifically address the key challenges in localist consultation practices. Civic technology designers have a growing tendency to work in the space left by a lack of government support and the lack of experience with civil society actors. However, this opens up questions on the role of researchers and civil society actors, bringing into play ideas of the expert citizen and the creation of a new political elite. There are also questions about the ability of civic technology to deal with issues around the link between engagement and action. Despite civic technology design finding some success in increasing engagement by innovating the mode of participation, the challenge that civil society is faced with around finding resources for action from engagement activities around decision-making and policy delivery remains.

There are some examples like those outlined above that address the challenge of fostering and gathering of more qualitative data, but very few that focus on making resources for action this form of data collection. Some civic technology has favoured deliberation and reason-giving. This aligns

with the principles of localism which states that ordinary people should be able to exchange reasons and views in the making of local-level policies on fund allocation and land-use in their community.

2.6 Summary of chapter

In this chapter, I have outlined the socio-political ecosystem which has cultivated the circumstances in which my studies are more accurately understood, and a response to this in the fields of civic technology and civically engaged sociodigital system design. Through this chapter, I have highlighted the barriers to meaningful community engagement factoring in both external and internal factors. Civil society groups and actors are through their own political will, or macro and micro socio-political influences, putting themselves forward, and being asked to take on the role of bureaucrats in emerging structures of governance at the micro-political level of civic participation. The participation of ordinary citizens in policymaking at this level is a legal requisite, with important ideological implications. Civil society groups have the will but not the means, or the means but a misdirected will, depending on what argument one takes. Civic participation in such policy devices and civic initiatives is not only vital to their immediate success, but a means by which, if done carefully, the 'public spiritedness' integral to localism is engendered, but this is frustrated in at least two ways. First, there is too much for the few 'expert citizens' to handle on their own with a growing burden, and second, the legitimacy of the new political elite is at best a waste of resources that could be better spent providing front line services, and at worst very dangerous to democracy. As such my thesis is that localism will live or die by the ability it has, through its existing expert citizen actors in civil society to engender a wider and more deliberative engagement with citizens.

In the following chapter, I build on and reframe the discussion of civil society to show how dialogic forms of decision-making are debated within the context of the wider public sphere. Concepts from the deliberative democracy literature indicate, for example, that dialogic forms of decision-making may provide the structure and consistency that is lacking, as well as providing a new way for ordinary citizens to engage in consultation processes in a mode that is potentially more inclusive and meaningful. However "specifying and crafting appropriate roles for participation" as Fung has suggested, "demands forward-looking empirical sensitivity and theoretical imagination" (2006, p.74). In that spirit, chapter 3 will set out a space for innovation in deliberative democracy research

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within the context of civil society, identifying opportunities into how deliberative democracy works for localism and what deliberative democracy needs to work at the local level, informed by a conceptual framework for *deliberative localism*, which informs my case studies, in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

3

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CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I introduced the socio-political context of my research and implications for localism in practice, focusing on policies that have helped shape civic life in the UK, and the tradition of participatory governance to which the localism legislation is ideologically aligned. I then provided a discussion of the literature on civically engaged technology design (Balestrini, Rogers, et al., 2015) and the paradigmatic shift that has caused a trend toward handing over civic technologies to civil society organisations to ‘do it for themselves’ (Johnson et al., 2016). I identified five broad problem areas for localism in practice³⁷, and investigated the ways in which civic technology fits into this space. In this chapter, in order to set out a design space in which to investigate the issues and concerns of localism. I shape my discussion of the deliberative democracy literature around the ways

³⁷ A lack of support and guidance from local authority, lack of experience in engaging publics in consultation, a lack of engagement in the process that causes an emphasis on the paternalistic nature of localism, the danger of creating a new political elite, and no clear way of translating consultative outputs into actions for policy-makers.

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that it responds to the criticisms of localism I have highlighted in chapter 2. In doing so, I link the issues from localist discourse to wider debates about the public sphere.

To achieve this association and establish a brief background to the salient social and political theory, the chapter moves forward in the following steps; (1) I discuss first how deliberative theory is important as a way of providing process and structure to localism. I present this as a means to provide the basis for political legitimacy in a way that responds to the issues caused by the dearth of resources and experience in civil society and a lack of local authority support; (2) I illuminate why this is relevant to debates around the creation of new political elites; (3) I outline the potential benefits of deliberation in political processes from theory and evidence gathered through empirical research and various deliberative experiments. In doing so, I set out how the normative theory of deliberative democracy may relate to issues around paternalism in localism; (4), I highlight the importance of the deliberative systems literature in responding to the prevailing conditions of localism and by emphasising the work around transmission (Boswell et al., 2016; Dodge, 2010), in particular, between empowered and public spaces, emphasising how these ideas relate to concerns from localism about a lack of connection between engagement and action. This part of the chapter will end with criticisms of the systemic turn paradigm – emphasising problems with evaluation and discussing alternative ideas for the deliberative system and the role of minipublics; and finally, (5) in order to establish a design space, I will return to the limitations, issues, and blind spots of deliberative democracy research, with a focus on how technology design might better respond to these.

3.2 Deliberative democracy

In its simplest form, deliberative democracy ‘describes an association³⁸ whose affairs are governed by the public deliberation of its members’ (Cohen, 1989). In deliberative scholarship, and in practice, deliberative democracy is most often defined as a form of political engagement built on *informed* deliberation, *mutual respect*, and the *willingness to hear others’ views* in the quest for establishing the best outcomes for a given community, even when those views represent *competing claims*.

³⁸ In the normative idealist form, it entails ordinary people, and professional politicians arriving at decisions together, through the deliberation of issues.

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As it has matured, the field of deliberative democracy research has established widely accepted normative principles of (1) *rationality* where the better argument is championed above simply aggregating existing preferences; (2) *reciprocity* where participants give others' reasons that are broadly accessible and acceptable; and (3) *reasonableness*, as a willingness to respectfully listen to and reflect upon competing validity claims (Wallace, 2002) and even change preferences based on the acceptance of competing claims (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004)³⁹. To these ends, Kuyper (2018, p.2) has indicated that participants in deliberation 'should': 1) foster inclusive and egalitarian interactions; 2) sincerely link reasons to arguments; 3) orient claims toward the common good; 4) frame arguments in terms of reasons acceptable to others; 5) show respect, and; 6) be prepared to change their mind when confronted by 'better arguments'.

I will approach each of these virtues in turn, framed by the issues and concerns of localism. The first virtue relates to being informed. In the context of localism, this could mean informed citizens, informed voters, or informed decision-makers. Effective deliberation relies on informed citizens who then come together to deliberate topics and, in light of new information or understanding, in some conceptions at least, arrive at a consensus. In reality, they may still have to vote, but the idea is that what the vote will then represent is an enlarged, post-deliberative point of view. Decision-making outputs in deliberative democracy can involve 'working agreements' and agreement on a 'course of action', without necessarily finding agreement on the reasons for it (Curato et al., 2017). This has been framed as an inclusion issue with concerns raised from empirical research that has stated that having to rely on reason and solidarity "usually means that very few 'ordinary people' will be motivated to participate" (Abers, 2003, p.206).

The second condition of deliberation is that it is built on mutual respect. Since the association is meant to be a democratic association, it is assumed that members have equal political standing and hence the right to participate equally in the deliberations. This involves mutual recognition of the legitimacy of others' claims, values, and preferences, as expressed (Dryzek et al., 2006). It is related to localism in the way it relates to issues of inclusion and ensuring that all voices are heard.

³⁹ Deliberative quality results from upholding these norms so decisions are better informed (an *epistemic function*), include more voices (a *democratic function*), and further reciprocity (an *ethical function*) (see Mansbridge et al. 2012).

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Third, there is the virtue that those views and claims are justified. In other words, participants "determine reflectively not only preferences, but also the reasons that support them" (Manin, 1987 from Curato et al. 2017). It "affirms the need to justify decisions made by citizens and their representatives" and more importantly the need for those with political views that have implications for the lives of others to justify this view to them (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004, p.3). This relates to justification and reasonableness but is also bound up in ideas of 'evidence' or at least being able to give good reasons on how something affects other people.

Finally, it is an important condition of deliberative democracy that competing views are heard. Decision-making in deliberative democracy is not simply concerned with measuring or registering citizens' existing preferences, but with discursive processes of preference formation involving listening, justification of position and demonstration of mutual respect, where citizens reflect upon, evaluate and perhaps revise initial preferences (Steenbergen et al., 2003). This challenges the formation of issues publics and the role of self-interest from localism. Political philosopher Iris Young (1997, p.403) explained: "Confrontation with different perspectives, interests, and cultural meanings teaches individuals the partiality of their own, and reveals to them their own experience as perspectival." This has connotations for localism in the participatory and organisational aspects of citizenship and 'public-spiritedness' reflected in localism ideologies.

3.2.1 Why deliberate?

Broadly speaking, Fishkin (2009) summarises that the effects of deliberation are two-fold. Those on the participants themselves, and those on the broader world through public dialogue or actual policy. In addition, I identify, from the literature the reasons related to the benefits for civil society of having recognised processes and structures, how this relates to inclusion and the ways this may mitigate against the creation of new elites and soft paternalism through localism initiatives, creating a link between engagement and action.

3.2.1.1 Impact on participants

Participation in public deliberation is argued to have a positive impact on the attitudes and behaviours of citizens who participate, including better civic efficacy, ability to be more reflective

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(Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Gastil et al., 2008) and move toward better judgement on issues (see Table 3-1).

1. Informing policy	— <i>identifying the public's values and concerns helps policymakers make better decisions. When problems are close to citizens, they can give their insights and then "offer critical pieces of the puzzle."</i>
2. Legitimising policy	— <i>when citizens engage authentically in decision-making processes, it is easier to legitimize outcomes.</i>
3. Frees up a paralyzed policy process	— <i>citizen participation can help loosen political deadlocks.</i>
4. Helps citizens move toward "public judgment" on specific issues	— <i>with deliberation citizens can mature their opinions about discussed issues. They then understand the issues better. Recognition of political manipulation is more frequent.</i>
5. Promoting a healthier democratic culture and capable citizenry	— <i>deliberative public engagement helps democratic culture and practice. It provides new methods for democratic action.</i>
6. Building community	— <i>with public deliberation it is possible to build stronger communities.</i>
7. Catalysing civic action	— <i>deliberation facilitates civic action. Deliberation creates more active citizens.</i>

Table 3-1. Reasons for discursive democratic engagement (From Friedman 2006, pp.17–19)

Participants in public deliberation are more likely to discuss politics with people in their social network, develop an increased issue-specific political knowledge and attention to political matters beyond the issue under discussion (Neblo, 2015, p.150). As a result of such interactions, public deliberation can cause changes in policy attitude and voting intention, as well as changes in knowledge or in 'civic capacity' (see Table 3-1). Changes in civic capacity refer to attributes that support citizens in solving collective problems. Finally, with public deliberation, it is also argued that it is possible to build stronger communities (see Table 3-1). This can arise through sharing reasons for viewpoints. "When people share their reasons in a dialogue about public problems, everyone is sensitised to broader public concerns. They come to understand the interests and values at stake from the perspective of other members of the community" (Fishkin, 2009, p.141).

3.2.1.2 Impact on society (or, the citizens who do not directly participate)

Beyond the benefits for those who directly participate there are expected positive outcomes for the citizenry in the way that it has a positive impact on the policy process by informing policy. Put simply, identifying the public's values and concerns help policymakers make better decisions (see Table 3-1). The impacts on policy are varied, and sometimes 'indirect' (Curato et al., 2017). For example, it is argued that deliberative public engagement helps promote a healthier democratic culture and more capable citizenry who are in a better position to solve complex problems particularly in local contexts, which has implications for the pathologies of localism, as identified in the previous chapter. When problems are close to citizens, they can give their insights and offer "critical pieces of the puzzle" (Friedman, 2006, p.17), in doing so it can free up a paralysed policy process as citizen participation can help loosen political deadlocks (see Table 3-1).

It can also encourage a more open democratic culture and practice, that is not just an ideological mandate, but rather [...] necessary to solve some of the complex problems that [society] now face" (Hearn et al., 2011). For example, research interviews suggested public deliberation as part of Participatory Budgeting in Brazil encouraged new ideas and topics for debate, particularly when representatives of underrepresented groups are present and that such representatives "helped to change the nature of the conversation by bringing new issues to the table" as well as helping participants "expand the foundations of their decisions (their interests and preferences), improve their decision-making capabilities and gain a better understanding of the way city government works and how to have an impact on it" (Hernández-medina, 2010, p.524). In a way functioning as a 'school for democracy' (see Pontual, 2000 in Hernández-medina, 2010), which in itself has benefits for those embarking on decision-making processes by helping to narrow the gap between politics and citizens, by making citizens "more aware of the complexities of real-world politics and become more trusting of political decision-making processes and outcomes" (Bächtiger & Wegmann, 2014, p.125). When citizens engage authentically in decision-making processes, it is easier to 'legitimise' outcomes (Friedman, 2006, p.18). This has a dual effect, both for the policymakers who carry out the outcomes of the deliberation when the *form* that participation takes is seen as legitimate by key stakeholders (Bryson et al., 2013; Hendriks, 2009). In addition, those who did not deliberate can accept those who did participate as legitimate proxies (Warren & Gastil, 2015, p.569). Issues of legitimacy are at the

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forefront of the deliberative debate. I will discuss these in the remainder of this section of the chapter, starting with how this is highlighted through criticisms and shortcomings of deliberative democracy in practice, as well as how these debates play out in wider theoretical debates about the public sphere, and the nature of genuine deliberation.

In summary, the micro-level impacts are at the individual level where the dominant literature tests this by measuring a range of variables alongside a control group. Recent work has shown that the theoretical predictions of deliberation, when measured at the individual level are apparent⁴⁰. At the meso-level, literature has focused on the effect on groups or collectives, proponents of which argue that “inclusive and authentic deliberation will lead to deeper understanding and appreciation of the views of others” (see Kuyper, 2018, pp.8–9). At the macro-level participants in public deliberation are more willing to participate more in the future, showing an increased rate of civic competence (Grönlund et al., 2010). Finally, at the macro-level, the instrumental changes fostered by deliberation are said to include support for political decisions due to an increased sense of perceived legitimacy (Kuyper, 2018; Traber, 2013). There is a diverse range of theories and interpretations of deliberative theory, categorised by Bächtiger *et al.* (2010) as type I and type II deliberation⁴¹. I will now briefly outline these two camps, not to show particular favour over one or the other, but to show lineage to the concepts my research responds to.

3.2.2 Type I and type II deliberation

As I have outlined up to now in this chapter, deliberative democracy is a normative theory and set of evaluative standards to determine the ‘deliberativeness’ of dialogue. This is what we may consider as the classic philosophical tradition of deliberative democracy. Characterised by rationality, in this tradition, emotional discourse such as self-interest and bargaining are antithetical to the ‘common good’ (Mansbridge, 1990, 2008). Type I deliberation is characterised by a focus on the process of deliberation, specifically rational, communicative discourse (1984, 1991, 1994; Wallace, 2002; Habermas, 2006) where the “force of the better argument” prevails. Deliberative democracy research

⁴⁰ This type of experiment is common in what I will describe as type I deliberation below.

⁴¹ Although I would not agree necessarily that there is a need for such contrasts to be drawn between classic and more pluralist conceptions of deliberative democracy, for the sake of the thesis argument I want to make clear that they do exist.

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in this tradition will typically entail assessing the quality of discussion, for example during debates in parliament using an analytical model such as the Discourse Quality Index (DQI) where a score is calculated based on an interpretation of how the unit of analysis (speech) reaches standards, such as consensus building⁴². Importantly, as this example from the index above illustrates, the goal of type I deliberation is usually consensus, in contrast to the characterisation of type II deliberation where the outcome of deliberation is not specified. Type I deliberative democracy attracts criticism for the way it is perceived to be bound up in rules and ideas about what quality deliberation is, much of this is in favour of the educated, men, and those from privileged backgrounds which has led to calls for a relaxing of such ideals, to make deliberative democracy more than a philosophy.

Type I and type II refer more broadly to modes of communication, where an example of type I would be legislators in parliament or judges in court. For example, one of the most prominent archetypal examples of type I offered by Rawls (Rawls, 2017; Saward, 2002) is the Supreme Court in America. All type I examples are characterised by technical discussion and importantly an expectation of 'rationality' or that deliberators speak in terms of political or universal values, and as I spell out in other parts of chapter 3, are criticised for being exclusive. In other words, they would exclude altogether, or create a disadvantage for those without a certain level of education and from privileged backgrounds.

Type II can be characterised by a move away from the idea that people can speak purely in universal values, rather type II characterises deliberative scholarship that allows for emotional language, stories, and jokes, greetings, rhetoric as valid contributions to deliberation. In other words, a more pluralistic and open stance that privileges 'inclusion' and perpetrated by among others, Iris Young (1997, 2000). That is not to say that type II can mitigate universal values, indeed it must always appeal to universal values (Dryzek et al., 2006). An example of this might be a set of deliberative minipublics in Ireland focused on social care policy. On the first day participants, who were social care workers and carers, told stories and shared experiences of the sector. Although this discussion was, as one might imagine, emotional and focused on personal lived experiences they can still be understood as

⁴² Where a score of 0 represents a speaker sticking to the original position, 1 for offering an alternative proposal, and 2 points for a mediating proposal.

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calling to universal values. Indeed, on the second day when the participants were asked to focus on recommendations for the adult social care sector, the organisers report that the discussion moved to more universal values, such as dignity, respect, and equality⁴³.

A defining pillar of type I deliberation is the construction of a 'two-track' model of legitimacy by Jürgen Habermas, in *Between Facts and Norms* (2002). Although others deter from this stance, Habermas' two-track model prescribes that opinions formed in the informal public sphere are translated into law in the formal public sphere by mediating institutions like minipublics, the news media and social networks, and automatically by virtue of the fact that decision-makers are themselves participants in discursive contestation (Parkinson, 2012). Interpretations of what occurs in each track is inconsistent across scholars of deliberative democracy, but on some level, the first track is at the very least where issues are raised and as such are put on the agenda, or at most where 'opinion formation' occurs through deliberation in the public sphere, where affected publics deliberate on how to deal with matters of concern. The resulting opinions are then transmitted to the second track. This second track is "comprised of binding assemblies of 'will formation' where laws are debated and passed" (Boswell et al., 2016, p.264), or in Habermas' (2002) own terms where the 'filtering of public opinion' occurs. Dryzek (2009) expands and re-iterates this model as to include the transfer of opinion from informal, open spheres (public spaces) to the more formal, closed institutions (empowered spaces)⁴⁴.

There have been attempts to broaden definitions of what 'counts' as deliberation, typically on grounds of inclusion, or as a conceptual move to create a 'working theory' of deliberative democracy (Mansbridge, 2008; Sunstein, 2015). Perhaps under criticism from social scientists (see Neblo, 2015, p.9) the normative ideals of 'deliberative democracy' have been forced to manifest into instances of 'democratic deliberation' (Chambers, 2009).

⁴³ see <https://citizensassemblyni.org/>.

⁴⁴ This model relates to power and the authoritative power of elected representatives and policymakers. Authoritative power, in the form of policymakers, is essential to democratic legitimacy, as it strengthens the claims, concerns, and preferences of participating citizens, by providing them with a platform, through their authority to act on outcomes from deliberation (Kuyper, 2012).

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In *Deliberative Democracy or Democratic Deliberation*, Mansbridge (2008, p.255) moves away from Habermasian rationality-model of deliberative democracy to a “neo-pluralist” approach to highlight and justify claims that civic dialogue, neither in its claims nor in its methods, is designed to “meet the classic philosophical requirements for legitimate democratic decision.” For example, expressing self-interest in this instrumental approach is permitted as individuals can both express viewpoints in order to advance their own and collective ends, however with constraint and according to the ‘norms of justification’ (Fung, 2008). This means that at a critical point, for example, a vote, participants decide on what is the common good above their own self-interest, based on the reason-giving that supports the common good (see Fung & Wright, 2003a).

This move from ‘conceptualisation to operationalisation’ requires a way of assessing the discrete elements and overall quality of a deliberative event (Knobloch et al., 2013) away from high-level abstract concepts of normative theory. Mansbridge (2008, p.261) identified the difference between legitimacy that derives from ‘process’ and legitimacy that can be derived from legislature as well as providing a tool for thinking about and measuring features of the deliberative process, which ‘contribute to legitimacy’. First, by arguing for a more plural approach to legitimacy, as well as ‘reason’, ‘the common good’ and indeed, deliberation. For example, “reason-giving”, not “reason,” and legitimacy, not conceptualised as a dichotomy, but as a spectrum (2008, p.263).

In summary, there is a philosophical tradition in deliberative democracy and a move to a more pluralist ‘working theory’ of deliberative democracy, which I have set out as two broad ‘ideal-types’. However, in practice most examples of deliberative democracy in practice fall somewhere between. Much of the deliberative theory discussed in academic writing finds its evidence in the study of minipublics. Not only are minipublics the most widely practiced form of deliberative democracy – when decision-makers think of deliberative democracy, but they also tend to do so in terms of deliberative minipublics rather than deliberative democracy writ-large as a public sphere wide activity (Niemeyer, 2012) – they are often considered as a simple way of testing the grander claims of deliberative theory – acting, in many ways, as an ‘important touchstone’ (Niemeyer, 2011) for theorists. In the following section, I will outline examples of minipublics illustrating the key ideas from deliberative democracy.

3.2.3 Processes and predicaments of minipublics

The minipublic is based on the notion of the *minipopulus* (Dahl, 2017), which is the idea you can get a representative group of the population in a room, sometimes they resemble town hall meetings, and sometimes they function as “purposeful associations” (Fung, 2003, 2008) carefully designed, organised and facilitated by deliberative democracy researchers but also by various civil society and community-focused organisations, and have become a service offered by consultancies.

	CITIZENS JURIES	PLANNING CELLS	CONSENSUS CONFERENCES	DELIBERATIVE POLLS	CITIZENS ASSEMBLIES
NUMBER OF CITIZENS	12 to 26	100 to 500	10 to 18	100 to 500	103 to 160
DURATION (DAYS)	4-5	4-5	7-8	2-3	20-30
SELECTION METHOD	Random selection	Random selection	Random & self-selection	Random selection	Random & self-selection
ACTIVITIES	Information deliberation	Information deliberation	Information deliberation	Information deliberation	Information consultation deliberation
RESULT	Collective position report	Survey opinions & collective position report	Collective position report	Survey opinions	Detailed policy recommendation
DESTINATION OF PROPOSAL	Sponsor & mass media	Sponsor & mass media	Parliament & mass media	Sponsor & mass media	Government & public referendum

Table 3-2. Key features of mini publics (abridged from Elstub 2014)

Typically, the most prominent minipublic designs can be characterised as Deliberative Polls, Citizen Juries, Citizen Assemblies, Consensus Conferences, and Planning Cells (see Table 3-2), each understood to have benefits and costs (Fung, 2003, 2008). Neblo (2015) draws on empirical evidence to assert that minipublics have a role in ‘creating connections between actors’ that reduces the “distortion” that comes from highly interested non-representatives⁴⁵, in effect filling gaps between constituents and their elected representatives. Fung (2008) gives three reasons why those interested in improving the public sphere should take note of deliberative minipublics: 1) they are the most promising constructive efforts for civic engagement; 2) this may be a way of re-thinking the idea of effective large-scale public sphere reform, and; 3) examining minipublics will help generate

⁴⁵ The term ‘highly interested non-representatives’ is used by Neblo to describe self-interested vocal citizens or those in civil society groups.

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knowledge and understanding of institutional design. However, the democratic credentials of minipublics have been met with some critique under normative assessment, are resource-heavy through recruitment, providing materials, and providing facilitation, and often fail to have a meaningful outcome. In the following I discuss the limitations and challenges for minipublics in terms of inclusion, resources, and consequence.

3.2.3.1 Inclusion

Inclusion is most simply a question of who is included in a minipublic and why. For example, in *Deliberating across Deep Divides*, the authors use the example of a Northern Ireland Deliberative Poll (Luskin et al., 2014) where only adults with children of school age were included. On one hand, this seems appropriate, yet it excludes people who may have children in the future. There are related issues associated with the potential minor representation of a viewpoint in the wider populous that is vital to the discussion. For example, the inclusion of minority groups in an issue that affects them.

Another element of inclusion relates to the opportunities to take part and barriers to do so⁴⁶.

McLaverty (2014) has questioned whether institutionalised deliberative democracy will always benefit those with the required literacy and education to participate, and be unfavourable for those with other time-based responsibilities⁴⁷. An equality of opportunity cannot rely on formal rules alone, as some people will talk a lot, and others will talk very little, even when they have the opportunity to. O’Flynn & Sood (2014) found that Deliberative Polls, even with the use of trained facilitators, fail to facilitate *effective participation*⁴⁸. Fishkin outlines a problem with large group sizes as another reason why minipublics may fail to facilitate effective participation, being that each person has 'too small a share in the dialogue to be an effective participant' (2009, p.38). Some issues of inclusion are interrelated to issues of resources. For example, the time allocated to public deliberation and the provision of trained facilitators.

⁴⁶ In the seminal book *Inclusion and Democracy*, Iris Young refers to such factors as *external inclusion*.

⁴⁷ This is an important element to my research, in which deliberation of the political variety, is framed as something which can promote equality, and give marginalised groups and individuals a voice in political decision-making processes.

⁴⁸ In relation to external inclusion, these factors constitute *internal inclusion*.

3.2.3.2 Resources

Fishkin (2009, p.13) defines 'opinion' that has not been tested by a process of deliberation with others with contrasting views, as "raw" opinion, in contrast to the "refined" opinion that results from having been tested by the consideration of competing claims. This is used to distinguish between institutions, through dividing democratic institutions into those designed to express a refined public opinion (from deliberative processes) and those that merely reflect it in its raw form (Fishkin, 2009, p.14), meaning outputs for public opinion can mean the difference between the filter and the mirror (Fishkin, 2009, p.15). In creating the 'filter' the organisers of Deliberative Polls, like many other minipublic designs, brief participants, but there is a disparity linked to education about how much people are informed. Briefing materials, handed to participants before the deliberative session, are not the panacea, and many participants do not even read them. A strong criticism is indicative of the idea that the ability to engage effectively in public debate is not equal to the extent that it will inevitably favour those who are educated and rhetorically gifted, thus reinforcing and creating new forms of unequally distributed power. However, Cohen and Rogers (2003, pp.244–245) have argued these objections underestimate the "capacity of deliberative bodies and political officials to recognise and alleviate it, should it arise".

Luskin *et al.*, (2014) refers to the process of 'being informed' as *enlightened understanding*, and on a review that focused on Deliberative Polls, in the absence of commonality measures from other minipublics conclude that the list of things that a person is likely to need to know in order to make an informed judgement is long and daunting. Fishkin (2009, p.2) echoes Friedman's (2006, p.24) point concerning the time and energy of citizens as a concern when stating it is difficult to motivate citizens in mass society to become informed. He adds that "the public" has fewer "opinions" than is reported in polls, and that those with differing opinions require work and the correct social context in order to hold a mutually respectful conversation. A limitation, which although identified in 2009, seems startlingly poignant now, is the vulnerability of public opinion to manipulation, and the increasing range of channels and means by which this is possible.

However, what counts as 'well informed' can be challenged or re-assessed here, for example in line with notions of *every politics* (Boyte, 2004), participants in deliberation may inform the policymaking

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process by providing information they hold as a by-product of their daily lives and experiences of living in a particular community. However, deliberation “makes a considerable difference and the uninformed do not simply reach the same result” as elected representatives (Fishkin, 2009, p.8). One issue with this ideal is that “from the perspective of citizens, the combination of technical and political complexity often means that few have the capacities necessary to relate their interests to policies” (Mackenzie & Warren, 2012, p.103). In addition, dividing the electorate into “issues publics” (Fishkin, 2009, p.9), could lead to a pattern of “minority rule” (Dahl, 1956), as this would not approximate the views of the wider electorate⁴⁹.

3.2.3.3 Consequence

This leads to a range of issues around the consequences of minipublics. For example, O’Flynn & Sood (2014) refer to *control of the agenda*, which they explained is notoriously difficult for the citizens to secure. As such it is ‘little surprise’ that this does not occur in the minipublics, as noted by Chambers (2017, p.308) in minipublics “the agendas are explicit and often set in advance”.

A strong criticism of minipublics is that they are not decisive, and do not usually result in a binding policy decision (Bächtiger & Wegmann, 2014; Goodin & Dryzek, 2006; Elstub et al., 2018). An inability to scale up, or influence decision-making processes, especially at a national scale, has drawn critique. It is perhaps telling that the endeavour continues to grow, however, among other criticisms, most deliberative events involving citizens struggle to be noticed and taken seriously by relevant decision-making authorities or policy-makers (see McLaverty, 2009; Hendriks, 2016).

Both deliberative and participatory forms of policymaking are driven by an agenda that seeks, on the surface at least, to make governance processes and administrative bodies more open, inclusive, and accountable, often by making citizen participation more direct. However, the ideological or intellectual roots of such forms of participation differ in how they are eventually enacted. It should not be taken for granted that citizens’ viewpoints and feedback on consultation have any policy effect

⁴⁹ Although it should be noted, under the conditions of the deliberative system, issues publics may form part of a thriving deliberative system through, for example, providing a voice to marginalised groups or getting issues on the agenda to be discussed in other parts of the system (see section 3.6).

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(Papadopoulos, 2012, p.131). This is often related to issues of transmission between informal discursive arenas and formal decision-making arenas (Boswell et al., 2016; Hendriks, 2016; Mendonça, 2016).

This gap between engagement and action (Acik, 2013) is compounded by “the institutional ecologies of our existing democratic systems [that] do little to help citizens maximize their scarce cognitive resources, while pushing many into a generalised distrust that leads to disengagement” (Warren & Gastil, 2015, p.567). These issues of a ‘participation gap’ leading to a lack of trust are also explored in civic technology literature around technology interventions and collaborative studies (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018a; e.g. Harding et al., 2015)

There is a need to think about how choices are registered, as a danger exists that the public may end up going along with decisions that are not reflective of each person’s underlying will (Niemeyer 2011). In other words, participants in a minipublic may arrive at a decision that not only fails to reflect their underlying will due to the way opinion-formation changes during the process (see Niemeyer, 2012; Huitema et al., 2007), but the group dynamic may not represent the will of wider society due to internal group dynamics (Barnes et al., 2004; Sunstein, 2008). As such, the consequences of deliberative minipublics may ‘short-change’ the wider public by not representing their views, or simply fail to be taken seriously by those in power.

Furthermore, most public or citizen deliberation fails to be taken seriously by policymakers. “At most public hearings, for example, officials commit to no more than receiving the testimony of participants and considering their views in their own subsequent deliberations” (Fung, 2006, p.68).

The idea of creating a link between engagement and action is bound by the notion of political will of those in power. McLaverty (2014) has asked what guarantees are there that they will abide by the requirements of deliberative democracy in practice. “While politicians and citizens do possess a potential for deliberative action, there are many hindrances for deliberation to ‘scale up’ even if institutions create a ‘space of the possible’ dimension, namely the willingness of politicians to engage in sustained deliberative action” (Bächtiger & Wegmann, 2014, p.131) As such, questions remain over whether deliberative democracy will ever be institutionalised when those in power do not benefit from it, and in fact benefit greatly from 'non-deliberative' democratic processes, in terms of

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power accrued. This mainly concerns a lack of accountability for policy officials and elected representatives, which manifests as the frequent lack of policy impact of deliberative citizen events (Grönlund et al., 2014; Bächtiger & Beste, 2017; Bächtiger & Wegmann, 2014).

In sum, minipublics encapsulate many positive outcomes of deliberative capacity building but may come up short when put under the microscope of normative theory. Challenges remain around the ability of minipublics to scale up at the macro-level, and the resources required to run and participate in minipublics. Deliberative democracy within the micro-level, particularly those toward the type II end of the scale, also draw criticism for their lack of a deliberative outcome. Much of the limitations and spaces for change in deliberative democracy are played out in discussion between the philosophy and the empirical study of deliberative scholarship. In the following section, I will discuss the systemic turn in deliberative democracy scholarship.

3.3 A systemic turn

The systemic turn in deliberative democracy research opens new empirical and conceptual potential, and important to my thesis provides a way of understanding the ideals for a wider public sphere bound up in localism. As discussed in chapter 2, localism depends upon being part of a wider system of communication and information sharing. Ercan and Hendriks (2013) have argued that localism needs to encourage greater democratic and political connectivity between participatory forums and the broader public sphere, as such, taking a systemic approach to understanding localism provides an opportunity to understand how deliberation plays out within civil society.

Neblo (2015, p.49) in *Deliberative Democracy between Theory and Practice* explained that from a conceptual perspective “distributing deliberative functions throughout the larger democratic system [reincorporates] the broader terrain of politics into one theory.” Dryzek (2010) adds to this argument stating deliberative ‘virtues’ *should* be distributed across different locations, and deliberation itself should be dispersed in different locations. Goodin (2006), has argued that each component of a deliberative system, need not have all of the qualities, as long as they can be recognised across the system as a whole. In the systemic approach the ‘entire burden of decision-making and legitimacy’ is not simply the responsibility of one forum or institution, rather it is distributed among several arenas and administrative bodies (Mansbridge et al., 2012). The system is presented as a set of distinct parts,

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which are to some extent, interdependent, and make up a complex whole – where some parts make up for weaknesses, and some parts do what others cannot do as well. In other words, the ‘systemic turn’ posits a ‘division of labour’ (Parkinson, 2012; Mansbridge, 2012) taking the pressure to achieve all deliberative standards off any single site of deliberation.

Finally, when Mansbridge adopted the term ‘deliberative system’ one outcome was to incorporate her ideas on ‘everyday talk’, in an attempt to broaden what is accepted as deliberation beyond the strict formal settings of authentic deliberation in formal political forums. Everyday talk (which occurs in informal arenas) is instrumental to the deliberative systems approach as it allows for the evolution of perspectives that might permeate (formal arenas) in other parts of the system, meaning through such discussions “ordinary citizens make significant ‘bottom-up’ contributions to the frames and understandings that political activists and leaders assign political issues, and that structure publicly binding decisions in our formal governmental institutions” (Conover & Searing, 2005, p.281).

Criteria for inclusion in a deliberative system are that the discussions in question involve ‘matters of common concern’ and have a ‘practical orientation’ (Mansbridge et al., 2012). By a practical orientation, the authors mean the discussion is not purely theoretical but involves an element of the question ‘what is to be done?’ Mansbridge *et al* (2012) do not include all talk that happens in society, but only that talk that contributes to a specific argument, debate, or decision. In this paradigm, non-deliberative acts, such as protest and rhetoric, can enhance the system overall by encouraging better deliberation in other parts of the system (Boswell, 2013; Dryzek, 2010b; Dodge, 2014). For example, one partisan campaign message may be the subject of debate and answers in another part of the system. The role of the expert, protest, and pressure, and the political media are also discussed as being tractable. For example, the media having an *epistemic* role as a transmitter of knowledge and ideas. Finally, protest and pressure, in a system, can be understood as *democratic*, allowing new viewpoints to ‘be heard’

Dryzek (2010) outlines the role of rhetoric (oft excluded by deliberate democrats) in a systemic approach to deliberative democracy. He focuses on the contestation of discourse in public spaces and the extent to which these are recognised in empowered spaces. In other words, how everyday talk may be recognised as political discourse and have meaning in more formal political forums. For

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example, he highlights, how irony, jokes, and metaphors may be necessary to 'penetrate misconceptions of those who are systematically deceived' or enable issues from the margins to get on the agenda⁵⁰, both of which have a democratic (inclusive) function. Listing other examples, including Hauser (e.g. 1998), he claims that rhetoric is not, as it is often treated in deliberative scholarship, the opposite of deliberation, and is something that we should 'come to grips with'. Rhetoric has a place in a deliberative system, as it can bridge gaps across dispersed actors, of different dispositions. This does, however, come with a health warning, with recognition of the potentially hazardous misuse, or undesirable use, of rhetoric. We can distinguish 'healthy rhetoric' (Spragens, 1990) from rhetoric that disguises a particular interest, over a general one. Dryzek's key standards for the inclusion of rhetoric, from an alternative text, is that it is non-coercive and that it induces reflection on the part of the audience. He also draws a distinction between bonding (energising people of a similar disposition) and bridging (finding commonalities between parts of people's representation) rhetoric, stating that bridging is more important to deliberative systems.

In sum, the benefits of the systemic turn for deliberative theory are a division of labour and a softening of what is accepted as 'deliberative' in the wider system. However, this softening of standards is met with criticisms regarding concept-stretching, transmission, and evaluation.

3.3.1 Criticisms of the systemic turn

The systemic turn in deliberative democracy refers to understanding distinguishable, differentiated, and interdependent parts as one, complex whole. It requires some parts of the system to do parts that others cannot. Different types of talk are accepted, and non-deliberative acts, such as protest or rhetoric may be accepted. However, this leaves questions such as how claims and ideas are transmitted from one part of the system to another, and how one evaluates this.

3.3.1.1 De-coupling from ideals and legitimacy

Dryzek (2011), despite being a leading advocate of pluralist conceptions of deliberative democracy has warned of the dangers of being too forgiving of non-deliberative actions, as such making too much of what is not deliberative seem functional for the overall system. Owen and Smith (2015)

⁵⁰ For example, 'memes' on social media have become a widespread form of vernacular communication that has been used to highlight and sustain public consciousness of issues and challenge dominant narratives through humour.

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claim that the systemic turn points to deliberative democracy losing its normative, idealist element as a political ideal. They warn that there is a risk that something may be judged as deliberative where absolutely no deliberation has taken place. They argue that a ‘distributed’ approach is highly problematic, in that it does not privilege deliberative actions and practices, and although it does not actively exclude them, neither does it require them to be acknowledged as a deliberative system.

Parkinson (2012, p.166) identified a danger in opening up what can be accepted as ‘modes of expression’ (political talk). “Perhaps, having opened up normative room for many different sites and modes of expression, systems come to be dominated by perspectives that are narrowly constructed, unreflective or self-interested.” Johnston Conover *et al* (2002) differentiate between the rational ‘reason giving’ of formal deliberation, against the unstructured, spontaneous, and without clear goals characteristics of everyday talk. Findings show that ‘everyday talk’ falls short of the deliberative ideals⁵¹, and that social motives are more important than imagined. Conover & Searing (2005, p.40) conclude that although everyday talk cannot stand up to deliberative ideals, it does promote the principle conditions of deliberative democracy (helps citizens to work out their preferences and try out justifications for them), and leads to citizens developing the autonomy that is required for effective citizenship. Political discussion can transform into deliberative talk, when a ‘deliberative stance’ (Curato *et al.*, 2017; Owen & Smith, 2015) is taken up by participants. That means if participants behave in the correct manner toward each other, and as such the correct conditions must exist.

3.3.1.2 Transmission

Deliberative systems literature, in particular, points to the need for empirical evidence into the transmission, or connectivity, between separate parts of a deliberative system (Cinalli & O’Flynn, 2014). It is theorised that civil society may be the ‘inducers of connectivity’ in the systemic understanding (Mendonça, 2016). In the opening chapter of their seminal book on deliberative systems, Mansbridge *et al.* consider the degree of coupling between the various sites of deliberation⁵²

⁵¹ Minipublic design attempts to get around this issue through institutional design; deliberative systems approach seeks to get around it by thinking about the quality of deliberation overall across the system.

⁵². For example, a public or private space where everyday talk happens and a formal decision-making arena such as a local council meeting.

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within a deliberative system to be a crucial issue. “[A] defect in the deliberative system arises when the parts of the system become decoupled from one another in the sense that good reasons arising from one part fail to penetrate the others.” (Mansbridge et al., 2012, p.23). In this case, it seems reasonable to advocate a tighter coupling of participatory devices (such as community engagement and consultation in the name of localism) to the formal decision-making circuit (where binding decisions and policy are formed). This tighter coupling allows better transmission between public (deliberative) and empowered (decision-making) arenas (Dryzek, 2010a, p.11).

Boswell, Hendriks, and Ercan (2016) examined ‘transmission’ between different sites in the system by investigating the transmission of claims and ideas across sites, and in particular between informal sites of public deliberation and formal (empowered) sites of decision-making. They suggested that the nascent literature on deliberative systems points to at least three key mechanisms of transmission, each involving interplay between individual agency and institutional structure (Boswell et al., 2016, p.265). They are: (1) citizens pursue matters of common concern through existing democratic mechanisms; (2) a democratic innovation with an emphasis on ‘coupling’ (see Hendriks, 2016); and (3) through ‘discourses’ as set out by Dryzek⁵³ (2009). An example of good coupling is the PB process in Pôrto Alegre, Brazil, where part of the budget is more or less directly decided by ‘ordinary’ citizens, who thus become *de facto* co-decision-makers (Papadopoulos, 2012, p.147).

A deliberative system (with transmission between parts of the system) is not *a priori*-ready, but it must be politically generated and sustained through inducers of connectivity (Mendonça, 2013, p.18). This criticism of the deliberative systems draws focus back to the public sphere, and the ways in which parts of a system connect. Starting with Goodin & Dryzek’s (2006, p.496) framing of a ‘macro-political uptake of minipublics’ where they attempt to illustrate the impact on actual policy resulting from minipublics. They asked, “given the limitations of a purely micro deliberative system (potentially elitist and exclusive) or a purely macro deliberative system (potentially populist and undemocratic), what would a more integrated system look like?”

⁵³ This discursive approach shares ideas with rhetorical or ‘storytelling’ approaches to ‘transmission’ and the role of civil society (see Dodge)

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Based on the two-track model of Habermas (see 3.2.2), the conceptualisation of an integrated system put forward by Hendriks (2006) situates micro deliberation within macro deliberation, with the addition of 'discursive spheres'. This integrated system, which accommodates the diversity of civil society, should be encouraged, by studying deliberation in a variety of spaces. Hendricks' suggestion is that "different public spheres emerge out of civil society, often in response to failures in the economy and state" (2006, p.489) stating that some, like interest groups, are more organised than others, such as less formal social movements, where civil society is made up of citizens who engage with the state as individuals when they can.

