



People, places and relationships - Stories of Social Capital

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1. Introduction

Scotland's National Performance Framework (NPF, 2018), presents a vision of the purpose, values and outcomes for Scotland, including a range of desired outcomes for Scotland across all aspects of life. It also includes a range of data that will be used to assess if the outcomes are being achieved over time.

One part of this national vision is focused on Scotland's communities, and a vision of living, to a greater extent, "in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe".

'Social capital' is used in this context, as a term that helpfully captures the wellbeing that is associated with the networks of support within people's local social, economic, and environmental contexts.

In the NPF, the measurement of outcomes involves the monitoring of statistical data, to show whether or not progress is being made. In the case of 'social capital', a range of statistics are relevant and available for showing the levels of social capital in society.

This piece of research was commissioned to consider if these statistics are enough, or if there are ways to add value and meaning to these quantitative data, through qualitative approaches and storytelling techniques. And if there are ways to communicate the information about social capital – that is, the wellbeing of people, places, and relationships - in more compelling and engaging ways.

The aim of this report is therefore to focus on realising the ambitions of the national outcome on communities. It builds on existing work to continue to add to an understanding of what we mean by 'inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe communities'¹, and what stands in the way to achieve this outcome.

¹ Findlay E., Dodds S. and Morrison A. (2017). *Enabling inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe communities*. Internal support material. Scottish Government.



The National Performance Framework

The project developed from an awareness that the use of statistical data alone is not always enough to inform policy responses. Statistical data carries the danger of reducing the world into separate data points and failing to include the complexity of people’s lives, how people experience their communities and how people’s physical, social and economic realities impact on wellbeing and shape outcomes. Therefore, the project attempted to explore if stories (if used carefully) may help to uncover links between phenomena and capture interdependence and process.

The report

The project consisted of two parts (1) first, to consider and offer recommendations of how to use stories within policy-making generally and (2) second, to apply this learning to capture social capital in a qualitative and compelling way.

Chapter 2 of this report, will be of interest to those interested in the role of stories in policy and research generally.

Readers who are most interested in stories of social capital that were collected might find it helpful to move forward to Chapter 3, which illustrates how stories can be applied to a specific area of policy research, and includes the stories that were collected. Although this report does aim to provide a detailed theoretical overview of social capital, we recommend that the stories are discussed in combination with the other statistical evidence that exists in the Scottish Household

Survey, and in other sources, so that both qualitative and quantitative data can be integrated into a more developed understanding.

When reflecting on the use of stories and what they can add, we will make the point that stories might be a first step into an analysis that allows researchers to explore the complexity of interconnected influences and processes that shape people's lives and result in wellbeing or its absence. Starting from the experience of a person or community allows researchers to start from lived experience. It is a first step that can help researchers to start with the experience of a person and then work upwards to trace wider influences that shape outcomes.

Method

For the project, the author – a PhD researcher working on an internship in the Scottish Government - met with third sector organisations and academics to explore both the use of stories and the concept of social capital. Additionally, the first part of the project involved a review of the literature and conversations with academics and researchers to discuss the benefits and limitations of using stories, offer a theoretical overview of what stories are, how to develop them and collate striking examples.

The stories of social capital were developed from conversations with organisations and people. Drafts of these stories were sent to relevant participants for validation, and for the re-writing of parts in collaboration, in cases where participants felt that stories were not accurately portraying their experiences. Organisations that participated in the project were: Cyrenians, The Eric Liddell Centre, Faith in Communities and Link Up (Inspiring Scotland). All of these organisations have a social capital focus within their work which aims to tackle inequality and promote community wellbeing. For further information about the various projects and work that each organisation is involved in please refer to the further reading section at the end of the report.

The people who were interviewed for this report are anonymous, but some were associated with the organisations named above in some way, as a volunteer, staff member, or visitor.

The Researchers that contributed to the report were: Dr Alistair Fraser (University of Glasgow); Dr Niall Hamilton-Smith (University of Stirling); Zoe Ferguson (Carnegie Trust) and Dr Alette Willis (University of Edinburgh).

The images for the stories of social capital were drawn by Candela Sanchez, and are used with her permission.

We would like to thank each organisation and all individuals for their involvement in and contribution to the project.

The structure of the report

The report starts by considering the use of stories within policy research and discuss benefits and limitations.

The second part of the report reflects on the research project and presents 'stories of social capital'. This includes a short introduction to what social capital is, and then presents both 'big' and 'small' stories of social capital. This is followed by a discussion of the stories and recommendations for future research. Details about the research process and data analysis can be found in the end of the report.

One of the aims of this project was to produce something that would feel and read differently, to make clearer reference to human experiences and to draw readers in. The report is written in the first person to help present the stories of social capital, and to help convey the reflections on the research process from the perspective of the researcher.

We hope that this approach will feel like a welcome change from traditional reports.

2. Why use stories within a policy research context?

Reflections on storytelling as a means of communicating research

Policy research involves the dissemination of evidence and providing recommendations for change. This is done more often than not through writing reports. The development and deployment of arguments is a fundamental part of the policy process.² If we want to simplify and generalise, we could define stories as a structured account that describes a phenomena or experience as told or written by an individual and from the perspective of that individual.^{3 4}

Any argument or coherent text that aims to communicate a policy message is already a story in some way. Yet, many policy reports and publications are difficult to read and fail to spark interest and excitement in most readers. While we as policy researchers put effort into making sense of data, we seem to pay less attention to how to communicate our data's 'story' in compelling and engaging ways⁵. This might be because storytelling techniques within policy making seem to move too far away from 'the facts'⁶ and there seems to be a perceived danger that using emotions and drawing on the perspectives of individuals threatens research validity. This is not an unfounded fear as the recent scandal of 'made up' stories by an award winning Spiegel journalist shows⁷. Stories are told from a certain perspective and they involve interpretation by the storyteller and by the reader. The message the stories is trying to bring across might be ambiguous and this stands in conflict to values such as transparency, reasoning and clarity. However, research has shown that the use of stories to communicate key-messages is more powerful than giving people a list of evidence, using numbers or citing findings as bullet points^{5 6 8}. People make use of stories to understand their own

² Fischer, F and Forester, J. (1993). *The argumentative turn in policy analysis and planning*. Duke University Press.

³ Kirkpatrick MK, Ford S and Costelloe BP (1997) Storytelling: an approach to client-centred care, *Nurse Educator*, 22 (2), 38-40

⁴ IRISS (2013). *The role of personal storytelling in practice*. Available at: <https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/insights/role-personal-storytelling-practice>

⁵ Davidson, B (2017). Storytelling and evidence-based policy: lessons from the grey literature. *Palgrave communications*. DOI: 10.1057/palcomms.2017.93

⁶ Kaplan, T. (1986). The Narrative Structure of Policy Analysis. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. DOI: 10.2307/3324882

⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-46624297> (accessed 4/2/19)

⁸ Jones, M, Shanahan, E, McBeth, M. (2014). *The science of stories: Applications of the Narrative Policy Framework in public policy analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan Publishers US.

experience and the life of others and the ability to tell and understand stories seems to be inherently linked to our sense of self and identity⁹. Creating a story around ‘the facts’ seems to help people remember and relate ⁸.

We argue that stories can honour all of the above and in combination with quantitative data they can be powerful to transcend phenomena. As most western societies have seen a decrease of people’s trust in government and voter turnout over past decades¹⁰ and in our recent times of ‘fake news’ we might need to rethink our way of communicating to and engaging with people.

