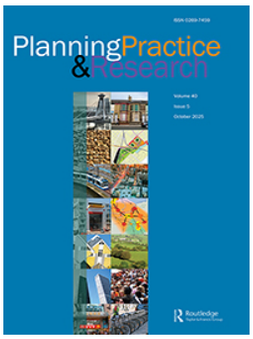

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Towards everyday conceptions of justice in community-led planning

Tessa Lynn [c], John Sturzaker [b], Gavin Parker [c] and Matthew Wargent [a]

[a]Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK; [b]University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, UK; [c]University of Reading, Reading, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper draws upon a novel analytical framework to review a sample of community-led plans produced across the four nations of the United Kingdom. It explores how communities interpret issues of (in)justice and how they seek to address them. Focusing on plans produced by communities categorised as more deprived, the analysis shows that discussions of abstracted notions of equality, diversity and inclusion are almost entirely absent, with communities more likely to focus on tangible issues of local importance such as access to affordable housing, health and service provision. The paper concludes by exploring the implications of these findings for understandings of justice.

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Introduction

A wealth of literature exists that discusses community-led planning and other forms of community development activity internationally. This often focuses on process rather than output:how a particular plan was produced, who was involved, and how inclusive or otherwise this process might have been. In this paper, we concentrate on one output of community-led planning – plans themselves – via a content analysis of a sample of plans produced by and for communities across the four constituent nations of the UK. These plans tell us a great deal about what communities themselves value and prioritise, alongside what they avoid, feel unable to address or are dissuaded from addressing, and issues of which they may be unaware.

The paper's thematic focus is justice and more specifically what community-led plans tell us about everyday understandings of justice, and how communities explore and seek to address questions of justice in their plans. The paper is built on Sen's (2009) argument that to focus on abstract or theoretical interpretations of justice can hinder attempts to reduce actually existing instances of injustice. As such, we argue for a better and more empirically-grounded understanding of everyday conceptions of justice, with a view to refining policies and initiatives that seek to combat inequality at the neighbourhood level.

Uptake of community-led planning activity is more widespread in affluent neighbourhoods than in deprived ones. This is true in the UK as it is elsewhere in the Global North (Parker & Salter, 2017; Sturzaker & Nurse, 2020). This in turn

CONTACT Matthew Wargent wargentm@cardiff.ac.uk

means that much research on community-led planning has tended to focus on those more affluent neighbourhoods, particularly in the UK since the 2011 Localism Act, legislation which empowered communities in England to produce their own plans. This research has drawn powerful conclusions about the exclusionary nature of the English case, observing that, *inter alia*, failures to challenge deep-rooted inequalities and power imbalances mean that more deprived communities are, almost by default, less likely to be able to take up the opportunities available to them (Brownill & Bradley, 2017; Wargent & Parker, 2018). As part of a wider research project, our focus is on under-representation in community-led planning, specifically looking at more (objectively defined) deprived communities that have produced community-led plans (henceforth, CLPs), to better understand the reasons behind decisions to engage with planning systems and community development more broadly, the content of plans, and the issues communities consider important.

The paper draws on an identified sample of CLPs produced across the four nations of the UK and uses an inductively developed analytical framework which enables us to review plans systematically and with a focus on questions of justice. The framework is oriented around the four concepts of justice, equity, deprivation, and inclusion (the 'JEDI' framework). Our analysis of the sample of CLPs assessed through that JEDI framework has resulted in a new understanding of whether and how communities, particularly those in areas classed as suffering high levels of deprivation, have addressed matters of social, spatial and environmental justice within their plans, and in turn how those communities consider justice in relation to their day-to-day lives.

We first set out how justice has been discussed in the planning literature drawing on philosophical debates. We then share the findings of a content review of 107 CLPs from across the UK and set out how our analytical framework was applied, before relating the findings back to the broader field.

Understanding justice

Conceptualisations of justice, whether explicitly or not, have underpinned a wide body of planning thought (Campbell & Marshall, 2006, p. 240). In recent decades, however, justice has become even more central in planning theory and practice (Campbell, 2006; Fainstein, 2010; Basta, 2016; Lake, 2016), likely due to persistent inequality, waves of neoliberal restructuring, and greater recognition of inter-related aspects such as spatial and environmental justice. In this section, we seek a better understanding of how local communities understand justice and how they look to achieve it. To do so, it is necessary to engage with existing thoughts on justice and planning; however, we do not provide a full *tour d'horizon* of justice in planning thought but look to contextualise the empirical work set out in the second half of the paper.

This section argues for the importance of contextual understandings of justice founded in everyday experience. To do so, it draws particularly on two complementary understandings of justice. First, Robert Lake's (2016, p. 1207) pragmatist construction of planning 'as the practice of justice', and second, Amartya Sen's (2009) outcome-focused conception of justice. Taking these together foregrounds lived experience over abstracted ideals of justice. That is to emphasise context-driven rather than universalised solutions, inclusive practices over technocratic processes, and substantive action over attempts to

perfect institutions or to critique without advancing solutions. In short, we argue for greater attention to be placed on situated and actionable practices of justice.

The literature is nearly saturated with normative arguments for planning's inherent or necessary concern with justice (or injustice). Few authors view this as controversial or unwarranted. Such arguments are typically grounded, more or less explicitly, in the need for fair distribution of the goods, services, and opportunities with which planning is unquestionably concerned. Providing a substantial definition of (in)justice, or how it might be achieved, however, is unsurprisingly both difficult and contested. There are parallels here with other closely related concepts in planning, such as public interest, which is variously viewed as incomprehensible (Tait, 2011) or inexistent (Moroni, 2017), as well as purposive (Campbell, 2006).