3.3.1.3 Evaluation

There are also issues with evaluation and measuring impact or effects. These issues come to the surface in the literature in terms of guiding the empirical work and practice and important to my approach, where to intervene or how to foster the qualities of deliberation. Owen and Smith (2015) have raised questions around the ability of researchers to evaluate the practices and effects of non-deliberative acts on other parts of the system, making the claim that deliberative systems theorists only conduct an evaluation at a systemic level, and not on each individual component; in doing so they may be ignoring the 'deliberative wrongs' present in non-deliberative practices⁵⁴. They offer two alternative systems of evaluation. The first essentially calls for the introduction of a 'deliberative stance', which is a minimum criterion for a discursive, social act to be considered as deliberation. This framework maintains that everyday talk and public spaces are acceptable. The second, in which they discuss deliberation as one mechanism within a democratic system with a function to achieve some, but not all elements of democracy. Then the systemic question becomes one of the roles of deliberation within democratic systems, not whether democratic systems are deliberative.

In the remainder of this chapter, I outline three broad areas of focus for a design space and highlight the rationale for each. The first discusses building capacities of civil society. The second part refers to the creation of structures and processes, which civil society actors and the practitioners of localism may use to structure their practices of public engagement and consultation and discusses the ways in

⁵⁴ For example, in only looking at whether the system is deliberative as a whole, in terms of mutual respect, we may ignore individual instances of exclusion.

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which inclusion may be addressed as a design space with attention paid to the fostering and utility of deliberative talk, as a design challenge and the creation of deliberative spaces. This leads to the third part where I outline how the connections between deliberative spaces and decision-making spaces can be better linked through the ways deliberative talk and deliberative spaces are configured, and the way this can be related to the role of civil society actors and their responsibilities as highly interested non-representatives (Bächtiger et al., 2010).

3.4 Finding a design space

In computing and design fields, many have attempted to take characteristics of deliberative fora to online environments (Konwinski & Zaiss, 2006) or through mobile technology (Nelmarkka, 2008) and presented this as the answer to creating more open and inclusive forms of political deliberation. Often, the concept behind such systems is the idea that engagement in the deliberation can occur across time and space, allowing participants to take part at will on their own terms. However, it has been highlighted that online platforms tend to polarise views (Rainie & Smith, 2012; Moss & Coleman, 2013), or become ‘echo chambers’ (Kim et al., 2015) of political viewpoints and claims. Technology is too often looked toward as the panacea for the shortcomings of deliberative democracy without any clear or strong examples (Albrecht, 2006; Baek et al., 2012; Effing et al., 2011).

Within the deliberative systems conception, one of the ideas that my thesis is reliant upon is the concept of deliberative talk. This builds on ideas of Hauser’s *vernacular rhetoric* (see Hauser, 1998), *everyday talk in the deliberative system* (Mansbridge, 1999), and *everyday political talk* (Kim & Kim, 2008; Conover & Searing, 2005). This idea that everyday utterances, complaints, jokes and gossip should ‘count’ as contributions to politics is conceptually aligned with the idea of *everyday politics* (Boyte, 2004). The idea of deliberative talk recognises that talk must meet a ‘minimum standard’ (see Knobloch et al., 2013; Moss & Coleman, 2013) but this is not restricted by hard line rationality or bound up in strict processes. Hauser calls for a *deliberative inclusion* that gives “more than a voice to [a] point of view’ and for ‘reasons acceptable to that point of view, even if they fall outside of the mainstream, [to count] as legitimate contributions to the deliberative process” (Hauser & Benoit-Barne, 2002).

3.4.1 Building capacities

The first purpose of the design space is one of *capacity-building* for civil society. This is important both to the problem area that motivated the research and the central point of my thesis regarding the potential of deliberative policymaking.

Curato & Böker (2016) set a research agenda for linking to the wider deliberative system creating a framework around the idea of three normative criteria; ‘deliberation-making’, ‘legitimacy-seeking’, and ‘capacity building’ (see also Curato, 2015). In particular, a design space should focus on building the capacity of civil society. “In general, institutional design for participatory governance must not only create deliberative settings, it must do so in a manner that strengthens civil society” (Krantz, 2003, p.234). This rationale for design is built on the idea that current services carried out by civil society should not be replaced, rather technology or investigations into it should seek to support existing infrastructures (see also Strohmayer et al., 2018), and focus on the interactions around technologies, not the technology *per se* (Le Dantec & Edwards, 2008; Le Dantec & Fox, 2015).

3.4.2 Creating deliberative spaces

The concept of deliberative spaces as I discuss them come from a lineage sociology research and scholarship on the power dynamics and qualities of ‘space’ (Gaventa, 2006; Wright, 2012; Kersting, 2014; Oldenburg, 2001), and builds on the idea of *information grounds* (Fisher & Naumer, 2006; Fisher et al., 2004). In particular, *information grounds* are characterised as spaces in which information sharing is a by-product of social interaction. Building on this, the idea of a deliberative space calls on the notion that deliberative talk can happen as a by-product of carefully designed interactions around matters of concern. The design of such spaces can take into account power dynamics, the mechanics of interactions, and promoting the values of deliberation. Much research has investigated the qualities of place as an affecter of human behaviour. Further, conceptions of claimed and unclaimed spaces (Aiyar, 2010; Gaventa, 2004), formal or empowered and informal arenas, and of course the public sphere, which “comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body” (Habermas, 1991; Habermas et al., 1974, p.49), and space as linked to power relations (Gaventa, 2006) have shaped the idea of the deliberative space, which also builds on the idea of the minipublic.

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Certain forums can and should be designed in ways that promote a systemic approach or using a minipublics approach, as it is more straightforward than redesigning formal political institutions. A similar approach is adopted by Setälä (2017) with a focus on integrating minipublics into existing representative decision-making processes. Despite most of the innovations in minipublics design, such as deliberative polls, preceding the deliberative turn in political theory (Niemeyer, 2011), the idea of the minipublic is often coupled with the systemic turn in deliberative democracy. For example, it has been argued that the deliberative system concept is improved when the minipublic is integrated as part of wider institutional design:

“A deliberative system which has institutionalised mini-publics in policy formation can, for example, socialise citizens to civic virtues that are deliberative in orientation, hence, perform an educative and capacity-building function. Minipublics can also prompt further citizen engagement by reaching out to broader publics and setting deliberative rather than confrontational terms of public discourse. These are small but not insignificant contributions mini-publics can make in building capacities of the broader system.” (Curato & Böker, 2016)

Minipublics can affect decision-making in three ways: influencing decision-makers, building solutions through referendums, and by actually making binding decisions, when they are constituted as empowered institutions, or *minidemoi* (Mendonça, 2013, pp.18–19). However, “even methods of facilitating the public voice that have no official standing can take on considerable legitimacy when care is taken about the appropriate conditions” (Fishkin, 2009, p.35). I will outline how these ‘appropriate conditions’ may be designed in the context of localism and civil society-level decision-making as a space for design. A deliberative space must first meet the condition of inclusion. “The institutional design of participatory spaces has a significant impact on who participates and on which terms” (Ercan & Hendriks, 2013), as well as permitting and encouraging participants to take a ‘deliberative stance’. One of Fishkin’s deliberative qualities is to achieve a “safe public space” where participants are encouraged and enabled to see *merits of the reasons*, rather than seek *prestige or social standing* (Fishkin, 2009, p.40). Through intervening in public (and semi-public) spaces with sociodigital artefacts, the aim is to construct and encourage behaviours reflective of the deliberative standards identified in the conceptual framework. Rather than producing a deliberative space through the enforcement of procedures, I explore the idea of a deliberative space through the creation of what could loosely be defined as game mechanics. The purpose of creating deliberative spaces in

this context is, in one sense to create artefacts in order to investigate further the role of the civil society organisations involved in devolved decision-making in the specific contexts outlined in the research study. I must seek to promote everyday political talk as both ‘evidence’ of the will of publics and citizens, as well as presenting it as ‘data’ that can be used as a legitimate form of policymaking.

3.4.3 Linking deliberative and empowered spaces

The deliberative space should also be designed in such a way that it is sympathetic to issues of transmission and connection to empowered spaces. A focus on civil society requires viewing deliberative forums within the broader political landscape. It recognises that claims-making activities are not confined to discrete forums, but include other spheres (Dodge, 2010). Felicetti, *et al.* (2016) warned that by focusing on the internal qualities of minipublics, not their contribution to the deliberative system, there is a danger that small groups of citizens in minipublics are disconnected from the ‘real world’ of politics, in a manner that undermines their legitimacy (see also Parkinson, 2012).

Deliberative systems should include, ‘roughly speaking’, four main arenas:
(1) the binding decisions of the state (both in the law itself and its implementation);
(2) activities directly related to preparing for those binding decisions;
(3) informal talk related to those binding decisions;
(4) arenas of formal or informal talk related to decisions on issues of common concern that are not intended for binding decisions by the state.

Table 3-3 Four arenas of deliberative systems.

There is a concern among political theorists and scholars that participation in deliberative fora will cause a greater aversion to, and frustration with politics in instances where there is no consequence to policy (see McLaverty, 2014)⁵⁵. In some respects, design should be concerned with leveraging the potential for digital technology and deliberative design, to bring ‘talk’ from the fourth arena (see

⁵⁵ However, Neblo et al (2010) found participants had a positive experience and were especially appreciative of the process. Further, it is shown to be an engagement method in its own right for example in having an educative effect (see Knobloch & Gastil, 2015).

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Table 3-3) into the formal political decision-making spaces, as a means of democratising policymaking processes and achieving deliberative inclusion. This involves both the creation of structures and processes and the creation of links between arenas in the system, in particular between public spaces where talk occurs and empowered spaces where decisions are made.

In summary, I have set out a design space as a means by which to identify a design-led research approach to *capacity-building* in civil society. In doing so, I have focused on the need to establish procedures that lead to *legitimacy-seeking* and discussed the creation of ‘deliberative spaces’ that are normatively aligned to *deliberation-making* criteria while being first, inclusive (through what are accepted as contributions) and second, designed to enable and facilitate transmission between parts of the system.

3.5 Summary of chapter

This chapter started with an introduction to deliberative democracy theory as a means to conceptualise and theorise the pathologies of localism identified in chapter 2, and to bring such issues and dilemmas into wider debates about the public sphere and the role of civil society. I outlined the reasons to deliberate based on certain democratic values that first align with those from localism, and second, have answers for the critics of localism. I also drew focus on the criticisms of deliberative democracy and reviewed how the theory of deliberative democracy has evolved, focusing specifically on notions of the deliberative system (Elstub et al., 2016; Mansbridge, 2012; Mansbridge et al., 2012) and discursive democracy (Dryzek, 2003) as instances of a move toward *deliberative inclusion* (Setälä, 2014; Ganuza & Francés, 2012; McLaverty, 2014).

Later in the chapter, I set out a design space in response to and informed by challenges in the context of localism that I set out and reflect on in chapter 2. Specifically, I discuss how deliberative theory can respond to a lack of resources, experiences, and local authority support through the design of deliberative spaces, offering political legitimacy and engagement methods built on democratic ideals (*process*); second, the lack of inclusion and danger of creating new unequal power structures in society may be approached through a lens of ‘deliberative inclusion’ through the creation of space and by accepting informal contributions (*structure*); and as a final point, I have outlined concepts from deliberative democracy scholarship as a way of responding to the issues of a lack of connection

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between engagement and action by introducing the idea of the deliberative system and emphasising the work around transmission and translation between empowered and public spaces (*outcome*).

The shaping of a design space is predicated on a conceptual understanding of Mansbridge's (1999; 2012) notion of the deliberative system. The issues and concerns from the contextual considerations I outline in chapter 2 are well reported on, but in order to establish a design space I required a way of bringing the high-level concepts from deliberative theory with the empirical work in HCI, and issues identified in the localism literature. In the next chapter, I will set out my methodological response to this challenge in the construction and situating of a conceptual framework. After that, I will give an overview of the methods and procedures I followed, before providing an overview of the site-specific contexts for the following case study chapters.

4

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METHODOLOGICAL AND PROCEDURAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I introduced and discussed the salient concepts and dominant contextual factors from the prevailing literature that have motivated my methodological approach. In response to the issues and limitations, I have attempted to sketch out a ‘space’ for design-led research, in which the relationship between theory and practice is enacted through an approach to qualitative enquiry. The nature of such an approach is the subject of this chapter. In what follows I will provide justification for and situate the conceptual framework that underpins and shapes the research. The chapter then moves forward in the following steps: first, an explanation and justification of the epistemological influences and methodological considerations, where I outline the research approach and method of enquiry. I then situate my conceptual framework and outline the research procedures. Following this, I provide an overview of each case study context, before a note on the developing nature of the direction of the research based on moments of insight throughout the work.

4.2 Epistemological and practical influences

The development of my approach to the research comes from a social constructivist paradigm.

Creswell (2013) explained this worldview as one in which individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and develop meanings that are varied and multiple. This leads the researcher to "look for the complexity of views rather than narrow meanings into a few categories or ideas" (Creswell & Poth, 2013, p.24). This approach to enquiry aims to hear and rely upon participants' views of the situation, as they are negotiated socially and historically.

In this dissertation, I attempt to represent my understanding of the changing role of civil society as a subset of a culture-sharing group (Creswell & Poth, 2013) through understanding the experiences of the civil society actors involved in my studies.

“The entire culture-sharing group in ethnography may be considered a case, but the intention in ethnography is to determine how the culture works rather than to develop an in-depth understanding of a single case or explore a single issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration” (Creswell & Poth, 2013).

Within my studies, I take a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach informed by ethnographic methods. Ethnography should be understood not as the study of a culture but the study of the social behaviours of an identifiable group of people (Wolcott, 2008). As such, I report on both my own experiences, interpretations and importantly, the experiences of my participants. Maxwell has argued that “to be genuinely qualitative research, a study must take account of the theories and perspectives of those studied, rather than relying entirely on established theoretical views or the researcher’s perspective” (Maxwell, 2013, p.53). I adopted a participatory action research methodology to get ‘close to participants’ as this is integral to the social constructivist approach that focuses on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of participants. The constructivist worldview is manifest in the grounded theory perspective of Charmaz (2006, p.15), who in addition to a ‘closeness to participants’ and an understanding their lived experiences, highlighted the importance of the reflexivity of the researcher:

“Researchers and research participants make assumptions about what is real, possess stocks of knowledge, occupy social statuses, and pursue purposes that influence their respective views and actions in the presence of each other. Nevertheless, researchers, not participants, are obligated to be reflexive about what we bring to the scene, what we see, and how we see it.”

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While I tried to get as close to participants as I could through periods of participant-observation and ‘hanging around’ (Whyte, 1995) in each of the case study sites, I considered myself as a researcher first and foremost, and the institution I represented to participants as impactful to the way participants behaved and chose to express their views. I wish also to highlight that in learning how the groups carry out their activities in their ordinary pursuits, I came with my own ideas and assumptions about what good practice should be. These ideas about the best way to do things were framed by the concepts from deliberative systems theory as I further explain in the following sections of this chapter. However, I also expected and welcomed the civil society groups, my collaborators, and citizen-participants to question me and my assumptions, and part of the way the conceptual framework functioned was to give us a shared language about their practices and how to make changes. As such, the research may be classed as theory-driven, but I focus on the way this is experienced by the research participants.

4.3 Approach to qualitative enquiry

The essence of my adopted research perspective is that participants set the agenda. Within my approach, a conceptual framework acted as a ‘point of departure’ for my initial participant-observations and fieldwork, which then became the basis for discussion and planning with my collaborators. The framework then was used by my participants as they framed their problem, which they drove the research agenda forward. “As with any design, the development of a methodology starts with an opportunity or need” (Blandford & Green, 2008). My participants each had an agenda to increase engagement in their policy and decision-making practices and make changes to their processes, and as I will explain within the case study chapters, in different ways had a desire to learn about new approaches to increasing participation in democratic processes they were responsible for, as I had the ambition to investigate the way deliberation might be supported in these settings.

PAR shares a principle of Participatory Design approaches, which attempts to ‘democratise’ the process of design through the participation of those affected by the design (Björgvinsson et al., 2010), but is not limited to design. I took a PAR approach to data collection and design that draws on methods familiar to digital civics researchers, such as participant-observational fieldwork and working closely with community partners (Hayes, 2011; Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Kemmis et al.,

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2014; Baum et al., 2006; Reason & Bradbury, 2007). The method is suitable to my methodological approach as it positions the researcher as ‘friendly outsider’ (Lindtner et al., 2011), not distant from the research like some traditional sociological methods. Finally, participants are framed as “active collaborators” (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998).

Importantly for my research and the contextual and conceptual considerations outlined in the previous chapters, PAR is focused on local solutions to local problems (Hayes, 2011). As well as the data collected through the deployment of sociodigital artefacts and interventions, my method involves carrying out fieldwork and qualitative interviews with the stakeholders involved in organising and implementing the consultation activities and events, the citizens who use them, and the civil society organisations who inform the design and configuration of sociodigital interventions.

In addition to the ethical and epistemological aspects of PAR, this approach suits my methodology as it enables the harnessing of expertise and capabilities of participants, not only ensuring a more effective uptake of engagement and participation in communities (essential to deliberative democracy ideals) but to better understand specific contexts to better design effective interventions. As such, this approach encompasses the idea of learning through action and should stem from the notion that interventions should be designed and implemented democratically and inclusively (Hayes, 2011). Practitioners of PAR, for example, may ask participants to “help with designing questions, collecting the data, analysing it and shaping the final report of the research” (Creswell & Poth, 2013, p.27) ensuring the ‘voice’ of participants is heard throughout.

In this recipe for participatory action research, the sociodigital intervention I outline through the case studies and the development of this technology in context functions as the ‘action’ in the research. The design and deployment of digital technologies are not considered neutral in the processes, and I endeavour to highlight my impact and biases throughout the studies presented, both to the participants and their lived experiences that I (critically) represent through my analytical interpretations framed by concepts from deliberative systems literature. This particular approach to qualitative analysis is built on the idea that the voice of the participant is able to influence the research.

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Finally, my method of qualitative analysis follows the ‘recipe’ for *reflexive* thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke et al., 2015), as set out by Braun and Clarke. In particular, I followed their six-step process whereby I familiarised myself with the transcript and field note data by reading through and listening to the audio, then assigned preliminary 'descriptive' codes to the data before constructing themes from the data by looking for patterns in the descriptive codes. I then reviewed themes and defined them, and finally relating the findings to the research questions or design goals, which becomes the basis of a report of selected abstracts and quotes from the data corpus. In the following, I introduce how this constructivist influence took shape through a participatory action research approach to digital civics research.

4.3.1 A digital civics approach

Digital civics (Olivier & Wright, 2015) is a research approach and methodology for a nascent body of work which “aims to support citizens becoming agents of democracy with and through technologies and in dialogue with the institutions that can actualize public will” (Vlachokyriakos et al., 2016, p.1097). My approach to digital civics research is characterised by a commitment to grassroots, bottom-up approaches to civic engagement with the support of sociotechnical digital artefacts (or, sociodigital artefacts). My research is typical in how it responds to this commitment by having a focus on supporting communication between citizens, community groups, and local councils. The research approach is dedicated to working with communities on-the-ground, not writing about theoretical ideals, but finding an application of academic theory through a participatory action research methodology (see section 4.3). I characterise a digital civics research agenda by endeavours that are sensitised to a strong civic purpose (going beyond the epistemology of e-democracy, e-participation, and e-voting research), driven by collaboration, and prefaced on the interaction between people, groups of people, and sociodigital systems in ways that create opportunities for co-production for researchers and civil society partners. With this comes points of consideration that are symptomatic of social research, and ethical questions that come to design researchers, unique pressures, responsibilities, and a focus on the role of researcher, which I will illustrate through existing research that I consider to be archetypes of the digital civics canon.

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First, there are issues of sustainability and timeframes. In *Leaving the Wild* (Taylor et al., 2013) and in other reflective articles on the nature of sustained community engagement projects (Balestrini et al., 2014; e.g. Balestrini, Tomas Diez, et al., 2015), digital civics researchers have highlighted issues and concerns about the impact of interventions at the end of studies, the benefits of interventions for community members, and responsibilities around the robustness and resilience of digital technologies, as well as the skills and resources within communities to maintain projects (Kensing & Blomberg, 1998; Erete & Burrell, 2017). These issues impact upon my research in the ways that developing prototype digital technologies through collaborating with civil society groups brought to the fore concerns around expectation management. Both civil society, and indeed local authorities, are increasingly seeking collaborations with University departments, specifically those departments who specialise in the field of computing. It could be argued (as I found in my studies), that they are increasingly dependent on universities, who generally have access to better resources, in terms of time, equipment, and expertise. However, with this comes a pressure on the researcher to ‘deliver’ or do more, and in some cases achieve ‘product’ quality work that is robust (see Garbett, 2017). The time taken for development cycles, invisible ‘work before the work’ (Le Dantec & Fox, 2015; Suchman, 2007a) and lead-in times did not always fit with the timescales of collaborators in the settings where research takes place. With this came a need to manage expectations of both civil society groups, and the wider community of citizens with sensitivity to their motivations, practices, and reputation.

Second, as is the case with action research at large, there is a tension between research and community action, blurring the line between researcher and activist. This comes to light and is articulated in the ‘transformative framework’ of PAR, described as helping people investigate reality, in order to change it (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998, p.21). Here, the researcher advances an action agenda for change, often starting from an important issue or stance about the problems in society, such as the need for empowerment, and aims to create a political debate and discussion so that change will occur. The values of the researcher, the institution, the civil society groups, and individual actors, and those of the other key stakeholders involved, are inevitably present. Real-life situations and collaborations with groups, organisations, and individuals (that are the cornerstone of

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digital civics research), mean that often the researcher has to put in a lot of effort and intervene in ways they maybe did not want or expect to, in order to keep the project moving forward (Le Dantec & Fox, 2015). For example, in my studies, there were occasions when I intervened to invite local councillors to community events and workshops, and this alongside the presence of University researchers may have added to the expectations of residents who participated in our workshops. Residents' expectations often did not match with what the civil society groups could reasonably achieve or had the will to deliver. In most cases across my studies, the invitation to residents to participate was handled by my collaborators, giving me little influence over this, and other aspects of the expectation management of participants. With this comes questions around research ethics. The work and research I report on in takes place in communities that are in national statistics as places of multiple deprivation, and as a result, research fatigue and low efficacy are also factors in these contexts. They are connected and intertwined, inexorably.

In the next section, I will describe how the conceptual framework enables my approach to digital civics, before setting out how I operationalised this methodology through fieldwork, design and deployment, and evaluation.

4.4 Situating the conceptual framework

Miles and Huberman (1994, p.18) defined a conceptual framework as a visual or written product that “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them.” Maxwell (2013, p.39) extends this to include ‘actual ideas and beliefs’ the researcher holds about the studied phenomenon. In my research, this is understood as a ‘tentative theory’ of the phenomenon to be investigated through the study that I used to generate recommendations for my participant-collaborators, form the basis of the interventions in their process that I designed with them, and finally, function as an analytical device.

The conceptual framework is situated in this context through the case studies as I learnt more about how these ideas and ‘ways of measuring’ could be re-formed as ‘ways of doing’ in the specific context of localism I found and through the way my understanding of the theory was shaped by my own experiences of the practices I observed. As such, the conceptual framework as I set it out here represents how I ‘situated’ the normative theory of deliberative systems in the specific contexts of my

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studies. Existing theory and research act as a *spotlight* (Maxwell, 2013, pp.49–50) that *illuminates* what I observed in practice (see Figure 4-2).

In discussing contextual considerations of the research, I highlighted an ongoing socio-democratic situation that is in itself problematic, while having consequences that are also problematic, in need of greater understanding, and which the studies discussed in the following chapters seek to situate the conceptual framework functions as a way to explain the existing practices of my collaborating civil society participants while responding to questions *from* and asking questions *of* the existing literature outlined in chapter 3⁵⁶. It was important to understand the existing theories and research that are important to the study, as they act as the key sources for understanding what is going on, however, I understand these as 'partial' (Maxwell, 2013, p.41) to this research.

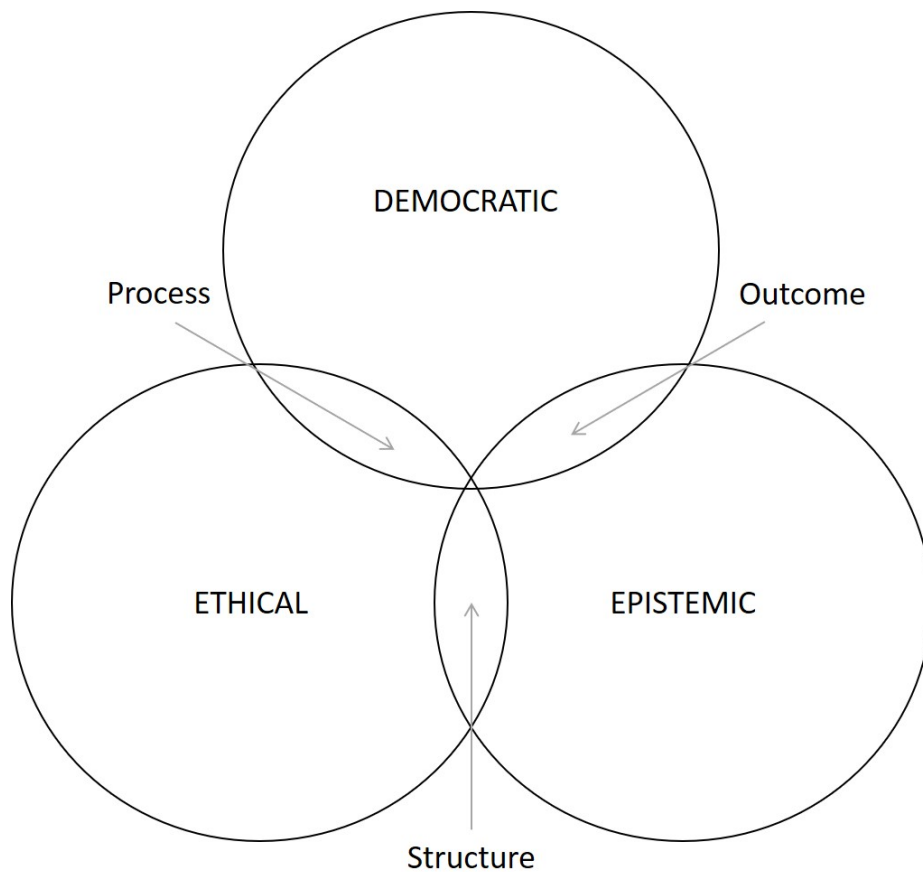


Figure 4-1. A diagram of the conceptual framework showing process, structure, and outcome

⁵⁶ Wherein I drew focus on the conceptual considerations that drive the conceptual framework

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The conceptual framework influenced the methodology in different ways in three distinct stages: (i) an initial exploratory period of research, (ii) the design or re-design and development of technologies and the deployment of the technologies, and finally, (iii) the evaluation stage. This process occurred for each of the study sites that make up the case studies for the research. As such, the concepts I outline below, provided ideas to pursue, as well as points of focus for the types of questions asked.

The following three functions may not be evenly weighted by all theorists, and allow for a nuanced application, with the recognition that some will be more important than others in different parts of the deliberative system (Curato & Böker, 2016; Parkinson, 2012; Boswell & Corbett, 2017; Mansbridge, 1999; Kuyper, 2015). Within the conceptual framework I situate here, the three functions represent Mansbridge's theory of the deliberative system I engaged with in chapter 3, alongside other aspects, or building blocks from theory, practice, and my own experiences, as outlined above (see Figure 4-1). In the remainder of this section, I will explain each aspect of this instrumental framework, discussed as the *ethical*, *epistemic*, and *democratic* functions.

4.4.1 The ethical function

The *ethical function* refers to the way interaction between participants happens, specifically through the promotion of mutual respect among citizens, serving “as the lubricant of effective communication” (Mansbridge et al., 2012, pp.10–12), as it supports as an atmosphere of reciprocity between participants and a feeling they can share their views openly. Beyond the micro-level of deliberation, mutual respect can be recognised as an ethical requirement among democratic citizens, the moral basis of which is grounded in the democratic ideal as equals. Within the conceptual framework, it is grounded also in ideas of *reciprocity* where participants demonstrate impartiality as well as mutual respect (Fung, 2003) and the giving of reasons that are broadly accessible and acceptable (i.e., giving reasons that we think others might reasonably be expected to endorse), and where “being open to being moved by the words of another [which] is to respect the other as a source of reasons, claims, and perspectives” (Mansbridge et al., 2012, p.11).

In local policymaking processes this becomes about fairness and against the dominance of particular or specific claims. For example, a particular protest group or other issue-public may turn the agenda toward their initial preferred position using coercive tactics, or an individual could express self-

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interest without reasoning in aggressive or manipulative ways. This raises questions beyond *who* participates (external inclusion) to *how* they participate in democratic decision-making (internal inclusion).

4.4.2 The epistemic function

The *epistemic function* refers to the capacity a deliberative system, or in this conceptual framework, a sociodigital system to “produce preferences, opinions, and decisions that are appropriately informed by facts and logic and are the outcome of substantive and meaningful consideration of relevant reasons” (Mansbridge et al., 2012, p.11). It is also bound up in ideals about *rationality* where the “force of the better argument” (Habermas, 1984) is championed above coercion (Hendriks, 2009; O’Flynn & Curato, 2015). This in turn is grounded in the deliberative ideal of reason-giving as opposed to aggregative forms of democracy, like a count of hands or a collection of signatures.

Part of the *epistemic function* relates to where the deliberation takes place, and specifically the local nature of deliberation. “Because the topics of these deliberations are issues of common concern, epistemically well-grounded preferences, opinions, and decisions must be informed by, and take into consideration, the preferences and opinions of fellow citizens” (Mansbridge et al., 2012, p.11). For localist politics, the *epistemic function* of the framework when situated within localism also relates to the ways that resident-citizens can call upon information. ‘Epistemically well-grounded’ relates to the use of relevant information and the capacity to make sense of and act upon information, and also what knowledge and experiences deliberators bring to the deliberation and the ways in which claims are supported by reasons.

Importantly to more pluralist forms of deliberative democracy, epistemic qualities that do not exist prior to deliberation can arise and strengthen during (Knops, 2017, 2007). Departing from Habermas’ ‘rational’ argument perspective that looks to ‘back up’ claims made with reasons (Habermas, 1984), to find validity in the ‘mutual understanding’ that comes from hearing others’ views and taking various positions in response to different issues (see Knops, 2017). Finally, the *epistemic function* is intrinsically linked to the *democratic function* and the ability of public deliberation to be *consequential*, outlined in more detail below.

4.4.3 The democratic function

The final part of the conceptual framework relates to the democratic function of the systemic theorisation of deliberation. Mansbridge et al (2012, pp.10–12) introduced this function in their theory as “the inclusion of multiple and plural voices, interests, concerns, and claims on the basis of feasible equality [that is a] central element of what makes deliberative democratic processes democratic.” In other words, “actively to promote and facilitate inclusion and the equal opportunities to participate in the system.” When the framework is situated with localism the *democratic function* is also characterised by the ability of engagement to be *consequential* (Dryzek, 2003), and the capacity for contributions to have an impact on outcomes (Gastil et al., 2007; Hendriks, 2009). The *democratic function* then at once reflects the democratic ideals of inclusion, as well as issues of accountability, and the link (for citizens) between engagement (deliberative workshops) and action (policy). It represents the part of the framework that deals with issues of policy and law-making more explicitly than the first two however the *epistemic* is concerned with the way information flows and is acted upon within this context, and the *ethical*, with how the form participation takes can engender a sense of political legitimacy. Different from the *ethical* and *epistemic* functions that concentrate on communication between citizens, the *democratic function* also concerns us with thoughts of how the outcomes of such engagements are communicated beyond this, what the channels are, who should be responsible for, and what the result of this communication is. The three functions in different ways are connected and might at once be seen as sets of three or two across different contexts, applications, and conditions (see Figure 4-1).

4.4.4 From theory to framework

In summary, the conceptual framework offers first, a *spotlight* on issues in which to understand the current state of things, but from this works as a *point of departure* from which to inform designs, and then evaluation of the intervention. To provide some clarity to the relationship between the theories and research practices I give emphasis to in this chapter I have illustrated a ladder of abstraction (see Figure 4-2). The ladder of abstraction shows how the deliberative systems literature, to be sure, the *ethical*, *epistemic*, and *democratic functions* (from Mansbridge, 2012), operate as high-level philosophical concepts that aim to describe why a deliberative system will work. The mid-level of the ladder shows the ways in which the high-level concepts are rendered a ‘working theory’ (Fischer,

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2005; Bächtiger et al., 2010) by political scientists who seek to operationalise or test the concept. As I have described in previous chapters, this might include parameters for assessing the *ethical function* through for example, by attempting to measure the levels of mutual respect or reciprocity. This typically relies on the assessment of small-scale experiments such as minipublics to “identify reliable indicators against which to rigorously assess the real against the ideal” (Boswell & Corbett, 2017, p.801). This assessment can take the form of discourse analysis or self-reported surveys from discrete fora such as citizens assemblies⁵⁷ (Suiter et al., 2016), consensus conferences (Goven, 2003; Bereano, 1999), or random assemblies (Gastil & Richards, 2013).

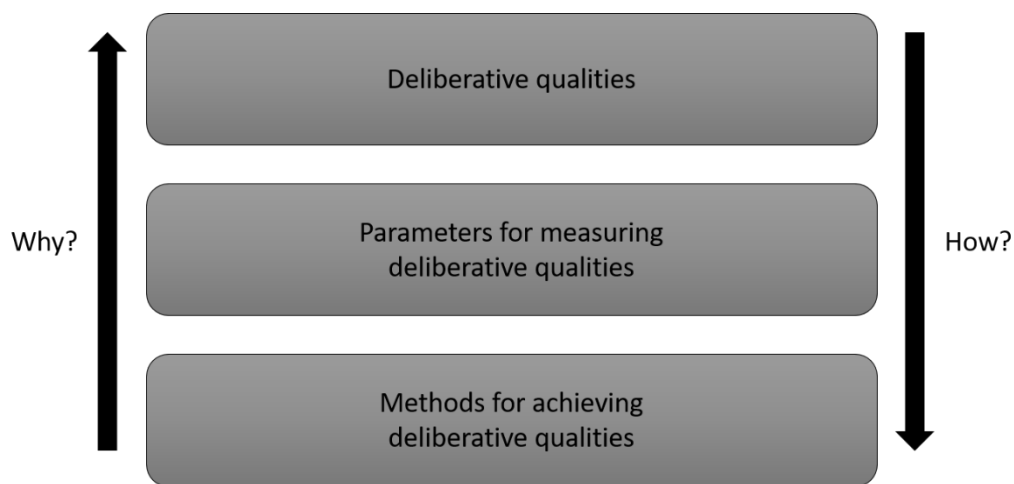


Figure 4-2 Ladder of abstraction showing the relationship between theory and my research

The lowest level of the ladder represents the micro-level or case-level and has more emphasis on questions of 'how'. Specifically, the case-level of abstraction includes the methods for creating the behaviours and activities that may be measured by the parameters of the mid-level of abstraction. For example, in my studies, this included PAR techniques such as interview and observation, as well as the design, development, and deployment of a sociodigital system. The micro-level relates to the mid-level through implementing methods and processes that seek to foster the qualities of deliberative systems and can offer insights for the high-level conceptual understanding.

To summarise, I take a qualitative PAR approach to investigating the high-level concepts of deliberative systems at the micro-level of civil society during instances of localism. The fieldwork was

⁵⁷ See table 3-2

framed by the parameters provided by mid-level concepts from deliberative theory that suggest what the evaluative standards may be operationalised. Insights from this fieldwork inform interventions in the civil society processes that aim to investigate the role of digital technology and the enactment of the evaluative standards (deliberative functions) at the low (or case)-level. Such insights can contribute to the understanding of the way deliberative systems function in society. The conceptual framework influenced practical aspects of the research methods across three phases: fieldwork, design, and evaluation. I will cover these aspects in the next section where I will focus on the procedures deployed across each case study, and how they relate to the approach to enquiry (see Figure 4-3).

4.5 Procedural considerations

My process of enquiry adopts a methodology built on technology design and intervention as a means by which to gain understanding and gather insights around existing practices and as a vehicle for participants to express their values and interpretation of their own experiences through co-designing and evaluating the interventions. The concepts from deliberative democracy theory formed the basis of a guiding interest that I used as a way to interpret my data through the process of collection and evaluation.

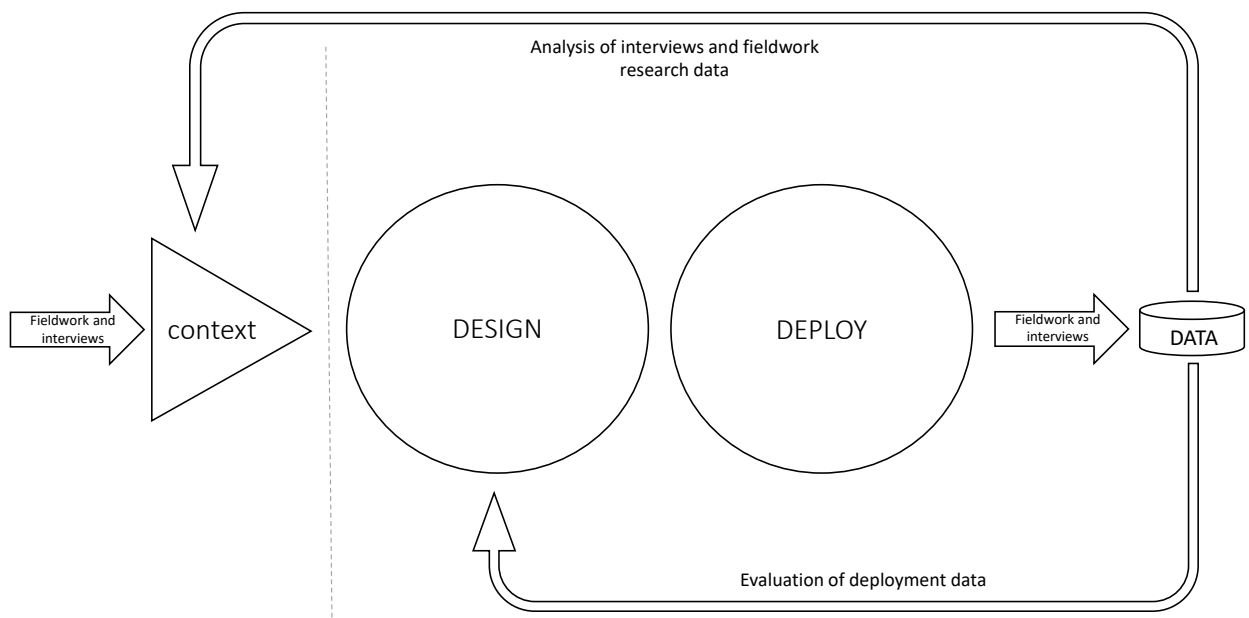


Figure 4-3. Procedural aspects of the research approach and methods

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The periods of data collection and data analysis are not distinct periods either across the research or within each case study. As such, the guiding interests I report were ‘points of departure’ (see Charmaz, 2006, p.17) that enabled this process to take shape. Throughout each case and across the research study I adopted new methods that held the promise of advancing emerging ideas throughout the studies.

For each case study, I followed the same set of procedures. I carried out an *exploratory* stage using PAR approaches to enquiry (such as observation and field notes) as a way of understanding the current situation, the *design* and *deployment* stage of the study takes a more traditional case study approach, and the *evaluation* stage takes methods from both (see Figure 4-3). This process of design and evaluation afforded an opportunity to critically look at the tensions between what is said (or reported) and what is revealed through action and interaction with data and others (including me), while also informing and responding to the conceptual framework. The research methods acted as tools, and as such the research problem shaped the methods with which I engaged. Moreover, the case studies informed one another and interacted with the framework, as my understanding of it developed and transformed by the ongoing research findings from study to study (see Figure 4-3).

4.5.1 Fieldwork and observation phase

The *exploratory* stage of the research involved a period of participant–observation during which I immersed myself in the day-to-day practices of the groups as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2013). Here, I was principally interested in the everyday political practices and processes of consultation and community engagement the groups enacted in their roles of community leaders in instances of localism. I focused on the values of behaviours and interactions between members of each group (in meetings and during informal discussions) and on how this is manifest in the ways in which they carried out consultation processes. During this observation and fieldwork period, the conceptual framework acted as a ‘yardstick in democracy’ (Dryzek, 2009), and a way of evaluating a base measurement of existing practices in terms of the theory of deliberative systems. I based observations of existing consultation practices, attendance at meetings and events, and discussions with collaborators against the conceptual framework. During the observation and fieldwork stages of each

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study, I used foreshadowing questions based on the evaluative standards of the conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework of three functions of deliberative systems, guided the fieldwork and participant-observation, as outlined above. As such, I produced field reports (see appendix A.2) on the existing practices of my collaborators through their consultation and public engagement activities, reflecting the three functions of my conceptual framework, which in turn became guiding principles for the re-design of their processes and practices. In each case, I produced a report for the group (see appendix A.1), based on the fieldwork (see appendix A.2). This presented an opportunity to provide the group with something useful to them for several purposes, including adapting their practices, providing evidence of collaboration for funding bodies, and offers a means by which I could begin a shared vocabulary with the group leading to the design and deployment stages of the research study (see appendix A.3). Notably, this also provided a basis on which to assess my impact on the group and reflect on my impartiality and biases I hold. At some level, across all of the studies I was ‘making myself useful’ in the settings I observed, as per Charmaz (2006, p.21).