Advantages of using stories

Academic research has shown that stories offer advantages, that may be useful for policy researchers ^{3, 5, 6, 7 8}:

- stories help people remember and relate
- stories help people to empathise with the subject
- stories help people to make connections
- stories help people to re-live the complexity embodied in a situation
- stories are able to build bridges between policy areas
- stories are able to amplify a message through the way they enable re-telling

In my conversations with academics, researchers and third sector organisations on the role of stories I saw and heard about examples of research that collected people’s stories to illustrate complexity and develop empathy. Researchers used stories to understand the social causes and connections between for example organised crime and certain geographical locations or between kindness and formal service provision in different localities. People identified a number of advantages and benefits during our conversations and they seemed to mirror the literature review but also added some additional thoughts. Stories were seen as valuable to illustrate the complexity, richness and messiness of people’s lives and experiences. This was seen as helpful to challenge existing narratives and simplistic typologies (e.g. people on benefits are lazy) and to highlight the role of systems, environmental

⁹ Habermas, T and Koeber, C. (2015). Autobiographical Reasoning is Constitutive for Narrative Identity: The Role of the Life Story for Personal Continuity. IN McLean, K. and Moin, S. *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development*. Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ Dempsey N. and Johnston N. (2018). *Political disengagement in the UK: who is disengaged?* Briefing paper Number CBP-7501, House of Commons Library.

factors and organisational practices. Stories were described as having the ability to create or build on empathy, to humanise and enrich, thus helping readers and audiences to put themselves into someone else's shoes and see life from their perspective.

Additionally, a number of researchers reflected that the use of stories might be key to move policy research forward. Participants felt that policy research was often conducted within specific subject areas and that consequently there was a danger of researchers and politicians losing sight of the overarching values and aims of the National Performance Framework. Participants argued that single indicators were unable to capture interactions of areas in people's lives (e.g. health, education, transport, security) and that stories might facilitate a holistic understanding of policies and their impacts. Stories might therefore be a way forward to illustrate interconnections and to build bridges between subject areas.

Furthermore, stories were described as a powerful tool due to their flexibility to be used and presented in different settings (report, presentation, speech, media) and retold in different forms (written, oral, visual).

Stories vs quotes

In my conversations people struggled to explain how to write stories and many admitted that they often used the more traditional approach to qualitative data, of using extracts of quotes, in their reports. In policy research reports quotes are often used to illustrate a statement, view or experience of an individual and they are usually not longer than a few sentences. They are commonly used in reports that follow a thematic structure to illuminate a theme that is proposed by the author. In this sense they differ from stories as they do not attempt to describe the whole experience of a person's journey¹¹.

Academics and researchers spoke about the difficulty of writing good and complex stories and the fact that social science researchers more commonly will analyse narratives, and report them in traditional report format, instead of practising how to write compelling narratives themselves, even where the benefits of these might be relevant.

¹¹ Maxwell, J. (2012). *A Realist Approach for Qualitative Research*. SAGE publications.

Organisations said they used stories to engage with people in creative processes and encourage them to write their own stories and explore their experiences through art. Thus, there seems to be great potential to work with organisations for future projects.

Ethics - Risks and caution

People reflected that working with someone else's experience of life requires sensitivity. The importance of stories to be authentic was emphasised by all of the people I spoke to. People felt that it was important for researchers not to 'storify' someone's experience and to make their life fit a plot-template. The person's experience needs to be central and inform the story line instead of the story line coming first. There was also some discussion around the term 'story' and the importance that writing stories in a policy context would need to be about real life, real experiences and real impact and not about made up stories.

Everyone felt that the core of stories should reflect inequality and highlight how inequalities are created. Ethical considerations are discussed in the research process section in more detail.

Stories as communication and as method

The word story has started to gain attention within research but it can mean very different things.

Stories might be best understood as a concept that includes a variety of methods and that spans different disciplines. In this report, that relates to the policy and research process, we make a differentiation between (1) stories as a means of communication and (2) stories as a method.

We make this distinction to discuss possible ways that stories might be helpful in different policy research contexts. Focussing on narrative can be helpful in both settings: to communicate both quantitative and qualitative data in more compelling and accessible ways (hence the emphasis is on communication) and as a technique to make sense of people's experiences and encourage participation of people within the research process (emphasis on stories as a research method).

This report does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview but will provide a brief discussion of the benefits and limitations of using stories

in a policy context and present particularly compelling and striking examples.

This is not a methodological paper and does not offer any discussion on how to analyse stories or explore how narratives are constructed. Instead it discusses stories as a tool that can help researchers to depict and illustrate a phenomenon or experience (although there will be some overlap). The report focusses on written and read stories, which can be presented in reports or in other forms such as film or audio. Visual illustrations can be a powerful way to communicate research and the report includes a number of examples where the use of visual illustration in combination with stories has been particularly powerful.

Stories as communication

It is essential for policy researchers to ask themselves who their audience is and what they would like their audience to take away from the policy narrative they present. Keeping in mind who the audience is, is particularly important *as the power of story to bring about change comes not from the story itself but from the reactions that it creates in the minds of the listeners.*¹²

How one attempts to make meaning of or explain a concept (climate change, poverty) is important because that one story will need to be embedded within the bigger political debate and vision that a government tries to communicate. Who is responsible? What can be done? What should be done?¹³

Working with techniques such as plots, and following a consistent story-line can help to navigate through complex phenomena and help readers to understand subsequent policy recommendations and increase their believability¹⁴. Readers will judge messages based on their plausibility, trust of the author but also if they feel moved by the text, if it keeps their interest and if they can connect to the content¹⁵.

¹² Denning, S. (2000). *Using stories to spark organisational change*. International Storytelling Foundation. Available at:

http://www.providersedge.com/docs/km_articles/Using_Stories_to_Spark_Organizational_Change.pdf

¹³ Frank, A. (2010). *Letting stories breathe. A socio-narratology*. Chicago Press.

¹⁴ Needham, C. (2011). Personalization: From storyline to practice. *Social Policy & Administration*. DOI: 10.1111/J.1467-9515.2010.00753.x

¹⁵ Hajer, M (1993). Discourse Coalitions and the Institutionalization of Practice: The Case of Acid Rain in Britain. IN Fischer, F. and Forrester, J. *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*. Duke University Press.

During conversations with academics and organisations and while reviewing existing literature it became apparent that using stories as a way of communicating a policy message can be done in different ways and with different aims in mind. In the following section I will discuss three main techniques:

- (1) Case studies – the classic technique,
- (2) Stories to create a vision – campaign stories,
- (3) ‘Zooming out’ – stories of complexity.

Table 1: Stories as communication

1. Descriptive case studies – the classic technique

The use of case studies within research has a long tradition within the social sciences and is most commonly classed as a form of qualitative research.¹⁶ Descriptive case studies aim to provide a rich description of the phenomenon under study¹⁷ and to provide real life context.¹⁸

In a policy context case studies are often based on knowledge that has been gained from projects, or services. Case studies might include summaries of what took place and describe the event or intervention.¹⁶

Limitations:

Case studies are often based on observations and evaluations are based on the subjective experience of participants. They might be powerful to illustrate existing practice but can be unsystematic in their choice of what to present. This means that there is room for bias in concentrating on practice examples that fit the argument or that are easy to access for researchers.

2. Stories to create a vision – The Obama campaign

Stories are helpful to build a connection between people’s own personal experiences and the experiences of the ‘other’⁴. Thus, stories have the ability to connect people and the use of stories has

¹⁶ Miles, M. and Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. SAGE publications.