In engaging with this literature, we can view justice as a normative, if open, good whose specific conception is often based on status, tradition, and self-interest, and that brings into view questions of both process and outcome, absolute and relative forms, and that can be contested on philosophical, logical, and practical grounds (Marcuse, 2012; Lake, 2016). The starting point for many discussions of justice is the work of grand philosophers seeking unified, typically liberal, conceptions of justice. The relevance of constitutional-level conceptions, such as in the work of Rawls or Habermas, can be queried amid the situated and contextual nature of decision-making in planning (Campbell & Marshall, 2006).

Indeed, Campbell (2006, p. 92) prioritises 'situated ethical judgement' in the pursuit of more just outcomes given planning's necessary concern with questions of value that can be considered problematic in a world of plurality and difference. This is to recognise that the idea of justice is brought about through deliberation that involves both the 'universal and the particular' (Campbell, 2006, p. 104), producing judgements that are ultimately contextual; as such justice must be considered historically contingent, with its meaning, importance, and operationalisation changing over time and space.

The social construction of justice is most clearly revealed where social movements, whether for universal suffrage, civil rights, or the environmental movement, have shifted collective understandings of what is considered desirable or undesirable, achievable or unrealistic, just or unjust. In planning, such movements have frequently resulted in theoretical injunctions that seek to reframe practice toward more than just outcomes, such as equity planning and advocacy planning in the 1960s (Davidoff, 1965; Krumholz & Hexter, 2018), or more recent calls to decolonialise planning (Kake, 2020). Some of these movements have generated sub-fields in their own right, notably racial and environmental justice.

Narrowing the conceptualising justice in the context of a prefix – social, spatial, environmental – allows the idea to be more easily discussed and operationalised, even if substantive definitions are still illusive. Such sub-fields arguably sit somewhat uneasily within a discipline predicated on a synoptic view of such issues and explicitly seeks a sustainable balance of social, environmental, and economic priorities. Nonetheless, planning's inherent concern with space has given spatial justice a pre-eminent position in planning thought, perhaps most famously seen in the work of geographer David Harvey (1973) who argued that social justice and urbanism must be considered together. For Harvey and others, the crucial question is how power relations affect urban outcomes and how spatial relations reinforce injustice (Castells, 1983; Soja, 2013). Indeed, as

Haugaard (2020) has argued, the so-called fourth face of power should not escape our attention, where individuals construct themselves in response to their context. This 'internalised' power can act to limit ambition and undermine the will to challenge or develop alternatives (Parker *et al.*, 2015). Categorical overlaps between issues and concepts are therefore inevitable: spatial injustices are often linked to environmental ills, and both are arguably a form of social injustice. This recognition can be seen in longstanding questions of how to meet socio-economic needs without going beyond environmental boundaries. Recent expressions of this argument can be found throughout the literature of several cognate ideas including just sustainabilities (Agyeman *et al.*, 2003), doughnut economics (Raworth, 2017), and the circular economy (Geissdoerfer *et al.*, 2017).

A further intricacy in the nature of justice concerns the scale at which it is pursued. The appropriate scale for planning and governance has proven to be a contentious topic in recent years, with various ideological claims made toward the idea of the local (Clarke & Cochrane, 2013). Some have argued that uncertainty about the role of scale can hinder meaningful engagement with planning (Natarajan, 2019) and indeed a core contention of this paper is that the local or neighbourhood scale brings with its particular implications for justice and the likely success of spatially isolated interventions in the absence of redistributional policies on a wider scale. As Lake (2016, p. 1213) notes, 'the practice of justice is dialectically local and global and cannot simply be delimited at the scale of a single planning project or outcome.' As above, similar arguments have been rehearsed in relation to the public interest, whereby pursuing a universal or abstracted notion will often break down where it conflicts with neighbourhood interests (Campbell & Marshall, 2006) or 'locally defined' public interest (Healey, 2006).

The difficulty in defining overlapping conceptions of justice has a long history. In the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill famously noted that 'justice, like many other moral attributes, is best defined by its opposite' (Mill, 1863, p. 3). This still resonates today with contemporary research more frequently focusing on injustices witnessed in the absence or delivery of planning, rather than exploring expressions of 'full' justice. This difficulty has traditionally been avoided by focusing instead on procedural definitions of justice that ask whether the 'correct' or appropriate course of action established by law or precedent has been followed, deeming this an acceptable threshold in the pursuit of justice. In other words, a focus on process rather than outcome, and on means rather than ends. For example, in the UK, statutory and judicial review processes can be used to overturn procedural injustices that may have occurred during the formulation of a development plan or in deciding a planning application. The fundamental distinction between proceduralist and substantive ideas of justice can be traced back to Aristotle (for a discussion, see Marcuse, 2012, p. 143). The former cannot satisfy justice as a moral criterion when unjust outcomes may still result, and indeed, planning practices have been critiqued for the same assumption that a just process will result in a just outcome (Fainstein, 2010), to which we might add that unjust processes can also lead to just outcomes (Weck & Schmitt, 2023).

In the context of community-led planning, the proceduralist view avoids dealing with substantive questions concerning justice (e.g. is it right that housing provision be market-led? or is restricting second-home ownership fair?), by focusing on issues of inclusion. This can be seen in the wealth of the literature concerning questions of the existence, scope, and nature of community engagement in planning. These are thorny questions,

especially where attempts to engage communities are viewed as structured by cultural and institutional norms (Parker *et al*., 2017). In such instances, recognising procedural justice is not straightforward, even within formal participatory initiatives at the local or neighbourhood scale.