4.5.2 Design and deployment phase

During *development and deployment* stage, the conceptual framework acted as a set of principles to guide conversations with both civil society actors as co-creators of interventions, and with collaborators in the design of the sociodigital artefacts. In making the three functions part of the discourse used to introduce the sociodigital system to collaborators during deployments, I endeavoured to create a shared terminology in the evaluation of deployments and workshop events (see appendix A.1). This process of design was always integral to the PAR approach to qualitative enquiry adopted. In essence, the design process was a negotiation between learning from the previous study, going back to the theory, and the knowledge I gained through participant-observation and fieldwork (see Figure 4-3). The design process started with the reports about current practices in relation to the conceptual framework, as outlined above. This report (see appendix A.2) was discussed with the civil society group and from these meetings, my collaborators and I established a set of priorities for areas to focus on improving or changing, from which I created a set of design requirements (see appendix A.3). These requirements were then discussed with collaborators and

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agreed upon after some negotiation. After the design requirements were finalised the process of creating (or re-designing) the sociodigital intervention started (see Figure 4-3). During the deployment, the same evaluative criteria from the conceptual framework were used to assess the impact of the study, to begin the process of re-design in a new context. The conceptual framework informed the design process in the way it provided a framing and terminology and language to discuss observed 'problems' in each context. This meant that the 'solutions' were not directly informed by the framework, rather by the approach to design and development set out in this chapter. In other words, situating the conceptual framework in each context highlighted a set of issues framed by an ideal way of doing participation, which were explored through sociodigital design and methods of participation.

Throughout the design and re-design process in each case study, different voices were privileged at different parts of the process. As stated above, the process started with a discussion between me and my collaborators which becomes a set of design guidelines and requirements. These requirements are then negotiated with a developer where priorities and changes are set out based on both what is technically feasible and within the timeframes and resources of both the developer and the collaborators. As such, the design is driven by the practicalities of the context and the resources of the developer. For clarity, the resident-participants in my studies are not then, part of the design process but become the 'users' of the design which represents a collaboration between me and the community partners in the context. My focus was on civil society and supporting them to better listen to residents and therefore potentially more legitimately represent the voices of citizens, rather than an approach that prioritised focusing directly on citizens.

4.5.3 Evaluation phase

During the *evaluation* stage of each study, the conceptual framework acted as a conceptual 'point of departure' for analysis (Charmaz, 2014), by providing a basis for observations and phenomena to look for. By using the evaluative parameters from the mid-level of the framework it acted as a 'toolkit to evaluate' the agents involved in devolved decision-making (Kuyper, 2016). The evaluation period involved follow-up interviews with key stakeholders and participants involved in the study⁵⁸. This

⁵⁸ See appendix E and F for examples of participant information and consent forms

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took shape around first going through the new data produced through the technology intervention either as a walk through or with more structured interactions such as ‘scenarios’ tasks designed to encourage engagement with the interface around potential ‘real-life’ use cases (see appendix B). Alongside this form of data collection, the workshop data, and all interview and focus group data is analysed as one corpus. Interviews were transcribed and analysed following a constructivist, data-driven approach to thematic analysis (see section 4.5).

4.5.4 The selection of cases

The selection of cases to study was a result of the convergence of three factors. First, the research presented here understands case study research, not as a methodology, but as a choice of what to study (as Stake, 2005). For me, the choice of what to study was informed by the conceptual framework and discovering instances of localism that provided opportunities to develop the technology and sociodigital interventions in my studies. Importantly, the cases presented opportunities for coproduction with a community partner. Second, the selection of cases is motivated by the shared ‘culture’ they represent as community organisations in processes of consultation in instances of devolved decision-making, third, they are selected for their uniqueness in terms of the specific context and type of decision-making.

Case study 1 discusses three civil society organisations consulting on the allocation of public funding devolved from the local authority and a parish council consulting on the creation of policy through a neighbourhood plan. Case study 2 reports on a collaboration with a collection of charity organisations in a situation where they are forming a neighbourhood plan group and the civil society group, I present in case study 3 had the responsibility of allocating a substantial sum of privately awarded funding. This civil society organisation formed and constituted a group of citizens in order to apply for the funding. Each case contributes to the enquiry by focusing on at least one of the research questions, and by building on the study before it. Throughout all of the cases, I explore the question of the role of civil society and the role of digital technology intervention as a method by which to do this. The use of case study is motivated by an undertaking to investigate the impact and politics of new structures of governance on civil society organisations and goes beyond the endeavour of trying to understand a particular case. I studied these particular cases to get insights into the

primary research question investigating the role of civil society organisations and the impact of localist politics. The overall method of enquiry follows an instrumental case study approach through stages of providing a detailed background for each case, data collection methods of participant-observation, fieldwork, intervention, and then interviews.

4.5.5 Answering research questions through an instrumental case study approach

Each case study can at once be characterised by their differences and by their similarities, but this section will establish how and why these cases represent one holistic study. The rationale for case selection is simply that each of these cases represents a typical situation where a civil society group, charged with the responsibility and power—in devolved decision-making or policymaking, brought about by the localism agenda—is carrying out a consultation in their community related to an eventual policy outcome or allocation of funding.

The selection of cases answers the research questions in the following ways; case study 1 focuses on sociodigital methods for shaping the logistics of public dialogue in new structures of governance [RQ1]. This study also contributes to the question of how sociodigital technology can support civil society through interviews with civil society actors who have been involved in devolved decision-making where a digital technology intervention was deployed [RQ3]. Following this, case study 2 seeks to maintain focus on the logistics of public dialogue while exploring the role of data as a way for technology to support and enable informed decision-making [RQ2 and RQ3]. This, in one respect, was to address implications for future work from case study 1 and in another to respond to the specific context of case study 2. Findings from case study 2 led to the selection of the final case study context. Case study 3, while contributing to answering the questions regarding shaping public dialogue and the role of technology to enable informed decision-making focuses more explicitly on the question of data capture technologies as a tool for affecting and shaping policy and policymaking processes [RQ1, RQ2 & RQ3] through more deliberate design and research design choices. In doing so, across all three studies I investigate the tensions at play when ordinary citizens are carrying out decision-making processes and interfacing with government procedures.

4.5.6 The recruitment process

The process of recruitment of participants to the studies was two-fold. I had two main participant types. First, I recruited *participant-collaborators* from community organisations. This occurred through contacting them directly and arranging meetings to discuss their work informed by opportunities for coproduction of outcomes, but also by the potential to develop the sociodigital artefacts in response to the previous learning. The second layer of participant is the citizens (*resident-participant*) who took part in workshops. I recruited this group through community organisations, using their networks and resources within the communities, in which they lived and worked. Participant-residents were always invited to participate as stakeholders in the community, interested in being involved in community engagement about their local community.

The motivation for community organisations to collaborate in some part was their will to develop new ways of engaging with their communities. Each group in their own way showed a willingness to reach out to more people and engage people in a more meaningful way. As reported in the case studies, there was a feeling that their work or the particular project we were collaborating on excluded parts of the community. There was also a resource-based benefit of collaborating with the university. Collaborations in this sense represent a two-way relationship. In general, I was able to investigate processes and viewpoints related to my research questions, in return, the community organisations receive the advantage of a 'critical friend' and the use of digital technologies to support their work, not in a transactional sense, like in what I have described as more traditional deterministic approaches to fixing problems with technology, but in establishing a shared goal, like the digital civics methodology and research agenda. It was less clear to the reasons for resident-participants to take part in the research, however, my assumption is that the research projects represented an opportunity for them to have their say, or partake in civic action as each project discussed in the case studies chapters were part of actual community decision-making process. Furthermore, in some circumstances, their participation was part of their relationship with the community organisation or in some cases a will to experience the novelty of interacting with what they considered unusual and novel sociodigital artefacts. Finally, the deliberative workshops presented an opportunity for residents to take part in an event in their community which was social

in nature. The workshop participants in survey responses indicated their attendance as an opportunity to meet new, or like-minded people.

4.6 Overview of each case context

In this section, I provide a brief outline of the context for each study providing details of the type of partner civil society group as well as the form the collaboration took. The use of a case study approach is considered appropriate for this research as it involves detailed analysis with a view to identifying and generating insights (Bryman, 2012). The work reported in the case study chapters privileges local knowledge and understanding as much as scholarly insights and understands data as bound up in that place (Taylor et al., 2015). In their work for the *World Bank* on feedback loops and the role of technology on amplifying people's voices, Gigler *et al* (2014) state that technology-enabled feedback mechanisms should be tailored to the local, political and socioeconomic and cultural context, which comes from an understanding of data as subjective and bound up in particular contexts and situations, in socio-material and temporal worlds (Wenger, 1998). These introductory descriptive contexts are derived from participant-observation studies in each case (all place names are pseudonyms).

4.6.1 Case study 1 context: Church House, Darrenton, and Fenting (parish council and residents associations)

The first case study took place in North East England across three sites, with one lead community organisation working with a different set of resident associations at each site. The lead community organisation is a not-for-profit social enterprise with ties to the local University and the local authority (LA). They are comprised of an administrative body of paid employees and a 'council' body of volunteers (*Emerald*), as well as a wider group of members with varying levels of engagement in their activities. Emerald is a group of self-selected leaders, each with a specific role. In this study, I worked predominantly with the chairperson and the treasurer, as well as with a group of four active members.

In the first site, the group collaborated with two residents' associations and some local councillors with a series of events set up to consult residents on the allocation of £90,000 of community funds. The group obtained this funding through a public funding body and the local authority matched it. The second site was a collaboration between the lead community organisation in *Darrenton*;

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Darrenton Parish Council, and the Darrenton Neighbourhood Planning board (however there was cross-over in personnel between these two groups). The third site, *Church House*, was a neighbouring town carrying out their own consultation around the allocation of community funds. The three contexts connect through their ongoing collaboration with the lead community organisation.

This collaboration started with the lead community group asking me to act as a 'critical friend' to observe and give advice on consultation they were carrying out in the first site. A community engagement officer from the local authority put me in contact with the group. They were offering administrative and other support to the groups during this consultation, as part of the offer that came with the funding that the local authority would match the funding with officer time. This consisted of four events at different locations within the community.

4.6.2 Case study 2: Moorholm (neighbourhood forum and community organisations)

The second case study involved working with three collaborating civil society groups, *Moorholm Connect*, *Oak Tree Trust*, and *Flicks*, and the formation of a new constituted body around a Neighbourhood Plan. Unlike case study 1, where the civil society group had been established for over two years, holding consultation events on a regular basis, this group was formed during the duration of the study, which lasted several months. At this time, the group was at the start point of the Neighbourhood plan and got to the consultation stage throughout my collaboration with them.

This particular community was, as some of the others, considered a place of multiple deprivation.

However, this community both within the last two years and in the 1980s had received national media attention, showing long-term and deep-rooted social issues. This study site was also noteworthy due to the number of interventions and initiatives it had encountered over the years.

There was a palpable lack of trust in authorities trying to 'do good' of which the University was considered one, and a lack of faith in anything changing due to a series of unsuccessful interventions from both local and national government schemes and initiatives. This study took place over two sequential phases. The first phase involved a process of understanding the community members and their roles through interviews, observations at community events, and attendance at meetings for the Neighbourhood Plan. I also ran deliberative workshops with residents and civil society representatives who used a paper prototype of a new data-rich version of the platform. I used the

platform to capture deliberative talk about 'place' and discover what data was important to communities in such processes.

4.6.3 Case study 3: Liddesdale Elsdon, Lupton, and Carson (Local Trust)

The third case study takes place across four remote rural villages in a former mining and farming area. The villages applied for the funding in the same way as the other 149 successful applicants⁵⁹, but due to the size and nature of their community decided to create a union between four smaller villages. This group was particularly interested in the communicative capabilities of technology. Poor transport links between the village caused the group to worry about how they could make the consultation fair, and inclusive to all of the residents across all four villages.

I met with the director and public engagement officer of this group as part of an engagement with another community organisation. Despite keeping in regular contact with them, it was about two years later when I started to collaborate in a purposeful way. The group had become frustrated by a lack of tools available to link the village communities and with the difficulty in having representatives from each village in physical 'town hall' style meetings.

4.7 Developed insights

The move toward an interest in civil society, and a reflection of the role of the researcher developed throughout the initial case studies. At the start of this research study, I had a preoccupation with the creation of deliberative events linked to the creation of policy and the democratic process on a large-scale through a conception of the actualisation of the so-called 'deliberative virtues'. Throughout the process and stages of the research, additional experiences and related external activities the shape, and indeed the scale and ambition of this work changed. One important change was the change of framing from 'designing for' deliberative virtues to building deliberative capacities. This came from an understanding of the role of civil society organisations in practice. Finally, the conceptual framework brings to the fore the relationship between theory, experience, and knowledge. I will reflect upon this in chapter 8, following the presentation and analysis of the three case studies in the following three chapters.

⁵⁹ 150 Local Trusts were funded

5

CHAPTER 5

CASE STUDY 1 – CREATING SPACES FOR DELIBERATION

5.1 Introduction

As I have outlined in the previous chapters, the development of platforms for community-led decision-making has been of growing interest in various academic disciplines, yet the forms by which technology might be woven into traditional consultation processes have been under-studied. This chapter is the first of three case studies outlining deployments of a digital technology platform in a range of localist policymaking contexts. In particular, this chapter reports on a study involving three communities invited by their respective local governing representatives to engage in processes of devolved decision-making. In each context, citizens were invited by the lead civil society organisation, in collaboration with locally based resident associations, to participate in consultation events intended to influence the process of allocating community funds.

The dominant literature outlines significant barriers to deliberative democracy at the local level.

Bächtiger and Wegmann (2014) suggest the challenges of citizen deliberation are related to whether

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citizens *want* to participate if they have the required skills to do so, and if they can show mutual respect with a focus on the common good. There are also issues related to the role of civil society organisations in localism settings (Andrews et al., 2010). Specifically, whether civil society actors have the desired skills and knowledge to motivate citizens to participate, and accommodate and enable the conditions for deliberation (or any form of inclusive engagement) in their local consultation practices (Hendriks, 2006; Dodge, 2010).

This study seeks to investigate how the qualities of deliberation play out in the specific case level. As such, my initial research questions focused on 1) understanding how community consultation events, as examples of community involvement in local decision-making, were facilitated and documented [RQ1, RQ2 & RQ3]; 2) examining the role of sociodigital methods to effect dynamics between different participating community members [RQ 1]; and 3) exploring what role, if any, digital technology might play in these processes [all RQs]. The findings discuss the design, deployment, and evaluation of a sociodigital platform that was used in two consultation events and outlines a discussion of the implications of structuring then capturing and evidencing citizens' opinion-giving and the accountability of decision-makers and community organisations.

5.2 Case study context

My main collaborators were an interest-based civil society organisation funded directly from the Local Authority. *Emerald* worked across all three consultations described in this chapter in which we collaborated with different residents' associations and parish councils within different communities, as explained below. This study took place across three locations: *Fenting*, *Darrenton*, and *Church House* (pseudonyms). Each of these sites is a small suburban town or a semi-rural village involved in ongoing decision-making processes around the allocation of funding of local projects, services, or new building developments.

According to the UK Local Government Association⁶⁰, local councils are the first tier of governance and are the first point of contact for anyone concerned with a community issue. They are democratically elected local authorities and exist in England, Wales, and Scotland. The term 'local

⁶⁰ <https://www.localgov.co.uk/>

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council' is synonymous with 'parish council', 'town council', and 'community council'. There are over 10,000 local councils in England and Wales, representing the concerns of residents and providing services to meet local needs. Parish councils have a wide range of powers including looking after community buildings, planning, street lighting, allotments. They also have the power to raise money through council tax. The funding for parish councils is allocated by the district council and is taken from the area's council tax; this is called an annual precept. The income and expenditure for the next financial year are calculated in the form of estimates and this amount is added to the local council tax and then returned to the parishes in two yearly instalments. They can also apply for UK grants and funding and EU money. At each site, the collaboration was reliant upon working closely with a local residents' association. Residents Associations are another form of recognised and constituted civic groups based on a geographically defined area, separate from any geopolitical boundaries, and often significantly smaller than the geographic area of a parish council. Their role is defined as a responsibility to preserve the amenities enjoyed by the lessees or occupiers of buildings and residents, protect the rights of tenants and represent them on matters of common interest⁶¹.

5.2.1 Collaborating with the Emerald and a parish council

My involvement in these processes came about through an invitation from the lead community organisation (Emerald), a group with whom I had worked with on previous projects. Primarily they were seeking support with event planning for a series of community workshops around the allocation of community funds, commenting that they lacked the necessary discussion facilitation skills and recording equipment. My initial role was as a 'critical friend' to offer advice on their initial plans. However, this soon extended to supporting explorations around ways of documenting the community conversations and facilitating a more formal project. My focus in this site was to examine the way the group created 'deliberative spaces' as part of a wider exploration into the ways in which the deliberative system is acting out in specific instances of localism. As such, I brought with me my own ideas of what an ideal deliberative space may look like, but I was open to being surprised by the lived reality and changing my definition and parameters for measuring deliberative quality.

⁶¹ <https://www.arhm.org/>

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When I first got involved in the consultation, Emerald was overseeing a series of explorative 'community conversations', each involving between 10 and 30 residents, initially in Fenting, with further engagements planned in Darrenton and later they added Church House. The initial events revolved around 'asset mapping' activities. Organisers arranged residents into small groups, each of which convened around a large paper map of the local area. A facilitator for each group then invited residents, in turn, to talk about the 'local place', share information on the places they visited or avoided, and reflect and comment upon particular service availability. In Fenting, a suburb close to the city, I observed four community engagement events at different locations across the community. Emerald was working with two residents' associations to invest £80,000 of privately attained and publicly matched funding. The events were thus structured to help allocate this money between enhanced local infrastructure and subsidised services. In Darrenton, a semi-rural, but affluent village surrounded by a 'green belt', the community organisation worked with the Parish Council to consult with residents on a neighbourhood plan. A single community conversational event was run and acted as the first intervention. Finally, Church House, a large conurbation encompassing two large towns separated by a motorway, involved working with one civil society group and an assortment of local voluntary organisations and residents' groups. Here the aim was to develop support for various new community services. Residents were positioned as 'local experts' to map out facilities and services, sharing information across both towns with the aim of co-generating priorities for a joint-funding application to a funding body.

5.3 Overview of study design

The study was planned over four cumulative phases: (i) fieldwork at four initial consultation events hosted by a community organisation that had been assigned community funding responsibilities by the local authority; (ii) the design of *Community Conversational*, a sociodigital platform designed in response to the fieldwork to promote more deliberative forms of conversation through turn-taking; (iii) the deployment and trialling of *Community Conversational* at two further consultation events; and finally (iv) evaluation of the study and captured data with community representatives tasked with leading on devolved decision-making processes.

5.3.1 Exploration stage

The first stage of the study involved understanding the existing practices of my collaborator-participants through the performance of fieldwork at the four events in Fenting. The consultation events were organised by Emerald in collaboration with two resident associations in Fenting. My role was as an observer and 'friendly outsider' as well as a 'critical friend', however, by the third session I was asked to facilitate at a table, and in the fourth session, I facilitated across two tables due to a lack of attendance from Emerald volunteers.

Through the exploration stage of observation during the four community meetings, I changed role based on what was necessary at the time, not for the study but for practical reasons to maintain the engagement process of my community partners. This meant interchanging between a more traditional type of ethnography and a more participatory ethnography. Both modes of observation complemented one another. As my role changed throughout the exploration stage I was able to begin to see different perspectives of the challenges faced and gain first-hand experience of what the everyday challenges are for organisers and facilitators, as well as providing me with an opportunity to experience the community engagement practices for citizens in ways that simply observing would not have done.



Figure 5-1. The persona cards, maps and sticky notes used in the Fenting events

The sessions were initially structured around a scenario in which residents were assigned the role of 'local expert' helping fictional new residents with information on local places, people, and services (see Figure 5-1). Residents were invited to use three types of sticky notes to indicate on the map

particular assets (places, services, or people) and, equally, anything that they thought that was missing in their area. The results of these activities from the community conversations were intended to feed into different decision-making processes at each location.

This initial fieldwork involved engaging in participant-observation (Watson, 1999), including the construction of field notes guided by the research questions and conceptual framework on observed interactions between organisers (*participant-collaborators*) and residents (*resident-participants*), as well as within the workshop groups during the events.

5.3.1.1 Insights from the exploratory stage

Observations at the four workshops run by my participant-collaborators highlighted that the consultations process involved ‘making up the rules’ in the absence of support or training. It was also apparent that while research language was being used during planning and evaluation discussions (“methodology”, “scenarios”, “data” etc.), the asset-mapping method led to very few easily documented insights. For example, the sticky notes attached to the maps by residents (see Figure 5-1), indicating particular concerns, were cleared away between sessions to prepare the maps for the next session. As such, major challenges concerned a lack of resources and research experience necessary to support the capture and analyses of the rich data, generated during each community conversation. The fieldwork informed by opportunistic interviews and discussion with my participant-collaborators at Emerald highlighted four main issues. First, there were clear issues with how the groups attempted to take a record of the conversations, and document the concerns raised by residents. The nature of the activity relied heavily on the use of sticky notes, which were placed on relevant locations of the map by residents during the sessions. However, invariably these would be written in hard to decipher handwriting or would be one-word statements that summed up a group decision, with no way of recording the reason for its discussion. As such, while the organisers took photographs of the maps with the notes on before clearing them for the next session, they lacked and meaningful context and detail. To help to mitigate the lack of a way to record the discussion at the events, facilitators were instructed to take notes. Again, however, these notes often failed to capture everything that was said at each table. This was not through the facilitators' lack of trying but because they were spending a lot of their time facilitating discussion and trying to focus the talk on matters of

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local concern. Furthermore, the unpredictable attendance levels for the public workshops meant that often, as I did in the fourth session, facilitators had to cover more than one table. My collaborator also expressed concern regarding the consequentiality of their notes. If they were able to be taken, would be considered legitimate evidence for the purposes of reporting to funding bodies and the local authorities. Different types of documentation were perceived to have more legitimacy than others. The visual was privileged as it seemed to better represent 'evidence'. Despite a lack of detail in the photographs they took of the maps, they felt that these were more meaningful evidence, above their notetaking, as it was a 'record' of the engagement. However, the lack of a record of the conversations between participants and around topics left them concerned they could not make a strong enough link between the conversations and any action they would take⁶².

A second issue for facilitators centred on providing equal opportunities for participants to express their views. It was common to observe people speaking over each other, or break-out conversations occurring at the same time the rest of the group were engaged in discussing a specific issue.

Generally, it appeared that residents were uncertain about when it was appropriate to speak or to interrupt somebody. On two separate occasions, the quality of discourse broke down to arguments and raised voices. This in turn led to multiple conversations happening at the same time, meaning some residents missed things others had said, leading the facilitator to miss a lot as well.

Furthermore, facilitation was unequal across tables as such I observed that while on some tables more experienced facilitators took a strong stance on ensuring cross-talk was kept to a minimum, whereas some struggled to manage the discussions, keep them on topic, or hold separate discussion separate to the main table. Third, there were some issues with participants dominating talk, meaning that some claims could not be heard. Many of those attending only seemed interested in talking about their interests and did not seem to engage in other issues that might affect the whole community, as my collaborators had expected. For example, at one of the events, it was clear that one resident association had co-ordinated to express their groups underlying will and went to great lengths to ensure that this was the dominant topic of discussion across the session by having their members at

⁶². Notions of feedback to residents who had participated were bound up in this too. My collaborators were unsure how they could implement a feedback loop with the data they had, despite a willingness to be accountable.

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every table. This led to a dominance of the discussion about a specific issue in the local area do with a lack of investment in specific facilities. In addition, due to the fact the events were linked to the allocation of funding, some groups tried to use the events as an opportunity to get support for their projects, forcing the conversation over to the issues they wanted the funding to address. As a result of this, not only did some residents not get a chance to have their say, but the dynamics on some tables left people feeling uncomfortable and visibly excluded from the discussion.

A fourth and final issue the fieldwork identified was that residents were relatively limited in giving reasons for their points of view. I observed how people did not regularly explain why they had identified a particular place, or why they had identified a particular person or service; often they would simply place a sticky note on the map without giving any further detail to why this was important to the community or give any indication of how they felt about things that were good or lacking in that place. During opportunistic interviews with my collaborators they showed concern that the rich discussion they expected, and they considered useful to them, was more likely to come up after the main event in the coffee breaks during one-on-one conversations, meaning other residents, as well as the decision-making civil society group themselves were missing out on some epistemic value from 'local experts' (Agid & Chin, 2019; Asad & Le Dantec, 2015).

5.3.2 Design and deployment stage

The second stage of the study involved exploring the design of tools informed by insights from the initial fieldwork. The subsequent sociodigital system—*Community Conversational*—focused on supporting event facilitation that was fair and data capture in a way that provided a means to document the events in ways that might be useable as evidence for decision-making. Following the observations and organisation of field notes around the broad functions of the deliberative system, I prepared a report for my collaborators. In this report, I outline a set of 'design opportunities' based on what I learned about the existing practices of consultation and community engagement (see appendix A.2), including 'how might we re-design the workshop to make intentions more clear' and 'how could we design tasks so that participants' rich conversations are captured' (see appendix A.1). Based on discussion these reports with my collaborators I created a list of collaborators' needs (e.g. everyone should have an equal say in the task or conversation) and converted these into requirements for

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design (see appendix A.3), which were then used to begin collaboration with a software engineer collaborator. At this stage, these were quite vague (e.g. the 'game' element will have rules for turn-taking, and each participant should be restricted to how and what they contribute). After an initial discussion with the engineer on how these ideas might work, I began to sketch some ideas for what the interactions may look like (see Figure 5-2).

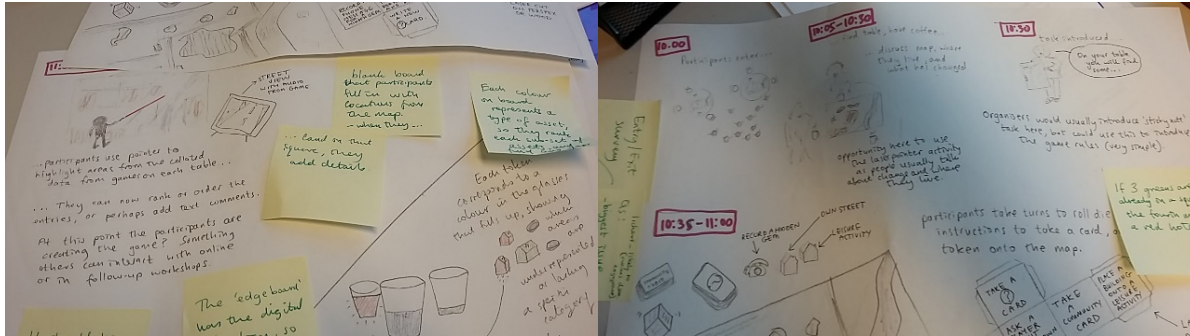


Figure 5-2 Early sketches of what the engagement process could entail

These contained several ideas such as RFID reader in a paper map with various game pieces with RFID tags that are moved around the map and registered, a laser pointer to point to a projected map that brings up a street view on a situated screen at the table, a dice that was rolled to see what type of comment (positive, negative, an interesting fact, etc) the participant should make, and a telephone that could be used to record local knowledge about places that were highlighted on the map (see Figure 5-3).

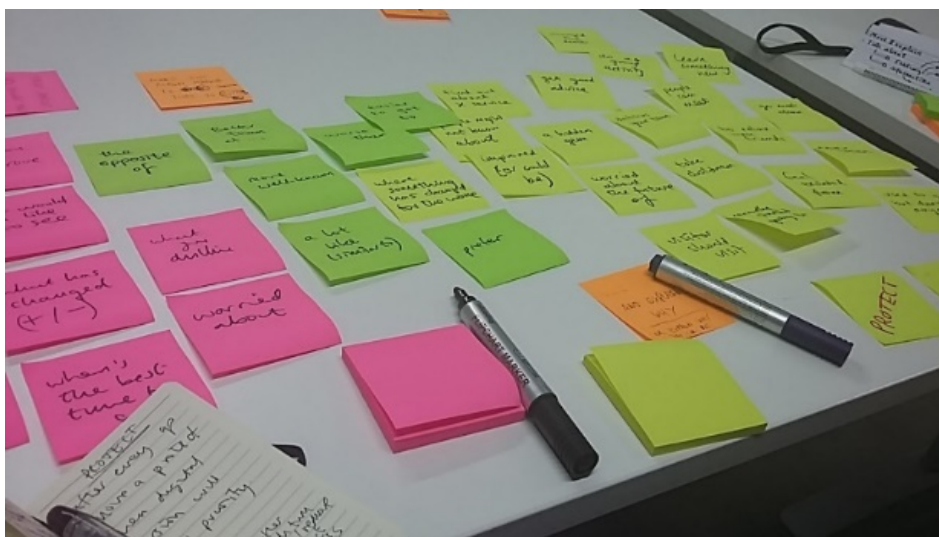


Figure 5-3 Initial ideas and typology of the prompts design session

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After more collaboration with the engineer and some conversation with my collaborators at Emerald, we finally decide to make the technology as invisible as we can, and that the technology used might be things people are familiar with. Based on this we started to explore what type of prompts would be useful, and different types of things we might prompt using sticky notes with different colours to represent different types of prompt that would involve different interaction with the marker, for example, move the marker somewhere new, tell us something new about where the marker is (see Figure 5-3). These were eventually formalised into standardised statements.

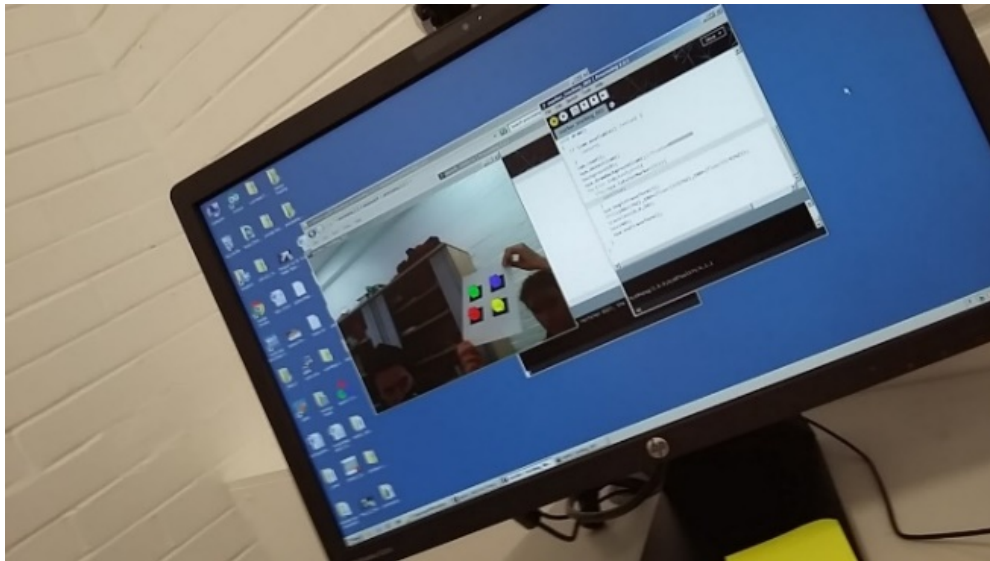


Figure 5-4 Testing the fiducial marker patterns using low-quality webcams

Meanwhile, the engineer worked on the idea of a marker that participants could move around and experimented with using computer vision technologies and fiducial markers (see Figure 5-4).

The next stage involved trialling the sociodigital artefacts at events in Darrenton and Church House. These subsequent workshop events were organised by the community organisations who used their own networks to invite local resident-participants. During these events, audio and video data were captured, while my collaborators and I took observational notes while also supporting groups at the various tables when appropriate.



Figure 5-5. Cards and marker – tangible elements of the sociotechnical platform

The sessions were otherwise led by the community organisations. This sociodigital platform had two distinct parts: (i) tangible objects that guide a dialogic engagement activity designed to encourage and structure conversations about ‘place’ without restricting and directing it (see Figure 5-5); and, (ii) a set of ordinary audio and video equipment that captures data around each table (see Figure 5-6). Finally, (iii) a prototype for an online interface (see Figure 5-4) that presents the geo-location data and captured audio, and through a simple interface design enables workshop organisers to search and filter down through the data, intending to support data representation, analyses, and sense-making. Together, these components help to structure a *Community Conversational* event.



Figure 5-6. The camera set up and map used in the *Community Conversational* workshops

5.3.2.1 Prompts cards and physical markers

I created 46 unique prompt cards across two categories (move, talk) and four identical “protect” cards. Move cards prompted participants to move the *main marker* to a new location in response to printed instructions. These either (i) invited discussion on a new topic: “*Move the marker to a place you visited in the past but no longer do (and explain)*”; or (ii) asked for a comparison to be made with the topic currently being discussed: “*Move the marker to somewhere that is more accessible.*” The second set of cards were intended to provoke and challenge participants, and to move the discussion away from pre-determined or dominant topics. Talk cards prompted participants to reflect on another issue related to a place under consideration. For example: “*Talk about what you would change at the place the marker is currently at*” and “*Talk about the best time to visit the place at the marker (and explain).*” These cards presented opportunities for other participants to find out something new about a particular location or change the content or tone of the topic. Protect cards are associated with the protect markers. At the start of each session participants, each receives a protect marker which they place on the map to indicate somewhere they would like to protect from change. Throughout the workshop activity should they pick up a protect card, they may move any one of the protect markers to a place they would prefer to be “protected”. They may move another participant’s protect marker or add extra protection to somewhere already marked.

The protect cards and markers were designed with a dual purpose. First, to help ascertain and communicate community members' priorities. And second as a response to observations from initial fieldwork which revealed that many residents focused discussions on protecting either their own homes or one particular issue within the town. As such, the protect markers intended to disrupt narrow or dominant conversations and enable wider, perhaps less subjective yet important issues to be discussed. The intention was that they allowed people to talk about their own 'self-interest' (see Mansbridge et al., 2010) while also serving to stimulate a dialogic process that was attuned to normative virtues of deliberative democracy.

5.3.2.2 Mechanics of the activity

The sessions began with a brief introduction by a facilitator (either a local councillor or a representative from Emerald) and myself, as ‘the researcher’, the resident-participants were invited

to sit around a table on which a map of their town or village is laid out (see Figure 5-3) and the 'rules' are introduced to the room. Then everyone introduces themselves and moves their protect marker to a place on the map, explaining their decision to the rest of the table. The main activity then proceeds during which participants take turns to take a prompt card from the top of the pack, read it aloud, and move the main marker or one of the protect markers to their location of choice, explaining their action. The prompt card is then discarded. The materiality of the card pack was designed to establish clear turn-taking between the speaker and listeners. Once a participant has explained a choice, their turn is "over". This notion of turn-taking was designed to eradicate the need for facilitation, which was found to be problematic and inconsistent, encouraging turn-taking and exposure to others' claims and views.

5.3.2.3 Software interface

The software interface is a data mining tool that can be used to filter down and quickly review sections of the audio-recorded transcribed conversation and video data. It allows selected themes from multiple conversations to be found quickly, across what is a significant corpus of video and audio data. Following each event, the video and audio are uploaded onto the system; meanwhile, a visual tracking algorithm is run against the video and the marker locations identified to record their movements across a master timeline.

Other meta-data can be added, such as transcripts (of the audio) or external prompts. The software can then be "mined" to explore events, such as when a question is asked or when markers were moved. In this prototype, I represented the master timeline on the screen alongside a video window that provides graphical information on the marker locations at specific points in the video/conversation. It can be filtered to create a new timeline visualising multiple selected actions displayed adjacent to each other enabling quick comparison (see Figure 5-7).

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Searches could be made by the prompt question, by geographic area as selected on the screen, or via free text search of the transcript⁶³. Thus, overlapping data and unusual anomalies can be identified quickly. By clicking on a time bar, the video footage will move to the specific place for review.

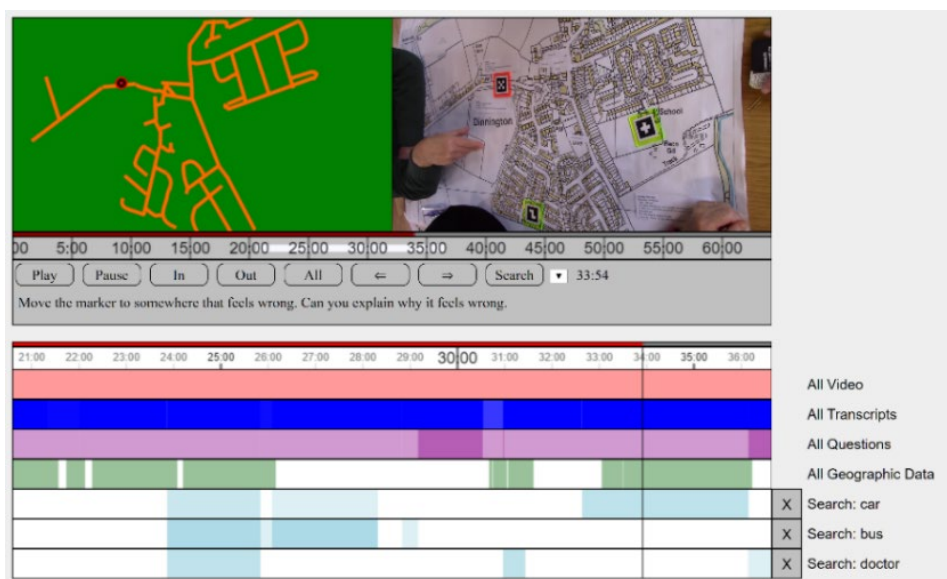


Figure 5-7 The Software interface prototype used to navigate the recorded and transcribed audio.

5.3.3 Evaluation stage

In the final stage of the study, I conducted two focus group style evaluation workshops with representatives of Emerald and the Parish Council⁶⁴. These workshops provided the opportunity to ask general questions about the events, as well as gather feedback on the value of the sociodigital artefacts and the data it captured using the software interface (see Figure 5-7). This process involved asking collaborators to use the software to find information relevant to scenarios based around common neighbourhood plan takes (see Appendix B). Through these discussions, I was able to discuss their experiences and evaluate how they might use these data and the platform in their consultation and decision-making processes.

ID	Role	Engagement Practice(s)
Citizen-Residents		

⁶³ For this initial study I had all of the audio recording data transcribed to aid search at this point in the process, however, this was not seen as a sustainable process for me or my community partners

⁶⁴ No-one from the Church House Residents' Association took part in the evaluation workshops as they were not in the position of decision-makers within this consultation.

DP 1-30	Resident-Participants in the deliberative workshop in Darrenton	Participants at <i>Community Conversational</i> workshop
CP 31-79	Resident-Participants in the deliberative workshop at Church House	Participants at <i>Community Conversational</i> workshop
Decision-Makers		
D1	Member of Neighbourhood Planning group, Darrenton	group interview, Facilitator at a workshop
D2	Member of Parish Council, Darrenton	group interview, Facilitator at a workshop
D3	Member of Parish Council, Darrenton	group interview
D4	Leader of Parish Council, Darrenton	group interview, Facilitator at a workshop
D5	Member of Neighbourhood Planning group, Darrenton	group interview, Facilitator at a workshop
Organisers		
F1	Director of Emerald	group interview, Facilitator at all 3 workshops
F2	Member of Emerald	group interview, Facilitator at all 3 workshops
F3	Consultant	group interview, Observer at Church House workshops

Table 5-1. Participants, their roles, and the engagement practices carried out as part of the study

5.4 Findings from case study 1

As outlined in the study design, I was interested in investigating the impact of the intervention in terms of the effect it had on establishing and improving the qualities of a ‘deliberative space’ connected to devolved decision-making in local communities. As such, one component of the analysis was concerned with the recorded ‘deliberative talk’, and another with the analysis of the interviews with the lead civil society organisation, and the decision-making civil society organisation (see Table 5-1).

The analysis of the data is constructed into five themes: *Taking turns and steering conversation*, which focuses on the impact on the way people communicated during the sessions. *Supporting facilitation*, which draws attention to the way the system increased capacities for organisers. This is further emphasised by *Explaining and elaborating viewpoints*, which looks at the impact of the physical components on the way people shared ideas, whereas *changing opinions and engaging with others* looked at the way this form of presenting ideas effects the form of communication. Finally, *Opening up and bounding the conversation* looks at the overall effect of this mode of communication on the

ways it changed perceptions on the engagement process. This focus of this study was primarily on the designed aspects and reporting the findings on the creation of a deliberative space, but in developing the process I shall address each element of the conceptual framework as part of my analysis.

5.4.1 Taking turns and steering conversation

The first big question to establish in terms of the *ethical function* of the conceptual framework was whether the residents would follow the turn-taking rule. While, as anticipated from the initial observations, some people turned up with pre-rehearsed issues, in practice people appeared compelled to ‘comply’ with the ‘rules’. During the conversations, residents acknowledged that the cards were framing their topics, but showed a willingness to wait until the cards presented them with an opportunity: “*I’m going to hope to get a word in about [...] hopefully it will come up in one of the cards.*” (DP17). In other cases, some residents articulated that the session structure mitigated against the discussion going off-topic or focusing too much on a specific community asset: “*You haven’t let me wax lyrical about the scout hut, where I spend half my life*” (DP5). As such, the cards and turn-taking kept conversations on-topic.

In Darrenton, a resident mentioned the medical centre in a conversation about transport and was quickly reminded by another resident of the rules: “*Well I think we will get a chance further down the pile [to discuss the medical centre], mightn’t we?*” (DP12). This balancing of the conversations was appreciated by the Emerald who was in a sense, tasked with promoting these new decision-making processes. They recognised that people at previous events had “*pushed*” for a particular issue and would “*take every opportunity to keep raising it*” (D4). The simple mechanics of this process appeared to prevent this: “*You made everybody say something. If you’d sat in the hall and said, “What do you think about this?” Two or three people would take the whole conversation. Somebody would have said nothing*” (D4). The protect markers did respond to this issue, however, there were still opportunities to make a strong point as a group about one particular place, for example agreeing on placing protect markers in one place at the start. This happened in Darrenton and was followed up with the participant placing the main marker on the same place as the card they picked permitted it (see Figure 5-5).