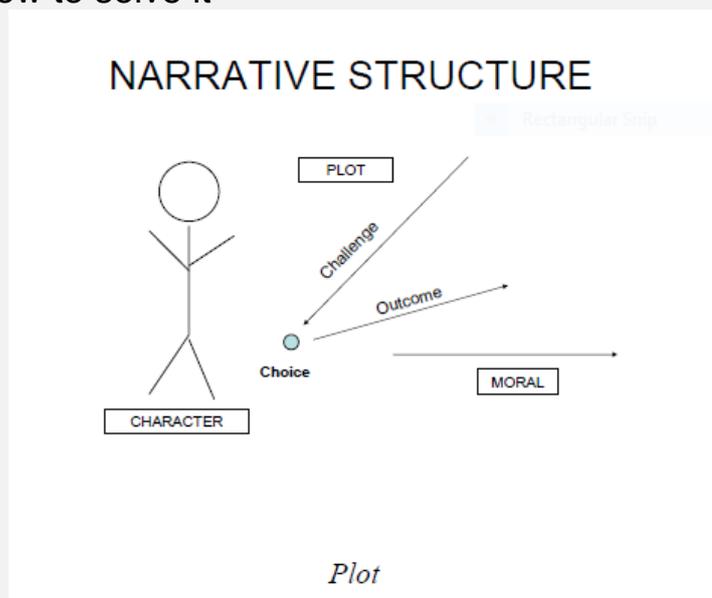
¹⁷ Yin, R. (2008). *Case Study Research. Design and Methods*. SAGE publications.

¹⁸ UK Health Forum (2016). *How to write a case study in public health: Guidelines and template*. Public Health England. UKPHR. Available at: <https://www.ukphr.org/news/uk-health-forum-guidance-and-template-on-how-to-write-a-case-study-in-public-health/>

been explored as a way to unite people to create a common vision. In this context stories focus on the question of WHY more than HOW: Why does it matter? Why should we care? ^{19 20}

Ganz ^{19 20}, a lecturer at Harvard university and a key member of Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, offers guidelines on how to write stories that are able to influence policies and change government agendas. Ganz writes: *Public narrative are woven from three elements: a story of why I have been called, a story of self; a story of why we have been called, a story of us; and a story of the urgent challenge on which we are called to act, a story of now.*

Ganz (2008) suggests that the structure of the story is centred around a main character who is faced with a challenge that leads to them making a choice which leads to a certain outcome. In the end the story needs to be able offer a moral, an argument for what the underlying problem is and how to solve it



(Ganz, 2008, <https://changemakerspodcast.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Ganz-WhatsPublicNarrative08.pdf>)

Further resources can be found here:

<https://workingnarratives.org/article/personal-and-political/>
<https://workingnarratives.org/article/public-narrative/>

Limitations:

¹⁹ Ganz, M. (2008). *What is public narrative*. Available at: <https://changemakerspodcast.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Ganz-WhatsPublicNarrative08.pdf>

²⁰ Ganz, M. (2011). Public Narrative, Collective Action, and Power. IN Odugbemi, S. and Lee, T. *Accountability Through Public Opinion: From Inertia to Public Action*. The World Bank.

Stories that centre around a main character do not automatically result in a recognition that there is a need for social change. They might even add to an individualised view, emphasising individual responsibility over systemic influences. Therefore it is important to highlight societal influences and the interdependence of people and their circumstances throughout the story.

Additionally, the story of one might not be representative of all and references to quantitative data can help to increase trust in the credibility and transferability of the story.

3. 'Zooming out' – Stories of complexity

One of the limitations of categorical and thematic approaches to writing reports is that they often struggle to communicate circumstances and interdependence.¹¹ Stories on the other hand are able to illustrate context and complexity and to make causal relationships visible.^{6, 21} Throughout a story, actions and events can be positioned within their societal, organisational, cultural and historic context. This can help readers to gain a better understanding of how the world works by embedding contextual influences in the concrete doings of people.^{22 23} Stories of complexity encourage researchers to take a step back from their data to identify key problems, draw out ethics and build bridges to the cultural and political spheres that surround the data.^{6, 24}

Developing an understanding of context is particularly useful for researchers who work with complex concepts that are multi-layered. This report will illustrate this later on in relation to the concept of 'social capital'.

Limitations:

Research highlights that existing stories on the same subject can vary significantly. For example, within research on climate change the use of stories to influence people's attitudes has been shown to be very effective but it has also highlighted that different stories will identify

²¹ Dudwick, N., Kuehnast, K., Jones, V. and Woolcock, M. (2006). *Analysing social capital in context. A guide to using qualitative methods and data*. The World Bank Institute. Available at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/WBI/Resources/Analyzing_Social_Capital_in_Context-FINAL.pdf

²² Erickson, F. (1977). Some approaches to inquiry in school-community ethnography. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*. DOI: 10.1525/aeq.1977.8.2.05x1396r

²³ Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five Misunderstandings about case study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*. doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363

different villains/problems²⁴ (e.g. large companies, national governments, scientific community, the consumer). Stories can have multiple valid interpretations and the possibility that people will view different stories on the same problem as equally true is the main limitation of using stories within policy research. It is not enough to merely present stories and researchers will need to engage in careful analysis to unravel the complexity and identify key-factors. Making reference to quantitative data and using robust evidence within stories is crucial. Risks can be mitigated by being transparent, striving for clarity and making reference to quantitative data.

Stories as method

The two main reasons to use stories as a research method in a policy context can be summarised as:

- (1) to make sense of experiences, and
- (2) to promote participatory practice and involve people within the policy making process.

While a research project that aims to explore experiences might involve participatory methods it might also draw on methods that are more researcher led, especially in the phase of analysis and writing up findings.

Table 2: Stories as method

1. Making sense

Quantitative data can help researchers to give an overview of the extensiveness of a problem but questions of how and why will often remain unanswered. Listening to the stories of people affected can help researchers to understand the barriers and constraints that people experience, how they make sense of their experiences and the resources and strategies they find helpful.

As we have argued before, using stories as a method to make sense of the data stands in contrast to thematic approaches to data analysis. Thematic approaches attempt to find similarities across their data, thus the analysis is 'similarity based'¹². Interview and text sequences are

²⁴ Jones, M. (2013). Cultural Characters and Climate Change: How Heroes Shape Our Perception of Climate Science. *Social Science Quarterly*. DOI: 10.1111/ssqu.12043

coded and recoded into smaller units and consequently by working with quotes, the small text units are decontextualized and categories instead of process frame the analysis. Stories on the other hand can inform an analysis that closely works with context.^{11, 25} Researchers often use interviews but data collection might also involve other methods such as observations or arts based approaches.

Examples of analytic approaches that work with a focus on stories are narrative inquiry²⁶; narrative research²⁷; narrative profiles²⁸; writing as a method of inquiry²⁹; ethnography³⁰ and life story research³¹ or narrative ethics³².

Limitations: Stories will often be based on the perspective of one individual and leave out different perspectives. Furthermore, the storied text might be interpreted differently than intended based on readers' own assumptions and experiences. Therefore it is helpful to provide a discussion that surrounds the stories and that includes contextual information and draws on further evidence and information.

Researchers carefully need to think about who will have ownership of the story (also applies to participatory approaches).

2. Empowering participatory practice

The co-creation of stories goes one step further as it empowers participants to write their own stories. Using stories might be one way to promote participation and involvement and link people's experience with policy-making processes.^{33,34} To ensure that participation does not

²⁵ Riessman, C. (1993). *Narrative Analysis*. Qualitative Research Methods Series, No 30. SAGE

²⁶ Wells, K. (2011). *Narrative inquiry*. Oxford University Press.

²⁷ Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R. and Zilber, T. (1998). *Narrative research: Reading, Analysis and Interpretation*. SAGE Publications.

²⁸ Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research. A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. Teachers College Press.

²⁹ Richardson, L. and St Pierre, E. (2005). Writing: A method of inquiry. IN Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. SAGE publications.

³⁰ Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., Delamont, S., Lofland, J. and Lofland, L. (2001). *Handbook of ethnography*. SAGE publications.

