Participatory governance: creating space for participatory research or crowding it out?

Discussion Paper

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The Poverty Alliance is Scotland's anti-poverty network. Together with our members, we influence policy and practice, support communities to challenge poverty, provide evidence through research and build public support for the solutions to tackle poverty. Our members include grassroots community groups, academics, large national NGOs, voluntary organisations, statutory organisations, trade unions, and faith groups.

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Summary

- Scotland has undergone a 'participatory turn' in recent years involving greater attention towards increasing the engagement of people with lived-experience in policy-making processes. This involves changing attitudes and skillsets, as well as the creation of new participatory instruments, specific events, processes, or mechanisms through which government can connect to and hear from people with lived-experience. Civil society groups have led, welcomed, and cultivated the move towards increasing participation. However social researchers have raised concerns about whether such knowledge contrast with evidence-based policy making and meets expectations of rigour, analytical validity, and question the impact on qualitative and participatory research opportunities.

- This discussion paper explores one aspect of the rise in participatory governance: whether this new context creates more opportunity and support for participatory research? Or whether the space is taken by the rise of a range of new participatory instruments? Broadly speaking, participatory research, stemming from debates in social research about power, maintains a range of research processes and values to create evidence. Participatory instruments, born out of debates about the role of the state, policymaking and power, seeks to disrupt established power arrangements and bring lived-experiences (particularly of the most disadvantaged) into policymaking.

- The move towards increased participatory instruments and involvement of people with lived-experience involves a wide range of practitioners, organisations, sectors, and professions. Knowledge of participatory approaches, previous experiences, and underpinning principles fluctuate. There are therefore many variations in policy instruments, (including some which are government led and others from third sector and community groups) and questions arise about the design and delivery of some participatory instruments including concerns over ethics, analysis, rigour, and how policymakers use these insights in their decision-making.

- There are three aims of this discussion paper. First, written from the perspective of a participatory and qualitative researcher, the paper seeks to provide introductory background to different approaches to participation in order to consider the relationship between participatory research and participatory instruments. Second, it seeks to raise a number of pertinent questions about the design and delivery of participatory research and participatory instruments. Third, it seeks to answer the question of whether the varied understandings of participation and different reasons for using participatory instruments means they are 'crowding out' participatory research. Collectively, it seeks to support an on-going discussion and reflections about how to continually improve the move towards participatory governance.

- This discussion paper draws on discussions with Poverty Alliance's research team, and the author's experiences undertaking and teaching qualitative, collaborative, and participatory research in Scotland over the past 15 years, including over five years as part of the What Works Scotland project. Funded by an ESRC IAA grant, during 2021-2022 the author also undertook 14 'conversations' with people working in policymaking in Scotland who mobilise participatory approaches, use knowledge generated through participatory projects (instruments or research) or are engaged in evidence use and policymaking.

Findings:

- This project found that there may be instances where the availability of participatory instruments does appear to overshadow or limit the space for participatory research. There are also some issues in terms of shared knowledge and understanding about the different processes to producing, analysing and sharing 'lived-experience' and qualitative insights into social issues and policy impact, which might lead to a decision that there is no need to commission participatory research.

- The move towards participatory governance is messy and concerns that all participatory instruments lacked 'rigour' seem misplaced; some third sector organisations had developed participatory processes involving practices that considered ethics, situated and filtered individual experiences, scoped and aligned lived-experience groups to related evidence, and analysed shared experiences during the recommendation process. The binary between participatory research and participatory instruments is not clear cut.

- This project reveals a need for greater discussion and knowledge sharing across professional boundaries, bringing social researchers (especially experienced participatory researchers) into discussions about the design of participatory instruments and policymakers' use of the insights generated from such mechanisms. Investing in creating a community of practice across academia, third sector, and government and a series of training workshops and events for co-learning would help this process. This community could collectively refine and discuss the different conceptualizations and practices shaping participation in research, policymaking, advocacy, service design/implementation, and high level decision-making.

- Participatory research does not seem to be crowded out solely by the rise in participatory instruments but by a combination of existing perceptions or limited resources for such research projects. During the conversations people put forward their experiences and views on how to improve the status and take up of participatory research findings:

  - **Increasing participatory research expertise**: So that research commissioners and evidence users can understand the research processes and nature of research outputs.
  - **Accessibility and mobilisation by third sector organisations**: Participatory research can have a direct influence on policy if the knowledge generated is mobilised via trusted third sector organisations.
  - **Investment in relationships and active sharing of findings instead of passive publication of outputs**: Where participatory research findings were simply publicised or published online with the hope that they would be included in the evidence base, it was seen as less likely to be influential on policymaking.
  - **Policymaker/evidence user engagement throughout the project, not just with research outputs:** Participatory research, particularly action research models, were more successful where policymakers and key decision-makers were engaged in the research project throughout.
  - **Long term accessibility of project outputs:** Ensuring research findings and outputs have a legacy beyond the short-term participatory project and are stored in accessible repositories.

Participatory governance: creating space for participatory research or crowding it out?

Purpose and project background

Scotland is experiencing a 'participatory turn' involving new participatory tools and political commitments to include people's views and experiences in policymaking and public service reform. Drawing on insights initially developed through research and policy activities as part of What Works Scotland (2014-2019), followed by a series of conversations undertaken in a subsequent ESRC funded short-term placement with the Poverty Alliance[1] (2021-2022), this project explores Scotland's move towards participatory governance and potential tensions with evidence-based policymaking practices.

While the project broadly sought to increase and improve the use of participatory approaches to knowledge production and policy-making, this discussion paper focuses on two main aspects. First, participatory research which refers to the participatory paradigm underpinning some social research approaches. Social research tends to lead participatory research projects and retain a 'scientific' approach to data collection and research while prioritising a number of principles including researching 'with people' rather than conducting 'research on people', social change, and power-sharing in the research process[2]. Second, the rise of participatory instruments which refers to the tools, mechanisms, and activities through which policymaking processes engage with lived-experiences, perspectives, and insights from people affected by particular policies, service users, or disenfranchised groups.

While there may be shared interests in increasing participation in policymaking and ultimately social change, there are different processes and methods through which participatory research and participatory instruments play out. The starting point for this discussion paper is the concern from social researchers that (some) participatory instruments are insufficiently robust as a means of generating knowledge or evidence. As we discuss, this depiction of participatory instrument is perhaps overly simple; there are wide variations in approaches and execution of participatory instruments. Furthermore, there are similar variations in quality and practice of (some) social research projects.

This discussion paper seeks to engage with the messiness of participatory governance in practice, and pays particular attention to the opportunities and barriers for participatory research (particularly using qualitative methods) in this context. Written from the perspective of a social and participatory trained researcher, the guiding question is whether **the participatory turn is creating more space for participatory research and qualitative methods (than had previously been available in evidence-based models), or are these forms of knowledge production being crowded out in policymaking by the use of participatory instruments?**

Developing participatory governance in Scotland is complex. It involves:

- numerous professions and organisations,
- the development of new skills and knowledge,
- experimentation with various participatory approaches,
- and real-time learning about how participatory instruments and participatory research can contribute to the policymaking process.

Through raising questions and critically reflecting on various practices and forms of knowledge, this project seeks not to criticise those working to increase participation, but instead contribute and support this on-going learning process.

For this discussion paper and project, the author drew on social research training, resources, experiences, and publications about conducting participatory research from social researchers. This work underpinned a time-limited series of on-line and in-person conversations (2021-2022) with 14 people working in the third sector, academia, research consultancies, Scottish Government, and Local Government in Scotland[3]. These individuals were identified via an online scoping of recent work on participatory governance in Scotland, recommendations from Poverty Alliance employees, and suggestions from discussants. A small number of individuals were approached to participate in the conversations but unavailable during the time-period due to covid-19 related workloads or sickness.

The conversations sought to explore the relationship between participatory research and participatory instruments, and the value and uses of evidence produced through participatory research (and in particular qualitative methods). The conversations sought to encourage people to reflect on these issues in relation to their own work and practices.