This brings in to view Lake's (2016, p. 1210) argument that justice is useful as a *subject* guiding a planning process toward desirable ends, rather than the *object* of planning and can be revealed in its outcomes:

> The focus of planning with justice as its subject is to mediate a process that specifies the conditions of justice to employ in addressing a problem, designs and implements a planning practice that actualizes that standard in its goals, means and outcomes, and understands these conjoined elements as a single, unitary, co- constitutive, inseparable process.

This is to recognise that planning's meaning is actively constructed, contested, and embedded in the process of planning itself. Justice can thereby be seen as a lived, relational, and evolving dimension of planning, shaped by who participates, how power operates, and the ways in which planning processes unfold. This requires continuous negotiation, reflexivity, and engagement with those communities involved and effected by planning process and outcomes – and, therefore, a better understanding of how communities themselves perceives issues and priorities that might achieve more 'just' realities.

Towards a framework for analysing justice

Differing priorities and rationalities for actions directed at different dimensions of justice (social, environmental and so on) at different scales (neighbourhood, regional) raises questions of relative or comparative forms of justice. The work of economist and philosopher Amartya Sen stands slightly apart in this regard. In *The Idea of Justice*, Sen (2009) queries the preoccupation with identifying a singular form of justice or a definitive set of principles or ideal institutions through which we might govern justly (a misplaced desire he terms transcendental institutionalism). Sen's argument is that discussing theoretical end-states and abstracted ideals clouds our ability to discover actually existing injustice and its effects. In seeking an ultimate notion of justice, the possibility of making practical improvements by which to reduce injustices may be eroded. This is not to abandon theories of justice entirely, but instead to reorient efforts toward practical discoveries of *in*justice, including the comparison of different social states to uncover which is *more* just, and evaluating impacts to see how lives can be improved. Sen (2005, 2009) calls for a comparative approach that encourages societies to strive toward consensus around the presence and tackling of an injustice, either in process or outcome relative to others. He argues that humans have strong inclinations towards fairness and an acute sensitivity for, and aversion to, injustice. This moves away from ideas of the utility-maximising *homo economicus* and the belief that humans act principally from self-interest, to argue that we are just as concerned with ameliorating injustice wherever it is found. Furthermore, Sen argues that we are not moved by the realisation that the world is not 'entirely just' – this would be naïve, and very few of us expect or anticipate such a position – but we *are* animated by the fact that we are surrounded by clear and

remediable injustices which we might reasonably address. Of course, some injustices are more or less apparent or require forms of knowledge and understanding to make them clear if not always remediable.

The desire to address injustice means, for Sen, that institutions are of relatively little importance – in contrast to, for example, Healey (Sorensen, 2025). We interpret Sen's position to be that we do not need to devote undue effort towards creating ideal institutions that govern in a just manner, or else guide others to act in line with principles of fairness, since this quality is central to humans. There are corollaries here with planning thought that has historically tended to defend and perfect (and thereby reify) planning *systems*, equating the messy, plural, and social process of planning with technical, bureaucratic, quasi-judicial procedures and regulation. Thus, we need concern ourselves less with how to make planning systems, plans, tools or technologies more just, since the desire to root out injustice in our lives is self-evident. This corresponds with the everyday experience of community engagement where, often, groups coalesce around issues they seek to remedy – the desire for affordable housing, resisting gentrification, securing community assets – before identifying how they can do so.

Following open discussion and rational argument, Sen argues that a 'plural grounding' can be achieved (what Rawls termed an 'overlapping consensus') even between those with disparate interests or conflicting values. We therefore need not concern ourselves with identifying entirely just social arrangements, or any *a priori* theory of justice, instead communities (of interest or place) identify injustice themselves. The view of Sen and to an extent Rawls, is that people, culture, and human relations play a critical role in identifying and addressing injustice.

This approach has been taken up in planning scholarship, combining further the capability approach (e.g. Sen, 2005, 2009; Nussbaum, 2011) and informed by Rawlsian concepts of justice, and which centres on questions of fairness rather than utilitarian ideas (Rawls, 1971; Basta, 2016). This perspective obviates a need to engage too directly with normative theories, or those that seek to establish the nature of justice abstractly, instead the orientation is towards fairness, equity, or other affiliated ideas via a focus on comparative injustice. Such thinking can be closely tied to place and disparities between places, that is spatial injustice (see current interest in 'left behind' places, e.g. MacKinnon *et al.*, 2022). This train of thought has led to the consideration of situatedness and how assessment of ethical decisions and the orientation of justice come together; Campbell and Marshall (2006) review justice in planning through this lens and discuss how to reconcile political philosophy to questions of situated judgement, i.e. how to make the best decisions informed by justice criteria in real-world situations.

Our starting point for this paper was the consideration of justice and planning at the community scale, and more specifically what community-led plans themselves tell us about justice. As this review has highlighted, there are diverse, overlapping definitions of the term, and – as we show below – in practice justice is often inseparable from a series of linked concepts, such as equality and inclusion. We recognise that these pairs of terms are not synonymous with each other, and we likewise do not suggest that any of them can be seen as an adequate alternative to justice in conceptual terms, but we have found that they appear to more fully represent the aspirations of communities than if we were to simply focus on a 'pure' conception of justice and this accounts for a broad usage of language which can be reconciled with justice.

Method

The paper now turns to a content analysis of community-led plans from the UK's four constituent nations: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. This section sets out how the sample of plans was identified, and how the content review was undertaken.