³¹ Brannen, J. (2013). Life Story Talk: Some reflections on narrative in qualitative interviews. *Sociological Research Online*. doi.org/10.5153/sro.2884

³² Frank, A. (2014). Narrative Ethics as Dialogical Story-Telling. *The Hastings Center Report*. doi:[10.1002/hast.263](https://doi.org/10.1002/hast.263)

³³ Christensen, J. (2012). Telling stories: Exploring research storytelling as a meaningful approach to knowledge mobilization with Indigenous research collaborators and diverse audiences in community-based participatory research. *The Canadian Geographer*. doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0064.2012.00417.x

³⁴ Gubrium, A. and Harper, K. (2013). *Participatory Visual and Digital Methods*. Developing Qualitative Inquiry. Left Coast Press.

stop at the data collection level researchers need to think in how far they will involve participants within the analysis of data and the development and presentation of findings. Stories offer researchers the possibility to draw on a wide range of creative methods that lend itself to the involvement of participants within all steps of the research process. This might range from story writing workshops to writing poems or developing films/theatre plays to using photography or art where participants themselves create the visuals that will be used in publications.

Limitations: People's own assessment of their circumstances might overlook important contextual information. References to available evidence that can challenge stories or provide support will be helpful.

Reflecting on power relationships between researchers and participants is crucial. Additionally, researchers should reflect on who they engage with and whose voices they include and whose voices might consequently be missing. As participatory research is time consuming there can be a tendency to engage groups that already have strong links to local authorities and government.

It can be frustrating for participants if nothing changes for them once the research is completed and this can lead to anger and resignation.

Table 3: Summary – Purposes and Story approaches

Linking to Practice – Descriptive Case Studies

Aim: To illustrate impact or implementation.

Format: Classic reports (case studies alongside main text), Websites

Methods: Descriptive case studies ^{16, 17, 18, 35, 36}

Example: [Greater Manchester Victims' Services](#); [Creative Scotland – Creative Learning](#)

Creating a vision – Campaign Stories

Aim: To unite people and convince them of key-messages

Format: Speech, presentation; An introduction or conclusion in a report

Methods: Public narrative ^{19, 20}; Sociology of Storytelling³⁷

Example: [Obama speech](#); [Tom Hanks story](#); [Obama campaign stories](#)

Zooming out – Stories of Complexity

Aim: Illustrate complexity and communicate processes

Format: Report or articles, radio or podcasts, non-fiction novels

Methods: Narrative profiles ²⁸; In-depth case studies ^{17, 23}; Ethnography ³⁰

Example: [David's story](#); [Serial \(podcast\)](#); [Palaces for the People](#); [Homeless relocation](#); [Boy X](#); [the water we eat](#)

Making Sense

Aim: To understand how people make sense of their experiences; To understand how people make decisions

Format: Report; Book chapter; Short stories; Poems

Methods: Narrative inquiry ²⁶; Narrative research ²⁷; Narrative profiles ²⁸; Life story research ³¹; Ethnography ³⁰; Writing as a method of inquiry ²⁹; Narrative ethics ³²

Example: [Seidman's profiles](#) (p.133ff); [Social fiction series](#); [The Renewal of Generosity](#)

Empowering Participatory Practice

Aim: To empower people to write their own stories and to be equal partners in the research process

Format: Written, visual or oral stories

Methods: Participatory research methods ^{33, 34}

Example: [Young People Creating Belonging](#); [Places for all](#); [Place Standard](#)

³⁵ Stake, R. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. SAGE publications.

³⁶ Merriam, S. (1988). *Case Study Research in Education. A qualitative approach*. Jossey-Bass Inc.

³⁷ Poletta, F., Chen, P., Gardner, B. and Motes, A. (2011). The Sociology of Storytelling. *The Annual Review of Sociology*. Doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150106

Recommendations

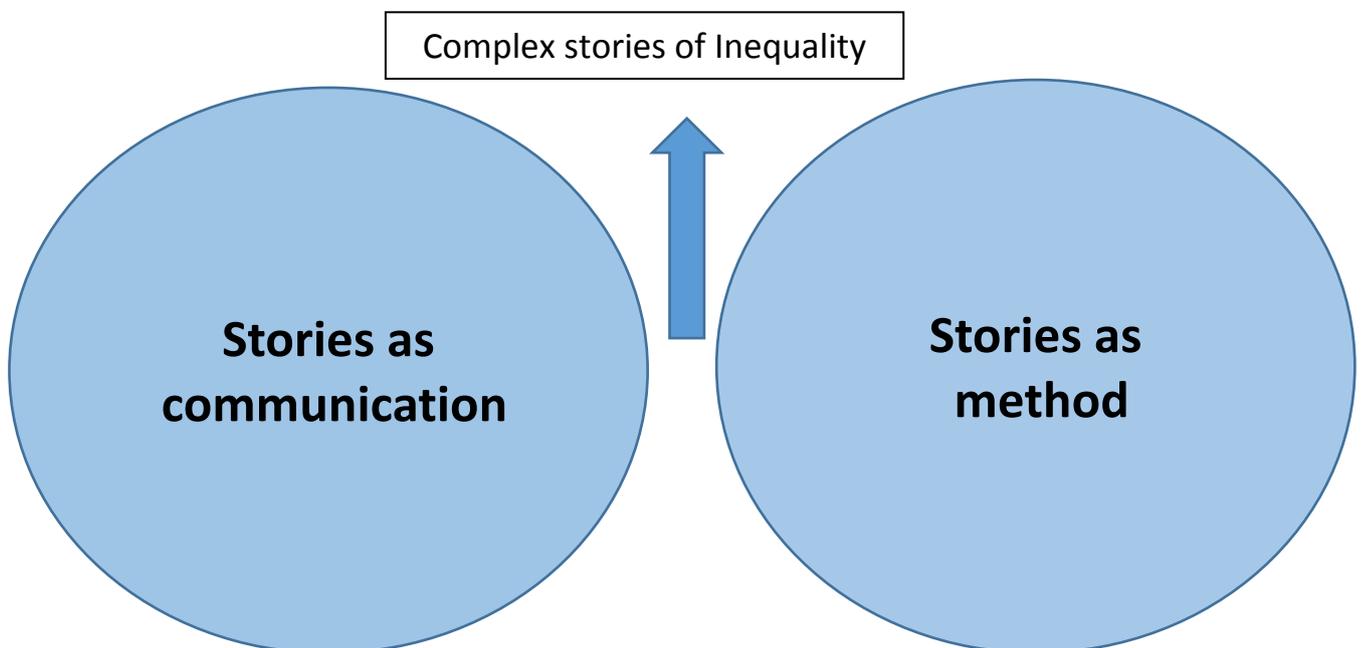
During my interviews, the researchers, academics and organisations with experience of using stories in their work saw the benefits of stories for policy research, as a means of capturing complexity.

This was for two main reasons:

1. stories can complement existing quantitative indicators and show interconnections between different areas (e.g. housing, transport, social infrastructure, health, education)
2. stories can help to communicate findings in more compelling ways and connect with audiences on an emotional level.

Additionally, all interviews emphasised that it would be best practice to use participatory methods to empower people to write or communicate their own stories. Using stories of complexity could help researchers to include contextual information and create larger stories to reflect how inequality is created.

HOW TO WRITE STORIES OF COMPLEXITY?



The literature review and interviews highlighted a number of tools that researchers can use when attempting to write stories of complexity. However, they are quite broad and looking at the examples given in table 3 will be an important first step.

Some tools to help:

- Identify a main character and write the story from their perspective (individual, place, group). This will include references to emotions and feelings. Difficult and emotional content should not be left out but the story should be written in simple language.
- Focus on movement and momentum by creating a sense of time. Events or actions can build on each other so that the reader gets an understanding of sequence and process.
- Include contextual information to 'zoom out' and illustrate how the story is embedded in larger stories of organisational practice, institutions and cultural and economic circumstances.
- Create space for questions and uncertainty to encourage the reader to think and engage with the complexity.

The report now considers if and how these methods could relate to an important element of the National Performance Framework's outcome on 'communities' and the social capital measure within it.

3. Stories of Social Capital

Social capital, as it refers to the wellbeing of people in their relationships and places, is included in the National Performance Framework as part of the vision for community wellbeing.