While each conversation varied depending on expertise and experience, they all centred on the following questions:

 ➢ Does the participatory turn in Scotland create new opportunities for participatory research and qualitative evidence to influence policymaking?
 ➢ Does the participatory turn create more space for, training, and understanding of participatory research methods to a broader audience of researchers, policy-officers, and decision-makers?
 ➢ Are new participatory instruments crowding out participatory research methods?
 ➢ Are new participatory instruments challenging established evidence-based policy structures and practices that have tended to prioritise quantitative methods?

This discussion paper seeks to encourage practitioners, policymakers, social researchers, and others involved in driving forward participatory governance to consider practices and processes and to critically reflect on where there may be tensions.

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[3] 14 conversations (20 hours+), with people working in Scotland in the following roles: Social and participatory researchers (academia, third sector, Scottish Government), Policy officers, and policy managers (Scottish government), Senior Manager (local government), Policy officers, & participatory officers (third sector), independent research consultant (specialist in participatory research). It was agreed that respondents wouldn't be named or directly quoted.

A Participatory Turn?

Understanding how policymakers and government organisations produce, value, and use different forms of knowledge is central to understanding equality and power in policymaking. As part of its commitment to a Human Rights Based Approach, the Scottish Government has committed to increasing participation in policymaking[4], with a focus on citizens and service-users being more involved in shaping policy decisions and service design. For example, Scotland's Open Government Action Plan committed to increase and improve participation in policymaking and service delivery[5]. This 'participatory turn' places increasing emphasis on experiential knowledge, for example through the rise of participatory instruments such as experts-by-experience panels and lived-experience groups. Many third sector and advocacy groups have welcomed this shift and the opportunities it brings to shape policies and services.

> "*A Participation Framework will be developed based on the needs of public servants to make effective decisions on how, why and when to involve people in the development of policies and services openly.*"
>
> Scottish Government: Open Government Action Plan 2018-2019

However, the Scottish Government's stated commitment to participatory governance also suggests a move away from existing ideas about evidence-based policymaking, and raises questions about the role of research and evidence. While, public administration and public policy scholars question the role participation actually plays in public service delivery[6], some researchers raise concerns about the increasing use of lived-experience participatory instruments in policymaking. They argue that these instruments lack rigour and analytical procedures, and are an inadequate replacement for (qualitative and quantitative) research-led evidence[7]. For these researchers there is a clear view that the insights gained through participatory instruments are less rigorous and scientific than research outputs.

> "*While it is important to understand personal experiences and to ensure that they are reflected in policy, planning and practice, they should be interpreted as what they are – the subjective experience of individuals which may not be representative of wider concerns or well-informed in relation to solutions*" MacLeod and Smith, 2022.

How concerned should we be that participatory instruments are crowding out research evidence? If they are, are such participatory instruments less rigorous and scientific than knowledge produced through qualitative and participatory research?

Evidence-based policymaking

Let's start by considering the role of participatory research in this context of Evidence-Based Policymaking (EBPM), an approach that has dominated policymaking processes and debates about the research and policy interface in the UK over the past twenty years. In its simplest form, EBPM describes the way that policymakers examine existing evidence and engage in the commissioning of new evidence to improve decision-making. However, in practice,

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[4] Scottish Government (2021) Human Rights Budget WorkingGroup: https://www.ideas.gov.scot/help-us-change-the-ways-scottish-government-works/a-human-rights-based-approach-to-improving-201chow-government-works201d

[5] https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-open-government-action-plan-2018-20-detailed-commitments/pages/3/

[6] Osbourne, S., and Strokosch, K. (2022) Participation: Add-on or core component of public service delivery? https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/participation-add-on-or-core-component-of-public-service-delivery

[7] MacLeod, M., and Smith, M. (2022) "Experience and Evidence – Where the Twain Meet" 17/03/2022 https://commonweal.scot/experience-and-evidence/

EBPM can focus on narrow constructions of evidence leading to the prominence of evidence pyramids and methodological hierarchies that prioritise large-scale quantitative studies and random control trials (RCT). Quantitative data often takes centre stage in conceptions of 'good evidence' which has led to a sizeable investment in hiring and upskilling researchers in quantitative methodologies and embedding quantitative practices in policy, research, and analytical teams (as well as university research training and funded research programmes).

The extent to which such (often) positivist and quantitative approaches to knowledge creation dominates varies by policy domain. While clearly evident in health policy domains and organisations it has had a broader impact across the public sector leading to all public organisations institutionalising numerical data in policymaking, performance management, and audit processes. Dominant approaches to EBPM (rooted in evidence-based medicine) often position qualitative and participatory research as the least valued in strict 'hierarchies of evidence' based on scientific concepts of generalisability, representativeness, and narrow constructions of statistical rigour[8]. Put crudely, qualitative and participatory researchers can face obstacles as this form of EBPM can position qualitative methods and participatory research as anecdotal and unable to meet specific quantitative research criteria.

As such, instead of crowding out participatory research, perhaps a more general shift towards participatory governance, could challenge this EBPM position and offer an opportunity for participatory and qualitative research to gain prominence and use.

Participatory Governance

Despite the EBPM backdrop, times appear to be changing in Scotland with political rhetoric for an alternative policymaking model. Drawing on ideas and approaches from collaborative governance and participatory democracy, the Scottish Government and various public institutions are increasing citizen engagement in policymaking in order to "reinvigorate democratic life by infusing diversity, experience and knowledge into official decision making"[9]. This broader movement has led to the creation or introduction of **participatory instruments**, some led by government others by a combination of civil society, academia, political movements, and third sector organisations. Participatory instruments use a variety of designs and approaches to unearth and incorporate experiential knowledge or citizen views. Some simply seek to broaden the range of people engaged in policymaking processes.

"*We want social security in Scotland to be based on dignity, fairness and respect, that's why the views from the people who actually use the service are so important*" (2019 Social Security Secretary Shirley-Anne Somerville)

Participatory instruments vary in design and purpose, covering everything from lived-experience advisory groups, citizen's juries, mini-publics, participatory budgeting, citizen's assemblies, client panels, and experts-by-experience commissions. They also vary in their origins, with some designed and led by third sector and advocacy groups, and others led by government departments and civil service processes. There is much discussion about the design of

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[8] E.g. see Murad MH, Asi N, Alsawas M, et al (2016) 'New evidence pyramid' BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine 21:125-127. https://ebm.bmj.com/content/21/4/125
[9] Escobar, O 2014, Towards Participatory Democracy in Scotland. in POST (ed.), Scotland 44: Ideas for a new nation. POST, Edinburgh, pp. 24-33. http://postmag.org/towards-participatory-democracy-inscotland/

such policy instruments and the type of participation different models cultivate[10], as well as whether some of these instruments could be combined with participatory research models and principles[11].

The shift towards participatory governance brings three related issues to the fore for this particular project and our interest in participatory research.

1. Participatory instruments create new or alternative ways of working for policy officers, public service managers, government and third sector researchers, elected officials, and various established stakeholders involved in policymaking. Are individuals and departments equipped with the skills, experience, and knowledge of various participatory instruments? Are these skills being created with an awareness or alongside qualitative and participatory research approaches?

2. How does the shift towards participation play out within complex organisational, professional, and policy systems where there are established forms of evidence, knowledge, practice, and power? For example, the commissioning of research projects, or the transfer of resources from established budgets to be spent on developing new policy instruments?

3. Are the potential differences between participatory instruments and participatory research well understood? As discussed in detail later in this discussion paper, are we seeing tensions between participatory instruments (functioning as policy engagement tools) and participatory research (as an inquiry led approach and well-established paradigm in social research)?

These issues raise questions as to whether some of the new participatory instruments are replacing EBPM approaches to knowledge and evidence, or seeking to exist alongside (and therefore at times, in tension with it). Across all these issues, we can ask, what role for participatory research and qualitative methods?