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Meanwhile, the relative serendipity of the card topics kept people engaged. If their “*burning topic*” had not already arisen, the opportunity was still there for it to appear. However, this steering of the discussion by the cards did raise some concerns from some residents, especially as events progressed and fewer opportunities remained to discuss a particular issue.

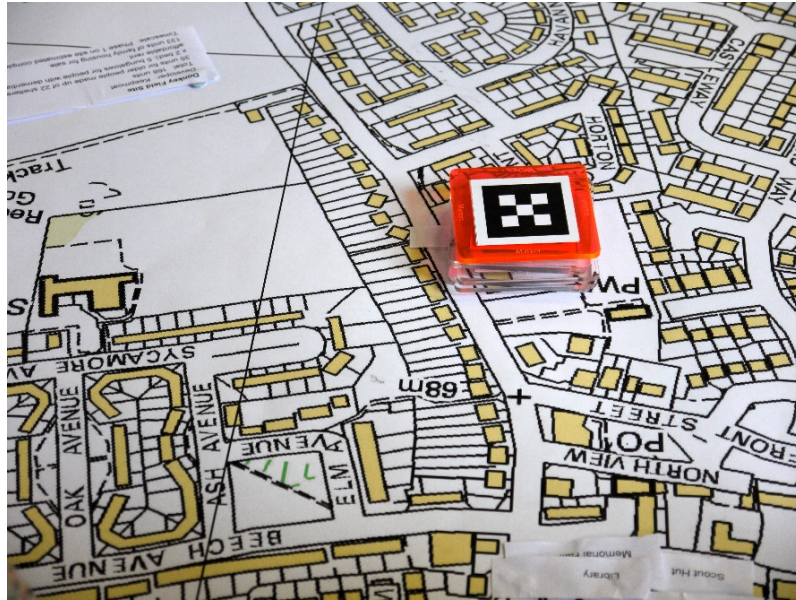


Figure 5-8. During session 5 protect markers and the main marker in the same place.

In one case, a resident felt compelled to raise a particularly timely issue about Church House. They intervened, blaming the cards for restricting them in raising this matter of concern: “*to me, the one thing we’ve never touched on because of these cards*” (CP14). It was quite common across different groups during the closing stages of the game that space would be made to capture additional, unarticulated, issues: “*I thought we didn’t mention about more shops. I think we need more shops you know*” (CP39).

5.4.2 Supporting facilitation

I observed in the initial fieldwork that those who ran the previous events often struggled to facilitate tables alongside documenting points raised and overseeing the general running of the event. In this case, *Community Conversational* was seen to take on “*the role as facilitator for us*” and those who might normally be the facilitators were able to “*mostly take a step back*” (F1). It enabled them to not worry so much about ensuring people were not talking over one another as the game somewhat inhibited that. Instead, they could focus on noting down particularly interesting points that were

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raised, moving between tables to see how different group dynamics work, and keeping a better eye on timings and schedules. The facilitative role *Community Conversational* played was further appreciated due to the unpredictable numbers of attendees that come to such events as well, which can stretch organisers across multiple tables and groups.

One issue was that there were not enough experts to go around. This was addressed through each expert speaking at the beginning of the session but could not be carried through the activity due to the lack of expertise from some of the facilitators. It was felt that, initially, some form of organiser facilitation was still necessary for each group. This would be so that initial rules and expectations could be set and—if necessary—to bring attention to the game if the conversation gets side-tracked. However, it was noted that even if a facilitator was not present, or unable to guide the discussion, to some degree the game filled this gap: *“There was one table that was poorly facilitated, for various reasons. If you hadn't had this method, it would have failed completely. So, you know, I think that was really interesting to watch that. They still had a useful conversation with minimal facilitation, so, yes.”* (F3)

There were further reflections on how the community organisation that was leading this series of events had very little experience of running consultations previously. While they had many connections with community and residents' groups and LAs, they recognised that prior to the events they had little knowledge of what would create and support a meaningful group discussion. They acknowledged that this was quite common, as organisations like theirs are given the responsibility to oversee these processes: *“It's almost like saying, “Who have we got around the table who's got a bit of nous [common sense]” really. Do you know what I mean? With no formal expectation, and certainly no formal training, or only some briefing.* (F1)

While the facilitative role of the game and technology was appreciated, it was still considered that the engagement method needed careful framing and explanation to those participating in the event. This was considered particularly important by the Parish Council. They noted that their involvement in the event was critically important in relation to the potential action that might be taken around the neighbourhood plan: *“we knew what was going to happen and knew what we were trying to do.”*

Therefore, in materials related to the event and at the start of the event itself they carefully framed what its purpose was, why it was being held, and what they were trying to do next: *“I think, otherwise, it [the event] would have been a bit stiffer or stilted.”* What comes through here, is that while *Community Conversational* itself was valued as a means of structuring and equalising talk between residents, the bigger picture and purpose of its use still needed careful articulation and framing by those organisations responsible for its use.

5.4.3 Explaining and elaborating viewpoints

From the perspective of the facilitating civil society organisation, the system was generally very successful in prompting people to explain their reasoning. Each card prompted residents to explain 'why' they had selected a place to move the marker, and in practice, this happened more than I had envisaged. This was also surprising for the facilitating organisers (Emerald) who noted they had to do much less prompting, and instead just remind people of the rules: *“Well, this is how it works, just to get people started”* (F1). Perhaps unsurprisingly, people often explained the places they marked in reference to personal observations: *“I think that it's necessary to have it in the village for older people who haven't got transport really. They certainly can't get a bus [...] so I think it's very necessary we have one here”* (DP26).

On other occasions, residents would ask each other to explain and elaborate on the reason for a move. In one series of interactions, a resident moved a protect marker to a specific place for a second time. They gave the same reasoning as before (that it is a big problem in the town and probably a pre-rehearsed idea they had come to talk about). At this point, another participant affirmed their view but also encouraged them to consider alternative locations: *“It is really. If that is a fait accompli [decided and cannot be changed] or is there anywhere else where you would like to protect?”* (DP20).

Sometimes this manifest as contestation: *“Oh Really? [...] Is it used?”* (DP26), but still served the purpose of encouraging further elaboration or explanation. On discussing examples of participants being able to question, offer advice, and challenge each other, organisers reflected that it added some value to the conversations: *“And somebody else chipped in and said “Well, what about this?” [...] So, I think it created a different dynamic. It felt, in a sense, more rigorous to me”* (F1).

5.4.4 Changing opinions and engaging with others

In addition to participants challenging one another, there was clearly respect for, and better understanding, of competing claims, which is one of the expected outcomes of deliberative talk. During the deliberative workshop, resident-participants showed a willingness to listen to and even empathise with alternative views on issues and consider these during the game. For example, one resident explained that someone else's view had influenced where they moved their marker: *"I think that's a very good point, I do think we're short of what we can call communal spaces in the village and for children, it's very important."* (DP23). This in turn prompted another resident to reflect on their views and raise an issue that had not yet been discussed: *"I never realised it must be difficult to live here and have children because it's not geared up to children, is it, the village?"* (DP21).

A further unforeseen practice of the process was resident-participants passing on their prompt (or turn to speak) to another participant. One participant-resident, when prompted by the selected card to talk about somewhere they would take a visitor, asked other residents on the table to make suggestions: *"Well, I know where I would go but it's quite a wee while since I've been. But I'll leave it up to other people if they want to say."* (DP15). These dialogues, in which residents changed opinions, listened to others, and even passed on opportunities to the rest of their group, were a notable contrast to the discourse in the earlier Fenting events, where talk comprised of people making statements based on established viewpoints in an aggregative fashion.

5.4.5 Opening up and bounding the conversation

The qualitative, 'talk-based' nature of the consultation meant different things to different stakeholders. It was clearly valued by many of the residents who took part, where the turn-taking supported equality and (internal) inclusivity from those that were there but came across as convivial and not overtly processional. The community organisation running the events greatly valued the way the system configured participation and fostered engagement: *"Looking across, you could see by people's body language [...] they're leaning forward, they're really engaged"* (F3). In particular, they valued the fact that the conversational nature of the events meant that they captured a more holistic, "big picture", of what is valued and significant in the local area: *"Lots of planning consultations seem to be very restricted, especially around roads and things. So, what you're getting with some*

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consultations [...] it's the concentrating on one area, and the big picture, widening the view [...] is not being asked. It's not even being touched on." (F2)

The relatively open-ended nature of the discussions surrounding the *Community Conversational* workshop was also valued as it gave space for residents to talk about what was important to them:

"The opportunity to have a facilitated discussion, instead of having it bound by and driven by council officers. So, I think that was really striking" (F3). However, this richness came with a cost, especially for the Parish Council who was in charge of the neighbourhood plan in Darrenton. Upon going through the conversational data collected from their event, they noted that while the captured talk was useful "evidence", they would not find the qualitative data useful in coming up with decisions. Instead they privileged lists and statistics: *"You could say that, [out of] however many people went to the event, how many of them, or how many tables, mentioned the doctors'? [...] Even if it was just a bar chart, which said, 'Doctors, transport, rural space kept open, green spaces, church, listed...' You know, whatever was important, and say how often, or how big in the topic of conversation that became."* (D4)

Therefore, those leading the decision-making process saw the rich data the platform presented to them as a resource to produce figures from, rather than a resource to understand, search within, and discover insights. Indeed, they requested that the conversations be reduced down into more simple visualisations that could then be used as evidence: *"You could produce a graph, surely, could you, from this?"* (D5).

5.5 Discussion of case study findings

The findings highlight the challenges community organisations face when carrying out consultations, where devolved decision-making powers have been entrusted to them. In the following sections I draw on the role of 'informal' participation in local decision-making processes, the role civil society actors in such collaborations, and I demonstrate how community-generated data is a powerful resource but which is at risk of being re-presented to support a civil society organisations' agenda while creating the impression of democratic renewal. Despite not entirely replacing the facilitation role, early findings suggest that facilitators using *Community Conversational* take a less prominent

role, are freed up to manoeuvre between tables, note-taking, or speak to others in the room.

Community Conversational also acts as an effective “leveller”, across tables and between sessions.

5.5.1 On supporting and valuing everyday talk

The design of the initial system was predicated on the idea that informal conversation and opinion-giving, or ‘everyday talk’ (Hauser & Benoit-Barne, 2002; Conover & Searing, 2005; Mansbridge, 1999) could be considered as significant contributions to local consultation processes. *Everyday Politics* (Boyte, 2004) champions the idea that ordinary people, often through civil society organisations, are fundamental to a functioning democracy. In this study, I looked to implement these concepts to scaffold a conversation about place, and to respond to issues from the initial fieldwork around equality of voice, respect for others’ views, and reciprocity. There has been considerable research on different methods for engaging publics, most with an emphasis on deliberation as a process of respectfully understanding different perspectives and technical issues (Burgess, 2014; Landemore, 2017; Holst & Molander, 2017; Estlund, 1997). The sociodigital intervention builds on a lineage of games and ‘playful interactions’ used in participatory governance (Poplin, 2012), HCI and participatory design and co-creation (Brandt & Messeter, 2004; Brandt, 2006).

As discussed in chapter 2, prior work has focused on novel digital technologies in this context with work on the role of technologies designed to elicit lightweight feedback in place (Taylor et al., 2015; Koeman et al., 2015; Schroeter, 2012) or designs that aim to transpose traditional decision-making voting or aggregative systems to digital platforms (Semaan, Faucett, S. P. Robertson, et al., 2015; Golsteijn et al., 2016; Vlachokyriakos, Dunphy, et al., 2014). The approach I adopted in this study focused on soliciting, structuring, and capturing rich discussions about ‘place’ from multiple individual perspectives. Specifically, I was interested in how simple mechanics from turn-taking games might promote the structuring of discussion and provide social cues to shape dialogue.

I also stress the importance of deliberation as an engagement method, and while the first deployment of *Community Conversational* raised several problems about supporting and developing methods that promote and capture ‘deliberative talk’, there were also many promising elements. This included

promoting equality within the conversations through the introduction of turn-taking, which was appreciated by Emerald for opening up the consultation to a wider band of perspectives. It was also valued by the Parish Council in Darrenton as it provided new forms of hands-off facilitation and structure to their ongoing consultation for the neighbourhood plan. The method also created opportunities for citizens to be reflective, to challenge one another, and to engage each other in discussion, creating rich data about matters of local concern which has the potential to be used to promote accountability, and as such political legitimacy in local decision-making processes.

5.5.2 On utility and meaningfulness

The process of *Community Conversational* was such that it accumulated a lot of audio and textual data of participants' conversations during the sessions in Darrenton and Church House. Much of the rhetoric around open data and the accountability of social enterprises, the state, and even community organisations suggests that access to more data will give ordinary citizens more control (Marshall et al., 2016; Wilson & Rahman, 2015; Puussaar et al., 2018). In that paradigm, it seems reasonable to assume that community organisations should be able to make better decisions that represent the views of their communities, with access to more community-data. The idea of making data “actionable” has been studied with respect to social change organisations using “imperfect” data to force social change against violations of human rights where the actions were to: inform citizens, request action (data as evidence), and build capacity (through alliances) (Alvarado Garcia et al., 2017)⁶⁵.

On one hand, there were benefits of capturing this community-generated data. For both the community organisation facilitators and the decision-makers this meant their work was *visible* and could be used as *evidence*, related to the consultation process. Furthermore, there are opportunities for review, archive, and dissemination. On the other hand, there are clear issues with so much data, in particular how to make sense of it or make it meaningful to decision-makers, in other words how to make it “actionable”. Furthermore, the way in which some of the community decision-makers (in particular, the Parish Council) reacted to the data collected raises questions around the role of data

⁶⁵ These issues are addressed more thoroughly in the second case study, in which I draw focus on the role of data.

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(and experiences) as *evidence*. This dichotomy between experiential knowledge against a rational, or quantitative argument is discussed in chapter 2.

To the civil society organisations, I collaborated with during this study, data meant being able to evidence that consultation had taken place, in order to evaluate themselves against the success criteria of funding bodies or show a local authority that the community has been consulted. This does not necessarily translate to the use of this data to inform the outcomes of consultation in ways that are representative of public opinion or matters of concern. The decision-making collaborators talked about the events being *evidence of* what they have done, not what they found out. A further question about the meaningfulness of the rich dialogic data generated by, or representing community views, relates to the ways in which decision-makers desired data that is simple to read, easy to understand, and quantitative. This was, in part, related to what appeared to be epistemological biases in terms of privileging what they saw as 'facts' and numbers over qualitative attributes. But the lack of engagement was also problematic because of the ways the groups are able to put their own narrative on these simple figures and use them to create evidence to back their cause. My findings indicate that that the groups were positive toward the process because they considered it a means to make the work of 'doing' consultation visible, and in one case raised their profile to attract new members. However, the outcome of the events was not considered to be meaningful, or something from which the decision-making group could make "actionable". It could be argued that they saw the 'utility' of the data (*in order to* provide evidence of consultation), but did not see the meaningfulness (*for the sake of* representing public opinion) (from Arendt, 1958).

5.5.3 On power and accountability

In previous HCI research that focuses on the nuances and mundane aspects of work with civic organisations (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018c; Le Dantec & Fox, 2015; Strohmayer et al., 2018) and echoed in work on localism (McGuinness & Ludwig, 2017; Bradley & Brownill, 2017) concerns are raised around the democratic rhetoric that surrounds devolved decision-making that community representatives may lack the social capital and resources required to access certain people or places within their community. In this study, this relates to problems of representation and diversity and is bound up in issues of accountability. The civil society organisations invited residents to the events

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using their networks. The groups they invited were not diverse, and Darrenton in particular represented a very narrow demographic. Such details may be left out of the evidencing and reporting on consultation work by community organisations, however, this type of detail can be made visible through the richness and veracity of the data and outcomes of sociodigital systems like *Community Conversational* that support the capture of ‘talk-based’ community-generated data.

However, a concern raised by this study is the way in which community organisations, with exclusive access to data generated by platforms like *Community Conversational*, are able to represent that data in ways that give a sense of impartiality and neutrality. The concern here then is that decisions made might be in some way masqueraded, or that the representativeness of the consultation (or lack thereof) might be disguised. Furthermore, it speaks to issues already identified in community-led consultation around the hand-picking of abstracted, community-generated data to legitimise pre-existing decisions (e.g. Taylor et al., 2012; Christensen & Grant, 2016; Ercan & Hendriks, 2013)⁶⁶. In other words, if the type of data collected by platforms like *Community Conversational* is presented online in full, and is easily searchable, residents or other community organisations can make visible when organisations are misrepresenting the people they are seeking to represent. With this comes questions around who should have access to this data. This study looked at the role of community organisations in this space, as in this context it was, they who had the responsibility to carry out decision-making. Prior work has highlighted how the handing over of decision-making responsibility in this manner could lead to problems of bureaucracy (Burgess, 2014; Young, 2000), power relations (Fung, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 1998b), the marginalisation of certain citizens (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004) and even the creation of a new kind of creative political rule (Bang, 2004, 2005), as highlighted in chapter 2. Furthermore, they may also cause inequalities in forming new power structures, with community representatives setting their own agendas (Boyte, 2004; Fung & Wright, 2003b; Fischer, 2006). In this study, these issues were not pronounced, but there were obvious challenges associated with the ways in which representatives of decision-making organisations interpreted what was captured in the events and placed limited value on the deliberative talk of residents.

⁶⁶ This has implications for the democratic function articulated in the conceptual framework I outline in chapter 4.

5.6 Reflections on the conceptual framework

This case study was conducted at community consultation events where residents were invited to discuss, and map assets related to their neighbourhoods to inform community decision-making. The fieldwork highlighted problems with equality, and turn taking (*ethical function*), the evidencing and elaborating on opinions by residents (*epistemic function*), and challenges related to capturing and documenting the events, and the related outcomes (*democratic function*). Informed by the prevailing issues identified in this context the primary focus was on respect, reciprocity, and fairness which I approached through a sociodigital design to encourage turn-taking, listening to, and responding to competing claims. The design of *Community Conversational* was such that it opened up what is considered to be democratic deliberation through the concept of 'deliberative talk'.



Figure 5-9. Participants examining additional information in workshops

The *epistemic function* was addressed in two ways. First, through the attendance of local councillor and a community engagement officer from the local authority at each event, second through the availability of additional information on the maps and on the walls around the space in which the events took place (see Figure 5-6). This was successful in that it acted as a touch point for the facilitators and as a reference point to support specific location-based discussion, particularly around urban development plans where there was fear of significant development and misinformation. However, the amount of information available was inconsistent across each event, and primarily from local authority sources meaning it was information on decisions that were already ratified. This

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was problematic on two levels. First, it's too late for the consultation to affect, and second, it was not available in such a format to 'work with' the viewpoints and opinions of participants in a meaningful way to them, nor in a way that would translate to the policymaking level or stage of the democratic process. In other words, it only allowed for residents to voice disapproval to things they could not affect—leaving them with no influence over the decisions that affect their lives or communicate this in a way that was not simply making a vocal complaint, in vain. The information available then should be both relevant and accurate but must also have utility.

Furthermore, by opening up the conversation to encourage competing validity claims, storytelling, and the sharing of experiences, while binding it to encourage fairness of opportunity to contribute, attempted to create a level of inclusion and legitimacy through the process. As discussed above legitimacy can be approached as a design opportunity in two ways: (1) ordinary citizens' expressions of views are meaningful to policymakers; and, (2) policymakers are equally enabled to respond, and be held to account.

5.7 Summary of chapter

This case study chapter documents the design and deployment *Community Conversational*—a sociodigital system designed to provide a flexible structure to consultation events related to 'place' (Bradley, 2017), and support the production, capture, and review of 'deliberative talk' to support decision-making around the allocation of community funds. In facilitating and organising deliberative talk through turn-taking questions arose about the 'type' of data and meaningfulness of evidencing and elaborating residents' viewpoints as evidence and the additional support required to capture and document this form of consultation activity in ways that are consequential. In this study, I have focused on an instance of localism enacted by a collaborative arrangement between civil society organisations across two sites. Through an investigation of the role of game mechanics to configure interaction and implementing capture technologies to record the structured dialogue I gained insights into and was able to reflect upon the complex collaborative processes around community decision-making. Within this setting I have investigated the role that 'deliberative talk' can have in instances of localism, placing emphasis on the need to scaffold conversations in these settings and provide ways for such talk to be captured and used as 'data' for decision-making

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processes. In doing so, I have raised questions about the accountability of community organisations, and the role of community-generated data, specifically the value of 'deliberative talk' in consultation processes. In the next chapter, I present the second case study. This study involved developing the *Community Conversational* platform to include quantitative 'data' to respond to the issues identified in this study around *evidence for* policymaking.

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CASE STUDY 2 – EXPLORING THE ROLE OF DATA

6.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I described the first case study where I outlined an analysis from interviews with civil society actors and participant-observation (Watson, 1999) at community events, and described how this informed the design, deployment, and evaluation of a sociodigital platform that fostered the conditions for 'deliberative talk' at consultation events and created an associated system that captured and organised the audio data. In this chapter, I outline how this platform was reconfigured to address the reflections on the conceptual framework from case study 1 – which despite contributing to a fairer and more equal discussion, raised issues of the perceived legitimacy of qualitative 'evidence'.

In the UK, there is a strong emphasis on data to inform policymaking processes (Kitchin, 2014; Sanderson, 2002). In particular, evidence-based policymaking is at the centre of national and regional urban planning processes (Healey, 2015, 2003, 1998; Tewdwr-Jones & Thomas, 1998; Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998), and increasingly data is at the heart of what policymakers understand as

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evidence. However, as Hakken (2003) has warned, the presumptions we have about knowledge have now become embodied in economic policies and social programs, which opens questions about *Datafication* (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013) where the collection of statistics about citizens is framed as 'knowledge' for creating policies that affect people's lives.

With this study, I intended to build on learning from the last case study that grounded discussion more in wider epistemic issues, such as the idea of evidence and statistics. This case was particularly interesting as a collection of civil society groups that had a desire to utilise data as part of their activities and use this to gather interest in and evidence for a neighbourhood plan (NP). This context offered an opportunity to respond to the concerns raised in the previous study around the perceived legitimacy of evidence as well as an opportunity to explore the idea of informed decision-making with a community partner that was already exploring the use of open data to inform and engage residents in the NP.

As such, there was a need to better understand the following concerns in relation to the wider research questions (i) the role of open data and statistics to foster informed decision-making in these processes [RQ2]; (ii) the challenges faced by civil society organisations involved in devolved decision-making [RQ3]; and, (iii) how theories and methods of more dialogic forms of engagement, such as deliberative democracy, can be used to facilitate these processes of policymaking [RQ1].

6.2 Case study context

The second study took place in *Moorholm* with three civil society organisations: *Moorholm Connect*, *Oak Tree Trust*, and *Flicks* (all pseudonyms). All three associations function within the geographic community of Moorholm as charity organisations specialising in social mobility and providing rudimentary public services that were traditionally provided by local government, such as those outlined in chapter 2. The town was selected as a pilot for a new initiative around the Localism Act and received funding for a specialist membership network to support community organisations (Locality⁶⁷) to work with civil society organisations in the community to start the neighbourhood

⁶⁷ Locality are a charity organisation who support civil society groups to 'meet local need' and provide training, resources, advice, and support (<https://locality.org.uk/>)

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plan process. A criticism of the neighbourhood plan policy device was that it was mainly picked up in more affluent areas, typically where educated, ex-professionals resided in more socio-economically advantaged communities (McGuinness & Ludwig, 2017; Bradley & Brownill, 2017). The consultants from Locality set up a weekly meeting known as the neighbourhood plan forum in the community building owned by the Oak Tree Trust, in collaboration with representatives from the three civil society organisations. The first task for the groups was to establish a group of residents that would be the neighbourhood plan forum. Due to the main contextual factors at this site and the nature of the collaboration, there was a focus on the role of data and the nature of 'evidence' for localism and local decision-making. Besides, reflections from the previous study in Darrenton, where my collaborators requested simple graphs and figures, led to a re-focus on the *epistemic function* of the conceptual framework.

The main focus of this study was the ways information and data about the community impacted deliberative processes at the local level, and the way deliberative consultation could relate to notions of legitimacy. First, through rooting the deliberative talk in 'data' to act as a way of 'informing' citizens, and second, through adding an epistemic element to the outputs of deliberative processes at the local level by using 'data' to augment and 'evidence' the utterances and claims of citizens. The original *Community Conversational* process designed in the first case study contained information about planning applications and developments in the area (see Figure 5-9). However, it did not utilise any form of statistical or numerical data as part of the main game interaction. Therefore, in order to work within the context and aims of this study, the physical artefacts of the platform were adapted to include a 'data' element.

6.3 Overview of study design

The study took shape across three activities. The first activity involved a process of understanding the key stakeholder community members and residents through field notes informed by unstructured opportunistic interviews, participant-observation at community events, and attendance at official meetings for the neighbourhood plan forum. The second activity involved running deliberative workshops, where a paper prototype version of *Community Conversational* was modified to include graphs and tables representing data for different areas of the town. The third activity consisted of

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semi-structured interviews with ten civil society group actors involved in the community. The purpose of these interviews was to reflect on their current practices around consultation and community engagement, evaluate the impact of the deliberative workshops and other events, and led to a discussion of the interplay between data and people in these processes.

6.3.1 Exploratory stage

The first phase of the collaboration with the community began 12 months before the re-design stage and coincided with the preliminary stages of the neighbourhood plan process. Over the course of that year, I worked with local authority actors, several community actors, and civil society groups on various projects and community events in Moorholm to get a better understanding of the place and people living there. I performed the role of participant-observer in a series of forum meetings, organised by the civil society groups and chaired by Locality, with residents who were interested in becoming part of the neighbourhood plan (hereafter just Plan) working group, to explore how they could use the process of the Plan to bring about change to improve the community in different ways in line with their group's main purpose. These meetings resulted in the creation of five themes (e.g., housing and employment), which could act as areas of focus for the beginnings of putting together a local planning policy document. Despite some interest, the attendance at these meetings was often disappointing, and a concern that not only was the same small group of residents attending but also within that group some people had a dominant influence on discussions. Regular meetings and discussions with the community leaders who were driving the process forward resulted in the decision that to support the democratic processes of the neighbourhood plan, there was a need for a wider engagement with the community. At this point, I offered to contribute to the design and organisation of some engagement workshops with residents to explore how to address the thematic issues and engage the wider community.

I took field notes during meetings and events (when appropriate) and wrote memos and notes which allowed me to reflect on the current practices of the groups, the ways they communicated, and the role they played in getting residents involved in the NP forum. Like in case study 1, these notes and fieldwork observations were framed by the conceptual framework and the current and potential role of technology to investigate the ways in which current practices were deliberative. These field notes

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where used to structure conversations with my collaborators and establish shared areas of focus for the design of any intervention. Unstructured interviews carried out during this period revealed that the civil society groups, over the last few years, had carried out several consultations and community engagement, using traditional methods, such as town hall meetings, questionnaires, and posting leaflets through residents' doors. Moorholm Connect and the Oak Tree Trust, favoured hosting events at their community building, whereas Flicks used training events at several venues and locations across the town, and 'knocked on doors' to gather opinions or support for existing projects and ideas. The groups felt they had been successful at engaging their community members in their core activities, such as youth work, employability skills and training, and social events such as coffee mornings and community action days⁶⁸. However, they struggled to engage people in the neighbourhood plan process. Locality had a limited amount of time they could spend supporting Moorholm to establish a neighbourhood plan forum so were increasingly putting pressure on the three groups to recruit residents. Representatives from the groups were particularly interested in giving residents access to open data sets. My collaborators felt that the statistics about the area might act as a catalyst for discussions about the community and the local environment in order to open a dialogue around 'place' that would support them as well as create interest in the NP. Following several discussions with community leaders and the local authority, they asked for support to design methods for and run some workshop activities that would engage residents in a structured dialogue around data. Initially, I organised two pilot studies with the Oak Tree Trust and Flicks in their community buildings, before holding the main workshop in the Moorholm Connect community building. The civil society groups provided the venue for the workshops and invited residents to them through their social networks. My role was to explain the *Community Conversational* process, and activity once residents arrived and provide a report to the civil society groups involved in the planning process, on what information was captured during the workshops.

⁶⁸ These were open events in which the civil society group hosted several external agencies to run activities and provide training or activities, as well as serving lunch and providing childcare.

6.3.2 (Re)design and deployment stage

The intervention I discussed with the group was based upon the original *Community Conversational* platform (discussed in Chapter 5) designed to structure and capture conversations about people's experiences of living in a specific neighbourhood. However, this new version would be adapted with the integration of a layer of data (statistics and graphs) using open-source datasets from governmental institutions (i.e. Home Office, Office of National Statistics). The main workshop was held on the same day as a community event at the Moorholm Connect building around safe communities and residents were able to sign up before or on the day. Despite only three people signing up beforehand, the eventual session included 12 residents across two tables. The workshop lasted one hour, including instructions at the start. The conversations were audio recorded and marker data captured using audio recorders and computer vision technologies as with the first case study.

6.3.2.1 Integrating a data element during the workshop

Building on the initial sociodigital platform (as described in chapter 5) an additional paper layer of data was integrated using open-source datasets from governmental institutions (i.e. Home Office, Office of National Statistics). These data were requested by my community partners during a series of discussions, where they would request information on rates of employment or crime figures. Then I would identify the source of such data from the relevant institution, access it and represent back to the groups as simple graphs and images (infographics) on specific places (output areas) that related to the national data to specific areas of the map, so data was available to a more granular level⁶⁹.

In other words, the infographics and graphs were an attempt to represent local data from national statistics. These statistics were presented to participants as simple tables, graphs, and graphics embedded as a layer into the map that formed the board for the deliberative workshop activity (see Figure 6-1). These particular statistics were selected and collated by my collaborators. The map data was based on the five priority areas for Moorholm, as identified during the initial community meetings with residents (i.e., housing, transport, employment, health, anti-social behaviour, and

⁶⁹ This process was created by a collaborator as part of a data science project, which I adapted for use in this study

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crime). This was presented as a paper prototype design. This process involved printing out the graphs onto a layer of A0 paper, and cutting out flaps on the map so participants could lift the flap to reveal the information in the relevant geographic area of the town (see Figure 6-1).



Figure 6-1 Statistics from open data integrated into the map (prototype 1)

We had discussions about re-designing the prompts from the first case study to specifically refer to the data points in the map, however, my collaborators preferred to maintain the original elements and game mechanics from the previous study. They wanted to run the deliberative workshops in a way that added to the original design (the data layer) without taking anything away or changing any other aspects of the design. Moreover, the groups wanted to hear views based on more neutral questions prompts to determine if residents would ‘use’ the data to back up their claims.

6.3.3 Evaluation

I organised and ran three workshops⁷⁰ with my collaborating civil society actors who recruited participants from their existing networks in the community. During these sessions they observed, or in some cases took part as residents, where I asked them to take the role of 'community member' not 'community leader'. After the workshops, I interviewed the civil society actors who had collaborated on the workshops, those present at the workshops, and some other community leaders who were not part of the workshops, for example, the local neighbourhood police officer and a local councillor.

This took the form of semi-structured interviews on the topics of data, the neighbourhood planning

⁷⁰ Two drop-in sessions during the Community Action Day and a self-contained *Community Conversational* workshop

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process, and the role of civil society with community leaders and key stakeholders in snowball sampling that involved each interviewee passing the interviewer on to another person they identified to interview about the same topics. All participant-collaborators I interviewed were residents of the town, apart from the chief officer of one civil society group, the council officer, and one charity worker, who travelled in from neighbouring areas in the region. This was an important part of the selection criteria, as interviewees were in the position of representatives of the community. This was an important factor in my approach to research that places participants as experts that bring value in the collaboration that is rooted the specific and located values, arguments, and worldviews people and organisations bring into design and research contexts (e.g., Agid & Chin, 2019). Apart from the elected councillor who had worked in civil society roles previously, all interview participants were employees or volunteers (some worked part-time and volunteered their time over those contracted hours) from the three main civil society organisations in Moorholm. They had worked in their current role for between 1.5 and 17 years, for an average time of 7 years. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis as discussed in the following in the findings section.

6.4 Findings from case study 2

In this section, I present the analysis in five thematic sections that represent groupings of coded interview data around wider issues that represent my participant-collaborator experiences in their own words, and the recorded dialogue from resident-participants the *Community Conversational* deliberative workshops carried out in this study.

The following represents audio recordings from ten semi-structured interviews with community leaders, as well as audio recordings of resident-participants taking part in the *community conversational* platform at the drop-in and the deliberative workshops (see Table 6-1). *Telling stories* discusses the negative stereotypes the community face as a result of national data and how they resist these labels and form a collective identity. Some of these issues are highlighted in the second thematic area, *Working together*, which discusses relationships within the community and between the organisations, and similarly, *Doing it alone* discusses the lack of collaboration and issues with trust. *Using what they've got* brings to attention how these issues relate to the work of the civil society groups, while also bringing into focus the resources and knowledge in the community across the civil

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society organisations and the practices around collecting and sharing data as well as the utility of data. The fifth and final theme, *Getting on with it*, focuses on issues of disempowerment, conflict, and loyalty. The context for this theme is provided in *Telling stories* and developed in *Working together* and *Doing it alone*, where issues of ‘othering’ and trust come to the fore.

ID	Role	Engagement Practice(s)
Residents		
MP 1-11	Resident-Participants in Community Action Day in Moorholm	Residents at <i>Community Conversational</i> drop-ins
MP 12-26	Resident-Participants in the deliberative workshop in Moorholm	Participants at <i>Community Conversational</i> workshop
Community Leaders and Organisers		
MD1	Community Organiser, Oak Tree trust	interview, Facilitator at a workshop
MD2	Volunteer, Oak Tree trust	interview
MD3	Program Manager, Oak Tree Trust	interview, Facilitator at a workshop
MD4	CEO Moorholm Connect	interview, Facilitator at a workshop
MD5	Elected Councillor	interview, Introduced workshops
MD6	Chief Executive of Oak Tree Trust	interview, Facilitator at a workshop
MD7	Community Development Co-ordinator, Flicks	interview
MD8	Leader of Flicks	interview
MD9	Neighbourhood Police Officer	interview
MD10	Community Engagement Officer at LA	interview

Table 6-1. Participants, their roles, and the engagement practices carried out as part of the study

6.4.1 Telling stories

The community that forms the context for this study is perennially at the bottom of the UK government’s list of most deprived areas according to the national statistics indicators⁷¹. In the

⁷¹ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>

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workshops one resident-participant explained this when sharing their experiences of young people from a more affluent neighbouring town talked about the impact of this on those from outside of the community: "*We had people from [neighbouring town] and they didn't want to come here because of the reputation, but when they came they loved it and they can be ambassadors for this place now cos it's a lovely place. That's teenagers, but it's what parents pass on*" (MP26). In this interaction, another resident-participant reflected that this is a misconception that is easily challenged from experiencing the community first-hand: "*Some of my young people were like 'I'm not going there I'll get stabbed' but once they came, and it goes to show because they'd never been, they had this perception*" (MP25). Open data, and how this is reported on and conceived, therefore often gives the community a label that brings negative perceptions, a reputation associated with anti-social behaviour, and crime, but that is not reflective of the lived experiences of members of the community.

There is resistance against the 'deprived area' tag which is commonly discussed. This came up several times during the fieldwork and in the *community conversational* sessions. For example, MP25 discussed their frustration with structural aspects of the built environment, which were put up in response to riots in the 1990s: "*a 2-minute walk becomes a 10-minute journey cos there's no access. But it's not the nighties anymore*". One community organisations worker indicated that the local news media are prone to perpetuating a negative image of the community: "*no matter what you do that's positive, the papers put a negative spin on it*" (MD7). The media does not tell the story in a way that is recognisable to the community. MD6, a senior member of a charity organisation in the community, discussed this as a representation that is difficult to control and is surprised by the perception that is constructed: "*I've recently seen two or three films about the estate - and we've been involved in a lot of them. And in each occasion, I've been shocked by the pictures, and they are the things I see every day.*" An image—considered misleading—is constructed in this film which focuses on damaged and vandalised buildings or untidy parts of the community.

The media coverage of the community is perceived by MD2 as a way of perpetuating negative stereotypes associated with deprivation. The 'deprived' label is talked about as something that is 'used against' the community: "*I mightn't have the best paid job or I'm not in the statistics that say 'this is a high-income job' but you don't humiliate people by saying I'm deprived. [...] A lot of the*

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young'uns were a bit miffed that they were still saying it was sort of deprived, you know they're trying to better themselves". There were times when community leaders spoke about part of their role as a responsibility to show positive stories to counteract the media portrayal: "I mean in some respects I think organisations like ours have got a bit of a responsibility to collect...I mean we do collect positive stories of things, that have changed for the better and that's largely why we get up every day and come to work" (MD4).

Within this social perspective, my collaborators faced resistance. There is a perception that the services provided by civil society groups are only for those who are struggling. This perceived perception from the outside world is problematic for the civil society groups in terms of engaging people in community projects, who don't want to be seen as "*tramps or whatever*" for using the services they provide. Paradoxically, statistics that show deprivation make it easier for them to apply for funding from national funding bodies: "*We're often asked by funder to portray the worst possible picture of the estate*" (MD6).

Participant-collaborators often reflected that it is easy to show statistics about deprivation, but more difficult to show the positive things that the community organisations do, in their work with residents. From early in my collaboration with the community and partner organisations they discussed a will to create positive stories about the community. One community leader felt that it was important to them to have forms of information beyond the headline deprivation figures: "*The life stories have got to be part of it, like case studies, that sort of thing.*" (MD6). Another participant explained this as something they feel is unfair, but a basis for solidarity: "*I think they're fiercely proud and loyal to one another [...] and because they've been labelled, they want to sort of rally against it I think.*" (MD4)

6.4.2 Working together

During the workshops, resident-participants thought carefully about how they were presenting their views and built on others' points. For example, MP23 builds on a complaint about parked cars by highlighting the dangers and indicating action.

MP22: "*and there's loads of cars parked along there*"

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MP23: *“yea, one of the things we talked about is going along to the shops, and how I haven’t been hit or anyone else hasn’t been coming along those shops, so things have to be put in place”*

In another session, MP21, responding to the question of what could be improved in the place the marker is currently placed said: *“I think the memorial could be spruced up actually, I think some work had been done on it. It’s really pleasant her I would want to, but sometimes there is a lot of litter there it could be better maintained there’s a bit a graffiti there, not my cup of tea, actually I wonder if it could be better signposted.”*

MP19 supported the claim: *“Yes when you’re coming down this road you don’t notice.”*

However, without the face to face interaction of the deliberative workshop participants were far less likely to hear another's' view. For example, MP2 during the early drop-in sessions: *“I like it there cos there’s open spaces. And I work there so I like it. But this would just be a paper exercise for me co I don’t know it. I don’t want to just do it for the sake of it.”*

After responding to a prompt that asked the best place to go for information and giving the answer of the room they were currently in (the community centre). MP20 said: *sorry that was such an easy one, I feel like I’ve cheated.*

The civic capacity building element of public deliberation is vital in sites such as this. MD2, a worker and volunteer in a charity that focuses on getting people back into employment explained that when trying to encourage residents to take part in civic action designed to improve their quality of life, they would often get a negative response because of residents' apathy towards the local authority borne out of an overwhelming sense of residents not having a voice: *“Yeah, ‘is it really worth it?’ ‘Will it happen?’ [...] that is the difference.”*

This seemed to discourage civil society groups from association with the local authority. Instead, they felt it was better to be 'on the side of' the residents. During my time with the community, the local authority had arranged events where attendance is much lower than events organised by the community groups. Some local authority officers are respected within the community but, interestingly, these public officials are described in a way that portrays them as autonomous from the

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local authority: *"I mean I know if we see glass lying around and that we can phone because we've got good links with [Anon: local authority office]. We just say, 'look there's graffiti on the wall can you come down and get it off?' Or 'there's glass down here' and he'll just come and do it straight away."*

(MD1). The groups feel they should show loyalty to residents in the community who have been let down in the past by the local authority: *"They haven't been listened to in the past so they're a bit reluctant [...] so they just think 'let's not bother, it's not worth it'"* (MD3).

Community leaders thought that time was the key factor in building trust with the community. The amount of time spent getting to know all of the agencies is often stated very clearly, with an emphasis on time and not being able to take shortcuts: *"you talk to other agencies, you visit all the other agencies, you talk to the churches, you talk to the people in the community - parents, people who live here."* (P8). This particular civil society organisation has been in the community for almost four decades and gives insight into the negative perception civil society groups have for interventions from the local authority or national charities: *"a couple of weeks programme doesn't work, you need long-term"* (P3).

Through speaking to the community leaders, it quickly became clear there is a history of interventions in the community not only from local but also from national organisations providing short-term courses and carrying out various development projects around new and existing infrastructure. This has prompted concern that national charities, in particular, apply for funding in this specific locality, as a way of doing headline-making work, by virtue of its score on the deprivation index. Such concerns have led to short-term engagements that end abruptly when the funding runs out: *"A lot of people have tried to do quick fixes, but they just need to be here for the people, to support them"* (MP3). Many successful projects have closed due to funding running out, which has led to unemployment of residents, employed as part of a project: *"But when they ran out of funding they can't sustain that particular project to employ those people anymore, the project itself sort of closed down."* (P4).

The relationships in the community are important to building trust and encouraging any involvement of residents in community projects. As such as the group's main priority was often to

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create a sense of cohesion, as it was simply not a good idea to attempt to get engagement from residents in activities related to the neighbourhood plan, or indeed any other instrument of localism. Having autonomy from the local authority was essential to this.