This report now considers if and how qualitative data and storytelling approaches, can contribute to a common understanding of what this means, and how this outcome can be achieved.

3.1 What is social capital?

Social capital as a concept has gained importance within research on communities and community wellbeing over past years³⁸. It can be summarised as

“(...) the relationships and networks of support that people experience, the interconnections within communities, and the involvement of people and communities in decisions that affect their lives.”³⁸

This focuses on the idea that social relationships matter – they help people to achieve their own objectives, and they are an end in themselves, and an element of wellbeing in their own right.

Using social capital as a policy goal raises questions for policy researchers, to think about the types of networks and relationships that help or hinder access to public services, community resources and how networks of support are able to promote participation and involvement in decision-making.

Statistical indicators that are commonly used to assess the levels of social capital in society are usually grouped in some of the following dimensions: (1) social networks, (2) community cohesion, (3) social participation and (4) community empowerment.

In the following section we will give a brief overview of additional processes that are commonly used to describe social capital. For a more thorough definition of the concept and a list of the four indicators and

³⁸ Dodds, S. (2016). *Social contexts and health: a GCPH synthesis*. Glasgow Centre for Population Health. Available at: https://www.gcph.co.uk/publications/620_social_contexts_and_health.

their sub-indicators please refer to Findlay et al (2017)¹ and Dodds (2016).³⁸

Dimensions of social capital

Social capital relates to both **cognitive** and **affective** processes (trust, feeling of belonging, feeling valued and accepted) and **structural** ones.³⁸

Additionally, authors often differentiate between **horizontal** and **vertical** networks. Horizontal networks describe relationships between people that are equal and within those relationships most authors make a differentiation between the processes of **bonding** and **bridging**. Bonding refers to supports and relationships that are formed between people who are similar (e.g. in relation to age, religion, ethnicity etc.) while bridging refers to relationships and connections that are formed between people or groups that have different views and backgrounds. Vertical networks describe hierarchical relationships and address the role of power.³⁸

Findlay et al (2017)¹ connect social capital and community wellbeing by promoting a perspective of social capital that explores people's networks of support across local **economic**, **physical** and **social** spheres (or their absence).

Statistical data are not enough

The dimensions noted above highlight a potential complexity and multidimensionality within this concept that has consequences for policy researchers.

Social capital is a complex and multi-layered concept. It is also rather abstract and it can be difficult to understand how this concept can be appropriately and consistently applied to everyday life and experience. To better understand how different processes interlink and how social capital influences people's lives, researchers therefore advocate for the value of integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches²¹.

Statistical data can provide a robust, general idea of social capital and highlight trends in different local areas²¹. Additionally, statistical data can be helpful to identify correlations between social capital and other areas (e.g. health, education, employment). However, while quantitative

data will provide **breadth**, qualitative methods will be able to add **depth** to the government's understanding of social capital.

This depth is helpful because social capital describes complex relationships between individuals and groups of people and statistical data alone cannot adequately illustrate the nuances of the power and importance of those relationships and the contexts in which they occur.²¹

Value of stories to capture social capital

One of the main criticisms of current research around social capital is that accounts are too often stripped of context.^{39 40} As we have argued in the first part of the report this is one of the strengths of stories – to highlight circumstance and to situate abstract concepts within real life contexts.

To give a contextual and in-depth account of social capital, stories will need to capture local economic, physical and social environments. Stories might refer to different levels of social capital: the personal level, neighbourhood level or city level and portray the uniqueness of different perspectives.

A focus on Inequality

Qualitative research on social capital often involves an analysis of patterns of inclusion and exclusion from support networks and an exploration of the distribution of social capital to highlight inequalities.^{1, 41}

Findlay et al (2017)¹ write:

*One of the key challenges in relation to enabling inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe communities going forward is tackling the **persistent and increasing levels of inequalities between people and communities in Scotland**. (...) Tackling inequalities and promoting equality of opportunity and outcome,*

³⁹ Naughton, L. (2014). Geographical narratives of social capital: Telling different stories about the socio-economy with context, space, place, power and agency. *Progress in Human Geography*. DOI: 10.1177/0309132513488731

⁴⁰ Sheppard, E. (2011) Geography, nature, and the question of development. *Dialogues in Human Geography*. doi.org/10.1177/2043820610386334

⁴¹ Narayan, D. and Petesch, P. (2000). *Voices of the Poor. Crying out for Change*. The World Bank. Oxford University Press.

therefore, remain a major challenge, and interventions and support are required to address this.

This means that social capital has the potential to highlight how inequality is created in the interaction between people and the resources available to them in different communities. Additionally, through a focus on inequality social capital will connect to a wide range of areas such as public service delivery, housing, employment, health, education. For that reason, our engagement with organisations and individuals to write stories of social capital had a strong focus on inequality from the outset.

3.2 Stories of social capital

The report now presents four 'big' stories of social capital.

Two stories are written from the perspective of individuals, highlighting different aspects of inequality, one story explores the community level, written from the perspective of an organisation, and another story looks at the role of spaces.

After the four big stories follow a number of smaller stories. While the 'big' stories were written by the researcher and include both reflections and direct quotes, the 'small' stories are direct extracts from conversations with organisations, individuals and researchers and have not been rewritten.

While the 'big' stories try to create a holistic picture, the 'small' stories often illuminate specific processes and dimensions (e.g. participation, community cohesion). They differ from traditional quotes, as although small, they still describe processes and make connections instead of only illuminating one theme, or describing one feeling or view.

The stories illustrate the complexity of people's experiences. They have therefore been written to be read and used in full rather than being split into smaller sequences in other contexts. All names have been changed and pseudonyms are used.

They have also been written to complement the statistical data that exists, and it is recommended that, in practice, policy researchers present these stories in the wider context of social capital understandings and the quantitative information.

Story 1: Black clouds and open skies – James’s story

I decided to follow James into this story by starting at his favourite place up where the clay pits lie.

From there you can look over the whole of Glasgow, James says. And on a lovely summer’s day you can sit there for hours and if it was not for the fact that you have all the noise from the nearby



highway you can get lost in your thoughts. So if you take people up there who are new to the area, who think it is this horrible, junkie ridden area then you take them here and they are so surprised.

James is proud of his community. He cares about it deeply. I can feel that when I talk to him. *I am not going to say that it is a dump*, he tells me. *Why always start with the negatives? I am trying to bring over the positives and what people are doing.*

This is James’s story of where he lives and of other people that live there. It is about how people try to make their community a safer and kinder place but it is also a story about the community and its social, physical and economic realities that can stand in the way and that can make living here difficult.

James has always lived in the community and he has seen it change over the past decades. James says it used to be a community where you would leave school one day and move into a job right away.

There was plenty of factories around. Then during the 80s it was as if a storm hit the community and all the big industries closed down. It was like a domino effect, one went down and then bang bang bang.

James was a teenager through this and he remembers that things got bad very quickly. Unemployment went up and then the drugs hit the area. *There was lots of violence*, James says. *But that was in the 80s and the 90s. It is different now, not like it used to be. Yes there is a drug problem, we got high alcohol, there is very little employment, there is a*

high rate of elderly and there is a high rate of people on sickness benefits, but there is a lot of good things happening now, he says. Things have changed but it is frustrating for James that it still got the stigma of what it was like in the 80s. So there are a lot of judgements made about you if you come from here.

Family is important to the people here and it would not be unusual for parents, their children and grandchildren to all live close together. *Just now we have members of the same family below us, above us and beside us, James tells me. There are groups of people who volunteer and who try to make spaces accessible for the community. They have raised money to get park benches and to put in goal posts so the kids can play football. People try to connect, to help each other but it can be hard at times.*



James thinks it has a lot to do with people's self-esteem and during our conversation he mentions the feeling of a 'black cloud' hanging over the place several times. *Sometimes you feel like there is a heaviness and a black cloud over the area. There is an expectation of things being done to you. What does he mean by things being done to people I ask.*

James starts to tell me about the facilities and services that have closed.