Consideration of such issues is particularly pertinent in the context of inequality and poverty, where researchers and representative organisations have a long history of supporting meaningful participatory research and qualitative studies. Much of this work has echoed ethical concerns and pressures from activists about 'nothing about us without us' [12] and more recently action towards institutionalising a Human Rights Based Approach. Yet, policy reforms to address poverty remain limited despite decades of excellent qualitative and participatory research highlighting the experiences of poverty and welfare reform. This raises questions about how policymakers and power holders engage with or use research evidence relating to poverty and inequality[13]. Participatory instruments, on the other hand, often driven by third sector and civil society seem to have found an influential role in the new policymaking processes in Scotland, especially social security and anti-poverty policies (discussed in more detail later in this paper). **For example, Poverty and Inequality Commissions, Poverty Truth Commissions, Social Security client panels, lived-experience/experts by experience panels etc**.

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[10] Poverty Alliance (2021) 'In the room where it happens' Approaches to engaging people with direct experiences of poverty in the development of local child poverty policy. https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/TPA_GHS_Participatory_Approaches_FINALSept21.pdf

[11] Wakeford, T., Pimbert, M., and Walcon, E. (2015) Chapter 22 'Re-fashioning Citizen's Juries: Participatory Demcoracy in Action' in Bradbury (2015), The SAGE Handbook of Action Research. https://methods-sagepub-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/book/the-sage-handbook-of-action-research-3e/i1686.xml

[12] E.g. see Downie, E (2016) 'Nothing about us, without us, is for us!' https://scvo.scot/p/13499/2016/09/05/nothing-about-us-without-us-is-for-us

[13] Bennett, H., and Jones, K (2022) "Getting in, being heard and influencing change: the labours of policy engagement in employment and social security research" chapter 3, 48-70, in Jolly et al (ed) Social Policy Review 34, Policy Press, Bristol.

What's the difference? Participatory research and participatory instruments

Participatory research (especially using qualitative methods) and participatory policy instruments are not (necessarily) the same. There is some common terminology and often shared ambitions around democratising knowledge production and altering power relations. Furthermore, advocates of both may seek to amplify people's experiences and voices in policymaking processes in order challenge traditional power arrangements. However, there can be significant differences in purpose, design, practice and values amongst different participatory instruments, and also between participatory instruments and participatory research projects. There are also different professional practices, skills, and training of the individuals or teams designing and delivering the participatory process.

Participatory research: What is it?

Participatory research has grown out of long-standing methodological debates between social scientists about power, voice, and control of 'scientific knowledge'. The term participatory research covers a range of approaches with a common aim to disrupt conventional, hierarchical processes of knowledge production that underpin much scientific and academic research. In doing so, participatory researchers seek to transform power relations that shape the production of knowledge. To achieve this aim, participatory researchers maintain a standpoint of researching *with*, rather than researching *on*, communities[14]. There is much discussion and well-developed debates amongst participatory researchers about the appropriateness of different participatory models and research methods for working with different types of communities, vulnerable groups, or the exploration of sensitive topics.[15]

Research and a scientific inquiry remain the focus of the activity; however, key research stages such as problem identification, research design, analysis, and execution are no longer the prerogative of the social researcher alone. Instead, many participatory researchers involve 'community members' in all phases of the research process. This includes

> "*The kinds of participatory methods used, as well as the design and context of the research and the relevant theoretical underpinnings, should be clear from the outset in PR projects, as should the ways in which participatory and, where relevant, emancipatory, principles and objectives will be achieved through working collaboratively and inclusively with participants*". (Aldridge, 2015, 153)

identifying the issue to investigate, defining research questions, unearthing ethical concerns and practices, co-designing and undertaking an investigation, ensuring community-based expertise shapes data collection and analysis, and producing accessible outputs suitable for a broad audience beyond academia. Participatory research approaches consider communities of place, experience, or practice. Many participatory researchers claim to involve individuals and communities who are 'hard to reach' or whose issues and perspectives are 'seldom heard' through traditional research approaches[16] (although the extent to which researchers achieve such aims is often the subject of much debate within research communities).

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[14] See Chevalier, J.M., and Buckles, D.J., (2019) Chapter 1: Ins and outs of participatory action research in 'Participatory Action Research. Theory and Methods for Engaged Inquiry'. Routledge.

[15] Aldridge, J., (2015) 'Participatory Research. Working with vulnerable groups in research and practice' Policy Press, Bristol.

[16] Aldridge, J., (2015) 'Participatory Research. Working with vulnerable groups in research and practice' Policy Press, Bristol or What Works Scotland (2017) 'Hard to reach or easy to ignore? Promoting equality in community engagement' WWSHardToReachOrEasyToIgnoreEvidenceReview.pdf (whatworksscotland.ac.uk)
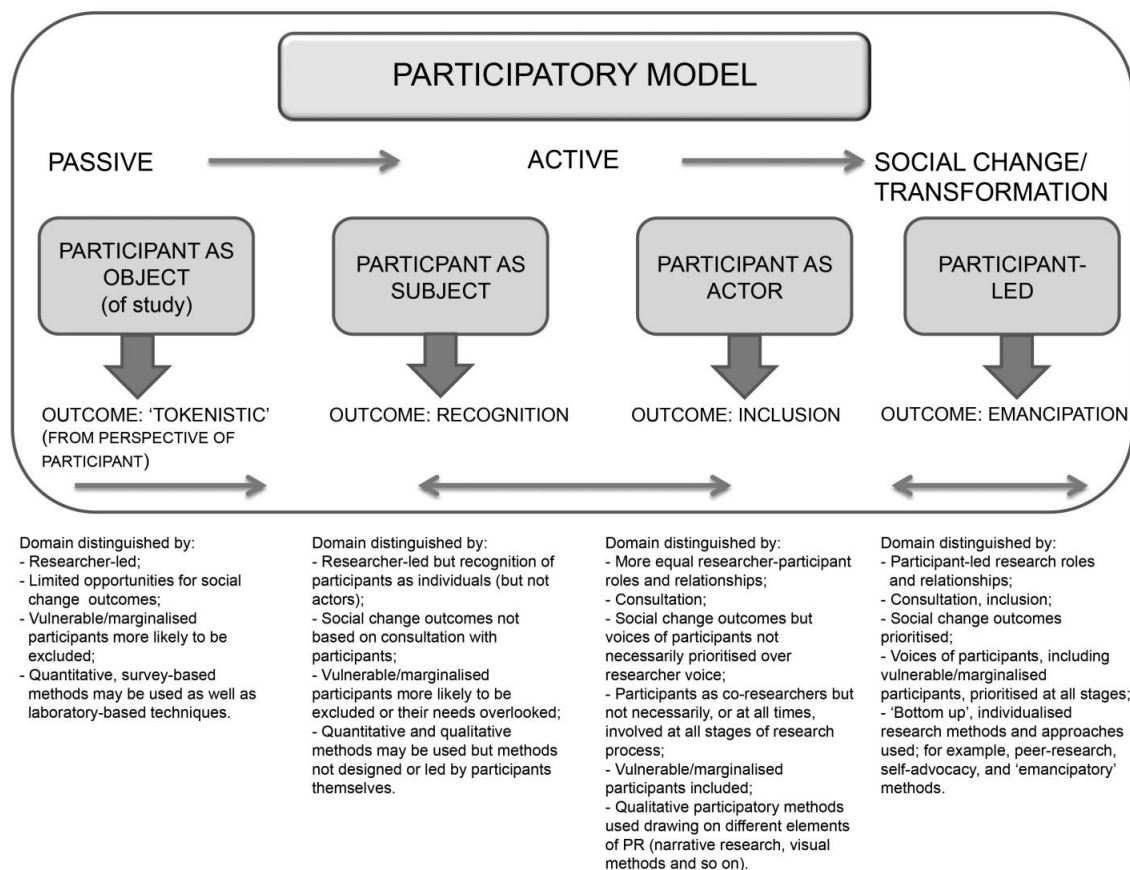
PARTICIPATORY MODEL

PASSIVE → ACTIVE → SOCIAL CHANGE/ TRANSFORMATION

PARTICIPANT AS OBJECT (of study)	PARTICPANT AS SUBJECT	PARTICIPANT AS ACTOR	PARTICIPANT-LED
OUTCOME: 'TOKENISTIC' (FROM PERSPECTIVE OF PARTICIPANT)	OUTCOME: RECOGNITION	OUTCOME: INCLUSION	OUTCOME: EMANCIPATION

Domain distinguished by:
- Researcher-led;
- Limited opportunities for social change outcomes;
- Vulnerable/marginalised participants more likely to be excluded;
- Quantitative, survey-based methods may be used as well as laboratory-based techniques.