The project this data is drawn from focuses upon communities traditionally under-represented in community-led planning. This under-representation strongly correlates with higher levels of deprivation and has employed widely used measures of deprivation as a proxy for under-represented communities in this phase of the research. We follow an established definition of community-led planning as activities 'undertaken by individuals, groups or organisations within defined geographical neighbourhoods in order to achieve social, economic or environmental objectives defined by participants with minimal external control' (Crisp et al. 2016, p. 4). This seeks to capture the spirit of community activity, without assuming the degree of control sustained by the communities themselves. It also omits specific reference to planning, instead deploying the broader label of 'activities', which is closer to citizens' own experiences, rather than a proscriptive attempt to define what constitutes planning.

Sample

The same has been constructed with a view to capturing the diversity of community-led planning occurring in under-represented communities across the UK. The sample cannot be called representative, however, since the total population of communities undertaking community plans is unknown. In order to construct the sample, different approaches were taken in the four nations reflecting the types of formal community-led planning, the level of uptake, and availability of data.

Community-led planning is undertaken in different legal and institutional contexts in each country. In England, Neighbourhood Planning has been the dominant form of community-led planning since its inception in 2011 (Parker *et al.*, 2019). Once completed, Neighbourhood Development Plans become part of the statutory development plan, meaning they hold significant weight in planning decisions. In Scotland, Local Place Plans (LPPs) were introduced in 2022. These carry statutory weight in the planning process – Local Planning Authorities must take them into account when preparing their Local Development Plans – but are not part of the development plan as in England. In Wales, Place Plans are one of the several forms of community-led planning and presently the most popular. First introduced in 2013, Place Plans are non-statutory and do not form part of the development plan. They can, however, be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance and therefore are designed to advise and assist the delivery of the Local Development Plan produced by the Local Planning Authority. In Northern Ireland, Community Plans and Place Plans were enabled post-2014 but are local authority-led initiatives with community input and Neighbourhood Renewal Area strategies are created primarily to structure how NRA resources will be targeted, none have statutory weight in terms of land use planning in NI.

The significant level of community-led planning activity in England allowed for a robust process to identify an appropriate sample (see Table 1). The smaller populations of Scotland and Wales, combined with the non-statutory nature of the main community-

Table 1. Sample of community-led plans.

Country	Data sources used	How the sample was constructed
England	• Locality (2024) list of communities undertaking a Neighbourhood Development Plan (based on UK Government data) • Local Trust, and OCSI (2019) list of "left behind neighbourhoods" • Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (2019)[1]	Identifying communities that were on "left behind" (Local Trust, and OCSI, 2019) and that resided in the 98 Local Authority areas within the top quintile (i.e. most deprived) and known to have undertaken Neighbourhood Planning (n = 321). This communities were then assessed against the IMD at Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) to find those in the top quintile, resulting in 45 plans
Scotland	• A desktop review of all Local Authorities in Scotland within the top 20% of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation to ascertain the number of communities in deprived areas undertaking Local Place Plans or similar CLPs • Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) (2020)[2]	All CLPs produced by communities located in the Local Authorities in Scotland within the top 20% of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation were reviewed (n = 30)
Wales	• A desktop review of all Local Authorities in Wales to ascertain the number of communities undertaking Place Plans • Planning Aid Wales data on Place Plan Activity • Welsh Indices of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) (2019)[3]	A list of communities known to have completed or be undertaking a Place Plan was compiled using the desktop review and Planning Aid Wales' data (n = 32). Those communities with significant parts of the neighbourhood within the top quintile of WIMD (2019) LSOAs were include in the same, resulting in 16 plans
Northern Ireland	• A desktop review of all Local Authorities in NI to assess the number of Community Plans and Place Plans • Northern Ireland Indices of Multiple Deprivation (NIMDM, 2017)[4]	A list was developed to focus on the key areas of concern and in areas in top quintile of NIMDM. This embraced all existing finalised Place Plans in areas where higher levels of deprivation were present, some NRAs and the remainder Community Plans. This approach gave us a total of 8 in scope local authority areas and 16 plans for review (6 Community Plans, 4 neighbourhood scale Place Plans and 6 NRA strategies.

led planning initiatives, have resulted in significantly fewer plans to analyse. In Northern Ireland, given the mixed picture of community planning activity post-2002 and a lack of truly community-led planning, we looked for Plans with claimed community input at scale and in more deprived areas.

Content review

The content review was conducted by the research team using an agreed approach. First, a pilot review was conducted with each team member analysing three to five plans to generate a list of relevant issues that could be considered relevant to more 'just' outcomes. These were coded (see 'linked concepts' in Table 2) and collated in a spreadsheet including examples drawn directly from the plans. The coding process was inductive and applied flexibly to incorporate the diversity of interpretations of local issues. For example, positive statements concerning social infrastructure (e.g. policies to 'maintain and improve facilities … particularly those that focus on youth provision and cultural activities') and negative statements (e.g. 'Some local neighbourhood facilities have been lost [such as] the youth centre') were grouped together. A distinction was made during the analysis between aspirational or descriptive statements and concrete policies.

Table 2. JEDI framework developed for the content review.