The groups I collaborated with had to perform a dual role in working with the local authority in some instances but keeping a distance in others, especially in the eyes of their community members who held a distrust of local authority.

6.4.3 Doing it alone

Typically, issues of ownership are a challenge in data-driven projects. In this community, the local authority is discussed as a 'guardian' of the data: *"at the minute, unless you go to the Council you don't know what data is where."* (MD1). Civil society groups do not have easy access to the local authority or national statistics data. One community leader I interviewed identified the main barrier to involving residents in the neighbourhood plan is the association with the local authority: *"I think people locally are quite wary of the council, they don't see them in a friendly way."* (MD4). The relationship with some groups is so degraded that it would be difficult to arrange access and support: *"That political support, you would have thought would have been easily obtainable wasn't."* (MD6). MD4 talked of changing the terminology as a solution: *"I mean the word 'neighbourhood plan' sounds a bit kind of 'local authority' doesn't it [...] it's about maybe changing some of the language."*

This idea that the local authority does not understand the community well enough also comes up in the workshops. For example: *"There's talk of new council housing down here. For me until the council get there finger out on affordable social housing, I don't think they should do it, just leave it the way it is [...]. No offence to the council but you know the way things are in this area it's not working. The housing for young people is not affordable and I think they should change it to something more communal."* (MP19)

P1 described the connection of the neighbourhood plan with the local authority as the single most problematic barrier and even discussed thinking about being able to disguise or obfuscate the local authority's role in this: *"You can't guarantee that most of the residents on here won't want to work with the Council. If we say 'we had to involve' - which you do, have to involve your local council - they'll be*

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((makes noises of disinterest)) because they've been promised that much off the council in the past and it's never materialised" (MD1). One significant project involving substantial "European money" was invested in two new developments in the area. Residents felt let down by unfulfilled promises it would create employment for the area: "I mean I think the residents were promised that they would employ local people of the estate and they brought outside contractors in. So, everything that the people on the estate got promised didn't materialise" (MD10).

This form of distrust, and a kind of siege mentality manifesting as 'othering' was apparent in the workshops. MP12 challenged the boundary lines from the NP: *"If I was drawing a line it would go here, anything to the right of that is not Moorholm"*. There was also a concern that if the boundary spread any further, toward more affluent areas, then Moorholm would miss out: *"People feel this area is rubbish and won't want to be involved. And the danger is, if you go out as far as [local big town] then they'll want to be at the centre"*. (MP15)

Civil society actors from across the community and organisations agree on how trust and knowledge should be built in the community. MP8, an experienced youth worker reflected about what it takes to make a difference in the community: *"I think the worst thing you can do as an outsider, as a professional, is to come into an area and then assume things and do to people rather than identify what their needs are."*

There are issues of trust between citizens and the local authority that act as a barrier to engagement. Civil society has a distrust of the local authority, particularly around ownership of data, and based on experiences share a mistrust of the local authority with residents, which caused barriers to engagement with civil society groups around the neighbourhood plan consultation process. Within the civil society groups, there's a lack of trust in new organisations that attract funding to carry out interventions in the town, who do not have the same understanding of the community. Community initiatives and data-driven interventions have created distrust toward large charity organisations from residents and local civil society groups. This stems from an issue of data ownership and control, and the way the community's data can be leveraged for top-down interventions that 'miss the point' of the community's issues.

6.4.4 Using what they've got

The Community Development Co-ordinator at Flicks (MD7) described a frustration they feel that the facilities their group has are underused due to lack of awareness about them within the community: *"I think it would be good for people to see what is available because I think a lot of people on the estate don't know this is here [...] and then you compare it with another area where there's nothing – maybe people will look at it and think 'yea there is things here'".* It is possible to imagine that sharing information about services would have a significant role in increasing groups' visibility to residents and to each other. Although this data exists it does not seem to be used effectively. In the following MD8 indicates how the local data the groups' hold should be enough to inform the neighbourhood plan: *"Not duplicating what people are already doing. [...] You can feed data into that plan...of what you've got [...] I think we could give you that information using the data we've got."*

The data that is counted for funding bids or evidence is not what the experts on the ground think counts. In discussing the day-to-day work of one civil society group, the director explained that it was not the rudimentary, persistent issues and social problems that 'attracted' funding. To apply for funding from national charities often concessions, such as focusing on a particular age group, or particular social issue, are needed in order to get the funding. MD6 explains: *"So, to try to package that up to a funder who's looking for something that's sparkly and give them lots of press coverage, it's quite difficult to do that"*.

Moreover, even when a funding bid is successful there are often caveats attached. MD3 described their dismay at the restrictions attached to some funding bids around the circumstances of individuals. For example, they are faced with a difficult situation when they are awarded money to provide and run a service but have to deny access to these services to people, they know are in need but who are not eligible for certain social benefits under the Universal Credit scheme. They are awarded funding but cannot legitimately use it to carry out the day-to-day work of the charity: *"and you can only do certain things if you're [the service user] on certain benefits, well it's not providing a service for everyone"*.

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Some parts of the groups' work were 'invisible' to funders as it was not public data. The idea that there were parts of their work that were not easily made visible, was discussed often. For example, The Leader of Flicks (MD8), who works with young people co-designing projects with the community, articulated the point that their work is not visible to the rest of the community. They used the example of a youth club as a very visible thing in the community and as something you can draw out figures for by using attendance as a metric of success: *"A core group of young people would use that youth centre. But if another group of young people was intimidated by that group, they wouldn't come in. So even though you've got 50 or 20 kids there, it doesn't mean to say you're doing an effective service for young people."* Here, doing something positive with a smaller group of marginalised children is considered something that would not look like an 'effective service' but it is where the real value is in their work. The way the data the groups have is presented as a resource for attracting funders from funding bodies is a perennial issue. It does not always show the true value or contribution of the group members or organisation. Reflecting on the agencies that might collect data that would be useful, one community representative suggested that there are several kinds of data collection within the community from medical organisations, community organisations as well as other administrative data: *"I suspect the only people who aren't collecting data in a formal way are the people who live here."* (MD4)

Despite each community group collecting data, they do not always agree on priorities for the community. Most of the groups indicated that a priority for the community was to invest in infrastructure for young people, which was the result of a data collection exercise carried out by one of the groups: *"we done a survey a few year ago and the priority for that was stuff for kids."* (MD7). However, this is challenged by MD8 who explained that these misconceptions occurred due to groups not being aware of each other's work: *"And I think the mistake that adults make is 'there's nothing for young people' because they can't physically see it."*

There are contrasting views from one civil society group to another who each do their own research and administrative data collection. They do not, or perhaps cannot, share that data or collate it with one another, leading to misconceptions about what provision already exists and what the priorities should be for the community. All the data required to inform a Neighbourhood Plan exists, but it is

distributed across different civil society groups, and each group doesn't know what the other groups hold. As such, this data is effectively lost to the NP and other policy processes.

6.4.5 Getting on with it

Despite issues of data ownership, sharing, and utility in the previous themes, there was a culture among the groups to get things done, work around their barriers and issues with other organisation, including the local authority and a more pragmatic approach to carrying out their role was practiced. Often language used in the interviews reflected the sense that civil society organisations were there to 'fight' on behalf of the community, in particular, against the local authority: *"We had to fight to get a bigger building, we had to fight the Council and it got nasty in parts, it wasn't an easy job (P6).* This sense of having to look out for one another was dominant.

For residents, this is discussed as existing within one particular community group. As discussed above, there are three main organisations in the community, each having a different mission statement but with a lot of overlap in terms of basic community services. Residents who use the services of the civil society groups we worked with felt a sense of loyalty to the group and thus a sense of 'rivalry' and partisan attitude exists between these groups: *"[There are] tensions within the community in terms of loyalty, and you know, whether or not they'll come to this building [...] it's not exactly tribalism, but there is a bit of that sort of sense that a community tends to cluster around specific organisations or specific people."* (MD4).

This is the opposite of feelings toward the local authority, who despite carrying out community engagement work and funding projects in the area, are not seen favourably. MD6, a long-serving community organisation employee in a charity, explained to us that the sense of apathy and disenfranchisement comes from bad experiences: *"And maybe that pride is a bit of bravado and a bit of 'we can cope' but in fairness they've had a lot thrown at them over the years and they've come out – they're still surviving."*

I was often be warned that, based on past experiences, getting people involved in projects would be difficult, and for valid reasons. MD1, reflecting on their own experiences advised us that residents would need to see change happen before getting involved: *"I think that if they knew they had the voice*

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and they also had the power to say 'no you're not building on there' [...] 'that you have to come through us first before they can do it' I think that would probably give them a little bit of thinking 'oh right, I can now finally have a say.'

In order to build a sense of community and protect those who used their services, the civil society workers often spoke of their roles as acting on behalf of residents. The civil society actors are committed to the idea of the neighbourhood plan as a tool for raising engagement that creates an opportunist moment to fulfil their wider agenda around social cohesion and improving the lives of people in the community but needs to maintain a sense of being 'on the side' of residents rather than with the local authority. The way the civil society groups discuss their interactions with the local authority shows they have had to adopt a partisan position to achieve their goals for the residents. Communication at times goes along a more lobbyist or activist approach: *"because we kept on at the Council [...] and we kept it on the agenda, and we kept forcing it"* (MD8).

Another issue is the timescales of decision-making processes and eventual outcomes. The slowness of which is at odds with 'direct action' residents have become used to when working with community leaders. This creates a gap between engagement and action, as well as a 'participation gap' (Acik, 2013), where it is more difficult for some sections of the community to take part than others. For example, MD8 is concerned that the way the neighbourhood plan process works will never suit any of the young people they work with: *"I'd struggle to get young people along to a meeting about the community plan (sic) [...] they don't want to come and talk about it, they want to go straight to direct action"*. MD6 echoed this frustration at the challenge of knowing the best form of civic action, relating it to issues of disenfranchisement and power: *"I think sometimes there's a will to change but they just don't know the way to do it [...] it's difficult to change from a position where you've got no power."*

This position of no power was re-iterated in the workshops MP20, a member of the governing body for the local school discussed statistics they heard in a governor meeting: *"I'm worried about outcomes for kids, and that's not just about the school, that about the expectation about grades just because of where they live. There's a difference in 11 years life expectancy for kids in our estate*

compared to kids 100 yards away and that is criminal. 11 years is a long time, some of them aren't even 11 yet, so to take that away from them, that raises big concerns for me. "

The will to get things done, sense of tribalism, and will of civil society actors to fight to achieve things for the community comes from their understanding of the data about the town and about the people the data represents and what it means for residents. The ways in which residents want to participate is at odds with the way the localism initiative in the form of a neighbourhood plan worked. The data required for the Plan is would be very difficult for the organisations in Moorholm to collect, they can collect data about residents but using residents opinions and ideas for the Plan would be seen as a form of 'knowledge exploitation' (Müller, 2018) when compared to their existing practices around 'getting things done'.

6.5 Discussion of case study findings

In trying to investigate tensions around using open datasets (e.g. national statistics) for local decision-making and access my analysis surfaces the experiences of civil society actors when given devolved decision-making responsibility, and their relationship with data, the local authority, and the residents in their community. In the following sections, I will draw on some key issues such as the interplay between people's experiences of their community, data and evidence, the role of civil society within this complex policymaking space, and the ways we can use this understanding to build the epistemic capacity or civil society.

6.5.1 On evidence and data

There is a growing interest in the idea that the release of data from government and the private sector creates potential opportunities for data-driven civic participation (Tenney & Sieber, 2016b), with research that points to the idea that open datasets could also be used for novel forms of democratic participation, and social interactions (Chourabi et al., 2012; Janssen et al., 2012). As such, there has been a strong focus on increasing the capacities of civil society organisations to make sense of data (Ruijter et al., 2017; Puussaar et al., 2018) and act upon data they gather (Lindley et al., 2017; Alvarado Garcia et al., 2017), particularly when this is concerned with increasing the efficacy and literacies of citizens (Wolff et al., 2017; Bhargava et al., 2016; Matthews, 2016; D'Ignazio & Bhargava, 2015).

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The civil society groups I worked with were required to provide evidence for writing funding bids to funding bodies and to persuade the local authority for more resources. This raises concerns that civil society groups will privilege doing the type of work that gets recognition or that is simple to represent with statistics at the cost of excluding those in the community they understand as having the most need for support. There was a recognition that their success stories or their fundamental services could not be turned into data that could be understood by decision-makers or funding bodies.

As reported in previous studies (Wolff et al., 2017; Asad et al., 2017; Erete et al., 2016), the most interesting discussion came from storytelling and participants' reflections, experiences, and opinions. This community-generated data (Balestrini et al., 2017; Gascó-Hernández et al., 2018) is often used to support relational models of civic engagement through storytelling (Erete et al., 2016), learning (Gascó-Hernández et al., 2018; Gordon et al., 2016), and collaborative sense-making practices (Asad et al., 2017; Balestrini, T. Diez, et al., 2015; Wolff et al., 2017; Balestrini et al., 2017). However, in practice references to the data embedded in the paper map were separate from the discussions. Information materials provided as a reference point were not engaged with during the sessions. This could have been for at least two reasons; as the analysis shows, the 'data' provided was not meaningful to resident-participants, and the information was not integrated into the mechanics of the process. When asked about data the participants in this study started by describing demographics and simple statistics like employment and occupancy rates, and this is what I used in the workshops, but on closer inspection, the types of data that did affect their lives came from a multitude of sources (e.g., administrative data⁷², services, residents' stories, use of resources).

Participants in this study did not recognise their own neighbourhood in the official data with which they were presented. The data made people feel they were misrepresented, and they put distance between themselves and the data. This study indicates that community data should be thought of as more than the data captured about the community and held by authorities. It also includes the data produced by the community including their opinions and viewpoints expressed as (in this case)

⁷² Here, administrative data refers to the data the groups collect about their service users, activities, public engagement data collection activities, and other forms of bookkeeping and archiving.

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'talk'. As discussed by my participants, data that is held by the community organisations could be useful in policymaking at a neighbourhood level as well as including the experiential stories that make people's feelings and successes visible.

Moving towards integrating storytelling, and deliberative talk with relevant datasets is one way to make such forms of participation meaningful to decision-makers, legitimising the expressions of concern for decision-makers. Access to, and the ability to use the same data that the local government has about the area may be an important step in establishing such forms of participation. The ways in which the design of events can be consequential should first consider the outputs and how the outputs are translated and transmitted. However, this is bound up in the mode of engagement, and as such, this should first be considered.

As well as questions around governance there is a need for a greater understanding of the types of data that are important, have value, and relevance in data-driven design processes. When taking on such projects we cannot assume that everything that we count, counts, or that everything that counts, is counted (Bruce, 1963). From hearing the experiences of collaborators in this study it suggests that this is whatever a community cares about enough to measure.

Finally, the perceptions that exist within the community present the problem of a double-edged sword for those working to empower and improve the lives of citizens. On one hand, national statistics data (e.g., the deprivation index) makes it easier for them to get funding to continue as a charity or community organisation. On the other, it makes their task more difficult, because it creates the stigma around using their services and discourages residents from getting involved in civic action. This opens up questions about the role of national statistics data in local decision-making, whether it should be part of such processes at all, and what opportunities communities have to create their own stories to challenge what this data represents.

6.5.2 On legitimacy and consequence

The relationship between civil society and the state or other civic authorities is important to the perceived legitimacy and impact of an organisation (Young, 2000), as well as the way trust is built with citizens (Kuyper & Wolkenstein, 2019; Hendriks, 2016; Elstub & Mclaverty, 2013; Corbett & Le

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Dantec, 2018b, 2018a). In the past, my collaborators' most successful form of civic action and communication with the local authority came from a type of 'disruption' rather than consensus (Korn & Volda, 2015). This is not unusual and has been found in other contexts such as during Participatory Budgeting in São Paulo, Brazil, where civil society actors used their positions as administrators in the PB exercise to 'occupy other decision-making arenas' (Hernández-medina, 2010). In *HCI, Civic engagement & Trust* (Harding et al., 2015) the authors call for civic technology design that is sensitive to the needs of both civic authorities and citizens, moving away from what they identified as an almost exclusive focus on 'empowering citizens'. Whereas others have called for reflection on system design to "better cater to these kinds of political work and facilitate illegitimate civic participation as a valuable and significant means of practicing democracy" (Asad & Le Dantec, 2015, p.1702).

Previous work in HCI shows, gathering opinions and views of citizens is often the easy part, but the problem lies in the link between engagement and action (Taylor et al., 2012; Vlachokyriakos, Comber, et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2016). Others have discussed the idea of a 'black hole' (Asad & Le Dantec, 2015; Le Dantec & Edwards, 2010; Le Dantec, 2012) to reflect the tendency for local views and community decisions to become lost in the system and have no tangible impact on the policy process. In political science terms, this is an issue of 'legitimacy'. Because decisions are made in the absence of those whose lives are affected by that decision, the policymakers themselves are not trusted, nor are the decisions seen to reflect the views of a community. As such, the decisions made by those in power and not considered 'legitimate' by the citizens. This manifests in issues foregrounded in this study around a lack of trust and disempowerment.

Democratic legitimacy can be derived from the inclusivity of democratic processes (Dryzek, 2009; Mansbridge, 2014). Community mapping projects have shown to be successful as an engagement method (Shkabatur, 2014; Elwood, 2008) and in policymaking (Parsons, 2004). They offer a means for citizens to engage in a form of participation that is more engaging than a vote and more meaningful than a town hall meeting. One of the aims of the policy device of neighbourhood planning is to represent "counter-narratives to the dominant planning paradigm" (Brownill & Bradley, 2017). Further, research into engagement in the planning process has suggested that novel

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‘storytelling’ approaches can empower people who feel they are ‘missing’ from the data (Manuel et al., 2017). Similarly, putting the voices of citizens from a community into dialogue with the large data sets about that area, to contrast with it could support more democratic legitimacy.

There was a belief from my collaborators that data could give people a voice or empower them, but it is the consequence of that voice that is a major concern in projects and initiatives discussed in this case study chapter. To be consequential the outputs need to be obtained in the right way, delivered in the right format, and to the right place at the right time. As such, the design of deliberative consultation processes should consider the ways that deliberative talk (as data) can be reified into a ‘resource for action’ (Suchman, 2007b, 1987) to those making decisions otherwise it is useless. Furthermore, making that voice, which is exhibited as storytelling and dialogue among residents on ‘matters of concern’ (DiSalvo et al., 2014), part of the evidence for decision-making is one way of making processes not only more inclusive but legitimate to citizens through their involvement. This could also be true of the involvement of other citizens who act as ‘trusted proxies’ (Gastil et al., 2007) in instances where trust for public officials in representative democracies is lacking.

6.5.3 On collaboration and cohesion

In this case study, it was clear that there was potentially a myriad of data collected and used within the community as a resource for funding bids and service design, dispersed across a range of institutions. At least one problem with this, or perhaps a potential solution to the problem, manifests itself through an apparent discrepancy in the priorities identified by some groups compared to others. A way for them to share their administrative data would mean a shared knowledge that would benefit the whole community. They could use data that exists within the community and about the community to coordinate their services better across the town or to support discussion about matters of concern that contrast and challenge national statistics and data sets about the community.

This is in line with recent work on community-generated data and ‘data commons’ that has pointed to the need for, and potential benefits of local hubs for resources, knowledge-sharing, and understanding (Asad et al., 2017; Balestrini et al., 2017; Díez et al., 2017). As well as sharing data, these projects involved co-designing data collection (sensor) tools, and collaboration with

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stakeholders (Balestrini et al., 2017), providing training so that residents could collect their own interview data (Asad et al., 2017), and using citizen-generated image data to allow citizens to express critically their local environment (Díez et al., 2017). All three of these studies in different ways discuss creating a link between empowered and informal arenas through building the epistemic capacity of citizens. In a sense, hubs such as this form a kind of 'public sphere' where ideas are formed and articulated, but the route for these ideas to empowered spaces is of utmost importance.

The data commons concept could be applied to systems that could function as local data repositories owned by the community and managed by a collective of community organisations (Crabtree et al., 2017; Aberer et al., 2010; Marinos & Briscoe, 2009). This will give civil society groups access to more meaningful local data which could in turn benefit citizens. When citizens encounter nonpartisan information and have opportunities for fair and honest dialogue, this creates “probably as powerful a way to help public judgment evolve as has been devised” (Friedman, 2006, p.19). When done across various agencies who hold data in the community, this has the potential to open up opportunities to promote better public judgement on issues, as well as a citizenry capable of healthier and more informed civic action.

Sharing resources in this way has also been found to promote increased social interaction and the sharing of skills (Balestrini et al., 2017), but such data resources should be “*strategically shared*” to maintain autonomy and accountability (Asad et al., 2017). Practically, it could help avoid redundancy of service provision and promote collaboration between institutions and community groups within a community. These ideas of a 'data commons' bring other possibilities. A local repository of community data could also support new agencies that come into the town to carry out community-driven work. It could be used to gain an understanding of the community needs and available existing resources. This raises questions about governance, privacy, and ethics. The above studies indicate initiatives should be community-driven rather than top-down and forced. An alternative view to governance is highlighted in *Citizen-Generated Data and Governments* (Wilson & Rahman, 2015) where it is indicated that the Government could or should host this.

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One important principle that comes from this analysis, is that the community is more important than 'data' to the extent that although data is useless without a group of citizens, a group of citizens can still make things happen without data. Re-thinking the role of data brings with it ideas of building a sense of community through the sharing of positive stories, as well as through sharing resources and data. This must be in place before one can expect any positive civic action to occur.

6.6 Reflections on the conceptual framework

In this case study, I have explored the *epistemic function* by investigating the value of 'data' at a community level in the context of civil society-led consultation on concerns related to a neighbourhood plan. The lead organisations who were set up to co-ordinate the Neighbourhood Plan process had a desire to utilise open data sources about the community. During the first case study, I found that my community partners privileged statistical data, but could appreciate the value in promoting deliberative talk around matters of concern. In this study, data was a means by which to augment the deliberative quality of the discussions around 'place' during the workshops (*ethical function*) and to make the outputs of the workshop more 'relevant' to decision-makers (*epistemic function*), by residents using data to back-up claims, or for civil society groups to couple up resident claims with appropriate data. Through the study, it became clear that there was a greater source of valuable data for the Plan within community organisations, and in relying on the experiences and ideas of residents, as an *epistemic function* in its own right. To render the integration and use of open data in local deliberative decision-making processes a legitimate form of participation thus fulfilling a *democratic function* it must be translated and transmitted from informal arenas to formal arenas of power, in a form that is both 'situated' and as a 'resource for action' in order to promote data as a negotiation between arenas of power, and not something that alienates one group and giving authority to another.

6.7 Summary of chapter

In this chapter, I discuss a study of the consultation exercises surrounding neighbourhood planning and reflect on this to consider the role of data in civic participation. Through investigating the tensions at play in situations where ordinary citizens are carrying out the decision-making process, interfacing with government and national statistics, I discovered a complex set of tensions. In

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discussing the implications of this study, I highlight the importance of the inclusion of data that affects people's perceptions of community beyond national statistics and push for re-imagining the relationship between data and people. Through these findings and the resulting principles for future designs, I bring together ideas on the role of open data, the role of civil society, and the way this interfaces with government policymaking processes in the UK and raised questions about the role of national statistics and data, and the importance of building a sense of community as a 'minimum standard' for community decision-making and instances of enacted localism. In the following chapter, I present the third case study chapter, in which I pick up and further explore reflections from this study on the role of the civil society actors in such collaborative decision-making processes. In particular, the final case study reports on a new design of the sociodigital system that introduces more involvement for collaborators and less influence and resource from the research side of the partnership.

7

CHAPTER 7

CASE STUDY 3 – FOSTERING OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL

7.1 Introduction to case study

In the last chapter (case study 2), I outlined how the design of the *Community Conversational*, a sociodigital platform to support civil society to facilitate deliberative consultation, was iterated to draw focus upon the ways different ‘data’ held by organisations and owned by institutions about a community were negotiated as knowledge and evidence. In my subsequent analysis of this process it was first clear that the idea of data as an epistemic virtue was more nuanced and complicated than first considered, and that more pressingly, the connection between different arenas is of importance, whether it is engendered through the translational aspect of data (as a resource for action) or other means or channels (for example, storytelling, rhetoric, protest—see Dryzek 1990; Mansbridge et al. 2010; Mansbridge 1999; Dodge 2015). The focus in this case study is on the impact of the sociodigital system to support a community organisation in terms of the inclusivity and potential for consequentiality from the localism practices they engender [RQ3].

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The ways that local instances of deliberation can be consequential to actual decision-making processes are integral to local consultation exercises as it confronts issues of legitimacy (Mendonça, 2016; Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018; Mendonça, 2013). The focus of this study builds on learning from prior case studies and the context-specific requirements and ambitions of the collaborators in this study. The final case study will place emphasis on the loop between engagement and action (Acik, 2013) for citizens and ways that processes of local policy design and decision-making may be made to be more inclusive, and in combination with consequentiality increase legitimacy of local decision-making processes (Dryzek, 2009, 2001). From a sociodigital design space perspective, the motivation in this study is on building the capacity of civil society groups to not only listen to community voice but foster a process of listening that is configured to enable community data collected in this way to be a 'resource for action' (Suchman, 1987). As such, in this study the three broad design goals were around (1) making the practices of consultation more aligned with ideas of inclusion; (2) designing processes that could produce actionable data, and; (3) fostering sociodigital design that promoted the sustainability of deliberative consultation practices beyond the research study.

7.2 Case study context

The third case study took place across four rural villages of *Lupton, Elsdon, Carson, and Liddlesdale*, which form a *Big Local* area. In this section, I outline the specific contextual aspects of this case study, which I understand to be within the broader context of localism I have explained in earlier chapters (primarily chapter 2). I begin the section by discussing Local Trusts and the Big Local project, and in particular, I will outline the 'outcomes' the funding body expects of the investment and how these outcomes relate to the issues and concerns I have identified in chapter 2 about local decision-making led by civil society organisations. Following this, I go into some detail about my research study with my collaborating Local Trust group (the *Trust*).

7.2.1 Local Trusts

The Local Trust I collaborated with on this study are part of a national place-based funding initiative, funded by an investment of £220m from the National Lottery Community Fund⁷³. It consists of 150

⁷³ National Lottery Community Fund (Big Lottery Fund, at the time of this study) is a national non-departmental public body set up to distribute funding.

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areas around England, which are each awarded at least £1m the charity. According to the funders, the ambition for each Local Trust is to make “a massive and lasting positive difference to their communities⁷⁴.” The ambition of the Big Local initiative is to bring together local talented and ambitious people and organisations, who possess the skills and energy, to make their area “a better place to live.” Significantly, each Local Trust initiative has a 10-year lifespan, to encourage groups to focus on consultation and avoid finding quick fixes or short-term thinking. The Local Trust areas had a pattern of selection based on factors including levels of deprivation and “areas that may not have been successful in gaining funding and resources in the past⁷⁵”. This leads to questions around a skills gap, in respect of a more profound lack of experience from the locality of carrying out public engagement.

Each Local Trust area has six expected outcomes set by the funder: (1) Communities will be better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them; (2) People will have increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future; (3) The community will make a difference to the needs it prioritises; (4) People will feel that their area is an even better place to live; (5) It's not about your local authority, the government or a national organisation telling you what to do; (6) It's not about individual groups fixing their favourite problem without talking to a wide range of different people who live and work in the community. The funding organisation encourages autonomy from the local authority and other national organisations. Despite the social renewal promised in the form of empowering community actors to 'do it for themselves', this emphasises groups' ability to encourage participation, and carry out effective consultation. The funder also strongly encourage that groups talk to a range of people to ascertain matters of local concern, rather than focus on their "favourite problem" putting emphasis on the need for Trusts to identify who their 'community' is, and how local needs are identified.

7.2.2 Collaborating with the Trust

My contact and collaboration with the group began three years before the data collection that is subject to analysis in this chapter. The organisation is the Local Trust for the neighbouring villages of

⁷⁴ <http://localtrust.org.uk/>

⁷⁵ <http://localtrust.org.uk/about-us/media/>

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Liddlesdale, Elsdon, Lupton, and Carson. The collaboration was initiated by the Trust after they contacted me through a board member when I was working on a project around consultation in a neighbouring town. The Trust was interested in that project and asked me to present the technology and methods to the board members to help support generating ideas related to expanding their consultation activities. Subsequently, this led to a long-term engagement where I attended various meetings and held a series of planning meetings. My main contact in the group was the Public Engagement Officer (PEO) and the commitment and main interaction revolved around my attendance at a series of board meetings and smaller meetings with selected members of the board and various taskforce groups working on specific thematic areas in the town (e.g., Environment, Transport, and Wellbeing). After several meetings over the subsequent months, the collaboration focused on developing the technology and functionality of the *Community Conversational* sociodigital platform (see chapters 5 & 6) to respond to their circumstances. This resulted in an iterated version of the technology, documented below (section 7.3.3).

7.3 Overview of study design

The final case study was designed in the same way as the case studies described in the previous chapters (see Figure 4-3). As such, I followed a process that involved a period of understanding of the current practices and social geographies (Ley, 1983) of each of the contexts before designing and implementing an intervention as part of the Trust's specific consultation processes tied to their allocation of community funds. The second phase of the study involved re-designing and deploying the new version of the sociodigital system (*Ambit*). The third stage involved investigating the impact of *Ambit*, first through an analysis of the discussions during the workshop events, and then through a series of interviews with my main contact, the public engagement officer, and other stakeholders (see Table 7-1).

7.3.1 Exploration stage

I started by meeting the Trust board at their regular meeting where I was asked to pitch and present previous work and other deployments of *Community Conversational* as outlined in previous chapters that I had discussed with the PEO during previous meetings. I was asked to present to them my sociodigital platform and initial ideas as well as discuss other forms of digital intervention in their

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consultation processes. During this phase, I observed meetings and various activities organised or facilitated by the Trust, where they discussed their previous consultation and public engagement work and the stage the project was currently at. A focus in these meetings turned to the forms of engagement and methods for consultation the Trust should develop going forward. Previous engagement activities had relied on town hall meetings, a survey to all households in the area, and various public meetings and events at their main community hub building in Liddlesdale (see Figure 7-1), the largest of the villages where the Trust were based. Part of the requirement at this stage was for the Trust to produce a report for the funders based on the previous 2 years of activity. The expectation here was that the Trust would show evidence of the consultation they have carried out and how this linked to outcomes. This was something they found very difficult to produce and recognised could have been done more meaningfully in terms of incorporating the views and needs of groups across the four villages, so were keen to make sure such opportunities were designed into the next stage of planning.

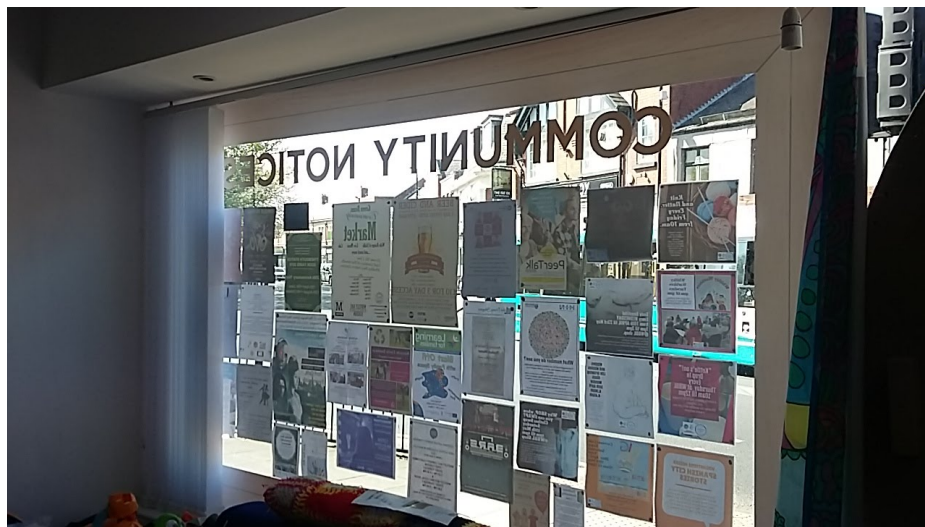


Figure 7-1. The Trust had a building that was used as their HQ and as a space to run activities

As stated above, my attendance at these meetings also involved me presenting technologies I had used in previous studies to the Trust members, as well as examples of civic technologies used elsewhere. During these encounters, some members of the group showed a reluctance to create a 'black hole' where my partners and I opened up new opportunities for residents to give their views without a way to be accountable or even keep track of what information they received. The Trust had experience of opening up channels of communication on social media platforms and were becoming

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increasingly concerned that they would be seen as ignoring community members or that responding to all of this would take up too much time and ask too much of Trust members who were volunteers. In addition, there was a concern raised by some board members that involvement with the research study would simply increase their workload and create more confusion to residents about who the Trust was and their role in the community. One of their objectives in the new plan was to raise the Trust's profile in the community (to involve more people) and raise awareness of the projects and activities run by the Trust. As such, too much explicit presence of 'the researcher' in the villages, and the running of any new activities, was a genuine concern early on in the collaboration.

The individual I worked most closely with at the Trust was a public engagement officer (PEO). This initial fieldwork period involved going on a tour of the four villages with the PEO, where I was given an oral history of each site where they pointed out important community buildings, transport routes, and amenities (or severe lack of). In discussions with the PEO, they articulated the aims of the group and ambition to gather a holistic picture across all of the villages, with a more grounded approach than previous public engagement (under another PEO) and more emphasis on residents' quality of life. The Trusts are afforded a large degree of flexibility in how they structure themselves and allocate funding. The Trust gave out small sums of money directly to small groups of residents or other local civil society groups to support the running of services and groups, from help with venue costs to new equipment or running costs. Their main avenue for fund allocation was to receive proposals from organisations or businesses to carry out larger infrastructure projects or run services at a wider scale. They felt that previous engagement activities had been too 'top-down' and focused on asking residents to select which projects they preferred. The new approach would see the Trust speak to residents first to establish priorities then put out a call to organisations to bid for funding to address the priorities. In reality, this was a two-part endeavour. First, to raise awareness of both the Trust's existing projects and the resources available in each village. Second, to ensure their focus and the concentration of projects and allocation of funding was equitable across all villages. Many of these issues were considered to be the same for many of the other 149 Trusts that were funded through this scheme. However, my collaborators felt they had a unique issue in coming to terms with the distributed nature of their community.

7.3.2 Summary of insights from the exploration stage

First, the Trust had a desire (they thought it was the right thing to do) and epistemic need (they relied on the community members to identify matters of concern and ideas about how to improve the community) to foster a discussion and generate ideas about the community from community members. The Trust had traditionally used engagement methods had little participation from community members, in terms of numbers, and were considered too shallow, in terms of what the group could ascertain about what the needs of their community were. They had held town hall meetings and other forms of community engagement in the past (at Liddlesdale Community Hub) but poor attendance and an inability for the Trust to act upon them required them to establish a new strategy. Second, the Trust had to see the four separate villages as one community but had experienced difficulty in getting people together in one place – people only stayed in their village⁷⁶. Third, the Trust required evidence ‘of consultation’ as well as ‘for consultation’ (see discussion on *utility and meaningfulness* from chapter 5.5.2), in so much as they have to show how they are addressing their plan, as well as any of the expected outcomes from the funding body (as outlined in section 7.2). Finally, the Trust need to run consultation processes that resulted in things they could act on, and that led to clear outputs they could use as evidence.

Ongoing formative meetings with the PEO in Liddlesdale focused on the upcoming 2-year plan for the Trust, which was described to me as a “*transition point*” in which the Trust was required to develop a plan and allocate associated budget. The PEO highlighted the aims of the group as an ambition to gather a holistic picture across all of the villages, with a more grounded approach than previous public engagement (under another PEO) and more emphasis on well-being and residents’ quality of life.

The PEO in Liddlesdale identified a problem they described as an “*issue of territory*”, highlighting that the four villages were not “*naturally connected*”. The ambition was to ‘future-proof’ spending plans by making it more collective across villages, which meant establishing an understanding across the villages that “*there can’t be four of everything*”. In reality this was a two-part endeavour. First, to raise awareness of both the Trust's work and the resources available in each village. Second, to

⁷⁶ This may have been due to their personal choice, or perhaps because the last bus is at 2 pm.

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manage expectations of residents who either expected too much of the Trust or felt they were too concentrated on one particular village.

The Trust also relayed to me that transport was perceived as a major issue but wanted to understand why it was an issue. One of the themes that came up throughout these meeting was a transport link which would create bus and cycle routes between the villages. This tied in with the ambition to mitigate the replication of projects and resources across the villages. In other words, if the villages were connected, surely people would use facilities and resources from other villages. However, as this did not already happen the group and the PEO, in particular, were keen to investigate the barriers to this, rather than follow their assumptions about transport. the PEO explained the situation in the four villages in terms of transport: *“You either have to have villages that have got a lot of resources in the villages or really good transport so people can get out of the villages to go to the stuff they need. Here, we haven't got either.”* Another concern related to the disparate nature of the villages, which came up when we started to plan the public engagement activities, was the factions within some of the villages. For example, Carson had a strong residents association but the PEO described this village as made up of a young person's group, and an older person's group, and a traveller's group. Three milieus that the resident association could not represent. On the other hand, there is a Youth Forum that is being set up across all villages. The Trust had struggled to come to terms with the distributed nature of their community. The funding was allocated to a boundary area including four villages who despite their relative geographic proximity operated as autonomous villages with the exception of some shared resources between two villages, for example, residents of Carson, one of the smaller villages would travel to their closest neighbours in Elsdon to use the post office. In other circumstances, it was more convenient for residents to travel to the nearest large market town by bus than attempt to travel from one village to another. Moreover, the economic disparity across the villages is wide, as are the socio-demographics. In Carson the most affluent of the villages, most residents have moved to the village in their retirement whereas, in Lupton, the smallest village, residents, and families have lived there for generations. So, despite Carson having the least amenities, it is not an issue for residents as they tend to have access to a car and can afford private transport, but Lupton residents are cut off from others without the same opportunities to overcome such barriers.

7.3.3 Re-designing the sociodigital system

Fieldwork and discussions with the Trust led to the re-design of the system in such a way that it enabled them to run a digitally augmented consultation process that collected qualitative data from remote and disparate locations (design goal 1) that supported the second design goal to support sense-making that created 'actionable' data. In doing so the third design goal of sustainability (continued use of the system) could be addressed. Importantly, it was my intention in this study to work in a way that did not create more work for the Trust by inflicting my ideals about how consultation should be run. The subsequent re-designed system involved the introduction of a new web-based application, *Ambit*. Like the previous system, *Ambit* uses a webcam and microphone to capture audio recordings and position data from a physical marker placed on a pre-defined 'map'. During sessions, participants use the physical marker on the map to indicate the location around which the discussion is revolving.

The application utilises the open source *ARToolKit* library⁷⁷ to detect distinctive matrix-code markers printed on the map as well as on the physical marker, allowing it to record the locations and areas being discussed on the map alongside the audio of the discussion. Unlike in previous iterations of the sociodigital design, in this study, a screen (Chromebook) was positioned on the table where a discussion is being held, showing the detected position of the marker on the map at any moment, and the prompts to facilitate the discussion (replacing the physical cards). The facilitator positions the computer screen so that everyone can see it. They then read out the questions and press to change the question at the start of a new turn using the space bar. This means the facilitator has more control (to, for example, skip a question) so less time to take notes or step away, and the physical demarcation of turn-taking becomes an additional responsibility. The main motivations for these changes were technical and prioritised managing the data (outcomes) over aspects of the interaction (process and structure). The result of these changes meant that when the session is finished, the application instantly produces a visualisation of all location and audio data⁷⁸. The design builds on previous case

⁷⁷ <http://www.artoolkitx.org/>, formerly <http://www.artoolkit.org/> at time of study

⁷⁸ Informed by fieldwork at this site and findings from previous studies, the initial re-design included a way to annotate the data collaboratively in the system as well as the ability to import to other map-based platforms. These features were

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studies in a way that recognises the importance of handing over ownership and control and recognises the dangers in creating a deluge of data for those without the skills and resources to manage (see section 7.3.3.2).

7.3.3.1 Creating and running an event with Ambit

The first stage is to use the application to set up a new *Event*, within which several *Sessions* may be created. Creating an *Event* represents the design of a new workshop, where the organiser can upload the map image to be used in the workshop and create discussion prompts. The prompts can be categorised using one of seven ‘prompt-types’ which the organiser selects from a drop-down list (see Figure 7-2).

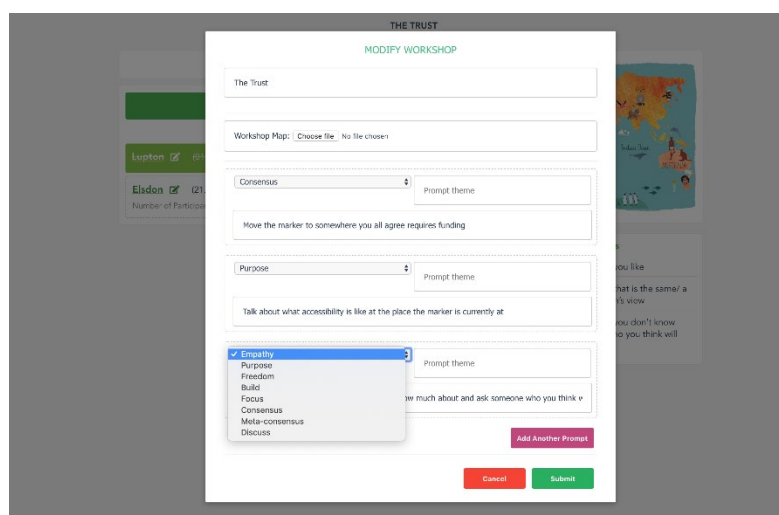


Figure 7-2. Adding prompts to Ambit

Once a ‘prompt type’ is selected the platform suggests a generic prompt in order to guide the organisers own choice. Each prompt can also be assigned a free text entry ‘theme’ if appropriate. For example, the Trust had thematic working groups and focus areas (e.g., environment, transport, and well-being) and by adding the theme at this stage they could sort or search by these in the review stage, within the platform (see Figure 7-5). The prompts were created based on an initial guide that I provided with basic information prompting participants to offer positive and negative opinions, think about the future and reflect on the past, etc. (see appendix C). Initially, the Trust themed the

never realised in the final design due to a lack of access to resources and expertise in line with the timescales of my collaborators.