Domain distinguished by:
- Researcher-led but recognition of participants as individuals (but not actors);
- Social change outcomes not based on consultation with participants;
- Vulnerable/marginalised participants more likely to be excluded or their needs overlooked;
- Quantitative and qualitative methods may be used but methods not designed or led by participants themselves.

Domain distinguished by:
- More equal researcher-participant roles and relationships;
- Consultation;
- Social change outcomes but voices of participants not necessarily prioritised over researcher voice;
- Participants as co-researchers but not necessarily, or at all times, involved at all stages of research process;
- Vulnerable/marginalised participants included;
- Qualitative participatory methods used drawing on different elements of PR (narrative research, visual methods and so on).

Domain distinguished by:
- Participant-led research roles and relationships;
- Consultation, inclusion;
- Social change outcomes prioritised;
- Voices of participants, including vulnerable/marginalised participants, prioritised at all stages;
- 'Bottom up', individualised research methods and approaches used; for example, peer-research, self-advocacy, and 'emancipatory' methods.

Figure 1: Participatory Model
Aldridge (2015: 156)

Action research

Some participatory researchers utilise action research approaches, such as community-led or action research, community based participatory action research, or collaborative action research. All position action research as 'both the medium for change and the method of analysis of the change'[17]. Action research involves the simultaneous processes of taking action and conducting research and is often solution focussed. Research informed change is the central concept. However, not all forms of action research are participatory in nature, or involve collective inquiry and a commitment to social justice as outlined in figure 1 above.

Participatory action researchers need a wide range of skills to facilitate group work, enable ethical communication, and undertake relational work with communities. These duties take place alongside typical social science work, such as contributing scientific ideas, analytical insights, theory development, contextualising qualitative findings, research expertise and appropriate methodological tools. The Participatory Researcher has often undergone specialist training in social research methods, as well as widely read and engaged with the extensive body of literature advancing participatory research practices and values[18].

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[17] Embury, D., (2015 p.530), 'Action Research in an Online word', in H.Bradbury (ed) The Sage Handbook of Action Research, 3rd Edn., Sage, London, p.529-535
[18] Bennett H, Brunner R. (2022) Nurturing the buffer zone: conducting collaborative action research in contemporary contexts. 'Qualitative Research'. 22(1):74-92. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1468794120965373

> ➢ The What Works Scotland project (led by Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities) created a series of action research inquiries with diverse practitioners to explore and improve services and policies. These inquiries focused on co-identifying research questions and problems, co-collecting and analysing data or existing evidence, and co-designing change[19].
> ➢ The Knowledge is Power project run by SCDC and Poverty Alliance utilises a community-led action research approach to ask communities to identify their own research issues, experiences, and the evidence they need for change[20].
> ➢ The Everyday Heroes project used an action research model to engage young people in the reform of gender based violence policies. Young survivors led the research process (which included surveys, qualitative interviews, and focus groups), collaboratively analysed and then shared the recommendations directly with politicians and senior decision-makers to ensure their evidence and experiences underpinned service change[21].

Why use participatory research approaches?

Facilitation through a scientific inquiry directly affects the knowledge and actions of research participants; community members whose voices and experiences shape the research focus, analysis, and use, may feel empowered, more confident to undertake research or work with policymakers[22]. Many participatory research projects also produce traditional research outputs and policy resources, such as research reports, accessible webpages, webinars/seminars, and recommendations for policymakers. Such outcomes act as research 'evidence' akin to research outputs produced by social scientists working independently or using alternative qualitative or quantitative methods. Participatory research outputs can therefore also influence individuals who were not directly part of the research, such as policymakers or powerful decision-makers who draw on research outputs to understand policy issues and produce an evidence base.

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[19] Brunner, R., Bennett, H., Bynner, C. and Henderson, J. (2018) Collaborative Action Research and Public Services: Insights into Methods, Findings and Implications for Public Service Reform. Other. What Works Scotland. http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/WWSCollabARCrossSiteFinal.pdf
[20] Knowledge is Power | SCDC - We believe communities matter
[21] Everyday Heroes – Children and young people committed to working together with people in power to make a safer and more equal scotland
[22] See Aldridge, J., (2015) 'Participatory Research. Working with vulnerable groups in research and practice' Policy Press, Bristol. OR Beresford and Carr, Eds. (2018) 'Social Policy first hand. An international introduction to participatory social welfare' Policy, Press, Bristol.

> *Participatory research can have multiple 'impacts':*
>
> - *On the research focus*
>
> - *On the researcher/social scientist (and by extension the research community)*
>
> - *On research participants*
>
> - *On policy process*
>
> - *On policy ideas*

> *Participatory research can seek to influence policymaking in various ways:*
>
> - *Shape public opinion*
>
> - *Lobby for political change*
>
> - *Provide specific recommendations for policies or services direct to key decision-makers*
>
> - *Add to the evidence base or fill an empirical gap*

There are various aims of participatory research outputs. Some have specific policy recommendations for invested partners (such as Everyday Heroes and What Works Scotland). Others may perform an advocacy role, sharing research evidence into social issues and lived-experiences. For example, UC:US is a project in Northern Ireland focussed on experiences of social security receipt and the processes associated with Universal Credit benefit. The project participants and researchers co-produced a Universal Credit Guide to help people know their rights and navigate the benefits system[23].

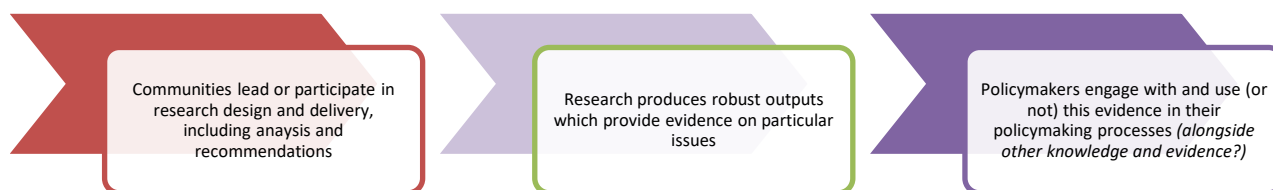**Participating in research and the policymaking process**

Communities lead or participate in research design and delivery, including anaysis and recommendations

Research produces robust outputs which provide evidence on particular issues

Policymakers engage with and use (or not) this evidence in their policymaking processes *(alongside other knowledge and evidence?)*

Figure 2: Participating in research, simplified process

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[23] UC:Us (ucus.org.uk)

Participatory Instruments

Participatory instruments seek to increase citizen engagement in policymaking processes. In particular, people who engage with specific services or who are directly affected by certain policy decisions. Many participatory instruments do not derive from social science debates about knowledge construction, methods, and power that underpin participatory research. Instead, civil society and disenfranchised communities have long called for greater participation in decision-making and greater influence of state policies and practices. Similarly, democratic scholars and public service reformers consider participatory instruments as necessary to increase legitimacy in government decisions and reconfigure the relationships between citizens and the state. As such, participatory instruments are often born from debates about policymaking processes, vested interests, dominant perspectives, and power. Individually each instrument may play a specific role in a policymaking process, however as Escobar (2014) states: participatory democracy "is not only about designing new institutional processes, but also developing new mindsets, skills and ways of interacting in society more broadly". Advocates of participatory instruments may emphasise the opportunity for dialogue, deliberation, and communication to generate new and meaningful conversations that influence the policymaking process. As such, participatory instruments seek to increase the spaces for a wider range of voices and experiences, and change the forms of communication between different interest groups, agencies, and stakeholders.