The local community centres have been knocked down, schools and doctor surgeries have closed and you just take it as that is what happens here so people develop this kind of attitude of this is as good as it is going to get.

In the end of our conversation I ask James what community wellbeing means to him. He says, community wellbeing is when there is a vibrant feeling in the community where all people feel as if they are part and they want to be in the community. *There are lots of groups and activity within the community that people have started and that they want to be part of. James is part of the local church and he volunteers with different groups. You find there is a core of people that volunteer at events, he says. It is*

always the same faces that turn up so the hard thing is getting people motivated to get involved. It is breaking the ice with people and asking if they can help.

He feels that volunteering can be beneficial for both the community and the individual. He feels that there is so much potential within everyone but sometimes people forget. *It is bringing it out and giving them value. Let them know that you want to hear their story, because they feel as if they are forgotten about.*

Story 2: Starting from social connections



I am meeting with the head of a Scotland-wide run community development program called Link Up. The program facilitates locally run projects that promote community wellbeing through participation and volunteering across a range of activities including sport, gardening, arts and cooking, informed by what local people say they want.

The program has worked with twelve different communities across Scotland over the past six years. They are in different parts of Scotland but all experience high rates of poverty and inequality. He tells me that this was the starting point of the program, a recognition that there were many communities in Scotland that were not getting lifted out of poverty. *Poverty and inequality seemed to be prevalent in a lot of places, he says, but it was not just that they seemed to be persisting, in some areas they were growing. So, we asked ourselves, why is that the case?*

The organisation found that in most communities, issues seemed quite intractable and interdependent; intersecting education, crime, economic growth, mental and physical health. *There were definitely structural problems, but what stood out when we first asked local people, and third and public sector bodies for permission to launch a project, was that almost every one of them said that the community had lost its connectivity. Things like gala days, these were events that used to happen, but not anymore. Communities had lost the connections that used to be there between people and for many of them, that was a fundamental barrier to them driving change, whether for themselves or their community.* He feels this is an issue that spans generations and that the program is fighting against decades of breakdown in the local social infrastructure and a change in cultural environment. *I think this has several dimensions to it, he says. Whilst the program is open to all, many of the individuals that participate in it are vulnerable, struggling with the effects of trauma, bereavement and chronic violence.* He tells me that recently it has become clear to the organisation that a significant proportion of people they work with have suffered adverse childhood experiences. *I think the prevalence of ACEs is higher than what we believe in Scotland, he says. So we can see that many people*

experience poor mental and physical health, addiction and social isolation and in this sense some people are withdrawing from society. But it is not just the person that withdraws, in some communities it seems to be society that is withdrawing from people. Arguably, you could say there is less kindness, compassion and neighbourliness in our communities, but people also disengage with some of the services that are there to help them, because they have perhaps had a negative experience, lack confidence to ask for help or see the service as stigmatising in some way. It's a position which is compounded by a pulling-back of public service provision, making people feel removed from services. I think the barriers to people engaging with services is very complex and the experiences of engaging with agencies that are there to help them is not always positive. Staff don't always have the time, they don't always have the capacity to engage people in a human way. So it is about the quality of the interaction between people and systems and structures, but those structures have been eroded.

Despite it all many people are engaging with the organisation and the local workers. *If someone comes through the door to us, and that can be a difficult step, what happens is that they connect with other local people they would not otherwise have met had they not pushed that door open.*

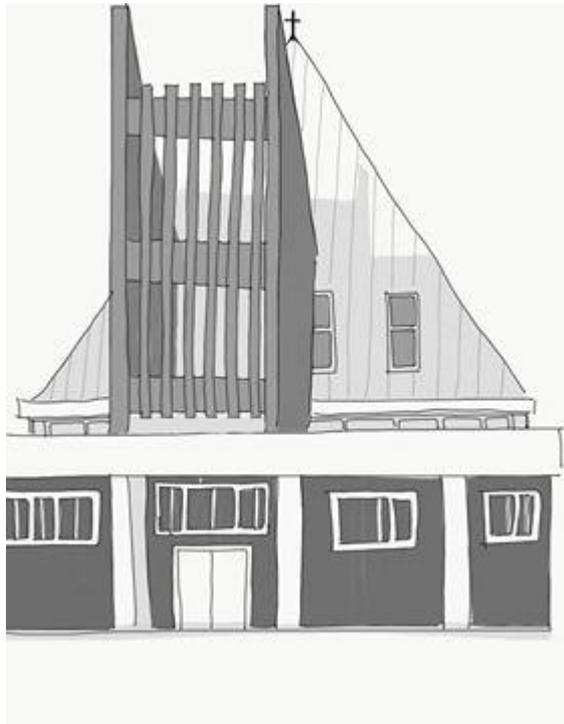
When that connection is repeated over time, the connections become relationships and friendships start to form. There is a fundamental shift as the person builds supportive relationships, confidence and self-esteem – but it all starts from the social connections. Local workers create conditions in which people can make changes. We don't empower, he says, we create spaces in which people can become empowered.



He feels that some communities, like those the program works with, can find it difficult to start initiatives themselves. *They need help to get the thing going and in the same way that you have teachers, firemen, policemen, doctors and dentists, community builders should be an equal part of the infrastructure of communities.*

Story 3: A tale of two spaces

The pyramid



It is a late Wednesday morning and I am walking to the Pyramid centre at Anderston from Glasgow Queen Street station. It is the beginning of December and it is raining and cold. It might not have been a good idea to walk. As I turn into Elderslie street I can see the turquoise pyramid towering over the blocks of flats. At first glance it is an odd looking building but it is a building that you won't forget.

I enter the building with two elderly women. They are chatting and laughing and one supports the other to step through the door. As we enter

there is an open kitchen behind a counter to our right where people are busy preparing a meal. They say hi to the two ladies, who lean on to the counter to ask about the menu for today. Then the two ladies turn to the left to enter a bigger room that has been transformed into a dining space. Half the tables are already full of people. I say hi to the kitchen staff and then make my way upstairs. I arrive at the top of the stairs and peek into the heart of the building, its big sanctuary space that opens up into the roof of the pyramid. The building has been used as a community space since the 70s. Upstairs is the sanctuary space and several offices and meeting rooms that are used by third sector organisations and local groups. The rooms downstairs are used for events and classes such as a karate for kids, language lessons or yoga. I turn into one of the corridors and enter the offices of 'faith in communities', one of the organisations that is based here. I am meeting their staff to see if I might be able to learn more about the building and how it is used.

The building is owned by the church of Scotland but a number of years ago the church decided to give up ownership and sell the building. When people in the local community and those that use the building first learned that the church was thinking of selling the building, they were very concerned because the building is used almost every day of the year. It sparked a process of local people and organisations coming

together to think about how to save the building. A new charity was established and the organisation now has 300 members and is in the end stages of securing funding through the Scottish land fund to take over ownership of the building. Later on I meet with two members of the trust and both tell me that it has been interesting to see how people have grown in enthusiasm. *Obviously there is quite a fear of being responsible for something like this but, you know, lots more people are coming on board and saying this is something we need to do. When an institution provides an asset people are glad that the asset is there, but when they have to take responsibility over owning and taking care of that asset they embark on a new journey and a new skill set is learned. It leads to a greater sense of participation. People are coming together and share their skills through the building.*

After some introductions in the office upstairs I ask about the group that is downstairs and I am told that this is the Wednesday lunch club that runs every week. I ask if it might be possible to join so we go down and ask and I am told that I am very welcome. So I go and join one of the tables. There are 36 people in total, mostly elderly people but also a few younger ones and a group of young adults with learning disabilities and their carers. At first I feel slightly out of place but I soon start talking with the group and the room is filled with lively chatter. I am made to feel welcome. While our three courses are served; lentil soup followed by chips, meat pie and baked beans and lastly jelly with canned fruit; I talk to the three people that sit next to me. *'We have been coming here for years. We always sit at the same table'*, they tell me. *'The lunch is open to everyone but it gets busier closer to Christmas'*. People tell each other about their grandchildren, who is ill, who could not come and about upcoming events. Some people I speak to are also part of the community trust.