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prompts based on their five thematic areas, which they did by asking each thematic working group to create their own which they reviewed and compiled into one list and added them to the system. Once the *Event* is created, the organiser is presented with the new *Event* page (see Figure 7-3) from which they can add new workshop *Sessions* and download the image of the map in PDF format ready to be printed. The PDF file is a single sheet of A0 size consisting of the original map image surrounded by several matrix-code markers. The scale and size are important as they contain the markers used to frame the camera vision plain, but during the exploration phase, it became clear that I should not expect community organisations such as the Trust to have the resources required to print large images, without the expense of an external printing service.

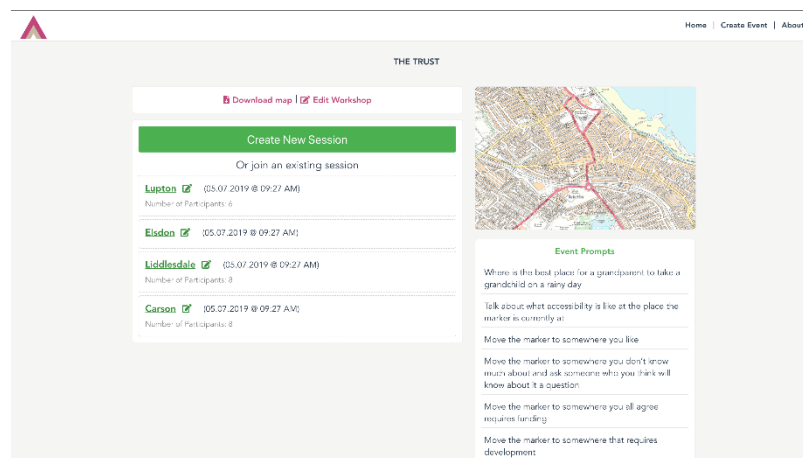


Figure 7-3. Event home page showing recorded Sessions

During the session, the mechanics of the workshop for participants remains the same as previous studies. The camera is set in a position that is orthogonal to the map sheet and can capture the entirety of the sheet. Participants move a physical marker around the map sheet by the resident-participants to indicate the area on the map that is being discussed. In this new version, the map is displayed for participants on a screen, alongside the current discussion prompt which may be changed at any point by a facilitator or participant. An icon indicating the location of the marker is shown on the digital map screen, negating the need to show the 'live video' (see Figure 7-4). This saves on storage of data due to browser restrictions and responds to concerns about privacy expressed by my collaborators. A bar along the bottom of the interface indicates the status of the recorded data and audio files (see Figure 7-4). After a session is marked as finished by the facilitator or organiser, the session data is stored and sorted ready for review (see Figure 7-5).

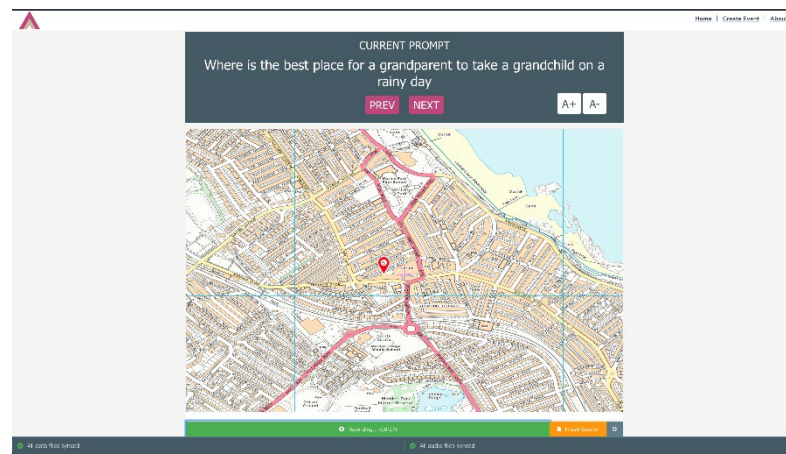


Figure 7-4. Interface during Session indicating that data is being recorded and stored

7.3.3.2 Reviewing and evaluation

The *Ambit* platform enables review immediately after a session is marked as finished. In the visualisation stage, the platform displays a map with coloured markers representing each section of audio (see Figure 7-5), with a corresponding place in the temporal audio bar, and a prompt window from which the audio section may be played back. This map interface may be manipulated by zooming into areas and manoeuvring around the map by scrolling and dragging the image. Alternatively, the audio may be searched by clicking on the desired prompt on the left side of the screen. If a marker on the map is selected the relevant part of the audio bar and prompt on the left is highlighted.

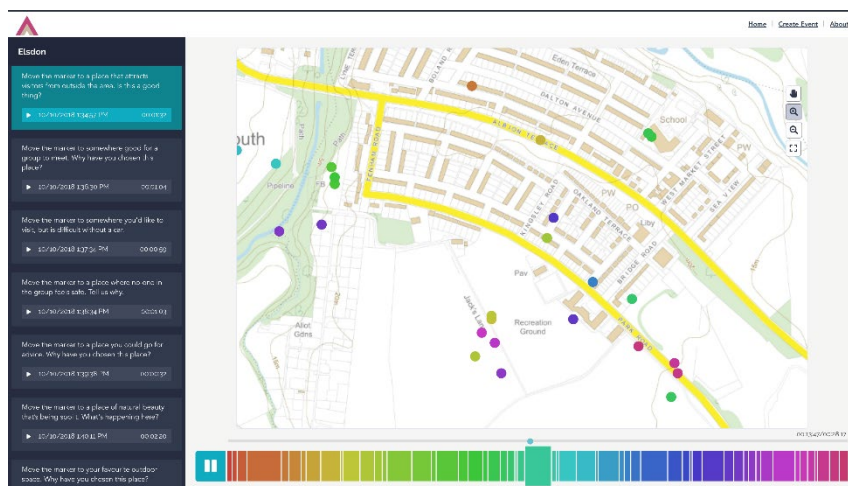


Figure 7-5. Visualisation of Session data for review

7.3.4 Evaluating the sociodigital system

The final stage of the project involved supporting the Trust in the use of *Ambit* as part of their ongoing consultation activities. During this phase of activity, while my collaborators and I collaborators provided initial introductions and demonstrations of the key components of the system, the aim was to intervene as little as possible in the actual running of events and use of the technology 'in the wild'. During consultation sessions, I conducted participant-observation and took field notes, focusing on both the use of *Ambit* by Trust members and the ways resident-participants engaged with the consultation activities and each other during the event⁷⁹. During the final phase, I also conducted interviews with Trust staff and volunteers (see Table 7-1).

ID	Role	Engagement Practice(s)
Citizen-participants		
P1 - 39	Resident-participants at workshops	Participants at the workshop
Collaborator-participants		
T1	Board Member for Liddlesdale Local Trust	Interviews at the early planning stages of the study
T2	Volunteer at the Trust and organiser at an event	Interviews after workshops
T3	Public Engagement Officer for Liddlesdale Local Trust	Interviews at the start, mid-point, and end of the study, facilitator at workshops

Table 7-1 Participants, their roles, and the engagement practices carried out as part of the study.

The first interviews took place after three of the five events, the second phase took place a week after the final workshop, and the final interviews took place two months after the last event. Throughout the consultation sessions, the Trust members facilitating the sessions created 50 prompts for the *Event* tagged under 5 thematic areas, which were used in 5 individual Sessions. During the Sessions, 39 resident-participants logged 104 individual data points that with location and prompt meta-data

⁷⁹ Photography or other documentation was not possible as many of the resident-participant workshop groups were vulnerable members of the community. My main collaborators at this site were also keen for the events to be as focused on the consolation as possible, and my involvement and the 'research' element to be minimum—therefore, photography was not appropriate.

for review. During this phase of the study, I also listened back over the audio from the session (captured via the *Ambit* system on each table) and re-visited the detailed field notes taken at the sessions, taking notes and beginning to make analytical connections.

As with previous case study chapters, audio data from the deliberative workshops, plus the interview data, was transcribed and thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). Analysis of data was conducted through open coding, but with a specific focus on drawing out insights related to the way the system was used and implemented by the Trust.

7.4 Findings from case study 3

The analysis of the data from the sessions with the community and interviews, along with my field notes led to the construction of four themes, which I outline and discuss in the following sections. Throughout the interviews, I developed a growing sense of the way the Trust functioned, as well as how they enacted and understood their responsibilities to their community. They felt a responsibility to funders and other external bodies, but first of all to the communities they represent. As such the first theme, *Valuing structured openness*, is focused on the ‘process’ of the event, the second theme, *Facilitating, shaping, and controlling the dialogue*, is focused on the ‘structure’, and the final two themes, *Mediating data and delegating actions* and *Actions and adapting*, draw focus upon the potential ‘outcomes’ of the consultation, with the former about how they used the system and the latter about the effect on their existing practices.

7.4.1 Valuing structured openness

At the outset of the consultation, my collaborators had concerns around the potential openness of the discussions being facilitated by *Ambit*. While there was a desire to be more inclusive and open in involving a wide range of community members in the Trust’s activities, there was some reticence around where the conversations around the maps might take residents and whether it would be possible to make sense of resulting discussion: “*I think the danger is, if you have quite an open consultation discussion, it just ends up being very big, very wide, no kind of natural steps in it, I suppose.*” (T1). However, having started to use *Ambit* in consultation sessions, my collaborators at the Trust started to see the value of the more open-ended, discursive, mode of engagement the system afforded. T3 valued the open nature of the sessions and the lack of formality felt in the discussions:

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“It was, really, really, informal. I think that is quite a good way of doing it. People who want the opportunity to have a longer conversation can do that as well.” A key quality of the workshops that was seen to be a success then was that they avoided being seen as just data collection activities and engendered a sense of sharing of experiences between residents.

While the prompts and activities provided by *Ambit* were relatively open, there was of course a degree of structure to the format. The use of the maps implied a structure but was enacted through the turn-taking mechanics and prompts the Trust provided residents to respond to. T3 observed how: *“Even though they don’t know what necessarily the detail of it is, they can see that there is a process that they are meant to be working through.”* They went on to reflect: *“So I guess it kind of reins people in a little bit. I mean, people were very polite, weren’t they?”* T2 saw the structuring as something that bounded the conversations: *“I think because of this process, people were definitely more cautious about going off on tangents and were actually kind of asking permission to.”*

This is not to say all sessions, and tables of residents, successfully engaged with the structure and the other residents they were working with. T3 noted that in some cases residents would disobey the order of prompts, which would often get the table to discuss other areas of the map from those already being discussed, to have their say on one specific location:

“The problem with that session was that whosever turn it was would say, “This is the place, and this is what I’m saying about it.” Then, somebody else would say, “Oh, actually, I’ve got something I like to say.”

This was a characteristic of about half of the sessions the Trust ran. Participants, rather than moving to the next topic chose to take it in turns to have their say on one issue or point on the map. The opportunity for residents to have an open discussion and debate took priority over the system ‘working right’, and participants-residents following the rules that had been established:

“You know, when... as long as what they’re talking about is generally the stuff about the area they live in and about how they feel about it. For the most part, if there’s a bit of a tangent, I don’t think that’s the end of the world. I get that that doesn’t necessarily sit very well with using the technology in that way.” (T3)

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At the end of the consultation, the members of the Trust running it started to see the great benefits of balancing openness with a degree of specificity and structure. It avoided asking residents for ideas themselves, which was felt would “*put people on the spot*” end up with “*a huge number of people who would go, “I’ve got no idea.”*” (T2), while also leading to deeper insight about under-understood problems and unmet needs in the communities: “*it’s better doing it the way round that we are, which is trying to get back, again, into the nitty-gritty of the issues*” (T3). Furthermore, it was felt that the types of engagement facilitated through *Ambit* had led to evidence that would be more valuable in reporting back to funders. T1, a chair for the Trust, explained how the data the system generated could be used as evidence for their plan: “*When we put the new project plan together, they’re interested in what’s in the plan but they’re also interested in how we got to that part.*”

The negotiation between opening up dialogue and restricting what residents should discuss was a key success factor for the consultation. My collaborators at the Trust valued the openness of group discussions but felt that this worked primarily because it was grounded in local place with a flexible structure that promoted conviviality.

7.4.2 Facilitating, shaping, and controlling dialogue

Building on the above, the Trust valued the way the system provided a facilitative role during the workshops. This structure was positioned as a positive in light of past experiences of certain residents dominating discussions at public meetings: “*People are a little bit more conscious about the time they are taking up or the direction their conversation is going in. [...] What we didn’t get was anybody up on a soapbox about anything, going off on irrelevant things.*” (T2).

Beyond an individual dominating the discussion, there were concerns about specific issues taking over. T3 gave a specific example of this with a group we ran a workshop within one of the villages: “*I did think, “Is this whole session going to end up being about that one issue?” Actually, that didn’t happen at all. They mentioned it, they mentioned in passing what was happening, but I think they also took that opportunity to ask me a question about it. They didn’t dwell on it at all. They could see that there was an agenda, I suppose.*”

The role of the facilitator was a dominant topic in my discussions with T3 at the end of each session. At times, they showed concern that they should more clearly delineate between their roles as a

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community organiser: “*Well, they saw me as being part of the discussion I think, didn't they?*” On other occasions, they felt that they should be enforcing the rules more. Reflecting on their role during the sessions T3 was torn between being a facilitator, being a sense-maker of the data being collected, and the role of community leader:

“When people would go off on tangents that were maybe not to do with the question, I think I was probably a bit unsure about whether our role was to stop people doing that or whether it was to just let them go with the flow of the conversation [...] In the back of my head, I was thinking, ‘This is going to be difficult to organise at the end.’”

The facilitator, as well as thinking about the way the system was collecting data, was also aware of what particular prompts would be useful to the consultation. During the session, I often observed how the facilitators would sometimes skip a prompt as they would deem it as not suitable for the consultation, and at other times brought a new prompt to the attention of everyone in a more enthusiastic way: “*this is a good one, move the marker to somewhere where there's anti-social behaviour*” (T3 during the workshop).

The role of *Ambit* in configuring the interaction, allowed the facilitator to be flexible and adapt to the participants. As discussed above, participants in some sessions ignored the rule of responding to a new prompt in favour of having something to say about the current prompt or location. On occasions participants asked for more detail and helped each other be clear on where they meant for example: “*would we say the beach bit of Carson, where the carpark is, or a little bit further along. So here where it gets really nice, is that where you're saying??*” (P18). On other occasions, participants built on the ideas or views of others or offered reasons for one another's' claims. One time when a participant was complaining about the condition of resident's gardens in one part of a village another participant suggested it may not be for the reasons that the speaker was making: “*Do you think it might be because they can't manage their gardens?*” (P11). On very rare occasions, residents tried to override another participant's turn to speak. For example, referring to a past conversation from earlier in the session one participant encouraged another to change their decision: “*No! Now put it down by the school. We've already had a discussion about this*” (P15).

The idea of allowing residents to get on with things themselves without much interference from the facilitator or even the system was a recurring topic in interviews. While it was acknowledged some groups thrived in more open-ended discussions, there was a concern that some groups may need the additional support that the prompt provided: *“I think if people can do that between themselves and kind of work through it, work it out, then I think that’s really useful. Not all groups could do that probably though”* (T3). As well as offering ways for participants to have a quite open discussion and challenge each other, the system was valued for the way it could add support to those who required it. As such, the Trust members appreciated the way they could lean on the affordances of the system at times when participants required support but could create a form of differentiation that gave other participants the space to have less structured discussions and debate.

7.4.3 Mediating data and delegating actions

During the sessions, my partners at the Trust were aware of the way the data was being captured by *Ambit* and the effect this would have on the way the system could organise and present the data. Because of this, there were continual concerns around the value and validity of the data they would be collecting, and how they might be able to use this going forward. While there was strong support of collecting data pertaining to residents’ experiences, over time there became a looming worry about how this large body of material would be made sense of. Over the course of the five sessions, the Trust collected 6.5 hours of audio. In reflections after the workshops my collaborators discussed an initial will to reduce some of rich data to simple graphs and tables:

“There’s a lot of duplication and we are kind of... I suppose what I’m trying to work out [...] you could go through it and you could pick out particular themes and you could say, “Right, this is mentioned once, this is mentioned five times.” That’s normally what you would do, isn’t it? You would be looking to see the issues that a lot of people are bringing up and trying to draw that out of the information.” (T2)

T3 later went on to explain how they were tasked with going through all of the material and making sense of it through the *Ambit* post-event interface: *“Well, I started doing it first, so I did a spreadsheet because I use spreadsheets for everything and I just had all of the questions and the names of the groups along the top and I tried, basically, for each question, we just kind of- we didn’t transcribe it word for*

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word but jotted down notes from the discussion for each question. So, it meant that you could then look at what each of the group said about the same question, kind of along..." (T3).

What is notable here is despite providing a tool that, I assumed would provide my collaborators a quick overview of topics and locations discussed and the associated audio for users to navigate around, this was discarded in favour of a more in-depth and systematic approach. The Trust, and in particular T3, accepted that it was their role to make sense of the data that they receive in this way, and to ensure it was shared back to community members:

"My job would be to collate all the information into some kind of logical format. [...] We will [then] sit down as a partnership, so all of the residents that are involved, and probably have a couple of quite long sessions actually going through everything that's there and reading through all the information and discussing some of the stuff." (T3).

It was notable that, despite this painstaking approach to looking through the generated data, there was no acknowledgement that the material required anything that may resemble a systematic approach to analysis. While it was important to format the collected data and ensure it was shared with the appropriate actors, the Trust was always seeing the data captured as part of their wider longer-term consultation activities: *"I guess the information either supports or undermines proposals that we've received. It also helps us to say that there are gaps in the proposals."* (T3). The way collaborator-participants talked about their understanding of the community-generated data placed them in a role of a translator, between the ideas being proposed by local organisations for the spending of their money, and the articulated needs, wants and experiences of residents:

"I can look through this and there are some things in here that I know that project proposals we've got coming in would address. So, there are issues around nothing for older young people to do and I know we've had some project proposals that would address some of that stuff." (T2)

This is not to say that the Trust only engaged in the data in a way that was driven by the existing proposals it has received, which would have just led to post-rationalisation to enable certain projects to be funded. The open-ended nature of the discussions opened multiple spaces for new conversations with proposers about what their projects could and should be if adapted to the needs of

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the communities. Indeed, it was viewed that *Ambit* and the creation of such community-data presented an opportunity to open up a more collaborative relationship with the organisations bidding for funding: “*So we might have to go back to some people and say, “Actually, we would like you to sit down together and come up with a joint proposal.”*” (T3)

It was also acknowledged that in some cases, the issues articulated in the consultations were not under the Trusts remit. The open-ended nature of the discussion was that the Trust would hear matters of concern where the only action is to pass it on to someone else:

“Then, I can also say that there are some things in here that are either not our remit [...] What we agreed at the meeting last night, one of our partnership members is a county councillor and a parish councillor. She said, “I’ll have a look through this, and I’ll pick out the things that I think are either parish council or county council responsibilities and flag them up to you.” Then there might be some of it that is just passing information onto people.” (T1)

7.4.4 Action and adaption

At the early phase of the consultation, I sent T3 all of the information and consent forms for participants, which I would typically use for research studies, for their approval. I encouraged them to check it was appropriate for the participants they were recruiting. As part of this process, the Trust added their logos to this documentation, as well as altering the language to frame the workshops as led by the Trust, with my help. For example, “*You have been invited by [The Trust] to take part in Community Conversational, a short, group activity which encourages residents to talk about how they feel about the [Trust] area, what they love (or hate!) about living here, and what could be improved.*

The information below explains exactly how the activity will work. Although the session should be informal and enjoyable, because this work is also part of a piece of PhD research, there are some things we need to let you know beforehand. Please have a read through and do get in touch with any questions at all.”

This was set up as part of the pre-consultation task and showed a greater willingness to control the process than previous studies. Once the consultation underpinned by *Ambit* was complete, my partners at the Trust articulated the various ways that the system, and the community data generated through it, had, and could in the future, shape their work. A key learning was the realisation for them

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that consultation was no longer seen to be existing in a specific timeframe but would be an ongoing process. The open-endedness of this consultation was seen as a positive, primarily as it meant future consultations could be more focused and finer tuned: *"If there are pieces of work where we feel as though we need to get more information about it, we need to have more consultation on specific things."* (T2).

At the time of concluding the study, however, what those more focused consultations would be on was still open to debate within the Trust. Initially, the assumption was that future consultations would be focused on one of five specific themes (transport, health, environment, employment, and young people) that were determined at the start of the formation of the Local Trust. Initially, when thinking about the kinds of actions the system resourced, T1 talked about using the data *Ambit* generated to delegate issues to the existing sub-groups within the Trust: *"In an ideal world, what would probably happen is, if we have our different themes and theoretically, we have a task group for each theme. Just that snippet of information for that task group would be passed across to them and we could say, 'This is everything that was said in relation to transport.' Or, 'In relation to the environment.'"*

After listening to the community data, however, T3 had started to question the validity and value in the thematic areas the Trust based their institutional practices and the prompts in the workshops, around:

"I was actually tempted when I shared this with the partnership, to just take the themes out completely. I thought, "I don't know if that actually creates a framework that's not really there [...] I don't know because I think when you listen to the recording, there's a lot of stuff that overlaps themes. When you look at the project proposals we're getting, they overlap a lot of themes as well."

When speaking in the final interview after the Trust had processed the new community data, T3 explained that the group fundamentally changed their approach to organising themselves and their funding allocation methods:

“We needed, in a way, to see what came from this and what came from the proposals to re-look at the themes.” For example, “What’s come out is that we don’t have a theme that’s specifically around health and wellbeing. We probably need one.”

The *Ambit* system resourced actions for the Trust in various ways. As well as providing a focus for future consultation, it created community-generated data that could be passed onto other agencies and be divided into actions for thematic task forces within the Trust. More significantly, the data the system presented to the Trust had an impact on the way they structured themselves internally and their wider collaborative actions with external organisations.

7.5 Discussion of case study findings

In this study, my collaborators were concerned with the process of consultation and how this related to the outcomes expected by the funding body and their own intended outputs. This was based on a set of values that championed 'talk-centric' and face-to-face interaction, and on trying to include people from a disparate set of communities. This brought forth concerns about inclusion and raised questions around ownership and sustainability.

7.5.1 On finding a method for local deliberative participation

The ambition of my collaborators was to include citizens in conversations about the places they live, in an environment wherein those who participated displayed fairness and respect. In other words, participants in the workshops should offer claims and reasons for their views (De Vries et al., 2011; Cohen & Rogers, 2003), and were sensitive to the opinions of others (De Vries et al., 2011; Chambers, 2017). In this study, this took the shape of creating a mobile deliberative public space where views are articulated, but where interaction is configured to foster a more controlled and structured form of dialogue. In previous chapters, I have discussed case studies in which I looked to create the right conditions for deliberation, related to urban planning using game mechanics and simple design methods to promote turn-taking and explored the role of data to encourage reason-giving. In this study, I built on this work to focus on making deliberative participation *consequential* (Thompson, 2008; Kuyper, 2016; Dryzek et al., 2008) through a specific approach to the way my civil society partners were able to control the parts of the process, and through the way the system captured and organised the audio and location data.

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The new *Ambit* platform enabled the Trust to collate and listen to community opinions, not to directly inform decision-making but to form the basis of their internal processes of discussion and deliberation. This was apparent in the way they in actioned future work and adjusted the way they collaborated with external organisations, building their capacity to listen to community opinions and concerns. Interestingly, the way this was enacted resembled a two-phase process, in which they collected community views and concerns related to their lived environment (by the creation of prompts and facilitation during the workshops), and then used this to inform discussion with their community partners and potential recipients of their funding (see section 7.4.4).

As I have discussed in chapter 3, the idea of a two-track model was first put forward in deliberative democracy scholarship by Jürgen Habermas (Flynn, 2004; Habermas, 1984). Criticisms of the two-track model allude to an issue on inclusion, which is familiar to concerns from digital civics and participatory design research I have raised through this thesis. For example, Sunstien (2015, p.10) a former administrator to the Obama Government, who used the idea of a two-track model to define how deliberative democracy occurs in the corridors of power in United States government, described an epistemic skew, in which “public officials learn from those who speak, and those who speak are likely to have both money and self-interest at stake.” In this study, I addressed issues of inclusion as an instrumental challenge through utilising turn-taking and prompt cards within the process to mitigate dominating talk and the infiltration of pre-defined topics during the deliberative workshop. However, the issue remains that once opinions from the first track (deliberative workshops) are passed to the second track (the Trust’s policy-forming) there is a lack of accountability, as the collection of views in the first track becomes advisory. Beyond concerns about accountability, or the relationship between engagement and action, the adoption of the deliberative workshops into a two-track working model by the Trust suggest a means to integrate deliberation into exiting practices of consultation.

7.5.2 On designing a system for local deliberative participation

Goold *et al* investigated what makes good public deliberation under the paradigm of process, structure, and outcomes (Goold et al., 2012). In this study, the sociodigital intervention imposed a structure on the process of involving citizens in a discussion about their local community through

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using maps to restrict the topic, and through the infliction of prompt cards that controlled the subject of discussions, as well as affecting the way the deliberative workshops were structured. First, by providing facilitators with an 'agenda' to follow, which not only enabled them to ensure equality of opportunity to take part in the discussion but flexibility and control to structure the dialogue. Finally, as was the way this study builds on the previous two, the design of the sociodigital system aimed to allow the consultation to produce meaningful outcomes for the Trust. This was a technical issue on how to manage and present different data, but also an endeavour to develop new practices around consultation based on new ideas and ways of doing.

Building on previous case studies, the specific technical affordances of *Ambit* provided the Trust capacity to go to specific parts of the community and listen to groups they identified as previously 'excluded'. This included a youth forum that was convened for a weekly club supported by local youth workers and a group of people with disabilities and their carers who were gathered to take part in a regular meeting. This ability to go *to* targeted groups, who were previously considered as excluded from the consultation part of the Trust's work⁸⁰, added new voices to the consultation outside of those residents who the Trust would see typically turn up at meetings in their community building. As stated in chapter 2, there are concerns that this excludes those with less economic and cultural capital, problematically the very people the Trust, and groups like them, want to support through their work and provide for.

Finally, the design of *Ambit* was driven by a desire to accommodate the 'sense-making' of community-generated data. Previous case studies in this thesis highlight this as a major barrier to democratic legitimacy—specifically, the link between engagement and action for participants (Acik, 2013), and the claim of representativeness that civil society actors can legitimately make in such instances (Mendonça, 2008). In this study, I addressed this challenge through providing my collaborators in the Trust with a sociodigital tool that enabled them to facilitate a discussion about local issues around topics they configured at the start of the consultation through a series of pre-defined tasks. The system produced an interface with audio data of discussions cut up and allocated

⁸⁰ The Trust funded activities for certain groups and classes in the past but found it difficult to include them in processes to do with decision-making and the allocation of funds outside of their own activities.

to a location in the geographic community, as well as a specific ‘prompt’ and pre-defined thematic area.

In practice, my collaborators incorporated the data into existing working processes, and alongside other data sources. For example, transcribing parts of the data and entering it into a spreadsheet alongside data from social media campaigns and surveys. This was an arduous task for my collaborators, and although they indicated it was an improvement on their traditional practices with community-generated data, it opens up opportunities for designers of sociodigital technologies for deliberation to focus on ways of creating outputs from new systems, or integration with existing simple data management tools. There is perhaps significant value in considering designing for connections and interfaces between the different systems and data management tools civil society organisations are already using.

7.5.3 On taking ownership and giving control

There are increasing calls from within HCI for researchers to be useful to people “on the ground” (Agid & Chin, 2019), tap into the expertise that exists, and fit into existing practices, achieved by developing plans together (Clark et al., 2017; Le Dantec & Fox, 2015). The digital civics research agenda has put forward an approach that prioritises supporting the existing practices of civil society organisations (Mahyar et al., 2019), to collaborate and assist, rather than design *to* or *for* (Bardzell, 2010; Strohmayer et al., 2018).

Handing over control of the consultation and configuration of a sociodigital system like *Ambit* raised questions during the study around what it means for civil society groups to be intermediaries and processors of community-generated data. It also poses challenges for the relationship between digital civics researchers and research partners. Le Dantec and Fox (2015) have discussed creating *productive partnerships* highlighting the different subjective perspectives the researcher must occupy throughout the research project (researcher, confidant, collaborator), and the need to develop research plans together with community partners, as ways to “work to keep the work going”.

Similarly, Manzini (2019, pp.70–72) sets out a taxonomy of different roles for designers and researchers in these contexts. For example, *facilitators* who “[bring] scenarios and proposals into the discussion, as instruments with which to foster the convergence of the various interlocutors on

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shared visions” (pg.70), *activists* “triggering or even initiating new collaborative organisations” and *strategists* and *cultural promoters* who make connections between initiatives and move from “criticizing the state of things toward presenting new ideas and values” (pg.71).

In this study, I build on this work by looking at one of the impacts of working as a designer in a specific modality. In other words, I have investigated the impact of when some of the burdens are passed onto the non-design side of the collaboration. Previous HCI research has indicated that handing over responsibility can lead to an increased sense of ownership (Light et al., 2013). In my study, I found that certain actors within the Trust took a strong sense of ownership over, not only their consultation but also the research study. As well as producing the prompts and setting up the system for their consultation, my collaborators actively sought to take ownership of many of the research protocols. As discussed in the findings, the PEO was keen to use their organisations logos and re-write the information I provided, resulting in them taking the lead with participant information and consent procedures.

Initially, I was reluctant to hand over control and simply shift the burden from the researcher to the collaborator. My participant-collaborators have a large workload and work long hours, I did not want to make their job any harder or get in the way—one of the aspirations on this study was to reduce the burden on civil society to organise and carry out consultation in their communities, but I was also aware that the heavy involvement of the researcher in controlling every step of the process was not sustainable. As such, I designed the pre-tasks to maximise the expertise within the group while minimising the effort and time to materialise it. However, I unintentionally (although perhaps not surprisingly) created a lot of extra work for the groups to do, in particular at the making sense of the collected data part of the consultation in ways that were beyond what I imagined. For example, the group listened to the entire audio, despite the availability of tools to drill down to particular issues and themes, in addition, my participants, in order to include this data with their existing data used existing methods of data organising, such as spreadsheets.

Clark et al (2017) have highlighted the *need* for design researchers to make constructive connections, develop mutual understanding, and generate mutual respect. In this study, this strong relationship opened up the possibilities to promote a certain way of conducting community consultations. The

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Trust was increasingly more open to more experimental (to them) methods of engagement. This shines a light on the relationship between the researcher and the community organisation. In some respects – in the name of sustainability of the technology – I designed *Ambit* in a way that allowed the researcher to take a step back from the day-to-day running on the study, from the way the system is set-up and configured, through the deployment, and then the review process. On one hand, this created a sense of ownership and a stronger relationship with my partner organisation, on the other hand, I faced several ethical questions, such as who owned the data. Issues of ownership, governance, and privacy are often at the forefront of digital civics work (e.g., Asad et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2018). For me, this was discussed throughout the study with my partners, who despite being comfortable with the duality of outputs for the data (their consultation, our research study) had concerns over anonymity and privacy, and questions over the ways this effected what they could 'use' the data for outside of this consultation. Finally, this meant part of my role was to help the Trust understand basic legal and ethical procedures and develop their practices and procedures around consent and data.

All three of my design goals for this study relied on 'supporting' the Trust to carry out their own practices around consultation. The first design goal of inclusion relied on them to mobilise parts of the community and reach out to various groups by going to them. The design supported this by moving to an online application that retained accuracy with basic equipment in unideal conditions, but unless the Trust felt this was useful to them, they would not use it. The second and the third broad design goals of sustained use of the system, and promoting consequentiality, were again, completely reliant upon responding to the Trust's requirements and existing practices. In effect, the aims of the study are to affect the behaviours and working practices of a group. The impact of digital civics studies is measured by the change created. Handing over the control of aspects of research study is an often-integral aspect of digital civics research. In this case study, as with the previous two case studies, the partner organisations were carrying out actual decision-making processes and it is important to understand that their goals take priority over the goals of the research study and that the goals of the research study are (or should be) bound up in the goals of the civil society group.

Finally, there are some questions raised through this study around issues of ownership and control such as, when we delegate responsibility for parts of participatory or co-design projects do our participants have more control or do they just feel like they do? And, does this make a difference to their sense of ownership? I think these are important to digital civics and questions for future explorations.

7.6 Reflections on the conceptual framework

In this case study, to address shortcomings from the previous case studies, I focus on investigating how the practices of civil society may address the dual aspects of the *democratic function* by being both consequential and inclusive. This chapter has focused on the ways talk-based forms of participation may go beyond lowering the barriers to meaningful community engagement (*ethical function*) to creating 'resources for action' (Suchman, 2007b) from community-generated data (*democratic function*). My partner organisation in this study had a clear ambition and responsibility to act upon their consultation outputs, without a way of doing so which satisfied their criteria for inclusion, both in terms of representativeness from across the villages and within the face-to-face meetings (*ethical function*). They had to show the funding organisation that they had consulted their community and that this consultation had impacted upon their decision-making and eventual capital projects (fund allocation). As I found in case study 2, the latter part of this duality is an opportunity to draw on the *epistemic function* of community members (citizen-residents) and their experiences and ideas⁸¹. It was noticeable in this study through the deliberative workshops that the facilitator played an *epistemic function* by answering questions and clarifying claims made by participants, either through answering direct questions or through 'checking facts' through interruption. This was particularly appropriate in this study, as the facilitators were part of a small governance structure with a good understanding of the wider project and its remit. To formalise this *epistemic function*, there should perhaps be a pre-consultation task or another way of sharing this knowledge in the deliberative space through the sociodigital artefacts.

⁸¹ For example, this has shown 'break political deadlocks; in deliberative democracy and bring new ideas and perspectives in HCI/PD studies.

7.7 Summary of chapter

In this chapter, I have discussed and reflected upon the design, deployment, and evaluation of *Ambit*, a sociodigital system to support civil society organisations to run their own deliberative consultation processes. This chapter provides details and analysis of the final case study deployment of the sociodigital platform I designed and deployed as a means of investigating the *deliberative potential* of community organisations carrying out practices and processes of localism. Like in the previous two case study chapters I have outlined the specific context of the site in this study and outlined the research procedures carried out and how they relate to the enquiry. Through presenting an analysis of data collected through the study, I have highlighted issues and insights into the organisations and their wider community engagement processes and discussed how these relate to the literature presented in earlier chapters and way that the idea of deliberative localism may be approached through the paradigm of capacity building and collaborative practices.

Finally, I have discussed the way the system was adopted and how the group adapted their practices in negotiation with the study and their own consultation, highlighting how this case study interacted with issues of ownership and control. Specifically, this study suggests researchers should find a way of integrating with current practices, existing systems, and that the goals for the study should be set collaboratively with a preference to the goals of the partner organisation. In the following chapter, I will discuss the research findings across all studies and draw some conclusions from the studies in terms of the role of civil society groups, implications for the deliberative system, and the role of technology in such contexts.

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CHAPTER 8

SOCIODIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES FOR DELIBERATIVE LOCALISM

“There is a direct link from more precise gossip at the watercooler to better decisions. Decision makers are sometimes better able to imagine the voices of present gossipers and future critics than to hear the hesitant voice of their own doubts. They will make better choices when they trust their critics to be sophisticated and fair, and when they expect their decision to be judged by how it was made, not only by how it turned out.”

(Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 2011, p.418)

8.1 Introduction

My aim with this thesis was to develop an understanding of the everyday deliberative engagement practices and decision-making processes of civil society at the local level, investigating the potential impact of digital technology and sociodigital design in this context. To this end, I took an approach to understand the current practices of civil society groups during public consultation and policymaking, in particular how they adopt deliberative techniques and how they use digital technology. This understanding led to the design of sociodigital artefacts (see appendix D.1, D.2, and D.3) and online system (see Figure 7-5) to increase capacities for more deliberative processes during local decision-making processes, creating a link between *deliberative talk* in communities and decision-makers. Individual case study chapters raised case-specific insights and discussion points. In case study 1 this

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was around the role of participatory design and HCI methods for configuring participation, the utility and meaningfulness of talk-based community-generated data, and how this raised questions about the accountability of civil society groups during instances of localism. In case study 2, I discussed the role of evidence and data and how this was interrelated with perceptions of legitimacy and the likelihood of resulting action. In addition, I reflected on insights related to the importance of collaboration and cohesion in civil society-led democratic work. Finally, in case study 3, issues of inclusion, representation, ownership, and control formed the basis of the discussion, and I gained insights into how community-generated data might fit into existing consultation and decision-making practices.

In this chapter, I discuss lessons learned from my empirical studies about the value of digital technology to the enactment of deliberative localism and reflect on the ways approaches to configuring participation may inform deliberative workshop design. To this end, the chapter moves forward in the following sections. First, I return to the notion of deliberative localism that I have set out in the earlier chapters. Second, I discuss my findings across all three case studies in relation to deliberative systems literature focusing on how technology and participatory design might address weaknesses in the deliberative system concerning the *ethical*, *epistemic*, and *democratic function*, leading to contributions to the empirical study of deliberative democracy. Third, I discuss what my findings mean for HCI researchers working with civil society organisations at the micro-level. Finally, I discuss the research findings as they relate to prevailing social and political structures and re-position my findings into wider debates about the role of civil society and community decision-making.

8.2 Deliberative localism

My thesis argues that it is essential to the democratic legitimacy of localism to consider deliberative exercises on a local scale and in civil society, not at the civic authority level (so-called large-scale deliberative democracy). This is during a time in British politics when the devolution of decision-making power and resources is becoming commonplace. Rather than live in hope of deliberative polls, citizen assemblies and other minipublic designs forming decisions that have discernible effect in other arenas, potentially turning into binding decisions for the whole polity, I have proposed

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thinking about deliberation as a local process in civil society; one that leads to decisions, policies, and the allocation of funds, which allow communities to have a say, and be heard, on decisions that affect their own lives, individual identities, sense of community, communal quality of life and well-being.

One argument against institutionalised deliberative democracy is the complexity and resource-reliant nature of informing citizens (partisan or no-bias witnesses, paying citizens for their time, producing resources, and getting everyone in a room together). Another is the representativeness (i.e., how do we know if we have a representative group for the issues in the first place, and as soon as I become informed do I still represent the citizenry?) These problems take a different shape when re-considered through the lens of 'the local'. One benefit of a focus on the local is utilising citizens for their knowledge of their own community spaces and everyday lives, which is essential to localism. Considering the impact of deliberation in local contexts allows us to frame participants as 'experts', potentially mitigating the resource-heavy process of preparing the 'informed participant'. Fung (2008) has highlighted the claim that as well as privileged access to their own preferences and values, citizens "may also possess local knowledge that officials and outsiders lack."

In my studies, participants were only ever asked to give their personal opinion or view on matters of local concern. In one sense, the local is a more inclusive way of getting the citizenry in a room together and making people feel they are worthy contributors. For example, it has been suggested that a focus on everyday matters motivates people to take part:

"Critics of the Pôrto Alegre participatory budget, for example, complain that the process focusses too much on the immediate and the local. Yet [...] it is precisely this focus that attracts people into the budget fora. (Abers, 2003, p.206)

In another sense, this made it less likely that those with preconceived political views or perspectives would use this to influence the agenda. "Precisely because norms of democratic legitimacy call for responding to policy agendas that emerge through broad public discussion, an effective way for more powerful or privileged actors to promote their political interests is to try to control the agenda of public discussion" (Young, 2000, p.178). In other words, focusing on local matters and issues was a way of creating civic spaces for social interaction without 'political intention' (Talisie, 2003, 2009). Both Abers and Talisie point toward the merits of local-led locality-based consultation. In creating local deliberative spaces, the nature of the issues (matters of *local* concern) and the turn-taking and

agenda control of the deliberative space design, engendered a civic space in which self-interest is apparent but controlled, and the likelihood of a diffuse policy arena was negated through an agenda focused on experiences and opinions, not political standpoints. Finally, there is a civic element to local-led deliberative activities about 'place'. This form of engagement can lead to citizens' sense of identity. For example, in case study 2, participants felt sharing their stories about their favourite local places and positive experiences could help restore a sense of community. This is an essential part of creating long-term improvements to people's lives, for example, in the context of 'place-making' activities around town planning seminal 'collaborative planning' scholar, Healey has written:

“It is about fostering the institutional capacity to shape the ongoing flow of 'place-making' activities in ways which can promote long-term and sustainable improvements to material quality of life and to the sense of identity and well-being of people in places” (Healey, 1998, p.1544).

Place as a concept is often tightly entangled with ideas of people and community, based on the popular belief there is a strong bond between people and place which is mobilised by community organisations and citizen groups to foster citizens' ability to bring about change (Bradley, 2017).

Concentrating on the local may also simplify concerns about the inclusion of participants. When the subject matter is 'the local' and focuses on 'place-making' the barriers to participation and burden on those who participate is lower. Finally, deliberative localism can increase the civic capacity of community organisations and the citizens who participate, which can benefit the whole community.

In the following section, I outline how I took an approach to realising deliberative localism through a sociodigital design process, drawing on a conceptual framework that I situated to negotiate meaning through the interplay between theory and practice, and knowledge and experience. By shaping this discussion around the three functions of the framework I structure my case study findings around a theoretical understanding of a working theory of deliberative democracy in local communities.