Despite the different origins and wider aims of participatory research and participatory instruments, these different forms of participation are playing out simultaneously in contemporary policymaking in Scotland. There may be commonalities with participatory research as some participatory instruments seek to disrupt established power hierarchies, or prioritise the valuing of different forms of knowledge in the process of policymaking. However, there is particular emphasis on the relationship between citizens and the state, and as such less focus on scientific processes and ensuring insight and experiences are accurately analysed to create formal evidence (as would be the case in participatory research). With the backdrop of EBPM, this contrasting purpose and focus can leave participatory instrument vulnerable to criticisms about their role as evidence.

There are multiple types of participatory instruments with varying conceptions and forms of participation[24]. Some participatory instruments may not seek to disrupt power relations at all, but simply seek to increase the plurality of views and knowledge considered within an established government decision-making process. For example, O'Hagan et al (2017, 2019)[25] examined different types of participatory instruments and categorized these as:

- transactional (e.g. disbursement of small grants from a limited pot),
- transference (e.g. of power, resources and responsibility),
- transformational, whereby the relationship between the citizen (local resident) and the state (local government) is recalibrated.

The development of a wide range of participatory instruments across Scotland has already raised a number of reflections from policymakers, communities, practitioners, and researchers. Concerns often focus on instruments that are consultative and raise questions about the scope of citizen involvement in decision-making (discussed in more detail later in this paper relating to the client panels). We should be aware of and critically reflect on the issues that arise when activities that are described as participatory in nature, may in fact be forms of consultation and standard feedback processes. Similarly, there are concerns that participatory forms of governance can lead to

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[24] Poverty Alliance (2021) 'In the room where it happens' Approaches to engaging people with direct experiences of poverty in the development of local child poverty policy. https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/TPA_GHS_Participatory_Approaches_FINALSept21.pdf

[25] O'Hagan et al. (2017, 2019)

exclusion, rather than engagement with particular groups or criticisms that some instruments may become dominated by interest groups who have grasped the engagement processes for their particular interests.[26]

Why use participatory instruments?

Increasing the use of participatory instruments across various areas of policymaking reflects an agenda to improve democracy, increase political engagement and in many policy domains, and arguably a will for the Scottish Government to 'do things differently' than traditional Westminster forms of policymaking. Such aims have shaped public service reform in Scotland and local governance reviews (Christie, 2011; Local Governance review, 2019), leading to reforms to Community Planning Partnerships, Local Government engagement approaches, the introduction of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, and revisions to the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework (NPF)[27]. Some see the Community Engagement profession and workers at the heart of the participatory turn in Scotland, with community development workers developing and leading various participatory initiatives at local and national levels in government, local government, and third sector. This profession has often led to long standing discussions around the distinctions between consultation, engagement, and participation, with value driven definitions around power, voice, and levels of 'authentic' decision making[28], since the 1960s. For example, Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation.
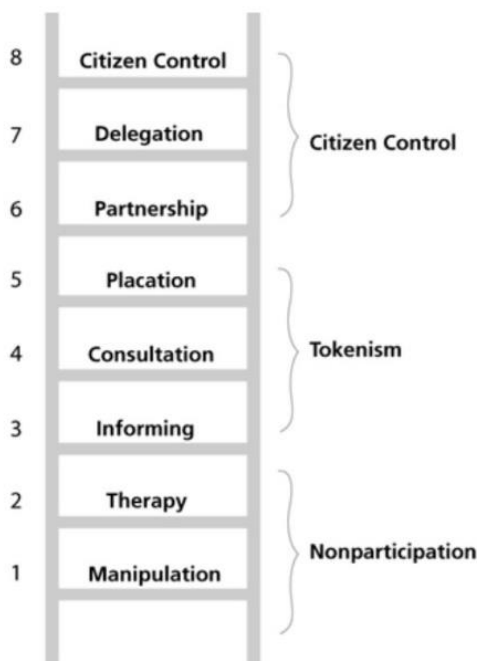

Figure 3: Arnstein's Ladder visual

Much of the thinking underpinning the community development profession echoes and aligns with debates that shape participatory paradigm in social research around the different types of participation and associated ethics and power relations. However, not all participatory instruments are designed and institutionalised by community

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[26] E.g. see Michels, A. & De Graaf, L. (2010) Examining Citizen Participation: Local Participatory Policy Making and Democracy, Local Government Studies, 36:4, 477-491 Full article: Examining Citizen Participation: Local Participatory Policy Making and Democracy (tandfonline.com)

[27] E.g. see O'Hagan, A., MacRae, C., Hill O'Connor, C., & Teedon, P. (2020) Participatory budgeting, community engagement and impact on public services in Scotland, Public Money & Management, 40:6, 446-456 Full article: Participatory budgeting, community engagement and impact on public services in Scotland (tandfonline.com)

[28] For example, see SCDC National Standards for Community Engagement: https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards

development workers or social researchers who follow these principles. This means there can be varied processes and designs demonstrating fuzzy distinctions between engagement, participation, and knowledge production (an issue that participatory researchers continue to debate). For example, a simplified government led process might follow the process outlined in figure 4 below.

Participating in government-led policy instrument and the policymaking process

| Policymakers seek to increase participation in policymaking process | Policicmakers create spaces such as forums, panels, advisory groups for people to participate in | Policymakers use (or not) insights from these spaces to shape policymaking or service design choices *(alongside other knowledge and evidence?)* |

Figure 4: Participating in policymaking simplified process

Researchers and organisations committed to participatory work continually reflect and discuss different forms of participation. For example, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation produce their own spectrum of partnership types with people with lived-experience of poverty. They consider what counts as participatory, based on values of inclusion, social change, and active involvement[29]. Such categories and conceptualisations may differ from participatory instruments (which may focus on forms of dialogue and deliberation for example), and participatory research, which centres the principles of a research process (such as co-designing a research question). Currently, different sectors, professions, departments, and organisations across Scotland appear to be adopting and developing *dissimilar* understandings of participation, consultation, and research. As such, there are variations in practice and execution of participatory instruments (including those adopting what appear to be similar approaches, such as lived-experience panels).

Experience Panels

The Experience Panels were established in 2017 to help design a social security system that works for the people of Scotland. Members have experience of at least one of the benefits delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that has or will come to Scotland.

Client Panels

The Client Panels started in 2020. They are made up of Social Security Scotland clients from across Scotland. Client Panel members share their experiences and opinions on how Social Security Scotland works.

(Scottish Government: https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-client-experience-panels-research-effects-coronavirus-pandemic-communication-preferences-visual-summary/)

Let us briefly focus on recent developments in Scottish policymaking to consider different understandings on participation and the role of research. The Scottish Government has developed a new social security agency

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[29] See The role of people with experience of poverty in social change | by Sarah Campbell | Inside the Joseph Rowntree Foundation | Medium

including various research and engagement approaches to co-design a social security system[30] including establishing Social Security Experience Panels (over 2,400 people registered as panel members in 2017) who the Scottish Government invite to take part in research through surveys and focus groups. But how does this instrument construct and deliver participation in policymaking? It is worth critically reflecting on such instruments: while committed to listening to lived-experience of people who engage with benefit administrative systems, from a participation perspective the design of such experience panels appears more akin to a form of consultation, with members having little scope to influence the topics discussed, deliberate as a group towards collective decision-making, or offer substantial challenge to existing decision-making and administrative structures. The Scottish Government describe experience panels simultaneously as evidence of participatory governance, but also as part of their 'research programme'[31]. But would participatory researchers consider professional researcher-led data collection methods (i.e. surveys and focus groups), participatory? That's not to say there is no value to experience panels as a form of complementary information and insight, but we should also reflect on the design of panels, forms of dialogue, their use in the policymaking process, whether and how they are more akin to consultative approaches, and if they should be described as participatory research?