Structuring concept	Linked concept	Examples
Justice	Social justice	Access and quality of public services, social infrastructure, life opportunities, cultural events, employment opportunities etc.
	Spatial justice	Locational disadvantage such as existence of 'bad neighbour' assets, anti-social or criminal behaviour, lack of pride or place attachment etc.
	Environmental justice	Environmental risks such as flooding, poor air quality, access to environmental goods such as open green spaces or natural resources, biodiversity initiatives, clean energy projects etc.
Equality	Equality	Issues of process (e.g. transparency), equal access and accessibility, gender equality initiatives, support for/engagement with marginalised communities, etc.
	Equity	Issues tailored to needs of specific groups such housing for the elderly, facilities for young people, target health or economic programmes etc.
Deprivation	Deprivation	Lack of basic resources, facilities amenities and physical capital such as health services, schools, poor quality housing stock, lack of affordable housing, libraries, etc.
	Disadvantage	Wider factors or conditions that limit individual social mobility and individual opportunity such as a lack of institutional capital, local capacity, leadership, poor health and wellbeing outcomes etc.
Inclusion	Inclusion	Existence of social capital, substantive issues such as inclusion of minority or marginalised groups, evidence of wider or targeted community engagement etc.
	Diversity	Representation and presence of differences within a group (both those leading the processes and the wider community) such as differences in race, gender, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic background etc.

The research recognises that plan content cannot be taken as a direct reflection of community expression and is often the result of modulation, particularly due to the actions of planning professionals (Parker & Street, 2015). This plays out differently in each nation, where institutional contexts frame the actions of communities but across individual plans too, for example, depending on the role of external partners. Future research could explore how such variables influence the authenticity of community-led plans and the extent to which they can be seen as accurate representations of community wishes.

The research team discussed individual interpretations of each linked concept to ensure agreement and grouped these under broader structuring concepts. The rest of the sample was then analysed using the developed codes; each plan was also briefly summarised, describing the context, content, and pertinent details about how the plan was produced (for example, the use of consultants, assistance from the local authority, evidence of wider community engagement, etc.). The review was compiled in a spreadsheet without the use of analysis software. To ensure the validity of the content review, the research team met on several occasions to discuss the appropriateness of the approach.

As the examples shown illustrate, the categorisations of codes are not mutually exclusive. For example, the nature of land-use planning means that many of the issues discussed or addressed in plans have a spatial component. The framework developed has three concrete benefits for the research. First, it allows the research team to capture a wide understanding of justice in relation to Sen's (2009) proposition to focus on what people are able to do and attempts to reduce injustice in concrete situations – as we will go on to discuss, this in turn reveals insights into how ordinary people, rather than scholars, consider justice. Second, it allows us to look both at the process of community-led planning (principally through the Inclusion category) and the outcomes (i.e. policies)

by exploring the issues prioritised by communities in their completed plans. Third, it allows the research team to look at a substantial number of plans from different places, and widely varying contexts, and collect data in a reasonably uniform manner. It is worth making explicit that this is a qualitative and not a quantitative approach, and any other individual reading any one of the plans might identify a different set of issues. Bearing that in mind, in the discussion which follows we have sought to present extracts from the plans wherever possible, to bring the voices of communities into focus. We then attempt to situate those voices within a wider picture of power and justice.

Findings

We have organised the findings across four sections that correspond to the JEDI framework that emerged from the analysis.

Justice

Few plans explicitly use the word justice, but many did raise matters that can be considered related to social, spatial and/or environmental justice. The Crail CLP (Scotland) was one of the few to explicitly mention the word, explaining in its introduction that the plan was 'designed to improve local capacity to tackle poverty, reduce inequality and promote social justice' (p. 3). The concern with issues related to social justice was a common one, however, particularly in plans covering the most deprived places in the study. It is clear that communities' engagement with different dimensions of justice are often expressed through substantive topics such as housing or employment. Linking material conditions with social challenges occurring was a common approach, for example:

> The housing conditions are associated with high levels of deprivation and anti-social behaviour which affects the quality of life of the community's residents. (Spring Boroughs Neighbourhood Plan, England, p. 25)

In a similar fashion, spatial issues were often linked with social concerns, as in Towyn and Kinmel Bay, Wales: 'The need for the project was in response to the place being fragmented and lacking cohesion both physically and by its community on this eastern edge of Conwy' (p. 9). Particularly in plans covering rural areas, the most common social justice concern was the loss of social infrastructure in the form of community facilities such as village halls, pubs, youth centres and doctors' surgeries.

Most plans considered spatial aspects of justice in some form; a common issue, for example, was unequal access to services or amenities due to locational factors, or because of access to transport. In Colne (England), some 30% of the population do not have access to a car and this was used as justification for policies to protect local shops and public houses 'because they are often vulnerable to closure' (p. 57) and to reduce inequality by ensuring facilities are fully accessible.

Access to public and private green space was also a consideration for many. In one area (Spring Boroughs, England), the plan noted that 96% of the population were in homes that did not have a garden, and the community was keen to address this by including gardens in the housing policy, thereby subsuming environmental goods and

health and well-being outcomes in one policy. In Great Aycliffe, the key motivation was to continue the Lord Beveridge vision for a large development that was being expected by the Town Council, which being to continue to retain the importance of green open space. For others, spatial justice was acknowledged in the need for regeneration of the area. The motivation to create a plan for several community groups was to expand upon the already existing community-led regeneration efforts nearby and gain funding from the Towns Fund[5] (such as Boscombe and Pokesdown, and Stainforth, both England).

Issues of environmental justice figure prominently in the reviewed plans. There were a variety of different ways that plans sought to address environmental challenges, including protecting, enhancing or introducing environmental assets, reducing environmental threats and other development-related mitigation policies, travel- and transport-related policies and policies to encourage renewable energy. The reduction of environmental threats is a feature in some plans, both immediate such as flooding and longer term in terms of climate change. In the *Growing Together* plan (England), policies that ensure high levels of energy efficiency are included and attempt to influence local energy generation through renewable technologies. In Bridport (England) for example, there is a focus on carbon with separate policies on 'Publicising Carbon Footprint', 'Energy and Carbon Emissions', and 'Energy Generation to Offset Predicted Carbon Emissions'.