8.3 Fostering deliberative qualities through sociodigital design

In chapter 3 I set out a design space in which I emphasised the importance of building the capacities of civil society, as a primary role of technology in this space. Specifically, using the design of sociodigital artefacts to support and build on the existing strengths and capabilities of civil society groups. Methodologically, it was important to think about the approach taken to the design of technology, as well as the role of participatory action research, as a means to support civil society

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organisations in becoming better inducers of connectivity between citizens and decision-makers by mitigating against three things: (1) their lack of resources to carry out consultation in a democratic manner, (2) their ability to create 'legitimacy' through their evidence collection procedures, and (3) their potential to foster engagement that is consequential to eventual decision-making outcomes.

Leading political science scholar, Archon Fung (2008, p.167) set out that good deliberation should be rational, reasonable, and equal:

“Good deliberation should be **rational** in the instrumental sense that individuals advance their own individual and collective ends through discussion, brain-storming, information-pooling, planning, and problem-solving. It should also be **reasonable** in the sense that participants respect the claims of others and constrain the pursuit of their own self-interest according to the norms of justification. Reasonableness may require participants to restrain themselves when others offer compelling reasons based on common group interests or commonly held norms such as respect, reciprocity, and fairness. For example, reasonableness may require someone to withdraw his support from a proposal that would best advance his own self-interest because others are needier. Good deliberation is also **equal** and inclusive. Participants should be roughly equal in their opportunities and capabilities to propose ideas and make claims.”

Normative descriptions such as this one, typical of deliberative democracy scholarship, emphasise the way participants *should* act and interact during deliberation, whereas my research has placed the onus on building the capacities and supporting civil society as decision-makers, to foster these conditions for participants in locally-led decision-making. In creating 'deliberative spaces' through a combination of material and digital artefacts, the results from the studies suggest that I could reach some standards of 'good deliberation' as those participants in the workshops had equal opportunities to speak⁸². Analysis of the discussion in the workshops also indicated that participants gave reasons for their claims and showed respect, reciprocity, and fairness. This was observable in the dialogue through forms of building on each other's points or ideas, changing their view in line with others' claims, and asking one another for advice or allowing others to be proxies for them during the workshops.

Despite discussing case-specific insights in each case study chapter reflecting on the conceptual framework, I turn to a more general discussion around the three functions and the relationship to design. I shape this discussion around the seemingly mundane aspects of participatory research

⁸² The inclusivity argument is a more difficult claim to make due to recruitment methods, see limitations in chapter 9.

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processes, such the way participation is configured (Wright & McCarthy, 2010; as per Vines et al., 2013) and the role of the researcher (as per Fox et al., 2016; Le Dantec & Fox, 2015). Looking at insights from across all three case studies illuminates some of the challenges for researchers and community organisations engaging in the use and deployment of sociodigital technologies for community decision-making.

Some challenges were practical and technical in nature—such as managing the audio data and working with camera vision technology with non-experts, but more were conceptual, social, and political. Clearly, in the design of sociodigital artefacts to support civil society groups in their policymaking practices, there is a need to be wary of the values and external power structures that impact collaborators and community partners. In the following sections, I approach this through a discussion of the wider processes around community decision-making.

8.4 Considering the ethical function

There is a vulnerability that an institutionalised deliberative democracy will be ruled by the educated and more articulate. For example, Pzerowski (1998) made the point that those who have attended university, have been pre-trained in the necessary skills to excel at deliberation. There is also the concern those who are better at arguing their point may be able to persuade others to support positions that do not reflect their interests. As such, even the most robust rules for deliberation may not be able to ensure the inclusion of collaborative countervailing power. In other words, it is very difficult to design processes and procedures for deliberation that overcome the power inequalities in society. Furthermore, there are questions of the fairness of any democratic process in an unequal society where some people cannot, or will not want to participate (Pzerowski, 1998; McLaverty, 2014).

Participatory Design (PD) is an approach based on “directly involving people in the co-design of the artefacts, processes and environments that shape their lives” (Simonsen & Robertson, 2013), and on the idea “that the people whose activity and experiences will ultimately be affected most directly by a design outcome ought to have a substantive say in what that outcome is” (Carroll & Rosson, 2007; Vines et al., 2013). As a result, PD has been argued to represent the “democratisation” of design (Björgvinsson et al., 2010). For designers, PD can foster a better understanding other people’s points

of view and be able to put oneself in other people's shoes (Ho et al., 2011), which is an important cornerstone of the institutional design of deliberative democracy, and as I have argued, to any claim of legitimacy made by purveyors of localism in civil society.

8.4.1 Designing the ethical function

In my studies, I utilised design techniques to foster an internal process that was inclusive⁸³. One element of the *ethical function* of my sociodigital design process was to foster the maintenance and advancement of fairness and mutual respect among citizens during the workshops. Specifically, I adopted PD methods of configuring participation to structure discussions in order to create equal opportunities for participants to share their views during the discussion about their local community. The first case study was informed by fieldwork and participant-observation around a locally devolved consultation process, where I highlighted issues to do with the ways in which participants had an equal chance to contribute their views. PD methods have been shown to give a voice to marginalised groups (Disalvo et al., 2013; Lindsay et al., 2012), as well as “empower groups of people whose views, opinions and needs might be the most ignored by the mainstream society” (Vines et al., 2013, p.430), which was important to address an inequality during workshops. This was addressed through the design of simple game mechanics⁸⁴ that first delineated a clear turn-taking procedure and second, freed up facilitators to take on a less involved role that would allow them to take notes and start making sense of the data that was collected.

8.4.2 Evaluating the ethical function

During the first case study, the materiality of the prompt cards and markers delineating when it was a participants' 'turn' to speak created the underlying conditions for a discussion that was fairer and more equal. This was further emphasised through the inclusion of markers that in connection to the prompt cards borrowed mechanics and metaphors from 'games' creating a sense of 'rules' that resident-participants were familiar with. This had the effect of creating safe civic spaces for social

⁸³ The other side of inclusion is the recruitment and promotion of the events. To bear repeating, that across all three case studies, the onus was always on the community organisation who led the local consultation to recruit participants to the deliberative workshops.

⁸⁴ After case study 1, I stopped discussing the idea of game mechanics and changed to framing design discussion to process design in light of collaborators in that study showing distaste for the idea of 'parlour games' being used to address such serious civic matters.

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interaction, where participants felt they could be more candid, while at the same time not only respecting others' viewpoints but being keen to build on and address them when their turn comes⁸⁵.

The first study showed in particular that participants disrupted one another less frequently, and even in situations that participants had a disagreement they remained civil. In designing the sociodigital system, I intended to create a deliberative space where every resident-participant would have opportunities to express their views. One outcome of this, discussed in case study 1, was how in supporting participants to open up, they built on others' views during their turn. Almost every turn involved a conversation with different options. In some cases, this influenced someone's topic or softened their hardened view on a subject⁸⁶.

In the second study, the prompt cards and the physical markers were important factors in creating a 'deliberative space' where social behaviour was conducive to the deliberative virtue of mutual respect, and reason-giving. The introduction of statistics was envisioned as giving the opportunity to challenge the views of others or be used to back-up points made during the discussions in the sessions, fulfilling an *epistemic function*, but I was interested in the effect the availability of statistics and data would have on the factors considered under the *ethical function* such as the way it shaped opinions and opinion-giving. In practice, there was little discernible effect on the ways the participants interacted, as participants did not engage with the data during deliberative workshops. Instead, the second study emphasised the importance of stories and storytelling practices.

The re-design of the system for the third case study took away the physical prompt cards and replaced them with a screen prompt. Although this gave the facilitator a more direct role, the delineation between turns to speak was less prominent and did have the result of participants talking over another, at times, and the effect of getting through fewer prompts. This had an indirect influence on the *epistemic function*, as it reduced the range of topics that were discussed.

⁸⁵ Of course, I gave the participants clear instructions in advance, and facilitators were able to answer questions about the rules of the interaction until participants became familiar.

⁸⁶ In deliberative systems scholarship this is referred to as one of three modes of deliberative transformation; namely *deliberative construction, reconstruction, and confutation* (Niemeyer, 2012, pp.11–13).

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As the nature of the deliberative workshops and approach to consultation my collaborators and I adopted involved participants to be physically present, the venues and community spaces this took place were important. Not only would practical aspects such as transport and distance for participants to travel be a concern, but it also became clear that other factors came to the fore, such as 'belonging' and other issues of ownership and trust. For example, in some instances, groups were portrayed as rivals to those in other parts of communities which complicates notions of how to achieve inclusive or representative groups.

In case study 1, this was addressed by holding workshops in different venues around the community during the exploration stage in order to represent each sector of the town but led to resistance of some groups to participate outside of their locality. In case study 2, there were issues of loyalty to each civil society group and there were difficulties getting residents to attend events in 'rival' community buildings. It also became clear in the second study that there was a stigma attached to attending one of the community buildings where I held workshops, due to the perceptions about the services the civil society group in this building provided. In case study 3, like in the first study the issue was driven by the need to 'reach' out to all parts of the community, in particular to more isolated parts of their community. For example, we addressed this by scheduling the workshops to take place directly after an existing meeting or event in the community⁸⁷ at times during case studies 1 and 3. Although this had a positive outcome on the numbers at events and an inclusive element of removing barriers to participate, it meant accepting that individual events would be homogeneous groups. In case study 2 the initial pilot workshops were held as part of 'community actions days' in central community buildings either during school holidays or at the weekend. This meant a lot of people that represented a more diverse group. However, the nature of being part of a larger event meant coming in and out of the room where I set up the system, and this sense of transiency took away from the sense of structure and order established through the prompts and turn-taking cues. As such, I realised the importance of how participation was configured to encourage a tangible sense of the

⁸⁷. For example, a coffee morning or youth group

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public nature of the event. In other words, that views are expressed in the presence of others was an important matter for the *ethical function*.

An element of the design was motivating people to get involved in the decision-making and policymaking that affects their everyday lives. As such, it was vital to have a variety of spaces, not only for issues of inclusion by lowering barriers to participation, but also the epistemic reason of having a more knowledgeable pool of people. As Hendricks (2006, p.501) described: "Given the varying dispositions and willingness of actors to deliberate in macro or micro ways, it is essential that the entire system fosters a diversity of deliberative spaces." In designing sociodigital systems the ability to take it to people was an important aspect of realising this. Bang's (2004) paradigm sets out the idea of the everyday maker to challenge the widely accepted reasons why citizens will be motivated to participate. Importantly, everyday makers are not driven by a sense of civic duty, or the need to be a better citizen, or even by gaining influence, but wish to 'be involved and develop themselves' (Li & Marsh, 2008, p.251). The creation of deliberative spaces enabled the building of civic capacity and a sense of community among residents and community members in a way that was not possible when residents were invited to 'drop in' or attend an event at an owned or private space. In particular, with case study 3 the creation of a mobile community space was very important to the Trust in their ambition to go to excluded groups in their familiar spaces, rather than invite them into their community building.

8.5 Considering the epistemic function

Deliberative democracy champions the idea that citizens should have a say as participants in democratic decision-making. This becomes a normative issue, as the 'uninformed participant' is fundamentally problematic in deliberative democracy but the process of 'informing' those who participate is resource-heavy. Deliberative democracy literature from minipublic design suggests that expert witnesses and a process of prior engagement with learning materials is an important aspect of the design of deliberative workshops (Huitema et al., 2007; Beauvais & Warren, 2018). This not only raises barriers to inclusive participation but opens ethical questions about what is expected of citizens. In the past, PD practices have sought to be informed by the experiences of participants, while positioning participants as experts in their own lives (McIntyre-Mills, 2010), and as a "source

of information and having certain types of expertise that should be intersubjectively shared and exchanged” (Vines et al., 2013; Carroll & Rosson, 2007). Participants in PD also gain skills and new knowledge about the issue they are designing for, so represent a useful way to convey information between citizens and experts (but usually from experts to citizens) (Huybrechts et al., 2017; Simonsen & Robertson, 2013).

8.5.1 Designing the epistemic function

In the deliberative space, it is critical to understand 'why' people express views (reason-giving), and to capture the wider discourse the questions posed provoke. The design of the prompt cards encouraged resident-participants to state why they had moved a marker to a place on the map in response to the prompt. In addition, the prompt-type encouraged participants to share their experiences and build on and challenge one another's reasons. For example, some prompts asked participants to move the marker to a place that was simply better or worse (at something) than the current marker position. The second case study was informed by the limitations identified in the first study, in particular around the nature of evidence and consultation data and attended to the requirements of my collaborators who wanted to explore open data sources about their community. This resulted in the development of a data-rich prototype of the system developed to investigate the role of data from the deliberative space and the relationship to consultation evidence. In case study 3, the onus was on handing over the control of the prompt cards to the civil society group, allowing them to focus the agenda on leveraging local knowledge on topics more directly tied to their consultation.

8.5.2 Evaluating the epistemic function

Analysis and evaluation of the *epistemic function* of the conceptual framework focused my attention on the ways data interplayed with notions of knowledge, information, and perceptions of evidence. Through these case studies, I was always confronted with the problem of the system creating a lot of audio data. Ideas and concerns about a 'civic data deluge', is an increasingly common dilemma in digital civics work (Mahyar et al., 2019). Beyond the mass of data produced and concerns about sense-making and evidence, there were related concerns about ownership of data produced through the system. As with prior work (Le Dantec et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2015; Vlachokyriakos, Comber, et al., 2014) analysis of my case studies raised questions around who owned the data generated

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through the interventions, and the subtle ways ownership and power over the data were deployed by the civil society organisations in each context. In case study 1, my collaborators' privileged statistics and simple data visualised as graphs above the qualitative discussion data we generated through the workshops, as they considered this to be 'authentic' evidence for their consultation process. In case study 2, producing evidence for policy became a priority, as my collaborators wanted the residents in their community to engage with open data about the community to promote engagement around their policymaking processes. However, the data *about* a community was disregarded in favour of data *from* the community, in the shape of stories and experience-sharing. In addition, through the process of the study, the civil society organisations learned from residents the importance of their own 'administrative data' above national statistics and they realised the potential value in generating their own neighbourhood statistics about what was important to them. Here, the epistemic value of residents was visible in, first being experts in their community and civic life, and second in steering the civil society groups and bringing new ideas. Framing the community as experts, and as an epistemic source for solutions to problems is a foundational aspect of participatory design (Simonsen & Robertson, 2013; Merkel et al., 2004; Björgvinsson et al., 2012). Notably, the use of a map was a significant design choice to enable participants to share their expertise and knowledge through moving markers to parts of a physical map. Drawing on PD literature, the map functioned as a 'boundary object' in that acted as a shared articulation of knowledge (Star & Griesemer, 1989) for resident-participants.

A critical aspect of my engagements across each study was working with the community organisations to establish the way participation was configured to position residents as experts and provide opportunities to share their expertise. However, the way participation was enabled through the way my collaborators and I configured the sociodigital technologies put different weight on this. In the first case study, the Parish Council and wider campaign group were very clear about the form of community-generated data they required and, as noted in the case study chapter, had a strong desire for it to look objective and to fulfil a specific 'civic action' role. It needed to carefully complement previous surveys they had conducted, and the data was to be used in a public report handed to the local council. The Parish Council, who were also campaigning on a housing

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development issue, preferred collecting the audio data where specific key words were mentioned so they could extract 'soundbites' that backed what their campaign was attempting to achieve.

Ultimately, they had to be convinced by me that this was at odds (or not) with the design intent underpinning *Community Conversational*—that it fostered a certain type of interaction based upon public discussion and deliberation of issues. This demonstrated a tension between the insights gained from previous research experience and their desire for it to fit in with familiar frameworks of data. Specifically, in case study 3 there were concerns about the role of the research in the consultation, highlighting tensions around the way collaborations between civil society and researchers and the research and the consultation.

The participatory research literature highlights the importance of capacity building (Krishnaswamy, 2004) and the negotiation of power and control in community research contexts (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). In my examples, I could see how a mutual exchange of skills and expertise informally supported the development of reflective practices around setting questions and inviting responses. Control over this had to be continually negotiated, however, and a balance had to be found between offering my expertise and not taking ownership of the consultation. Reflecting on these relationships I can see that in some way I was making 'expert citizens' of my collaborators. Expert citizens that foster opportunities for everyday makers to participate in meaningful ways. Simonsen and Robertson (2013, p.2) have suggested that in the process of PD, “designers strive to learn the realities of the users’ situation while the users strive to articulate their desired aims and learn appropriate technological means to obtain them.”

In my studies, it is important to acknowledge how critical my role was in shaping the research and the consultation processes I was studying. I acted as a 'critical friend' in my collaborators' meetings—helping them to think through the methods of recruitment, questions to pose and forms of response, and supporting them in understanding the particular affordances of the sociodigital platform and possibilities for development. On some occasions, I was more direct in my guidance. This was, for example, to ensure that they maximised the potential of the technology and qualities of deliberative democracy. However, with it, I also invoked a particular stance on what was the best way to do things and what was not always aligned with my collaborator's motivations.

8.6 Considering the democratic function

The democratic legitimacy of the deliberative system relies on connections between the individual parts that make up the system, “particularly between public and empowered (decision-making) sites” (Boswell et al., 2016, p.264). Indeed, “a defect in the deliberative system arises when the parts of the system become decoupled from one another in the sense that good reasons arising from one part fail to penetrate the others.” (Mansbridge et al., 2012, p.23). As well as concerns about legitimacy, the *democratic function* is a means to investigate concerns about inclusion, but as Iris Young has explained, these ideas are bound up together:

“Inclusiveness in democratic processes, then, suggests that there must be a single public sphere, a process of interaction and exchange through which diverse sub-publics argue, influence one another, and influence policies and actions of state and economic institutions” (Young, 2000, p.172)

One quality associated with participation in design and digital civics, along with other social justice-oriented research is to motivate change through the process of participation (Dombrowski et al., 2016; Crivellaro et al., 2019; Huybrechts et al., 2017). In this paradigm, participation is framed as an ‘intervention’ where new ideas, processes, and ‘lenses’ are introduced to provoke change (Hayes, 2011; Vines et al., 2013).

8.6.1 Designing the democratic function

The design of the system was predicated on addressing concerns about democratic legitimacy—whether the deliberative events are perceived as legitimate by decision-makers (and therefore consequential), and whether those decisions are accepted as legitimate by residents, and issues of inclusion—who is able to take part and the barriers to taking part. A central principle of the design space was creating the conditions to promote connections between parts of a system, and acknowledging that this connectivity was reliant on civil society (Mendonça, 2013)⁸⁸. This helps motivate the ambition to support and build capacities of my civil society collaborators.

In terms of designing sociodigital systems, this shifted focus to different data and ways of reifying the deliberative talk the system captured. In practice, this meant, not only shaping and capturing

⁸⁸ Mendonça did make the caveat that these are potential inducers and do not always behave as such they can sometimes generate opaqueness, not porosity.

deliberative talk through the creation of sociodigital deliberative spaces but ensuring outputs (such as data visualisation) that supported sense-making and resource actions. This was addressed as a set of technical challenges using the computer vision markers to label audio data and support different forms of sense-making in the software interface.

8.6.2 Evaluating the democratic function

The *democratic function* of my conceptual framework—the link (for citizens) between engagement (deliberative workshops) and action (policy and decision-making)—was arguably the most interesting and complex lens through which to evaluate each case study. In one respect, consideration of the *democratic function* is enacted through the civil society actors and local authority actors (the policymakers), and as such approached through the process of designing for them, and with them in mind. In other respects, it draws focus toward aspects relating to inclusion, access, and legitimacy within the design of the system and beyond the scope and purpose of the intervention.

In the first study, the idea of perceived legitimacy became apparent in the ways the presence of the camera, the University, and local authority actors and councillors created an ostensible sense of legitimacy for resident-participants. In case study 2, the *democratic function* drew focus on the role of the decision-makers and the ability of and the extent to which the consultation engagements have consequences for the policy-making process. I discussed this in the second case study by investigating how the civil society groups can listen better to matters of local concern, what form of data is the most effective in a way that is 'actionable', and how this information can be 'transmitted' (see Boswell et al., 2016). To avoid the "usual suspects" in case study 3 there was a desire to move out of the main community buildings and into other parts of the community. For the Trust, this involved making the system a lot more mobile, so my collaborators were able to travel around the disparate villages, in venues such as public houses and youth clubs. What became clear, was that gaining access to these participants meant relying on my collaborator's social networks.

My desire to seek case studies where the results would be "actioned" as part of actual consultation processes meant that the civil society groups themselves were organised or constituted to form a specific purpose separate from the consultation they carried out during the studies. Burgess (2014) warned that the ongoing appropriation of deliberative engagement by institutional authorities can

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often serve to legitimise policy decisions set independently of public participation. It would be unfair to claim that this was the case in my studies—there was a great will and desire from the civil society actors to reach into new parts of the community, to consult a wide number of people, and to use the insights gathered in a meaningful and honest manner. However, because the processes that I built my studies around involved very specific agendas, it was hard for my collaborators not to let this shape the ways in which the consultations happened.

Across all three case studies, the community groups had an agenda beyond the scope of my study. In the first study, this was the campaign to stop development, in the second this was their need to show deprivation to funders, and in the third study, the Trust had a desire to promote the work they had already done, as well as listen to views on future projects. This was rather more complex in case study 3, perhaps in part due to the scoping nature of the Trust's consultation exercise. Initially, much like the campaign group in case study 1, the organisation envisaged appropriating the community-generated data with traditional consultation methods. They wanted to use the community-generated data captured by the platform to achieve several outcomes, such as publicise the projects and activities of the Trust, as well as fulfil their role in supporting cohesion and connections across the disparate villages.

As a researcher, I had to find ways to fulfil the broad goals of each consultation, yet also encourage flexibility against some of the more conservative plans for using the technologies made by the community organisations. I was constantly aware that community partners have more at stake and more to lose than me as the researcher in this context, so in this sense, it was not surprising they resisted some of the ideas I brought and I would always allow them to have the final say and to challenge what I suggested. This is linked to issues of trust. Issues of trust were not just apparent between the citizens and civil society groups; they were apparent between my collaborators and me. As noted by Harding et al. (2015), this is not just mistrust of decision-makers and authorities by certain groups of citizens, but also mistrust from certain decision-makers as to the legitimacy and value of contributions in certain formats or from specific groups of people.

It was clear that the process of the case studies in some respects reaffirmed these issues of mistrust. Perhaps revealing these issues could be productively channelled in the long-term, but only if

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technologies like the one I have developed through these studies are designed in ways to account for this bigger picture in ways that translate into resources for action. In my studies, the process of translation was always two-fold in that the civil society actors (who were always under obligation to make decisions or write policy documents) had to construct meaning from their local consultation activities, and then use this to transmit to their funders or the local government authority. As such, in one way the civil society groups were conduits, or 'inducers of connectivity' between citizens (if we suppose that the participants were in contact with the broader society from which they were drawn) and public authorities, and in another, they acted as a governing body for citizens and a pseudo-empowered space. Despite an indication in case study 3 with regards to the impact of the intervention on the practices and plans for future actions brought about through the use of *Ambit*, the prospect of fostering a link between engagement and action remains a rather pressing challenge for both HCI researchers and empirical researchers in political science.

8.7 Summary of discussion

In political science scholarship, studies of the deliberative system either tell us about the holistic qualities of the system or a great deal about certain aspects but despite an evolving theoretical and normative understanding “empirical study is much less developed” (Boswell & Corbett, 2017, p.804). In this dissertation, I have discussed the design, development, deployment, and evaluation of a sociodigital system that took a digital civics approach to facilitate, promote, and capture 'deliberative talk' at community level consultation in ways that sought to foster deliberative qualities, and in doing so support a 'deliberative localism' approach to local-level consultation practices during devolved decision-making processes.

What I have set out is not an evaluation of an existing deliberative system⁸⁹ or how local consultation processes contribute to the deliberative system. Rather, my research aimed to investigate the impact of technologies to intervene in local consultation processes, informed by the evaluative standards of deliberative systems. As such, in this section, I have discussed how my study responds to the notion of the transmission between different parts, or nodes, within the system (*democratic function*), the

⁸⁹ Deliberative systems are “complex, porous and shifting in nature” (Boswell & Corbett, 2017, p.801), and as such are difficult to evaluate.

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need for a connection to shared resources, and a way to reify 'talk' (the *epistemic function*), and have discussed my research in relation to the issue of the how spaces are configured to foster the qualities of deliberation (*ethical function*).

In reflecting on what I have learned from framing my findings in deliberative systems conceptual framework: (1) there is room for participatory design methods or sociodigital methods in the creation of deliberative spaces to foster deliberative talk, and to support more deliberative public consultation processes led by civil society; (2); we should look at the balance between epistemic (influence from experts and facts) and the ability of citizens to be experts in their own lives and lived environments, particularly at the local level of governance; and, (3) the key to the creation of a diversity of spaces is the support and facilitation of 'everyday political talk' that does not occur naturally, and being able to reify that as a resource for action.

8.8 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I have reflected on my experiences of working with civil society organisations that have used a sociodigital platform for consulting their local communities during processes of budget allocation and policymaking. In doing so, I have highlighted the diverse ways the system promoted discussion and induced reflection on views, facilitated sense-making, the role of data and technology, and underlined the wider complexity and power structures in the places they were deployed. The issues encountered in all three case studies around defining the ways people responded to consultation questions highlighted issues around the utility of civic technologies to community groups. Furthermore, it highlights the significant agency that researchers have in advising and, in some respects, pushing ideas about what the technology was for and how it would best work.

The design of the sociodigital system followed a conceptual framework of deliberative democracy to meet the ends of creating more inclusive and legitimate locally devolved policy and decision-making processes. In this chapter, I have looked at learning from my studies for HCI and PD as well as for deliberative democracy and reflected on how these approaches can inform one another. In the final chapter, which follows this one, I return to my research questions, discuss what I have learned about my approach, and reflect on the nature of digital civics work and the limitations of my research.

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CONCLUSIONS

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
(From T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 1943)

9.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I reflect on my research questions, contributions, limitations, and future work. Despite starting my initial fieldwork with the view to ‘designing for’ the functions of deliberative systems, I instead developed my approach to investigating how these functions played out in the context of localist politics and how relationships to data and technology could develop deliberative capacities. Throughout the phases of development and design during my research endeavour, the conceptual framework allowed me to frame my understanding and establish a shared vocabulary with my collaborators in reflecting on and configuring the technologies used through their consultation activities. Perhaps paradoxically, deliberative systems literature provided a means by which to conceive of localist policymaking and public engagement sites as discursive arenas and as

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civil society actors as agents of transmission between public and empowered arenas. At the first study site, this resulted in focusing on the mode of participation in the public arena to legitimise the process. At the second site, the importance of creating 'resources for action' was the prevailing focus when building the capacity of civil society to translate from public (issues based) to empowered (policymaking) arenas. At the third and final site, I was able to recognise the importance of ownership and capacity building as integral to civil society's role and ability to operate and make claims of representation, and therefore legitimacy. During the deployment of the sociodigital technology at each site, various issues and tensions arose and became visible through the use of the system and the ways my collaborators reflected on the deliberative workshops and the overall consultation practices. The values of my collaborators came to the surface through the ways they configured and adopted the sociodigital platform into their consultation practices and the ways they made sense of the community data the system produced.

9.2 Contribution of the thesis and answering research questions

In this thesis, I have situated a conceptual framework derived from the theory of deliberative democracy and outlined an associated methodological approach to participatory action research in the field of human-computer interaction, applicable to participatory design. I have bridged between deliberative democracy research and HCI and applied this to the context of localism. In doing so, I have established a 'framework for configuring civic participation', which contributes to HCI scholarship by offering civic technology researchers and designers an analytical lens through which to understand existing socio-democratic phenomenon, establish principles for design, and offered the concepts of *deliberative talk* and the *deliberative space* to articulate these ideas, as well as a set of evaluative standards (ethical, epistemic, and democratic) by which to assess the impact of digital civics interventions within socio-political arenas.

I have demonstrated the way these conceptual and methodological frameworks may be operationalised through three case studies that investigated the way deliberative qualities were enacted in civil society during instances of localism. In each case study, I was concerned not with instituting a public nor with carrying out experiments in deliberative democracy; rather, I was interested in the way deliberative functions played out in existing publics to investigate the potential

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for civic technology to enhance the deliberative quality of civil society-led consultation. Throughout this endeavour I have drawn upon the evaluative standards of deliberative systems to raise questions about power relations, the complexity of participatory processes, and the role of civil society. In addition, I have contributed to an understanding of the way policy is negotiated in civil society and had a practical impact on the consultation processes and participatory practices of my collaborators and their wider communities of practice.

Throughout three case studies, I have developed a sociodigital system that responds to deliberative deficiencies in local consultation processes in a manner intended to provide insights into the research question: *What is the impact of sociodigital technologies to support democratic deliberation in local consultation processes?* My response to this question is a result of an action research approach to investigation that integrated empirical data collection methods. These methods—to investigate the impact of localism on civil society actors carrying out public engagement activities in their local communities, and subsequent design and evaluation of technologies to support more deliberative practices in my case study sites—were framed by a conceptual framework that operationalised the normative theories from the emerging deliberative systems literature and situated this within the context of the study.

The three functions of deliberative systems that framed my approach to understanding existing practices in civil society and the implementation and impact of interventions were the *ethical*, the *epistemic*, and the *democratic*. Considering the *ethical function* led me to identify turn-taking and the introduction of physical markers to delineate opportunities to speak in public meetings as part of consultation practices in civil society. This intervention into the process was recognised by participants in the consultation and by organisers as an important factor in creating equal and inclusive processes. Developing my understanding of the *epistemic function* allowed me to investigate notions of representativeness, the role of experts, and the role of data in localist decision-making and policymaking processes and led me to understand the importance of face-to-face and public meetings as part of building civic capacities and emphasising the central role of community in the enactment of localism. The *democratic function* ties the process and structure of moments of participation to the

outputs and outcomes they engender, and of the issue of democratic legitimacy that such practices demand.

9.2.1 RQ 1: Can sociodigital methods from HCI shape the logistics of public dialogue?

In my studies, I found that through designing workshops for civil society groups where participatory design methods and simple game mechanics were presented as a way to shape deliberative spaces that such methods have a great potential in configuring spaces for deliberation at the neighbourhood level. The challenges for civil society in running more deliberative local consultation are that of resources, including time and money, and the expertise of those in civil society groups. Simple methods that promote modest indicators of expected behaviour, such as picking cards for turn-taking and moving a marker to indicate who people should pay attention to, have had an effect on the way participants communicate ideas and share their (sometimes competing) claims. I have given an example of how this may be done by inexpensive means, where resources and instructions are made available in such ways that support civil society in the facilitation, documentation, and sense-making of deliberative talk.

With this research question I have provided some early insights into the potential for participatory design methods, and their role for configuring not just participation in addressing design challenges (Vines et al., 2015, 2013), but in promoting discussions (around matters of local concern) that are ‘deliberative’, related to the decision-making processes within civil society organisations. This expands ideas from early work-based PD about the distribution of power (e.g., Ehn, 1988).

9.2.2 RQ2: What is the role of sociodigital technology in enabling informed decision-making?

To investigate the practices of a community in relation to ‘informed decision-making’ and explore the challenges, opportunities, and limitations I performed observations, ran deliberative workshops, and carried out interviews. Through taking this approach I have considered the relationships between data and people and between decision-makers and evidence *for* decision-making, through investigating the potential uses of conversation data and open data for public deliberation during the different stages of neighbourhood planning and fund-allocation consultation processes. In doing so, I have explored the role of different data, and how they might be used in more creative and value-

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sensitive ways within wider participatory civic processes. I asked what data are relevant, and what is the relevance of data to people's lives.

Through answering this research question, I brought forward an ontological position, following Taylor et al.'s *Data-in-Place* (2015) and Wegner's *Communities of Practice* (1998) that understands data as subjective and bound up in particular contexts and situations, in socio-material and temporal worlds, something that is incomplete, potentially enriching, and potentially misleading. The role of data in local consultation processes is to build epistemic capacity, and as such data need to be relevant. What information makes sense or is valuable needs to be 'meaningful' and context-specific, as being 'open' alone is not enough to become part of the discussions from within a community. As such, the challenge is to create the infrastructure to enable a multitude of expressions, sensitive to the ideas that data are 'situated' not just by 'place' but by a plethora of socio-material and temporal contexts. In addition, what counts as data should be expanded to include, among other sources, community-generated and the administrative data held in the community by civil society groups, and importantly in ways that can integrate with other data sources.

9.2.3 RQ3: How can sociodigital design support links between everyday talk and decision-making?

The key to this research question is to develop an understanding of those who lead the consultation process, and what values and priorities drive their decision-making. In some respects, the main focus of my collaborators was to inform either their own decision making or to put pressure on and influence the decisions of others. At other times their focus was to create consultation data to support their reporting of their policymaking and fund allocation to funding or governing bodies. The hope of promoting discussion was perhaps only a by-product. In the first case study, the consultation was a key step in a much longer process of allocating public money through community-led consultation. The second case study involved the creation of a new land-use policy, and the third case study involved two groups allocating public funds. Through these studies, I found that the way the civil society groups were positioned in their communities and their relationship with the local government and other civic authorities (the degree of coupling) affected the way they approached consultation and ability to have an impact in their community, but also how open they were to

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adopting deliberative methods and ideas. For example, my partner organisation in the second case study site played a dual role in 'fighting for' citizens at times, and at other moments 'sitting round the table' with civic authority actors. The risks associated with a coupling that is too tight are that of reputation and public image, but importantly this can create more barriers and distance between civil society groups and citizens in their communities. As Young noted:

“Whenever procedures are created to link state and civil society for purposes of policy-making, implementation, or evaluation, these procedures risk becoming another layer of bureaucracy disciplining citizens or insulating them from influencing the process” (2000, p.195).

Deliberative talk can become part of consultation processes when civil society groups have the relevant means to reify it as a resource for action, to represent community members' claims as data that is perceived as legitimate in empowered spaces, and in giving them a legitimate claim to represent community members in other forms of democratic action. As such, the key to fostering a more deliberative (talk-led) consultation process in civil society is to support civil society in not just convening citizens, structuring and capturing talk, but in representing community-generated data in meaningful ways, integrating it with their own sources of information and taking ownership over the process of listening to their community.

9.3 Limitations of the research

The public nature of the deliberative space is crucial to setting the tone for deliberation⁹⁰, and may well have been an important factor in the behaviours of my participants during the workshops.

However, the intention of these studies was not to prove or disprove that deliberative spaces could be created using sociodigital artefacts, nor was my intention to measure the 'deliberativeness' of the workshops⁹¹ (typical of much research in deliberative democracy, in particular, minipublic design).

Rather, the driving factor in creating deliberative spaces was to engender inclusive practices *for my collaborators* as they carried out their devolved decision-making processes. With this in mind, I reflect on the limitations of the approach I adopted throughout the thesis.

⁹⁰ Research has shown that when in public places the behaviours of people is governed by a set of internalised rules.

⁹¹ For this I would have used control groups in a comparative study and considered the intervention, in all or part, to be a treatment.

9.3.1 The complexity of localist decision-making processes

The design and iterative development of the sociodigital system was predicated on the idea that technology and methods of PD can foster opportunities for civil society groups to lower the barriers of entry to citizens having a voice in decision-making, and thus support the conditions for deliberative localism. This approach is bound up in the idea that democratic deliberation builds the legitimacy of democratic institutions with implications for issues of representativeness and civil society actors' claims to represent as highly interested non-elected representatives (Neblo et al., 2010). However, this simplistic view ignores how such interventions fit into the much wider, complex network of processes and actors of varying degrees of power and influence at play. It also ignores pre-existing issues around trust between different parties, an issue that has been argued to be often discounted in digital voting and consultation literature (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013).

The rhetoric underpinning much of the civic technology and digital democracy literature is that digital platforms can support new relationships between citizens and states (Servon, 2008; Gigler, Custer, et al., 2014), and provide new mechanisms for decision-making (Fishkin & Luskin, 2005; Pitt et al., 2005; Maciel et al., 2009; Semaan, Faucett, S. P. Robertson, et al., 2015; Semaan et al., 2014). In many respects, it was this rhetoric that motivated the civil society groups' use of the system. In using the sociodigital technology, they hoped to come to some agreement about the issues that faced them, to determine what 'should' be done about urban development, or where the focus 'should' be for funded community projects. However, in practice the results of the case studies raised as many questions as answers. Primarily, however, the sociodigital system provided a platform for community members to express their concerns around the ongoing regeneration of the community, a recent history of political dissatisfaction and economic disadvantage, or a lack of support for vital services. In some cases, the civil society groups had to re-evaluate their own perceptions of the problem at hand, to soften their political stance, and to find common solutions to the very different challenges and positions of a myriad of stakeholders.

9.3.2 A lack of representativeness

One part of the *democratic function* I have not given full attention to thus far is the ways in which inclusion is enacted through representativeness and selection of participants. Representativeness is considered very important in deliberative scholarship (Mendonça, 2008; Luskin et al., 2002) and is

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bound up in ideas of inclusion and democratic legitimacy. As I have made clear, my approach to qualitative enquiry led me to an investigation into existing practices and publics, it was not my role to create new publics through the recruitment of participants for my collaborators' consultation processes. Representativeness is important for inclusion, but it's also considered important for ensuring that people who may not normally get to meet and exchange views do so.

Public deliberation (with strangers) can have important deliberative effects on how arguments are framed, usually moderating them in more inclusive directions (Setälä, 2017). However, it was not my intention to create experiments in deliberative democracy, my research questions led me to understand the world as it is and investigate the impact of technology and the capacity for sociodigital artefacts to develop an understanding of the *ethical*, *epistemic* and, *democratic* functions of deliberative democracy. Moreover, as I have stated in chapter 2 and beyond, the creation of artificial representativeness, through for example employing one the various sampling techniques discussed in chapter 3, comes with a financial cost that civil society simply cannot afford, or justify.

Furthermore, as I have set out in the previous chapter, the 'local' settings and context of the deliberative workshops (deliberative spaces) in some respects mitigates the representativeness issue as those who participate are in the first instance, drawn from a smaller pool (Raisio, 2010; Kuyper, 2015) and in the second instance, due to the content of the consultation (matters of *local* concern) and the process of the workshop (which set an agenda and controlled who spoke about what), have a legitimate 'claim to represent' (Mendonça, 2008) the rest of their community in civil society. Within the local setting, it could be argued that representativeness is not a real concern, without reducing the importance of representativeness across a deliberative system. In other words, if deliberative localism was established across society each local setting could be considered as doing their part within a wider system as a division of labour (taking pressure of individual site of deliberation) in the way where other parts of the overall system could be seen to establish representativeness when looked at as a whole.

9.3.3 Community interest and what interests the community

Linked to the idea of representativeness, is the notion of public interest and self-interest. In my studies, part of the role of deliberation (as a method for community engagement) was to foster a

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sense of public-spiritedness⁹² (Searing et al., 2007; Johnston Conover et al., 2002). My collaborators and I, through the way we configured participation in our deliberative workshop settings, in some respects were asking for issues and concerns that reflect a community interest by asking the community what they were interested in. However, what the community is interested in, is not the same as ‘matters of common concern’ or what is in the best interests of the community. As stated in chapter 3, there has been support for the role self-interest can have in public deliberation (Mansbridge et al., 2010; Mansbridge, 1990). As discussed in chapter 8, part of the battle of inclusion in Pôrto Alegre was to increase engagement, and using local issues by what local people considered matters of concern was a successful method (Abers, 2003). In other words, there is a balance to be had between encouraging meaningful participation by inviting citizens to discuss what matters to them and creating legitimate outputs that represent matters of local concern. Because the deliberative spaces I created through my studies encouraged civil society groups to ascertain, not just *what* community views or issues were, but also questions of *how* and *why*, and that in the deliberative space participants articulated competing views, and at different times changed their opinions on issues after hearing others give reasons for their view, legitimacy could be claimed *through the process* of deliberation (Dieleman, 2015).

9.3.4 A question of objectivity

Under the standards of political science scholarship from which I have adopted my conceptual framework, the approach I took to qualitative enquiry is open to methodological questions. My approach involved getting close to my collaborator-participants through an approach recognised as a form of participatory action research. This could lead to questions about objectivity. My answer to such questions is that I took an epistemological stance that prioritised and privileged the experiences of my participants. This might prompt further questions about the generalisability of the findings my work has produced. It could be argued that the findings produced in Digital Civics work such as this are, in some sense, subjective, and if this is the case why should anybody else care? Oulasvirta and Hornbæk (2016, p.4956) have put forward the idea of HCI as a ‘problem-solving’ discipline. In this

⁹². Public-orientation learned through the experience of deploying public reasons, is said to promote public-spiritedness or civic virtue, a disposition that encourages people to consider according to the welfare of their community greater weight than their own convenience (Searing, 2007, p.606).

paradigm, HCI solves problems that can be characterised as empirical, conceptual, or constructive. Cutting across these, the aspects of problem-solving capacity are 1) *significance* (that a solution addresses a problem that is important to the stakeholders of the research—be they researchers or practitioners or end users); 2) *effectiveness* (that the solution resolves the essential aspects of the stated problem); 3) *efficiency* (the costs of applying a solution relative to the gains achieved); 4) *transfer* (how well the solution transfers to neighbouring problems or other instances of the problem); and, 5) *confidence* (the probability that the proposed solution holds) (see Oulasvirta & Hornbæk, 2016, p.4659). The question, then, changes to how well the solution put forward transfers to other instances of the problem. In the case of my thesis, my approach to answering my research questions has provided insights into civil society and raised the issues and barriers I have faced in addressing the problems through sociodigital design. In doing so, I have increased the capacity for others to address the problem.