Similarly, Social Security Scotland have also established a 'programme of research' called **Client Panels**. Client panels appear to focus on providing feedback for service design. Such developments do provide opportunity for people with lived-experience to contribute to service development (which some may describe as co-production[32]), however to what extent are they participatory?

> Do policymakers consider a traditional (non-participatory) research method as participatory if they directly embed the information gained into their policy process?

Issues raised in the conversations included concerns about such forms of consultation on very narrow administrative design issues. Some social researchers noted how experience panels may lack traditional research considerations such as ethics, analytical frameworks, and contextualisation of the information gathered before being used in decision-making. As such, greater transparency into the policymaking process, and the development of awareness about how existing instruments could be adapted into either participatory research approaches, or into Participatory Instruments that go beyond consultation, could be beneficial.

> Questions regularly raised in the conversations included: *How did policymakers consider individual insights from panel meetings alongside other forms of research evidence generated in qualitative or participatory research projects, especially where there were contradictions?*

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[30] See https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-experience-panels-meeting-peoples-needs-report/pages/1/

[31] https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-experience-panels-annual-report-2020/pages/4/

[32] Ansell, C., & Torfing, J. (2021). Co-creation: The new kid on the block in public governance. Policy and Politics, 49, 211–230. https://forskning.ruc.dk/en/publications/co-creation-the-new-kid-on-the-block-in-public-governance

	Participatory Research	Government led Participatory Instruments
Background	Social research, knowledge production.	Participatory governance, public service reform.
Participating in?	Research/evidence production process	Policymaking process, feedback/consultation on services
Approach	Research/inquiry led, sharing power between researcher and participants	Opening new spaces in policymaking systems
Key concepts	Inquiry focussed, research methods, theory, analysis,	Listening to experiences, collecting views and opinions
Skills/competencies	Led by trained social researcher, specialist participatory methods, ethics, analysis. Contextualised knowledge and practice	Facilitation/public engagement. Some PIs are community development led (but not all). Some (such as citizen's juries) may be researcher led.
Example in practice	Disability Research on Independent Living & Learning (DRILL) project[33]	Social Security client panel [34]
Lived-experience/voices?	Through research, in design process, data collection, analysis and dissemination.	In practitioner curated forums/venues (such as panels or meetings).
Key people	Social researcher: may also act as facilitator of group work, provides technical research guidance, contextualises research findings, engages with theory and practice. 'Community' researchers, participants, collaborators, peer researchers etc.	Varies by instrument, profession, or department. Organiser or coordinator (not necessarily a research background). May involve specialist facilitator/community development worker. But could also be policy officer, service manager, etc. Collects insights and works out how to fit into policymaking practices.
Product	Research and evidence outputs	Experiential knowledge, views and insights, sometimes research outputs (depending on activity)

Table 1: Participatory Research v Participatory Instrument possible differences

Experiential insights

Central to both participatory research and participatory instruments is the notion of 'experiential knowledge'. How this knowledge is co-created, unearthed, shared, or contextualised is a key issue to discuss in the context of the participatory turn.

The Scottish Government have designed some influential participatory instruments and created specific spaces for people to engage in policymaking. These instruments can create 'quicker' avenues for government policymakers to consult with or hear from particular individuals[35]. However, there are concerns over the ways in which their feedback is constructed, forms of participation, and how facilitators analyse and contextualise the information provided. The conversations highlighted that some policymakers viewed the knowledge gained from participatory instruments (such as the panels) as 'insights' or 'information' rather than evidence. For some it served a primary purpose of connecting policymakers (detached from street-level work or particular lived-experiences) with individuals that their policies or services target or seek to support. This was particularly the case where policymakers were generalists rather than experts in the policy domain. During the conversations, it was stated that discussions had recently started within the Scottish Government to ascertain the connections between participatory

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[33] See https://www.drilluk.org.uk/

[34] See https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/about/social-research

[35] For example, see https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-client-experience-panels-research-effects-coronavirus-pandemic-communication-preferences-visual-summary/

instruments, such as experience panels, and the qualified social research teams to determine collaborative working and to discuss roles, approaches, expertise, and processes.

Adding further complexity to this context is that there are some participatory instruments that create the opportunity for participatory research. For example, commissions or lived-experience groups who also undertake peer research into issues in their own communities using inquiry models, social research methods, and conceptual and analytical processes. They then feed the evidence they have produced into the policy spaces they contribute to, or share research findings through participation-consultation mechanisms. As such, sometimes spaces for 'quick insights' can become forums through which such groups can share more thorough research findings.
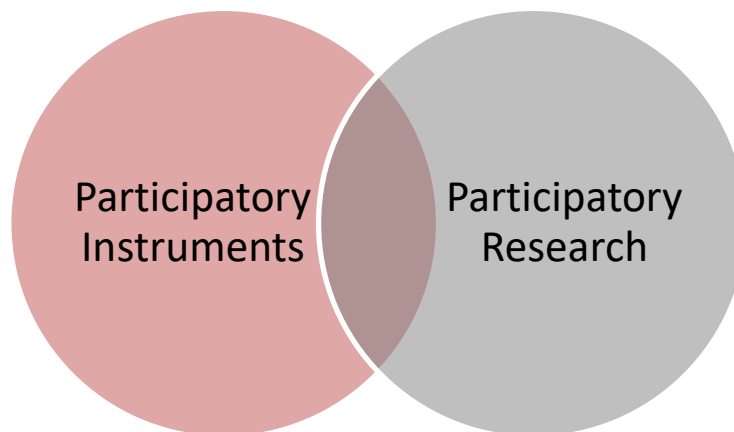

Figure 5: Overlapping activities of some Participatory Instruments and Participatory Research

This overlapping space is of particular importance in understanding both the role of participatory research and participatory instruments, and helping us to understand the opening question about whether participatory instruments and pushing out participatory research? The answer is complex. The lines between different models and approaches are not fixed, with many practitioners, researchers, and individuals engaging in both research and participatory instruments. The opening concern from researchers about rigour is overly simplistic. While there may be credible concerns about the design and operation of some specific instruments, there are also many developments and participatory practices that lessen these concerns.

For example, while we previously discussed a simplified government led approach to participation in policymaking, organisations such as the Poverty Alliance often act as intermediaries supporting individuals to engage with either government led participatory instruments, or proposing opportunities to increase participation. The Poverty Alliance have invested in and developed skills and capacities to contribute to, (and support people with lived-experience to contribute to) such policy interactions. Through their practice we can see that policy instruments are not by default "less rigorous" that research methods, and indeed there can much overlap with the practices and ethics of some participatory research approaches and indeed many knowledge exchange activities of social researchers who also engage in providing policy advice and insights.

Poverty Alliance practice:

- Careful discussions with and selection of participants engaged with Poverty Alliance or their partners,
- Identification of individuals who are active in their communities, support groups, and familiar with a range of poverty experiences,
- Long term support and preparation for individuals participating in instruments (such as experience panels),
- Provision and facilitation of preparation events which involve group discussion, challenge, and the sharing of research evidence and diverse experiences to support individuals to situate their own experience and knowledge,
- Training and support to help individuals engage in discussions and dialogue,
- Co-produce key themes and agenda items with members and those with lived-experience,
- Experts by experience may participate in a range of projects and research over prolonged periods which advances their contextual understanding and research knowledge

In this practice the intermediary undertakes a range of preparatory and support tasks and demonstrates their own expertise in participatory governance, in order to ensure the participatory instrument 'works' for those getting involved and operates to an acceptable standard.

- Intermediary is responsible for helping people understand their own experiences alongside other forms of knowledge (including research evidence).
- Intermediary is responsible for helping with the contextualisation process, in advance of policy encounters. This can include explaining policy backgrounds, context, and direction. Highlighting knowledge gaps.
- Intermediary challenges government led processes to move from consultation to participation.
- Intermediary is engaged in continual communication and dialogue with government policymakers.
- Intermediary engages in both research and instruments, as well as other policy spaces as stakeholders, and therefore continually draw across a range of knowledge sources.
- Intermediary works with other intermediaries in the policy field who undertake similar activities and practices to support experts by experiences to encourage a wider shift towards participatory governance in policymaking to rebalance the relationship between the state and the most disadvantaged communities.