After lunch half the people leave to go home but the other half stays on to play bingo. I go to talk to Mary* who has been part of the team that runs the lunch club for over 20 years. She tells me the club was set up as an initiative between social work and the church. *The pyramid lies between housing that was built for the elderly and a disability complex, so it is great for people to access. We do home visits as well*, she tells me. *I have been visiting one gentleman for over 18 years now. He used to come to the lunch but as his physical disability got worse he was not able to come anymore, so now I visit him in his flat. 18 years, it is a long time. We are friends now.* I ask her about her involvement in the community trust. *It is great*, she says. *The lunch club will continue to run*

and we are happy that we can keep the building. There is really nothing else here.

Eric Liddell Centre

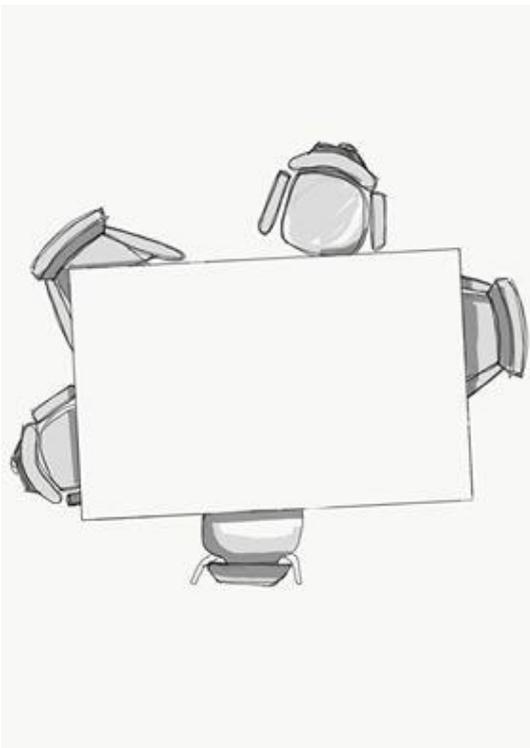
One week later I am outside again on my way to the Eric Liddell Centre. It is not rainy but it is windy, very windy. I am walking from Bruntsfield towards Morningside as I approach the centre. The building is a former church that stands at 'Holy Corner' between Bruntsfield and Morningside. I enter the building and I am greeted by a big Christmas tree and the smell of fresh coffee. The building now hosts the Eric Liddell Centre, a charity that runs several projects and courses funded by both donations directly to the centre; and by grants and trusts who fund specific projects. The building has been converted inside and now has four levels. Downstairs there is a café and a bigger room. When I enter a yoga class is just about to start. Children's music is coming from another room to the right and I can hear clapping and people singing along to nursery rhymes. To the back of the ground floor are rooms with second-hand toys, children clothes and books. I look up and I can see the other three floors that have been put in from the middle upwards. One can walk around each floor in a circle. On level 1 there is a day service for people with dementia, on level 2 there are offices and rooms that are used by different third sectors organisations and on level 3 are further offices and a bigger room where an exercise class is just taking place. While I am walking from level to level I can see the old stone walls to the side of the building and light is shining through the stained glass windows of the old church.

I am here to meet two members of the centre that are involved in different projects, run in the building and outside in communities further away. The café downstairs and many of the classes are open to everyone, but the centre also provides a number of specific clubs and services for people with dementia and their carers. There are two lunch clubs, and a befriending service that is run through volunteers⁴². Volunteers also work at the café or sell at the stalls to the back. The centre works with a variety of programs, trusts and charities and has connections with both the University of Edinburgh and Napier University.

⁴² *The clubs are co-ordinated by the Dementia Support and Befriending Co-ordinator, whose work in the Centre is funded by the Life Changes Trust, the Robertson Trust, the RS Macdonald Trust and Celtic FC Foundation. There are also two befriending programmes, one for people living with dementia; and one for carers; also funded by the above trusts. Both the lunch clubs and the befriending are kindly supported by the help of volunteers.*

It is felt that cross-collaboration and working in partnership with others has added to a rich exchange of experiences, ideas and resources.

Additionally to what happens inside the building I am told about a recent project that works with three communities on the outskirts of Edinburgh. The communities are part of Edinburgh but because they border with the countryside many services that are active in the city do not cover them as it is difficult to find volunteers willing to travel. *I have found that there is a strong community sense, a lot going on and some very well used community spaces there*, the head of the project tells me. *But because everything is run by small committees they struggle to get new people to join and the people that are running them are in their seventies or eighties themselves. It is a fantastic set up but it is also vulnerable. They feel that it is difficult to keep it going and to get a new generation to take it on.*



After our conversation, the Dementia Support and Befriending Co-ordinator asks if I would like to be a guest today at the lunch club, including staying on for the movement session that will be the activity for the club today. The lunch club is held on the ground floor in a room to the side. I am introduced to everyone and then I go and sit at a round table with four others. It is a very lively group and there is a lot of banter and laughter. Two are from the local area but the other two live further away.

Everyone talks openly about dementia and how it helps coming here to stay active. *We used to go dancing*, one couple tells me. *When we were younger.*

After lunch the tables are moved to the side and we all take our chairs to sit in a big circle. The movement class is run by the 'Movement for memories' outreach program⁴³. The music starts and while different pieces of music are played we follow the gentle movements of the tutor who is leading the seated exercise session today. There is a lot of

⁴³ The program is funded by the Life Changes Trust, in collaboration with Edinburgh Leisure

laughter. A lot. After forty minutes the music stops and the class ends. But before the group moves on to have tea and coffee everyone starts to sing a song. People are moving in their chairs, waving their arms in the air and singing loudly:

Never mind the weather, never mind the rain. As long as we're together....

Here we go again, happy as can be. All good pals and jolly good company!

I leave both spaces feeling good. It is a warm feeling. Which is funny in a way because something both spaces have in common is that they are quite cold inside. While walking home I think about what the two spaces mean to people. That was my initial question. The people I talked to said it gave them the chance to socialise, to chat and laugh, to learn new things. And something that struck me, that most people said, was that it simply offered them another place to be. That it offered them a space outside of their own home where they felt welcome.

Story 4: The messy and the small – Kay’s story



I talk to Kay on the phone and we end up speaking for almost two hours. She has a lot to say. At the end of our conversation I note down two words: Hope and Failure. I feel that there is both in her experience, experiences of failure, frustration and resignation. But there is also hope and the will to engage and help to make a difference. I ask Kay if she thinks both feelings contradict each other. She answers that her hope is that if you understand how you have failed me, you won't fail me again.

Kay is disabled through chronic illness and has been ill for a long time. She is in her forties now. Kay has left the house 17 times this year, mostly to go to medical appointments or public engagement events. *But I can only go when the right support is provided for me and this is not always the case*, she tells me.

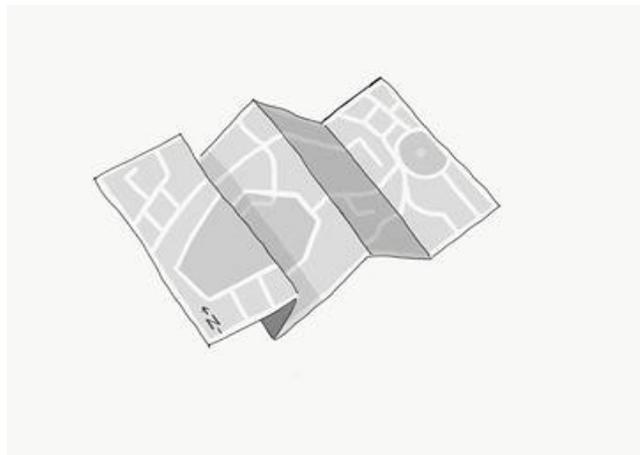
My ability to go out and about is limited and I cannot go on public transport. A lot of people assume that your friends and family will provide support to access things, but if you speak to anyone with chronic illness you will hear a very common story: In the first few years when you are ill people offer to help and then as it goes on and on and on and on and on you have fewer friends and they are less willing to provide help. So there comes a point where you run out of people and you turn to organisations and the state and say can you help me and the answer is NO. I keep being told I am the wrong age, I have the wrong type of disability, I live in the wrong part of the country.