Issues of spatial, social and environmental justice were therefore addressed via a multitude of concrete policy solutions, often bridging different dimensions of justice. Due to the localised nature of community-led planning, it is unsurprising that most if not all policies had an inherently spatial dimension (e.g. promoting certain goods within a specific territory), but perhaps more interesting is how many social issues – such as anti-social behaviour or lack of social cohesion – were tied to the built environment, either physical distance between places or lack of facilities such as community centres or social infrastructure. This could be attributed to the (land use) planning's inherent concern with the built environment, yet this was a consistent theme across community plans regardless of the institutional context.

Equity

Most if not all plans addressed the challenge of equity and affiliated concepts such as equality, in some fashion. Sometimes these two terms were conflated: 'The Big Plan is not about ensuring that everyone has equal access to services and facilities whether they need them or not. Equality, or equity, is about making sure that people have the support that they need to maintain their own wellbeing' (Ards and North Down CLP, Northern Ireland). Other plans, for example, the Ruchill and Possilpark Community Plan (Scotland) explicitly committed themselves to 'tackling inequality' (p. 1), while the Newry, Mourne and Down Community Plan (Northern Ireland) mentions equity as a principle and aspiration for the area.

Most often, equity was linked to the differential impacts of issues noted in relation to other challenges, for example, that older or disabled people might find the poor provision of footpaths a particular issue, or that younger people were particularly disadvantaged by a lack of employment opportunities or affordable housing. The Cupar and Country Community Action Plan Report (Scotland) contains a sophisticated analysis of the impacts of poor public transport provision on three

specific groups: 'people on benefits … young people … older people' (p. 13). Similarly, in the Welsh plans equity/equality was most often discussed in terms of unequal access, for example, to housing, transport or employment, and differential effects of the lack of provision, for example, on young people lacking community facilities, or the elderly lacking efficient transport.

Expanding upon the consideration on social justice above, there was some specific mention of 'social inequality' (Colne CLP, England) and in Cramlington's CLP (England) in a policy on healthy communities, the plan used the wording 'requiring development to contribute to creating an age friendly, healthy and equitable environment' (p. 52) the terms 'inclusive' and 'access' are part of the supporting text. Some included phrasing to aim to be as inclusive as possible to ensure that their area was 'accessible for all' (for example, Colne, and Stainforth, both England) or that in one plan in England 'sustainable [*sic*] will only be achieved if all sectors of the community are catered for' (March CLP, England, p. 21). This again highlights the overlap between key dimensions of justice as they are deployed by communities. Little distinction was made between equality and equity by the communities themselves (indeed, these terms were sometimes used interchangeably) and both tended to relate to issues of access (e.g. to a particular resource or good), most often for a specific group.

Deprivation

In the English plans, deprivation was rarely mentioned, and where it was it tended to be within the introduction of the plans, part of the context setting, rather than being a significant feature. One exception was the Braybrook CLP (England), noting that 'the area ranks relatively high (1st decile) on the Barriers to Housing and Services Index which means some residents may be disadvantaged due to financial accessibility to housing and physical access to local services' (p. 6). In line with the sparing inclusion of evidence in the Welsh plans, reference to the WIMD to identify deprivation was also rare – an exception being the Towyn and Kinmel Bay CLP, Wales (p. 9), which observed that the community is 'low in the areas of health, wealth, education and environment'. This absence in Wales may reflect the fact that little evidence is required in a Place Plan since they are not statutory documents; those plans created with significant external expertises (such as Towyn and Kinmel Bay and Colwyn Bay) were notable for their use of evidence and therefore reference to relative deprivation.

This was different in Scotland, where it was unusual for a plan not to discuss disadvantage or deprivation in some way. Sometimes this related to nuances in the Scottish IMD, for example, the Sandford and Upper Avondale CLP observed that, whilst the area did not score particularly highly on the SIMD overall, it was in the 'lowest 10–15% in Scotland for access to services' (p. 4), whilst variations within areas, and the identification of pockets of deprivation, was a recurring theme. Deprivation is recognised in most of the plans in the NI sample too. Sometimes the proxy of disadvantage is also used and, in several instances, poverty is mentioned. Typically, this word is deployed to highlight an economic and social gap in some areas for some groups. Other ways that deprivation is explicitly recognised is for instance found in the Omagh and Fermanagh CLP: 'We will prioritise resources and activities towards targeting areas where

deprivation and poverty are evident so as to narrow the gap between our most and least deprived communities' (p. 12) and this sentiment is cited across six plans in total.

The discussion of deprivation in Scotland and Northern Ireland is notable given its omission in England and Wales. There are no apparent differences in relative or absolute deprivation in the communities across the nations, suggesting other reasons for this differential approach, for example, it may be that the emphasis placed on deprivation in the guidance provided to communities by other actors is a key variable.

Inclusion

Inclusivity or inclusion was interpreted in different ways across the reviewed plans, with variations across the nations. Inclusion features explicitly in most of the Northern Irish plans or documents, considered to a lesser or greater degree of specificity (only two plans did not use the term explicitly; Ards and North Down and Newry). However, where mentioned, it is generally either as broad aspiration for a 'happy and inclusive borough' (Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon CLP, p. 16) or more in terms of acknowledging a need for this to be accounted for in policy or pointing to rather vague aspirations to 'pilot local initiatives to support social inclusion' (ibid., p. 17).