Other organisations committed to lived-experience groups (such and the Poverty and Inequality Commission) echoed such practice and outlined a range of ways in which experts by experience are supported to engage with a broad range of evidence as well as share their individual experiences to policymakers and decision makers. Notably, participatory specialists (from community development/engagement backgrounds and often with input from social researchers with participatory expertise) design and lead these processes. A key feature of such lived-experience panels, groups or commissions appears to be the dialogical/discursive nature of facilitated group-work, which supports individuals to share their experiences, challenge prejudicial views, and develop greater awareness amongst groups with diverse individual experiences of their shared events, structures, and barriers.

Reflecting on the Conversations

During 2021-2022 I undertook a series of 'conversations' with policymakers, researchers, practitioners and others working in Scotland to explore their perceptions and experiences relating to participatory research and the interactions with participatory instruments[36]. The conversations demonstrated the breadth of views, expertise, and understanding of participatory research methods and participatory instruments. They allowed both the participant and myself to reflect on research practices, and different perspectives on participation for and in policymaking. Some individuals and organisations were experts at designing and undertaking participatory research, including rich experiences of sharing findings, hosting parliamentary events, communicating to policymakers and politicians, and investing in sharing research insights (for example, organisations such as SCDC (Scottish Community Development Centre), the Poverty Alliance, and Glasgow Disability Alliance). However, most respondents were unclear as to if or how policymakers use their research outputs and how participatory research evidence is considered alongside other forms of knowledge or research outputs in for example, evidence reviews, briefings, and underpinning policy recommendations.

There were clear gaps in knowledge and experience in terms of the ability to 'see into' government decision-making processes, and to track and follow up on evidence once a project was complete. This was partly due to research staff needing to move onto other work (including academic researchers) with little time to trace the influence that research outputs have on different individuals, organisations, and ideas. However, when respondents discussed participatory research in connection to specific service design and delivery they were more aware of the direct use and impact of their participatory research evidence. Government workers (including local government) in managerial roles and some policymakers felt that they did use participatory research outputs, especially if they had been involved in commissioning the research and it provided specific recommendations to issues they were looking to address at that particular time. The possible limitations of such situated participatory research was that associated outputs produced by consultants/independent researchers were often overly place specific, sometimes embargoed and therefore not shared outside of the immediate Local Authority, such as through public forums or websites. This limited their use beyond the locality, for example any learning and policy recommendations for other organisations or the inclusion of participatory outputs in evidence reviews. Although some academic research projects include accessible websites (e.g. What Works Scotland), and a range of open-access services for peer reviewed academic articles[37] and third sector led research (e.g. SCDC or Poverty Alliance projects) is often easily available, there can be similar limitations in terms of accessibility and sharing of research findings.

The conversations provided insights into the role of participatory and qualitative research in EBPM, with three key issues standing out:

1. Policymakers are more likely to engage with research evidence if they are aware of a project in 'real-time' such as attending reporting events, or knowing the researchers involved and are able to talk to the research team during the course of the project or in the presentation of research findings.
2. The Scottish Government is working through some of the key questions raised in this project and considering the gaps in participatory expertise (both in terms of instruments and research), and the ways in which policy teams and social research teams might be involved in the design and use of participatory instruments to address concerns about analysis, and representativeness.

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[36] 14 conversations (total of 20 hours+), with people working in Scotland in the following roles: Social and participatory researchers (academia, third sector, Scottish Government), policy officers, and policy managers (Scottish government), Senior Manager (local government), policy officers, & participatory officers (third sector), independent research consultant (specialist in participatory research). It was agreed that respondents wouldn't be named or directly quoted in this report.

[37] See https://www.bl.uk/help/open-access-resources-for-research

3. Government social research units remain focussed on 'traditional' quantitative and qualitative methodologies, with a continuing emphasis on dominant quantitative skills, sources, and evidence. This is in part due to limited research expertise on participatory methods, and also the dominance and resources supporting skills development and the production of quantitative evidence, with associated views around statistical rigour, generalizability, and research 'truth'. Participatory instruments have developed somewhat separate to the social research community inside government.

Third sector respondents, experienced at working with particular communities or groups, shared some common experiences and perceptions.

1. **Participatory research remains poorly understood in EBPM.** They felt that qualitative research and participatory outputs were only valued when sat alongside quantitative data. They all noted experiences of presenting or sharing research findings and facing questions and concerns about 'rigour' 'generalizability' and 'statistical significance', often by policymakers or potential research users who did not possess expertise in qualitative research or participatory models. They also noted that such concerns reduced during covid-19 lockdowns (2020-2021) due to delays or inadequacies in quantitative data on certain aspects of impact of covid-19. As such, forms of evidence and knowledge that were not valued before suddenly rose in importance. They also felt that their views and research outputs were valued because of trusting relationships (that had developed with Scottish Government policymakers over time), their established and ethical connections to affected communities, and their ability to provide relatively quick insights. They noted that they received fewer questions about the source of knowledge and critiques of qualitative insights than had been commonplace prior to covid-19 lockdowns.
2. **Limited funding for participatory research that does not acknowledge the wide range of activities involved**. Funding and resources for participatory research are often too low for the volume of work involved in undertaking an ethical and credible Participatory Research project, especially with less advantaged groups or in numerous localities. Greater awareness from funders and partners about the skills and demands on facilitation support, research teams, and an awareness of the limitations and non-linear research process would improve the development and then potential use of Participatory Research findings.
3. **Participatory research is mobilised and communicated alongside other forms of knowledge**. Third sector organisations were engaged in both Participatory Research and involved in stakeholder meetings with government, or facilitating particular participatory instruments. The lines between were often blurred, and it was not always clarified which policy recommendations or feedback emerged from individual insights and which were generated thorough research processes.

Are participatory instruments crowding out participatory research?

While this question guided the project, there was no consensus in the conversations. There are many different views, understandings, and expectations from participatory work, with different vested interests and expectations about acceptable processes and essential features. It is the intention that this discussion paper will keep wider conversations going on this issue. In my view (one that is a social researcher's position), there is the potential for participatory research to be crowded out, rather than gain ground in the move towards participatory governance:

- Participatory research has always been poorly resourced and used in the context of EBPM. While the interest in participatory approaches ebbs and flows over time, there is currently alternative approaches (some instruments) that claim to offer the same benefits as participatory research, without the focus, cost and resources associated with a complex research project. From my view, the biggest issue is that people may not understand the difference in the quality and representativeness of the outputs from some instruments (especially gathering experiential insights) compared to participatory or qualitative research findings.
- The rise of participatory governance does not seem to have changed the EBPM mind-set for social researchers and policymakers in their consideration of evidence. Participatory instruments have instead developed

alongside and separately, often outside of the traditional notions of evidence production (although this may change).

However, there are places of overlap, where research and participatory instruments meet, that offer opportunities for participatory researchers to contribute to improving and adapting the operational design of some instruments. There are also ways in which third sector organisations are combining their social research training and skills, their advocacy roles, and their involvement in participatory instruments.

How could we increase the use of participatory and qualitative research?

Perhaps the first step to advancing the use of participatory research and ensuring there is space for it in the participatory turn is to acknowledge and address some longstanding issues that limit the use of participatory research.

- Participatory research projects appeared to have limited impact on policymaking and many experienced researchers did not know, or have the resources to rigorously explore what impact their research had on policies or services once a project was complete. Therefore, it could be difficult to demonstrate the added value and direct use of some participatory research projects in local or national policymaking.
- Participatory research projects are time-consuming, involve relational work, group facilitation, and social and organisational skills. These skills go well above traditional social research training and skillsets. Research funding was often short-term and considered too low to cover all the work involved, including unforeseen activities inherent in complex collaborative working. There is a tension around working intensely with communities to create impactful work for them, and policymakers viewing the impact as too localised and time required to adapt it into outputs of interest to a wider audiences.
- There are variations in the quality and transparency of participatory research, with variable understandings, knowledge, training and experience. This means that some research (claiming to be participatory in nature), is disputed by other researchers.