9.3.5 The limitations of case study research

It is often stated that the limitation of case study research is that of finding transferability or generalisability beyond the specifics of the case. The challenges my work responds to are specific challenges and any insights or lessons from my studies cannot be completely divorced from this. However, not limited to these research activities alone case study approaches afford opportunities to develop and test concepts (Flyvbjerg, 2006). I have situated evaluative concepts from deliberative democracy through a case study approach contributing empirical case studies to the theory of deliberative democracy. Flyvberg (2006, p.266) has suggested that generalisability, is "considerably overrated as the main source of scientific progress" and that practical, context-dependent knowledge is more valuable than universal or predictive theories. However, other researchers may learn from the insights from my case studies around the role of researchers, co-production with civil society partners, and collaborating with different institutions in carrying out digital civics and community informatics work. My findings in each chapter are grounded and allow my collaborators to tell their own version of the challenges in localist politics and their experiences of working with technology. In reporting on my case studies in this thesis I have attempted to give a rich description of the way co-production is negotiated between researchers and community partners, in doing so have provided small details and insights about these relationships that will apply to other research studies. I did not

link the findings of my case studies back to the general concepts from theory, rather I kept them open in ways that may cut across disciplines and the specialisms of HCI or design or deliberative democracy.

9.3.6 Reflecting on the potential applicability outside of UK context and settings

In chapter 2, I discuss transnational examples of localism, including in India and other parts of Europe. Specifically, I refer to the *village panchayat* in rural India and the *Bydelsråd* experiment in Copenhagen. These examples represent contexts that are different to the UK in several ways. For illustrative purposes I will discuss two here before turning to a discussion on the applicability of my work beyond the context described in my research studies. First, the *panchayat raj* system seemed to carry out its localist function as it fit into an existing hierarchal system within the villages. For example, the *panchayat raj* was devolved power to solve minor disputes in the village, as such carrying out civic functions that the elders may have been expected to without devolved power from the state. Second, the *Bydelsråd* experiment in Copenhagen, although similar in some ways to the UK localism context was (in 3 of the 4 experiments, the other was selected by the city council) constituted of a direct popular vote, meaning they have a claim to represent and as such a claim to legitimacy. However, even if we suspend potential critique of the selection process, like in the context of UK localism, this does not guarantee that those who were elected will have the will or capabilities to carry out democratic duties. Much of the motivation and design in my work comes from a desire to include ordinary citizens' voice in consultation processes led by civils society, often through improving the capacity of civil society.

I have designed a set of tools and methods that privilege talk-based opportunities for engagement in ways that configure the dialogue of citizens on matters on local concern as data for policymaking. To reiterate, my work reflects a specific response to a specific set of issues that I surfaced through a methodological approach and analytical framing shaped by a belief system to highlight issues framed by a specific set of values and beliefs. However, the conceptual framework I have situated in this context could work in the same way to frame the way issues are understood in other contexts. Would the sociodigital design simply 'work' in contexts outside of the UK? In the contexts I describe in this thesis, they are useful tools in exploring existing practices, contexts, and values, and can highlight not

only issues but directions for travel toward new ways of doing. As Flyvbjerg (2006, p.238) reminds us: “The goal is not to make the case study be all things to all people. The goal is to allow the study to be different things to different people”.

9.4 Future work and lessons learned

In the final part of this chapter, I unpack the approach I adopted to answer my research questions, take stock of and discuss the methodological approach to enquiry I carried out, and posit some initial thoughts on taking the theory of deliberative functions forward.

9.4.1 Recognising a responsibility to collaborators

I have specified in chapter 4, the approach to digital civics that I took and that approach entails working alongside community organisations and civil society in their communities, and in projects where the co-production of outcomes is possible. In the case studies I discuss here, this also involved working directly with residents. To be sure, the motivation and reasons for this approach are both methodological (leveraging the expertise in the context for the benefit of the study) and ethical (born from participatory approaches that share a belief it is the right way to work).

With this comes a responsibility to both the participants and collaborators in the study, and the other citizens who may be directly, or indirectly affected by the study. At different moments during these studies and the actual consultation processes they were coupled with, the social capital of my collaborators was more appropriate, and understanding this dynamic was an important element in maintaining positive and successful partnerships. Greater honesty and critical reflection on these issues is therefore needed, not just in civic technologies research, but in a broader range of participatory projects in HCI where such issues might arise.

The introduction of technology brings with it new responsibilities and a need to be accountable. The relationships between community groups and researchers should be more open and transparent and we should ask ourselves what is fair and equal. Despite bringing with it the hope of democratisation, the design of technology instead has drawn criticism for reinforcing existing power structures (Dombrowski et al., 2016). The fact that the system was adopted and used in real decision-making processes means the way it was used was ultimately shaped by the underlying needs and motivations of the civil society groups and individual actors involved at each site. A remaining challenge with the

system is how it can endure as a central part of the group's practices after the duration of the study. Further study is required into the impacts of civic technology interventions, in particular, what values the systems respond to and ways in which they can be adapted and appropriated in a range of contexts and to meet an array of ends. This entails a deeper understanding of the working practices and values of a particular group, or a systemic understanding across a range of contexts through which a greater knowledge of how groups' priorities and conditions change over time.

Another side of this challenge is creating more opportunities for co-production and adaptation to better fit civil society's needs. While I did observe groups taking ownership, particularly in the third study after the system design responded to this, further work in this aspect of the design would be appropriate. In a related way, the evaluation of the impact of this on sustainability requires a longer timeframe than is permitted in the time restrictions of my PhD. Further work will involve re-visiting the case sites and investigating the lasting use or impact of the studies and interventions, using not only system-use as an indicator but the ideals and commitment to deliberation and participatory methods. Beyond the endeavour to better fit sociodigital design to the requirements and practices of civil society, in increasingly complex and meaningful situations, there remains a question about the usefulness and role of a deliberative framework for participation in digital civics. Future research should look to evaluate civic technology studies using the conceptual framework I present in this thesis and look to build a collection of tools and methods for deliberative localism.

9.4.2 Refining my approach

The approach I describe and reflect on through the studies and analysis that is the subject of this thesis represents in many respects, a developing set of ideas. The way the conceptual framework came to be used in my PhD research is built on a negotiation between theory and methods. Despite its beginnings in deliberative systems literature, put forward as a normative framework that speculated on the way the world might (or should) be, I have shown that it may be situated as a 'framework for configuring participation' for digital civics research. For this, the framework requires a further set of tools and methods to help researchers understand (as a measuring device for observed and investigated phenomenon), create (sociodigital, institutional, and service designs that foster and embody the functions), and evaluate their work (using the evaluative standards). However, more

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work is required to prepare, test, and share such resources, ideas, and methods. The framework also leaves scope for additional 'functions' beyond those adopted in this dissertation (for example a *civic function* as I outline below). What I have set out is a starting point of three core functions, which embody the values and ideals of the normative theory of deliberative democracy. This works as a methodological model for participatory design and digital civics as the underlying participatory and democratic values are shared, but there is scope for deliberative democracy and this framework to learn and adopt ideas from a digital civics epistemology, as I have begun to explore.

9.4.3 Towards a civic function

Throughout this endeavor, I have demonstrated the usefulness of Mansbridge's three functions of deliberative systems. While this has been employed as a tool to make sense of the civil society decision-making practices I studied, it could not always do justice to the way I understand my participants' experiences and values. By situating the functions of deliberative systems as a design space, considering the insights from my three case studies, the necessity for a *civic function* has become increasingly clear. By thinking only about the internal validity of deliberative minipublics through considering the epistemic and ethical virtues, and the recruitment and accountability of the democratic standard, an important function of civil society is lost. The civil society groups that took part in my studies in some way had a commitment to building a sense of community, solidarity and creating sustained engagement and a sense of efficacy in their communities. This was enacted through promoting discussion, creating opportunities for storytelling, and fostering the conditions for information-sharing between community members. Practices and tools for local decision-making processes should make the *civic function* part of the design or evaluation, alongside the *ethical*, *epistemic*, and *democratic functions*.

Beyond the straightforward 'deliberativeness' of the spaces created through the sociodigital intervention; I developed an appreciation of these spaces as social-civic spaces. This type of space is, according to the political philosopher Robert Talisse, required in the face of an increasing political homogeneity in social spaces (Talisse, 2003, 2009). Rather than create open spaces where discussion on societal issues or Politics was encouraged or personal politics permitted, participants during the case studies were explicitly required to focus on the 'local', and to listen to and reflect on others'

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personal opinions and expression of concerns regarding 'place'. This was important to promoting respect and reciprocity, but also in fostering a *civic function* of community members speaking to their neighbours, sharing resources, and agreeing upon collective action.

I have outlined in chapter 3 that public deliberation has been shown to increase civic competence (Grönlund et al., 2010), a sense of civic duty (Neblo, 2015), or catalyse civic action (Friedman, 2006), and in HCI there is a push toward building civic capacity (Alvarado Garcia et al., 2017; Puussaari et al., 2018) and sense of efficacy of citizens (Taylor et al., 2013). Here, I am suggesting a *civic function*, could bridge between the motivations of the 'civic turn' in HCI and the systemic turn deliberative democracy. To draw attention to a more mundane and perhaps humble form of civic activity – based upon a togetherness that goes beyond collective action toward a shared democratic goal. Part of civil society's role as community leaders has always been to build a sense of community and bring people together, and support citizens to learn and develop as individuals and as a community. The emerging responsibilities of civil society around policymaking and decision-making should not deter from that purpose. In turn, sociodigital design in deliberative localism should seek to respond to such issues and measure the impact of interventions against these principles. Deliberative localism should ask what *civic function* it serves, not as a by-product of participation but by design.

9.5 Concluding remarks

In my endeavor to investigate if deliberative democracy has a role to play in local decision-making, I explored the barriers to civil society carrying out increasingly commonplace local-level policymaking. In response, I designed and deployed a sociodigital system of artefacts and evaluated how they were used in three different policymaking contexts. Through my research, I offer insights for the designers and researchers of civic technologies and show possibilities for political scientists in the empirical study of deliberative democracy. Finally, I invite future work to focus on finding the means to channel the talk and utterances of everyday politics in communities in ways that call empowered actors to action, in ways that support civil society groups to achieve their goals through identifying shared values over a sustained period, and in ways that promote civic virtues. This can be explored through building the capacities of civil society organisations, by supporting their work in

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communities and between citizens and decision-makers, through bridging between knowledge, experience, and practice.

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APPENDIX A.1

An abridged report for my partner organisations to use in their meetings with stakeholders during case study 1.

Community Conversations – [REDACTED]

REPORT BY IAN G JOHNSON, DIGITAL CIVICS, OPEN LAB, TO STAKEHOLDER MEETING WEDNESDAY 9 DECEMBER 2015

What we learned

- Narrow demographic represented (intentionally)
- Use of maps - interesting way to elicit feedback related to 'place'
- Facilitation of groups by organisers kept focus and encouraged rich conversation
- 'Piggy backing' onto existing community events:
 - Negotiation with established routines, self-organised groups with own conventions
 - Engaged participants, guaranteed numbers
- Information and knowledge-sharing (creation of social capital) was evident within tables, and minipublics
- Good environment for discourse and conversation built on mutual respect, with some cases of contestation

What we don't know about

- Who is involved in the wider process?
 - Who is on the [REDACTED]
 - What is the role of the Council, [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED]
- How are expectations managed for those who provide feedback in the meetings?
- What is the outcome, specifically related to the participants, and how is this communicated to them? (i.e., decisions made)

Design opportunities

- How might we engage more people in the process?
 - Attract greater attendance to the community conversation event
 - Involve people who are not at the meeting, in other places around the community
- How might we keep people engaged in the process beyond the workshop?
- How might we re-design the workshop to make intentions more clear?
- How could we encourage conversation about place without maps?
- How could we design tasks so that participants' rich conversations are captured and use this to create meaningful data?
- How might tasks encourage structured conversations, in the absence of facilitation of organisers?

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APPENDIX A.2

Field report from case study 1 [redacted for anonymity].

Community Conversations: Participatory Budgeting in [REDACTED]

A fieldwork report by Ian G Johnson, Digital Civics, Open Lab, Newcastle University

1 METHOD

During November I attended three 'community conversations' workshops in [REDACTED], organised by [REDACTED], The [REDACTED], and the [REDACTED].

The focus of this stage of the research has been ethnographic fieldwork and observations; 'hanging round' during the sessions, listening to what is said by the organisers and by the participants during the tasks – focusing on the types of interactions and what the topics of discussion are and how this is facilitated. The data collection thus far is the detailed notes taken during the observations. However, I plan to arrange follow-up interviews, which will be transcribed. The observations and note-taking have been guided by a framework to identify the qualities of the deliberation.

1.1 FRAMEWORK FOR FIELDWORK OBSERVATIONS

Throughout the observations I focused on looking at how and why people participated, the use of, resistance to and barriers to technologies, and three qualities for good deliberation. The framework is based on the epistemic, democratic, and ethical functions enacted in each workshop.

- 1.1.1 Democratic function - This function covers inclusivity, getting more people involved in the process of decision-making, and hearing the views of more than just the 'usual suspects'.
- 1.1.2 Ethical function - How the deliberation is facilitated, and based on mutual respect.
- 1.1.3 Epistemic function - This function is concerned with the learning that takes place, information sharing and being confronted with others' views.

2 WHO IS INVOLVED?

There are several stakeholders involved in organising and implementing these workshop events. However, roles, responsibilities, and intentions are not always clear. In addition to those below, there are eight members of Udecide. They are a constituted group, formed two years ago, however, the council appear to be reducing the time and resources they spend with the group. Beyond this funding they have, that is ring-fenced, there is no clear future for them in terms of council involvement (beyond the meetings and work with [REDACTED]).

2.1 THE ORGANISERS

Across all three workshops there were key personnel involved in at least one of the roles highlighted above.

2.1.1 [REDACTED] – [REDACTED]

Presented and ran the first meeting, and involved in collaborating with us. Missed the last two workshops.

2.1.2 [REDACTED] – Project Manager, Community Wellbeing, [REDACTED]

Present at first two meetings. Her role was to act as facilitator for a group. She has good knowledge of the local area and the issues in the community and seemed to know a lot of the people present at the events.

2.1.3 [REDACTED]

Also one of our collaborators alongside Karen and Barbara. Faye ran the secondary card-sorting task around free advice services. Was not present at second meeting, as such the card-sorting task was not part of the workshop.

2.1.4 Carol – [REDACTED] treasurer

Present first meeting, as she had some connection to the venue. Supplied catering for the event, found out only by talking to her about her role in the panel.

2.1.5 Mary – [REDACTED]

Present at all three meetings. Has a slot at the start to talk about the EC, and circulates the room with sign-up forms towards the end of the map task.

2.1.6 Brian – [REDACTED]

Present at first and third meeting. Only became apparent that he was an active member of EC in the last meeting. Involved in the management of a community asset in the town.

3 WIDER PROCESSES AND SCOPE

The Community Conversations workshops are part of a wider process including all three organisations. The meetings themselves were organised by [REDACTED], a [REDACTED] based constituted group, but the [REDACTED] with support from [REDACTED] Council, ‘piggy backed’ onto their events to ensure they had a captive audience for their agenda – which is to get more members and do ‘some kind of community engagement work’ to raise the profile of activities in the area.

The [REDACTED] Council will continue this process in other areas of the City, and [REDACTED] will continue to have their monthly meetings to decide what to spend their funding on.

3.1 [REDACTED]

They have 80k, they have to spend it in the community, have to demonstrate they consulted. The panel decide if it’s going to be spent on various little projects or one big project. This year is one big project. They also decide in what area it will be spent on – children and young people, environment and sustainability, older people and wellbeing. This was already chosen beforehand.

[REDACTED] (at the first meeting) informed me that in 2015 there is going to be one big project. The panel will come up with a project and put the project out to tender. This is usually done in a more consultative manner. In the meetings, the relationship between the community workshops and the decision-making processes are unclear.

4 THE SESSIONS

4.1 COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

The characteristics of the events are:

- Good environment for discourse and conversation built on mutual respect, but some cases of coercive conversations and rhetoric
- Use of maps – interesting to think about ‘place’ but some found it exclusionary
- ‘Piggy backing’ onto existing community events
- Facilitation good, but inconsistent
- Information and knowledge sharing (creation of social capital) was evident, but did not always get past the table, or mini-public
- People who may be interested unaware of events
- Only a small demographic represented

4.2 TASKS

The tasks are set up by [REDACTED], or [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]’s absence. About fifteen minutes after the scheduled start time, as people are sitting on the tables with refreshments the task is introduced, turning participants’ attention to the maps on each table. There are two sheets of A2 cardboard with cartoon characters (see figure. 1) of a stereotypical old man and old woman. The visual representation is sort of stereotypical – grey hair, moustache, walking stick etc. They both just moved to this area, but they don’t know anything about it. Fred has a stick, and poor mobility. Mary needs to work out what she can do in the area but also how Fred can travel round as he doesn’t have great mobility. They have grandchildren coming around and they want to know events and activities where they might want to take their grandchildren. Then they introduce the post-it notes.



1. The task involved the characters, and placing notes on an ONS map

There are three categories of post-it notes. Three different shapes – one was an arrow, but they said was a house that represented any type of building, then a ginger bread man outline that represented people, and a star was a wish – something that wasn’t there but they wished was. There was a square standard post-it note that was for anything else, and example used was transport. To help Fred and Mary to find out when they moved to this area if there is anyone or anywhere for them to go etc. write it on the note and stick it on the right area. And if when doing the task you think there is anything missing stick it on the star.

In the same introduction [REDACTED] does a short introduction to what the [REDACTED] Council was and does:

"We are a group of people who represent older people in Newcastle. But we can't exist without our members, we always need members, membership is important. Becomes a bit of a pitch. They distribute a newsletter, I go to loads of places and they say there is nothing to do in their area and that is jam packed with things to do in your area and in different areas. There's always something to do, those who say that haven't bothered to find out. We as the council and the [REDACTED] want to get more information about different areas in [REDACTED]. We want to find out what is here. And as you all live here you can all help us with that."

The trade-off it seems is that by helping with this activity participants will get a food, coffee and to socialise.

The maps are OS maps produced in 2010 (see figure.1). The area on the map was [REDACTED], a thick red line is shown which represents the political ward line for [REDACTED]. This boundary has been introduced relatively recently.

4.2.1 Issues with maps – across all three meetings

The maps caused confusion and discussion around what is and what isn't [REDACTED]. In the first meeting there is one man who says before has started: "This isn't me, I live in [REDACTED]. He came across as excluded from the discussion, he said I don't live in this area I don't know anything about it. The response to this was that it was about the wider community, and that although you don't live there you may have knowledge about it and use it.

4.2.2 Card sort task

This task is introduced by [REDACTED], and only happened in the two events when she was present (Church, and [REDACTED] Centre). Faye put an envelope with all the cards in it on each table, explained the activity – which was matching up various services and groups with what you could get from that group (e.g., services, advice, free stuff). See who can finish first.

15 services with one-para description. Was a good activity to get people talking and working together as it was quite difficult to do. Some were very obvious, e.g., test your fire alarms the fire service would do. Faye's intention was to give people new information.

The activity was finished when people finished the task, when Faye read out the answers.

4.3 SESSION 1 – [REDACTED] CHURCH

People were coming in from the main church room, the space next door. People were being offered drinks and cake. It felt like a coffee morning. People were wandering and sitting where they wanted. Maps on the table but not introduced to begin with. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were stood at the door greeting people. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were sitting at the tables engaging people as they sat down. More acting as hosts, offering drinks, food etc. People sit around chatting. They were happy for that to happen it seems, helping people feel relaxed.

The session started properly after 15 minutes of chatting and coffee. People are moved around a bit right at the start after introducing the task. There were four tables at the first but one isn't used. There were 16 people there and they spread 5 to 6 per table. One of the people who come in is the vicar.

She seems very familiar with the people. The Vicar helps organise people around a bit. The vicar also sat down at one of the tables and participated. The vicar tried to support the conversation. If someone said something quietly but was talked over she would say "oh what did you just say". Carefully guiding conversation.

There was also an ex-councillor at the session. It was assumed that she was retired. Margaret. She played the role of the resident though didn't appear to push specific views forward.

During this time I stood around with [REDACTED] for most of the session and circulated around the room to hear what was going on. [REDACTED] is the treasurer of [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] is also Bright Star. [REDACTED] said that [REDACTED] calls it Udecide because that's what "we" called the consultation; "we" being the council or "the panel" that is in charge of that funding. The council refer to it as Bright Star/ Small Sparks. This group decide on the spending of the £80k. [REDACTED] was at the meeting looking after the sandwiches and brought three cakes she had made at home. She didn't participate or help run the session but just stayed in the kitchen.

As the main task begins people spend time co-ordinating and discussing where the venue is and where they live etc. Finding their bearings. People just started talking quite easily and doing the task. The activity was quite explicit – there is a shop there, a doctor surgery there. Buildings were what people found easiest, and was often completed first.

Schools, post offices, and hospitals were on the OS map but some of these had moved. This side-tracked discussion. "I'll show you where the local doctors is... oh, but that school isn't there anymore". Big changes in Kenton over recent years. A hospital has also disappeared from the local area, places represented on the OS maps, such as post offices are now gone.

The facilitators ask follow up questions: "How do you travel there from where you live?"; "What bus do you use?" It seems a large number of people rely on taxis because of mobility or just timing of buses.

The information sharing between people seemed to be more interesting element of the workshop than the mapping of things and places. It seemed like the organisers expected and wanted this to happen. There was a feeling of connecting community groups was an important issue. Information sharing was a product of that, [REDACTED] was satisfied that was going on. There was a lot of people just talking about personal stories and how the area had changed. There was a lot of "when we first moved here in ... wherever, it was completely different, lots more to do". Talk about anecdotes and personal stories of problems with using things.

There wasn't many "people" post-it notes used. The facilitators tried to make more of this, i.e., when something was mentioned such as a specific event or activity in the area, they would ask who runs that or who organizes it. People did not think of "people" as community assets as such, and neither would they think that regular informal type activity as community events.

Wishes were generally around transport, i.e., we can't get so and where because there isn't a bus, or about bringing amenities closer. Again facilitated very similar to People, issues drawn out by the organisers. Another example is "there isn't anything for kids to do" and then a wish would be very general and vague.

A lot of what happened was people disagreeing around where things were in the local area, and vernacular interactions and bottom-level information sharing, making sense of the map. The second activity was the card sorting task.

4.4 SESSION 2—■■■■ HALL

This was in the ■■■■ hall (■■■■ Residents' Association). There is a large block of flats (Wyndley Place – see figure.2), opposite the flats there is a small building called the ■■■■. A room with tables in with a kitchen and toilets. There is a common room in the large flats but too small so ■■■■ was built. Wyndley Place. Some use the flat, some use the hall, but they don't mingle with each other. Karen mentioned this – community engagement office for this area. Rival coffee mornings.

This session was run at the exact time of their coffee morning – so the session was run as part of their regular routine. They did a role call for this one – but this may have been more to do with sending a newsletter.



2. Wyndley Place flats and inside of the ■■■■

People from ■■■■ TARA came to this as well – they were mother, daughter and another lady. This was the table I was on as a facilitator. They came to this session because they were hosting the last session and Karen and ■■■■ go to that one.

The session was introduced the same as the first session, with the props, script, ■■■■ introducing elders council, then starting the task.

The trade-off with 'piggy-backing' on social events came up here. There were issues with the table layout. The organisers had requested to move the tables around, but there was a concern from those who ran the coffee morning that people would just want to sit where they always sit. In fact it seems that it could have been disrupted and people would have been fine. Maybe instead a power issue from the coffee morning organisers. This event was interrupted for a raffle.

In the second and third meeting there was a group with a pre-set agenda and clearly used stars more explicitly. The resident's association people were very clear on knowing what "wishes" they wanted to make. They wanted something like ■■■■ in their bit of ■■■■. They used to have a community space but now the ■■■■ (the library, YHN service desk, dental surgery and doctors, 10 meetings rooms where civil servants with surgeries) – venue for the final meeting. Before then was a simpler community centre. If they want to do anything now they have to use the school hall and now have to spend money on hiring a room.

On the table I facilitated there was a married couple somewhat like the characters from the scenario. The husband was getting very frustrated because he couldn't see, it was upside down, and he couldn't make out what was going on. The map itself was upside down for them highlighting issues of doing group work around an activity like that. Happier talking to you about his life stories and anecdotes around planning in the city (his experience). He was focused on the bit of the map he could see near

him. He was trying to work out where he was on the map, noted that one place was Town Moor, and then talked about developments on that. The wife was engaged in the activity with the residents' association people and learned from them. She was complaining that she used to do things and didn't know what was now going on – the residents association was telling them about the things they organised instead.

The specific challenges in this area are related to socio-economic factors. Residents talk about the issues with anti-social behaviour in the area and the poor state of the buildings and public spaces. The organisers are opaque about the purpose of the event, and there was a feeling that people felt that this was 'yet another' consultation without any feedback. The role of the [REDACTED] in this context, is confusing. It is not clear who is leading the event, and the push to sign people up to their membership was sometimes uncomfortable. The session seemed like it was comprised of more people who run community events and groups. Tips were being exchanged. In this event Karen explained to some people about the funded projects but only to small numbers and careful not to over commit.

4.5 SESSION 3 – [REDACTED] CENTRE

This final meeting was led by [REDACTED] on her own hosted by the people from [REDACTED] I sat with at the previous session. Just [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were there as facilitators. Just 10 people in total, 7 non-facilitators but was in a small room. No understanding of how the rooms were paid for (or who booked them – *later found out the [REDACTED] booked it in my meeting with her*).

The space was a meeting room in the [REDACTED] Centre; a new council building that houses [REDACTED] Council customer services, YHN, a doctor surgery, dental practice, and the library, in which meeting room 10 is situated. The last of ten room that skirt the traditional library space, most of which are only large enough for one desk and inside are council staff holding 'surgeries' and 'drop-ins' where residents seek advice and access other services. I am told that the building sits on the site of the old community centre by a participant.

The meeting room itself is modern and without the character and ambience of the last two venues (the [REDACTED] and the church hall). The space is small with a low ceiling, it is very warm, and I suggest opening a window. There seems to be confusion over whether or not the windows can be opened. Nobody, of the people sitting at the two tables (two are left empty) is familiar with the space, and the mood feels more formal than the others, possibly due to the absence of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

They had the maps laid out again. A participant comes to speak to me on the 'empty table'. He seems to be knowledgeable about the area and the maps, perhaps a former civil servant. He takes joy in telling me: "the only people who understand these maps are the OS lads", and took pleasure in pointing to all of the buildings on the map that are no longer there.

[REDACTED] introduced the "script" this time but didn't use the characters like they did before. Initially felt this may have been a reflection of these characters being rather stereotypical, however, it later transpired it was because they left them at the previous conversation. Another person came to this session who was at the first session – Brian. Assumed to be participant / resident but actually member of elders council. Therefore only three people who were new to the event or activity.

[REDACTED] mentioned that they had the money, 80k, that needs to be spent. Needs to be spent on older people's wellbeing so we're asking you for ideas and some of them might be what we do. The emphasis was on 'might', not everything will happen. She then went on a much longer speech on what not to put down;

"This is lottery money and we have to talk to people about how it's spent which is why you're here," she told people to be sensitive (i.e. realistic) and started saying things like "don't wish for the moon because it just won't happen." [REDACTED] did the usual sign up to the [REDACTED] Council, in addition in this meeting she mentioned they needed more members to "tackle those with power and influence."

There were so few people that no facilitation was required from myself, although I had been asked to beforehand. There was a lot of buzz to begin with at the start, as usual. They were debating where things were – orientating to the map again and where places were. Then there was a big argument over whether there was a dentist in the [REDACTED] Centre. "If there was a dentist here I would use it because I have to travel down there..." "How did I not know about this, we should know etc." This caused issues in terms focusing on the activity, and was a distraction to other people too. There wasn't so much guiding. [REDACTED] was rather passive more passive than the other facilitators I had observed, [REDACTED] a little more dominant. Some aggression in the tone.

The task starts off with a lot of enthusiasm and again some informal sharing of information about the locality within tables, or sometime just one-on-one. On one table, however, an argument breaks about to whether or not there is a dental surgery in the building. It goes on for a few minutes overriding the conversation on the table. One participant actually leaves the room to retrieve evidence to prove their point, and upon their return the debate ensues.

The facilitation, so vital for good deliberation, is varied. On one table it is passive to the point where a disagreement between two participants dominates for a substantial time. The other table suffers more from the facilitator narrowing the focus too much, not allowing conversation or discussion to develop. Both tables have issues with rhetoric; the facilitator narrowing the focus too much, not allowing conversation or discussion to develop. Both tables have issues with rhetoric.

People were getting talked over. On [REDACTED]'s table – someone talking about not being able to find a space. [REDACTED] there are loads, you can use Weatherspoon's pubs, schools etc. But they said they had tried all of these things, our local pub charge. The response was there is always a way. Personality differences maybe as well here. [REDACTED] also went on a bit of a rant that old people and disabled people expect things to be done for them. We should help people to help themselves. People did think that the only way things to run would be to get money – [REDACTED] would say it was about using you initiative.

On one table the discussion turns to transport but the scope of discussion is narrowed by the facilitator's insistence on using the role play characters, and insisting there is transport, so people should be talking about other things. It feels like the agenda is turned to things that the [REDACTED] may be able to help with, but it caused frustration for participants who are dissatisfied with the situation, and felt this may be the right place to air concerns. Participants also highlight a specific need (a community centre in [REDACTED]). They are told that they should be finding alternative locations such as public houses, again leading to slightly heated exchanges and frustration from their expectation of the task.

There is discussion again about the ward boundaries, and there is a quick change of subject, which feels like a lost opportunity for discussion, or at least providing information for learning.

Political boundaries and the map was again an ongoing issue, and there was a lot of discussion about how the line was not relevant, and that it didn't represent people's perceptions of their community –

“what’s the red line?”(Political ward boundary), “what does that mean?”, “why do they keep changing them?”, “why does the boundary matter. It makes no difference to me”.

4.6 REFLECTIONS FROM ORGANISERS

They felt there were issues where community groups have an asset, be it a room, a space, or an event – and either just through not understanding how to they don’t publicise, it meaning they have small numbers and they are happy with it and don’t want it to grow. One example was a community centre in [REDACTED] that is physically quite hidden, which is run by residents just about self-sufficient the people who use it pay for it (this is possibly [REDACTED]). It may have been adopted as a community asset from the council. The types of activities being run are coffee mornings, raffles, bingo – spaces that people could use and benefit from but it is being hidden. People only come to meetings that are on their patch.

The main objective was for people to share information and resources. But there’s still a desire for better mixing and starting to share resources more than just sharing information. They only have one set of maps that must be cleared before the next meeting. The only real data is what they have on the notes and the photos taken of the maps.

The rich data about what they learn and understand more about the community exists only with the organisers. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] hear the stories and just then use this to influence their work but at an informal level. They identify to me that the pictures but they don’t really mean much, but’s what they learn from the conversations. They pick up useful bits of information ([REDACTED]) or facilitate people to share information amongst themselves ([REDACTED]). There is no feedback loop to the people who took part.

5 FUTURE WORK AND NEXT STEPS

Throughout the fieldwork I was looking for opportunities for interventions into the processes.

- Designing to disrupt the process in order to highlight issues for improvement
- Designing a paper-based intervention that could be digitised and deployed across all case studies
- Design in the inclusivity space, with the Information Grounds framework
- How might we engage more people?
 - Involve people who are not at the meeting in other places
 - Attract greater attendance to the community conversation event
- How might we re-design the workshop to make intentions more clear?
- How might we keep people engaged in the process beyond the workshop?
- How could we design tasks so that participants’ rich conversations are captured and use this to create meaningful data?
- How might tasks encourage participants to show mutual respect, and learn? (Structure, facilitation, and something to take away).
- Shaping non-obvious ideas and wishes.
- Dissimilar and similar comparative analyses across other case studies ([REDACTED])

APPENDIX A.3

A needs and requirements report for my partner organisations during case study 1.

Needs and requirements

Democratic Function

The organisers want to have something that they can share with people beyond the event.

The thing that can be shared should be meaningful, perhaps visually.

The 'rich' conversations that happen around a task need to be captured, and sharable, in a meaningful way.

Ethical Function

Everyone should have an equal say in the task, or conversation.

Turn-taking and mutual respect should be part of the design.

The technology intervention should facilitate the conversations and tasks.

Epistemic Function

There should be an opportunity for learning to take place.

Participants should share information between each other.

-
- The design should capture audio, in a way that can be shared beyond the workshop, perhaps during the event, as well as after.
 - The 'game' element will have rules for turn-taking, and each participant should be restricted to how and what they can contribute.
 - The game element should include simple tasks, such as find your own house to help participants orientate the map, and room to talk about what has changed.
 - The map should be simple and designed round 'landmarks' that residents will understand, not street names.
 - The outcome of each event (video, audio, or images) could be added to after the event by other residents who did not attend.

APPENDIX B

Excerpt from Scenarios and group interview schedule in case study 1 to support interaction with the software interface.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

OVERALL AIM: TO INVESTIGATE THE ROLE OF OUR SOCIOTECHNICAL PLATFORM IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AT A LOCALLY-DEVELOPED LEVEL

1. WHAT ARE CURRENT PRACTICES?

- What have been your methods for consulting the community in the past?
- How do your current methods and practices fit into the diagram I have shown you?
- Are there any areas you feel you are particularly good at?
- What areas do you feel are the weaknesses of your current practices?

2. HOW DID THE WORKSHOPS GO?

- What did you think of our methods for consulting the community in the session?
- How do you feel those methods and practices fit into the diagram I have shown you?
- Are there any areas you feel the tool particularly good at?
- What areas do you feel are the weaknesses of the tool?

3. CAN YOU USE THE PLATFORM?

In this section I will present you with three scenarios and ask you to use the online tool to respond to each.

Three tasks to be carried out by the participant, looking at using the filter, search and location features:

SCENARIO 1

The Neighbourhood Planning Board want a policy for preserving the village green, but are unsure about what residents feel about this area. How could you use this tool to find out more and inform your decision?

SCENARIO 2

The doctors' surgery is a hot spot area and hot topic in the village. How could you use what people have said in the workshop to inform a solution?

SCENARIO 3

How might you understand what people in the workshop feel about traffic and transport issues in the area?

APPENDIX C

Guidance offered to the Trust for creating prompts in case study 3.

Prompt Guidelines for ██████ Community Conversational workshop

September 2018

These ‘prompt types’ are based on what has worked well in the past, and are tied to ideas about what makes ‘good’ deliberation happen between participants in a discussion.

All of the prompts should be appended with an instruction to ‘talk about’ or explain to the rest of their group their reasons for moving the marker to the specific place.

It is best to have around 50 cards, so that each table gets different questions and we can cover tables or groups working at different speeds. It is best to have a mix of different prompt types, but as long as there are not too many of one type, the activity should work.

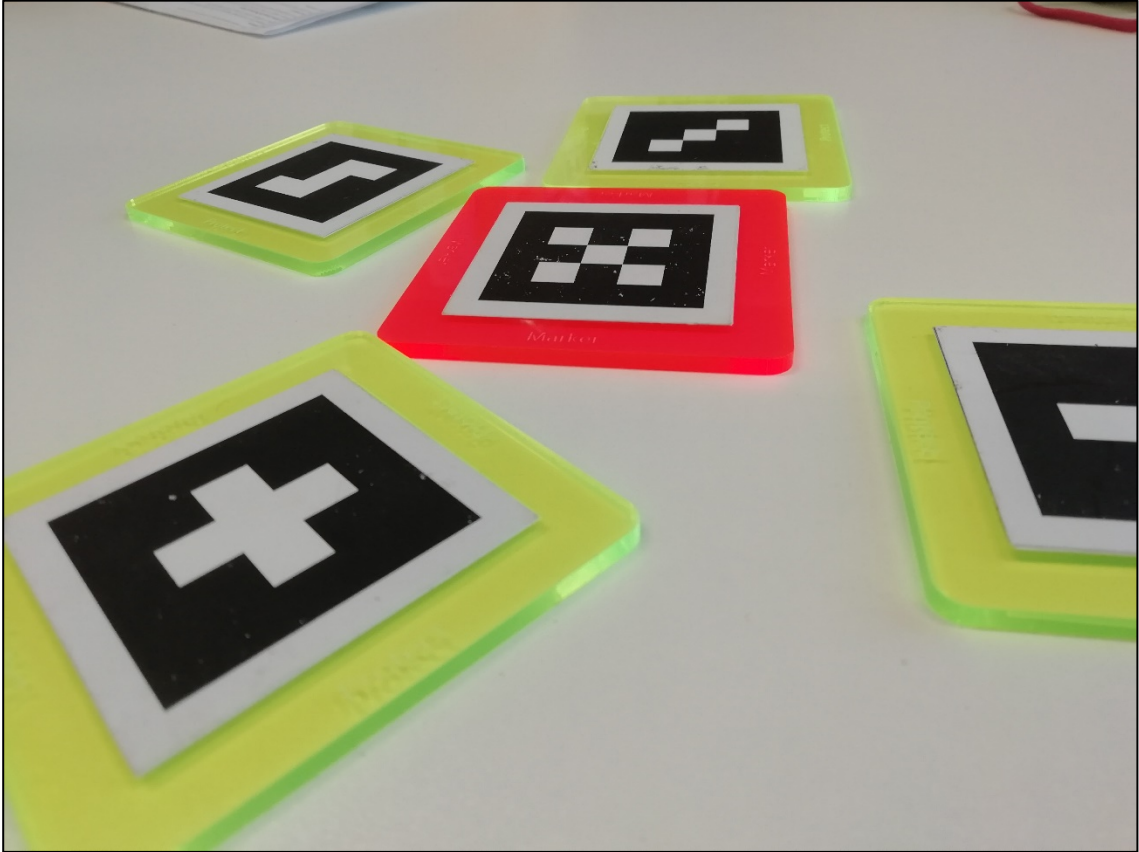
They can be used as a starting point for thinking of your own prompts and used in combination (for example, you could allow for self-interest, as well as restricting a participant’s scope, i.e. “Talk about what you think is the worst thing where the marker is currently at”).

Type	Description	Example
Empathy	Putting yourself in someone else’s shoes	Where is the best place for a grandparent to take a grandchild on a rainy day
Purpose	Restricting a participants’ scope	Talk about what accessibility is like at the place the marker is currently at
Freedom	Allowing for self-interest	Move the marker to somewhere you like
Build	Build on someone else’s view to show understanding	Move the marker to somewhere that is the same/ a further example of the last person’s view
Focus	Keeping the discussion onto key themes of the consultation	Move the marker to somewhere that requires development
Consensus	Gathering a shared understanding of an issue between participants	Move the marker to somewhere you all agree requires funding
Meta-consensus	Showing respect for others’ views to build trust	Move the marker to a place that someone else id worried about
Discuss	Participants ask each other questions to build understanding and empathy	Move the marker to somewhere you don’t know much about and ask someone who you think will know about it a question

APPENDICES

APPENDIX D.1

Examples of physical markers used in case studies 1 and 2.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX D.2

Examples of physical prompt cards used in case studies 1 and 2.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX D.3

Materials used in case study 3.



APPENDIX E

Example of consent form.



Participant Consent Form

Project title: Community Conversational in [REDACTED]

Please initial in the boxes

- The nature, aims and risks of the research have been explained to me. I have read and understood the Information for Participants and understand what is expected of me. All my questions have been answered fully to my satisfaction.
- I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and be withdrawn from it immediately without having to give a reason.
- I understand that my personal information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.
- I understand that my verbal interactions will be audio-recorded and transcribed for the purposes of this research study, and that this information will be anonymised.
- I understand that anonymised information may be used as part of the writing up of this research in academic publications and reports.
- I understand that the anonymised data related to this project will be securely archived by the research team for other genuine researchers to access in the future.
- This consent is specific to the particular study described in the Participant Information Sheet attached and shall not be taken to imply my consent to participate in any subsequent study or deviation from that detailed here.
- I consent to being contacted for future research as part of this project.

Participant Statement:

I _____ agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Participant Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Signed

Date

APPENDIX F

Example of information sheet for resident-participants and collaborator participants.



Participant Information Sheet

Project title: Community Conversations in [REDACTED]

You are invited to take part in a study being conducted by researchers at the Newcastle and Northumbria University. This study is part of work across two projects: the Digital Civics research programme at Newcastle University, and The Trust Map project being conducted between Northumbria and Newcastle Universities.

We are working with [REDACTED] Council to look at how structured group discussion and technology can support people talking about and sharing experiences about their communities and neighbourhoods. We would like you to help us by taking part in an interview to discuss your opinions on the event.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. It outlines why the research is being done and what participating would mean for you.

What is the purpose of the research?

The aim of our research is to explore the ways in which group activities and technology might support people in talking and thinking about their local areas. We are interested in how technology might support discussion between people, and how it might capture experiences, ideas, concerns and questions about how neighbourhoods may be designed and planned differently in the future. We have designed a simple review technology for decision-makers to try and make sense of the audio and geographic information we captured.

Who is doing this research?

This research is being conducted by Ian Johnson (from Newcastle University) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] and supported by our collaborators.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part as a decision-maker or organiser of a community conversation event in [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] is currently consulting on a Neighbourhood Plan, and seeking the views of residents on the future of the village. We'd like you to use the Community Conversations review technology to evaluate the data we captured at the event.

What are the benefits of taking part?

There are no direct benefits to participating. However, it will give you the chance to make sense of the data we captured at the event, and help us shape the next version of the technology.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

We don't anticipate there being any disadvantages or risks of taking part in this research.

Can I withdraw from the research and what will happen if I don't want to carry on?

Yes, of course. You can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be invited to an interview to discuss the community conversations events. At this interview we'd like you to use the Community Conversations review technology. The system itself is a very simple prototype, and will be explained in detail on the day. You will be asked some questions about the event in [REDACTED] and be asked to use the technology in order to find out more information based on scenarios which we will ask you to complete. The interview will be audio recorded.

We expect the interview will take one hour to complete.

Will my records be kept confidential?

Yes. Any information provided by you in the context of this study will be stored securely and confidentially. We will also take care to separate all personal details and make sure that your information remains anonymized.

Whom do I contact if I have any questions or a complaint?

In the first instance, you should contact [REDACTED] if you have any questions about this study or the research.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Contacts for further information:

[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