Elsewhere, some plans addressed inclusion explicitly, such as in Cramlington CLP (England), where the aim is to 'promote social and economic inclusion'. Others addressed it through substantive issues such as the need for social activities for younger people, and older people, which occurred frequently, as did the need to build community spirit and ensure people feel more involved. In Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn (Wales), inclusive well-being was a key theme. For example, the plan adopted a definition from Disability Wales' 'Way to Go' project and sought to go beyond issues of disabled access to think about a definition of everyone that 'parents with buggies, older people, people with less than perfect sight, less than perfect hearing, less than perfect mobility or less than perfect understanding of the world around them' (p. 31). The Kirkfieldbank Community Action Plan (Scotland) addressed both outcome, noting the reduction in active community groups, and process, in that 'There is a desire for more communication about what's going on in the village, particularly on how local plans are being implemented' (p. 17).

An emphasis on process (and the inclusivity thereof) was a common theme in Scottish plans, with many plans featuring quotations from community members on things they valued about their community, and things they would like to see improved (also a feature of Welsh plans) – the latter, in Scotland, often being a feeling of disconnection from decision-making.

Some groups were clearly motivated to create a CLP in England because of a general feeling of not being included or having influence over planning matters in their local area: In Gainsborough, 'Gainsborough's Neighbourhood Development Plan used the acronym "RAGE", a name that reflected the mood felt by many residents toward planning decisions made in the recent past … In reality, RAGE stands for "Rediscovering A Gainsborough for Everyone"' (p. 5). In contrast, in the Welsh plans, there was a notable lack of complaints regarding being disconnected from decision-making or being forgotten or bypassed by higher tiers of government. A common motivation, however, was the withdrawal of state funding and services at the unitary authority level in Wales and the need for the relevant town or community council to 'take

over' public services and community facilities: 'The budget cuts by the principal authorities affecting service delivery, some of which affect the structure of the town.' (Welshpool, p3). The promotion of Welsh language, culture, and identity features prominently in most Welsh plans. Mold's plan, for example, states: 'Mold's identity as a Welsh town' is steeped in the 'rich cultural heritage of the Welsh language' and this is directly linked to with attempts to encourage community development activity.

From aspiration to action

It is fair to say that some of the plans reviewed were stronger on identifying the problems, issues and challenges faced by the place than they were on specifying deliverable actions in relation to our JEDI framework. This reflects the scope of the plans and the ability of communities to achieve meaningful change to the places they live in, as we return to below, and not a lack of ambition on the part of those communities. In the Cumnock Community Action Plan (Scotland), the numerous actions include 'Improve rail links for Cumnock and explore re-opening of town station' (p. 25), whilst the Elie and Earlsferry Community Place Plan (Scotland) has an action to 'Provide more housing options . . . to enhance the health and wellbeing of the area; address fuel poverty through more sustainable construction' (p. 49). Other plans highlighted what had been achieved in recent years, whether by the community themselves or because of investment or policy change elsewhere. The Ruchill and Possilpark Community Plan (Scotland) identified that in addition to a new school provided by the local authority 'the local community has provided solutions for themselves' (p. 14) through voluntary activity. Community-focus ed actions were a common theme, often in response to a perceived failure or lack of action by the public or private sector. These ranged in ambition, for example, the Woolfords, Auchengray and Tarbrax Community Action Plan (Scotland) actions included 'Explore the feasibility of community-run gritting and snow clearance . . . [and] Explore the feasibility of community-owned transport for local groups' (p. 13). Exploring community ownership of assets, whether minibuses, shops or houses, was an aspiration expressed in several plans.

Discussion and conclusion

What does this review of tell us about community attempts to understand and seek to achieve justice? First, very few plans explicitly reference the four key 'JEDI' concepts. This is important for researchers and policymakers seeking to work with communities to note; these terms are not how communities seek to express themselves, yet virtually all the plans reviewed do address challenges associated with justice, equity, disadvantage, and inclusion, albeit to varying extents. For policymakers and others, adopting language that is closer to and better understood by communities and minimising technocratic, academic or otherwise jargon-laden terminology is likely to be beneficial in facilitating partnership work. Recognising points of connection to issues that can help tackle injustice requires a better understanding of community aspiration, especially if these are to be linked to action at 'higher' or more strategical scales.

In community-led plans, links are often implicitly made between spatial justice and social justice. Actions or policies related to the former (such as providing local access to

affordable or social housing) are often framed as solutions for the latter. As others have noted, it is an open question as to whether such interventions can address the deep-rooted problems of deprivation that are linked to long-term structural challenges (Sturzaker *et al*., 2022; Parker *et al*., 2022). Yet, following Sen, it is important to recognise and promote concrete steps that can be taken to combat injustice. It is also unsurprising perhaps that in the context of hyper-local plans, that communities would, explicitly or otherwise, acknowledge the limits to what can be achieved within their plan. This echoes prior calls to recognise the dangers of self-censorship and the rescripting of plans to accord with agendas being pursued by governments and others (Parker *et al*., 2015; Wargent, 2021).

Substantive topics such as housing are an important way in to understanding community perceptions of justice, and this occurs in many plans across the nations. In some instances, particular interpretations of justice in relation to housing are made by communities – for example, the emphasis made on housing for local people in need or for specific age groups (typically young adults or the elderly). This can be seen as progressive action with communities demonstrating solidarity with others who may be less fortunate, but it can also be seen as a regressive or exclusive approach if 'localness' becomes an overriding factor in eligibility for housing (Sturzaker, 2010). This signals the potential tension between ideas of justice that are locally defined and spatially bounded versus universalised notions of 'fairness'.