If there are multiple issues for participatory researchers, of which one is the potential competition with participatory instruments, what can be done?

A shared view in the conversations was the need to develop shared dialogue, training, and knowledge on participatory research and the connections with participatory instruments. In this way, participatory governance could have the potential to support participatory research, and increase the quality of some participatory instruments. This was seen as particularly necessary in the context of the move towards embedding a Human Rights Based Approach that centres voice and informed participation (a shift that will require various participatory models and a shift in evidence-based policymaking practices). Ensuring that the right to participate becomes effective in practice will require greater investment in skills, training and knowledge across policy communities, and greater awareness of the role of participatory research and evidence.
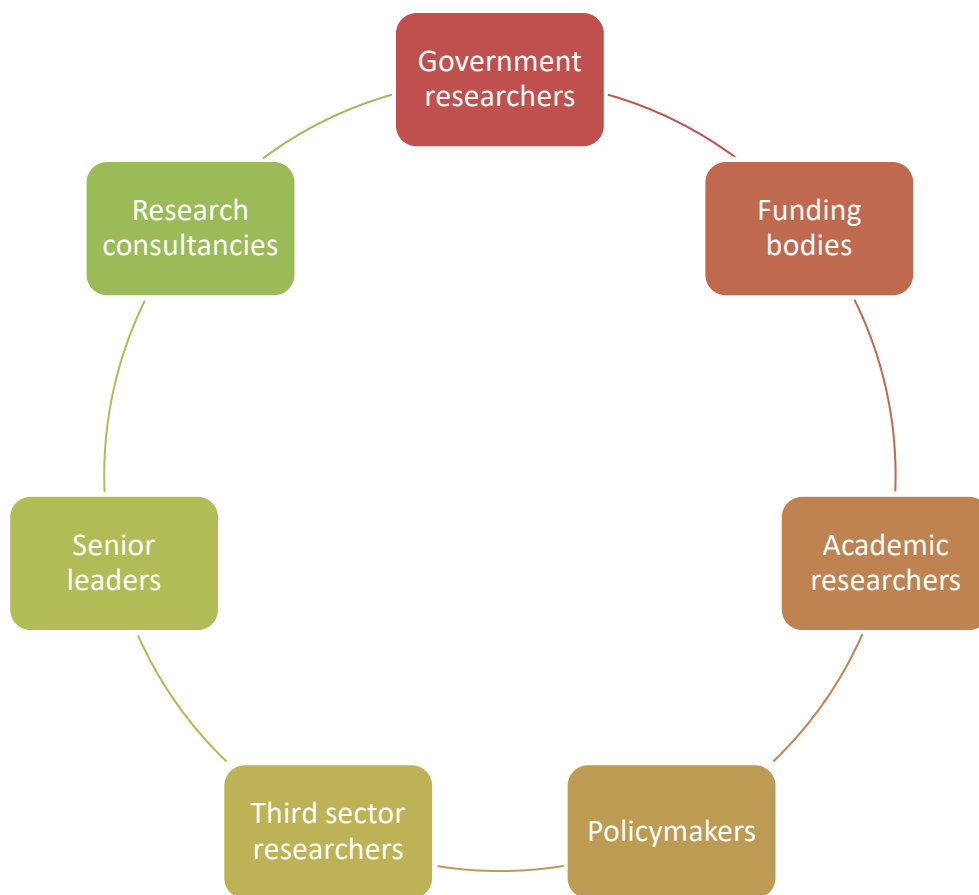
Figure 6: Community of Participatory practice

For participatory research to occur, you need not only participatory researchers with various skills and experiences to create the project and deliver the various 'impacts', but you also need funding bodies, methods training programmes, communities of practice, and senior leaders to understand the processes, values, and nature of impacts that such work creates. There is a clear need for more investment in skills required to design, engage in, interpret and produce participatory research findings.

There are pockets of knowledge and expertise particularly in community development and community planning policy and service areas. However, there needs to be greater shared understanding of the skills and practices of facilitators of participatory instruments (including community engagement techniques), including how to contextualise or analyse the information gathered through instruments. The conversations sought to answer some questions, but also raised new ones about professional training. Specifically, whether the civil service code is enough to cover the practice and skills associated with developing participatory governance via instruments, or through the commissioning and use of participatory research evidence.

Individuals with experience commissioning or producing participatory research projects were more confident and aware of how they could make policy or service recommendations based on participatory and qualitative projects.

During the conversations, people put forward their experiences and views on how to improve the status and take up of participatory research findings. A number of shared views are collated here:

- **Accessibility and mobilisation by third sector organisations:** Participatory research can have a direct influence on policy if the knowledge generated is mobilised via third sector organisations. Specifically, if policy and communication specialists engage in campaigns, provide evidence to parliament, or in stakeholder conversations with government. The tension here though lies in whether the recipient of the information is able to discern (or are told) which knowledge has been produced through research projects, and which are advocacy insights. Including media and communications colleagues in the dialogue around the development of participatory instruments and participatory research is essential.

- **Relationships and active sharing of findings instead of passive publication of outputs:** Where participatory research findings were simply publicised or published online with the hope that they would be included in the evidence base, it was seen as less likely to be influential on policymaking. Similarly, a policy manager stated that he trusted and engaged with participatory research and qualitative research findings that were shared by intermediaries, such as organisations who facilitate discussions and communicate findings. Where policy officers possessed longer-term relationships with such organisations they did not feel they needed detailed training on methods or facilitations skills, instead they trusted the organisations and individuals involved had undertaken rigorous research.

- **Long-term accessibility of project outputs:** Ensuring research findings and outputs have a legacy beyond the short-term participatory project and are stored in accessible repositories. A notable issue considered in the conversations related to short-term funding and once funding finishes participatory research outputs may no longer be shared, be easy to find online, or be included in evidence scoping practices.

- **Engagement throughout the project, not just with research outputs:** Participatory research, particularly action research models, were more successful where policymakers and key decision-makers were engaged in the research project throughout. This can take many forms, as active learners, listeners, and advisory groups.

- **Increasing awareness of participatory research expertise to the wider policy and research community would** increase the opportunities to use participatory research outputs. There is a pool of experienced participatory researchers in Scotland, and a growing number of projects that seek to use participatory methods. However, there is a lack of resource and coordination for a **Community of Practice** working across academia, third sector, and government who can shape the conversations and developments about the use of participatory research and participatory instruments. This community could collectively refine and discuss the different conceptualisations and practices shaping participation in research, policymaking, advocacy, service design/implementation, and high level decision-making.

Conclusion

Participating in policymaking can take many forms, and the rise of participation in policymaking in Scotland is proliferating, creating new opportunities and engagement processes, as well as reshaping the work and skills required from policy-officers, senior management, decision-makers and researchers. Moving towards a more participatory model of policymaking, and a human rights based approach will require experimentation and learning. The shift towards participatory governance is a learning process. Public service workers are increasingly involved in designing and delivering instruments to increase participation or include people's lived-experiences in policymaking. This context could create space for participatory research and qualitative methods, especially if a specific research project aligns with a policy agenda or occurs during the appropriate phase of policy development. To increase support for the commissioning and use of participatory and qualitative research approaches in this context it is

essential to improve awareness about the different forms of information or evidence produced in various Participatory Instruments or participatory research methodologies.

Institutionalising participation requires debating some difficult issues, which this think piece and exploration of participatory research, participatory instruments, and evidence based policymaking seeks to contribute towards. There were different views on whether participatory research projects are replaced by participatory instruments. Advocates of both felt their approach was the one requiring most work and time. The third sector has played an important role pressuring government and power holders to listen to and open up spaces for experts by experience and participatory policymaking.