There appears to be a general unwillingness to acknowledge the overall deprivation of the communities at the centre of the plans reviewed. Whilst at first this may seem surprising, a careful consideration might suggest that in forward-looking documents such as plans the tendency might be to seek the positive in framing how the future might look. A common framing followed a similar refrain: 'this community has some pockets of deprivation, but . . . ' The exception to this was plans reviewed in Northern Ireland, perhaps because the scale of the plans studied is larger, and the plans being produced are not directly by communities but by local authority (municipality) scale bodies, and deprivation is more explicitly identified through many of the plans. As above, this suggests that the language communities and that of local government and other partner organisations differ significantly.

The desire for increased and improved community facilities was common, whether specifically owned or managed by the community or not. This includes things such as community spaces, health facilities, pubs, shops, post offices, bowling greens, workshops, housing, energy and transport – a wide range of buildings and (social) infrastructure types. In some plans, the impact of cuts in public spending on community or health buildings and the consequent need for community provision are identified, clearly demonstrating the implications of 'austerity' at the community scale and attempts by the community to grapple with those implications. This is far from the Panglossian rhetoric of the Big Society (Cameron, 2010); however, what can be seen is communities viewing their ownership or management of these facilities as a last resort.

Regarding inclusion, the discussion above highlights both process-related concerns and outcome-related aspirations of plans. In terms of process, many plans were keen to emphasise the breadth and depth of their engagement processes. A common feature to demonstrate this was quotes from consultation exercises on community 'likes' and 'dislikes'. There was a correlation between in-depth consultation exercises, plan length,

and sustained engagement with JEDI issues – plans which drew on more comprehensive data gathering and attempted to address a wider range of topics were more ambitious in how they considered issues related to justice. Indeed, a striking aspect of the CLPs considered in this review was the variation in approach, from short, informal reports of a single consultation event to comprehensive, professionally guided plans. This may be explained in part due to the bricolage of CLPs that apply to the very local level outside England – the most 'formal' status a CLP in Wales and Scotland can achieve is Supplementary Planning Guidance (i.e. relevant for LPA decision-making but not statutory), but many plans did not carry, or seek to carry, this status. This affords communities more scope in approach and content, but places less importance on producing evidenced, actionable policies, or linking to existing policy.

Although there were notable exceptions, some plans lacked specificity in identifying who was responsible for desired actions and many actions and policies within plans were frequently outside of land-use/planning issues. This is quite different to the situation in England, where we looked at Neighbourhood Development Plans, found to be subject to a significant degree of 'rescripting' or 'framing' (Parker & Salter, 2017; Brookfield, 2017; Sturzaker & Gordon, 2017) by local and national governments.

A key finding lies in the variation of linkage of policy or issues to actions, and which emphasises the need for good action planning (Lewis & Flynn, 1979; Duffy & Hutchinson, 1997), as much as tight policy writing, or whether a community has acknowledged an issue. Where a CLP goes further to aiming for action (i.e. what needs to be done and who needs to do it) becomes ever more important to reckon with. This very much accords with the experience of developing parish plans and then CLPs in England (Parker, 2008). Some communities make clear links between social and spatial justice, for example, acknowledging the problems caused by a lack of affordable housing and spatial exclusion (Sturzaker & Shucksmith, 2011) that this can manifest, particularly in more rural areas.

The question of scale is important too, as noted in the literature review. There are clear limits on what can be achieved in a CLP, but this does not necessarily limit the ambition of communities. However, the limits on deliverability of any land-use plans in reactive, market-led economies like those of the UK are well established, so why should we criticise community-led plans any more than those produced by Local Planning Authorities or others, if they cannot be fully realised? A different viewpoint is why those who hold power and resource are not paying more attention? Conversely, why artificially constrain CLPs (or more pointedly orient them to another actor's priorities)?

The paper provides genuine insights into real-world injustice (after Sen, 2009), as opposed to abstracted or 'pure' conceptions of justice. These insights show that community interpretations of justice are messy, partial and imperfect, and are often rooted in tangible expressions (e.g. lack of affordable housing or lack of green space) but of course, so is (in)justice in any actual occurring context. We have, therefore, found empirical evidence that, as Sen argued, people are animated by injustices, and, crucially, attempts to remedy them through CLPs. The instantiations of justice as expressed through the CLPs reviewed here open-up abstract notions of justice (and equality, disadvantage and inclusion) and show us what communities, left to some extent to their own devices, seek to achieve.

In each case this may be different, and perhaps small in scale, commensurate with the scope of the plans analysed. But it is far from nothing, and taken collectively, the

proposals, suggestions and aspirations expressed in these plans are a clear demonstration of the importance of justice (and the JEDI framework) to individuals' and communities' lives.

What is much less clear is how their recognition and aspirations are taken forward or indeed, whether the extent of their ambition may be tempered by internalised power (see Haugaard's, 2020 fourth face of power). Working alongside such communities as they work issues through and plan/deliver activity could well help provide insights on both these issues.

Note

1. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019
2. https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020/
3. https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Welsh-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation/WIMD-2019
4. https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/deprivation/northern-ireland-multiple-deprivation-measure-2017-nimdm2017
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ORCID

Tessa Lynn http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3159-7343
John Sturzaker http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3922-2677
Gavin Parker http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3079-4377
Matthew Wargent http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1448-9383

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