Kay feels that the level of support that she needs is not big but without it she is really stuck. *For instance, there is a community centre within reach of my home, and I could go there if I took a taxi and knew that someone will meet me from the taxi and take me in, fetch me a chair, take me to the room where the activity is taking place, introduce me to people, make sure I knew where the toilets are, give me a mobile phone number to call in case I get into difficulty and make sure I get home safely. But you can't count on that, unless there was someone really nice, because it is not an official thing. It is an exception that they made. It is a kindness that they offered you. It is not a service.*

Later on she tells me about a public engagement she went to where she knew the organisers through email and phone contact and they knew her and how it made all the difference. *It helped me to know that she was there and that she knew what support I might need and it helped me not to need the support. That is the other thing people don't get. It is taking less energy from me because I am not so worried. I am not hyper vigilant to what is happening around me. So the more support I have the less support I need.*

Kay says that while she needs support to go out she feels that the biggest barrier is lack of information. To help me understand she asks me to look up her postcode. So after our call I go to google maps and type in her postcode.

I can see blocks of flats and a number of two story semi-detached houses. It is a large urban area with busy roads, busy traffic and a few green spaces here and there. She asks me to go and search for activities and events in her area.



Go through the pages, she says, and think to yourself as someone who lives here what did I just learn about the place and would I go there. I can see a hall on the map close to her and I click on it but it does not have a website. I find a few other centres and organisations close by who have websites with information about their programs and contact details but I can see what she means. There is little information about the accessibility of buildings.

No one is providing information about the environment you will get when you arrive, walking distances and noise and light, how long the thing lasts and is there someone you can ask for help and where is the toilet. They just say it is fully accessible by which they mean they have a wheelchair ramp. So you phone people and you ask questions and people say 'just pop along for a wee chat' but people in my position do not pop.

Another main barrier Kay mentions throughout our conversation is a focus on labels and fixed organisational practices.



In terms of social care support it is mainly care agencies and the vast majority of them are geared towards the elderly and children, she tells me. What is in the middle tends to be labelled so you have addiction problems, or you have mental health problems or you have epilepsy or some other specific condition. So you can't just say what service you need. You have to meet certain criteria and there isn't a mechanism to report unmet need, to say there is no service for me.

I have £22 a week Disability Living Allowance and no service wants it. There is no service for £22 a week or even £90 a

month and the way the organisations are set up they want you to book things in advance, so they can organise their rota, and they want you to book the same time every week. They want you to fit in with what suits them. Another option is to employ someone yourself as a PA, but it is not just that it is impossible to employ someone on £22 a week, it is the fact that I am not fit to do that. I don't have the energy for all that comes with it. So you become more and more isolated and the physical barriers and the resulting isolation mean that you lose your confidence. I do not suffer from a mental illness, she says, but it has an effect on your mind. It has an effect on your confidence.

Everything is overwhelming and actually leaving the house and going to something becomes in itself a problem, which you did not have before. And then there is no support with that either so it creates a level of disability in itself. I can hear her frustration when she talks. This is not a mental illness that I have but the circumstances that I am in create a mental health burden and you then find yourself reading websites about anxiety and being offered anti-depressants and it is not appropriate but that is where you end up.

Despite it all Kay continues to try and talk about her experience and to make suggestions how things could be improved but it is not always easy to get involved. *You are asking local people to take a level of involvement that many people are incapable of and they are incapable not because they are stupid, not because they have no capacity to read and understand but because what is going on in their lives is taking all that they have. For some people the actual distress of being ill, or living*

in poverty, for instance, it just takes up so much energy. Which means that those voices are missing. Kay suggests that we should ask a lot more questions. Who did not come? Who is not there? Why are they not there? But she feels that people don't like looking at what is not working. People don't like failure. I am supposed to say everything is fine and I am supposed to say everything is great but I refuse to do so.

Speaking to Kay I get the sense that what she is partly asking for is actually quite simple. She is asking for honesty - honesty about who remains excluded, about what cannot be offered, what cannot be provided and owning up to it. *For instance, if they say sorry we don't provide transport and if they'd made it clear in the event information then that might be ok, but making me ask and then telling me no you need to provide your own transport makes it harder to even consider being involved in anything. It makes it my problem, not their failing, she says. It is now my problem again, like it's my fault I need help.* After our conversation I wonder if Kay is feeling that she is not listened to despite her attempts to get involved and participate. She does not say it when I ask her but I feel that this might be one of her main frustrations. Not

being listened to, or maybe even more frustratingly being listened to but not being heard.



When I ask Kay what community wellbeing means to her she says: *I think the bigger picture for community wellbeing is information and support. Information to allow people to make choices about what to be involved in and adequate support to overcome barriers to participation, in order that things are genuinely person-centered.*

And it will not be just about one thing, which makes it challenging because it's hard to get people to believe in complex solutions. People like straight forward projects but it's all messier and smaller than that.

SMALL STORIES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Community Empowerment

“They asked me to speak on do you feel you have an involvement on a local level. What I was doing was explaining how you feel disempowered. As a government official it is ok reading the reports and the stats but if you’ve got someone in front of you who is saying ‘look universal credit does not work’. It is taking the stories to the people so they can see what the effects of their decisions and the policies are for people on the ground who are at the other end. I maintain that the majority of people on benefits have now got mental health issues. The system puts you in that role cause the fear, the stress everything that goes with it and you don’t understand what it is like unless you, I hope it never does happen, but unless you are part of the system. So it is good to bring it to the people who implement policies to actually realise that these decisions have this effect on people.”



Social Networks

“Charities or community groups used to exist purely for the social side of things and it was fun you came along and you had a good time. Quite often funding now is attached to an outcome or a label and that completely changes the dynamic. It is very often time limited as well so you can’t work at people’s pace but you are forcing the pace. So often health professionals will refer people to our community groups because their groups are time limited. You are not going to shift somebody in a 12-14 week program and the person is going to that group because it is a mental health group, or a recovery group and that changes the dynamics completely for people. There is a real stigma associated around those types of interventions.”

Community Cohesion

“We were working with one particular community where local health and social care services were relocated and are now located further away. This meant that it became very difficult for people to access social work and police services but what seemed to be even more of a concern was that people told us that they felt that professionals didn’t know their community any longer and they didn’t understand what it is like living there. For them it seemed as if it was all about the money and that they were not seen as a priority. So it is about both the geographical distances but also the social distances that are created



Community Empowerment

“It is important for people to be able to meet others so instead of living in a bubble you are exposed to difference. And through difference you find out things about yourself. That is the great advantage of difference. Difference is not a problem, difference is an opportunity. You do it this way and I do it that way. ‘Why do you do it this way?’ ‘Because my granny used to do it this way.’ It is about spaces where you express compassion and you learn how to express compassion because others do it for you and you build a connection at an inner level.”

Social Networks

“Social capital is one of those terms, you might say it is a jargon term. But at the end of the day what it is about is people coming alive to make the best contribution that they can make and not to be held back or limited by circumstance. And then to create the connection with others who share their passion and their concerns about their community. I think the most important shifts are made in small groups of people coming together to make a difference. You know the quote from Margaret Mead: ‘Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.’”

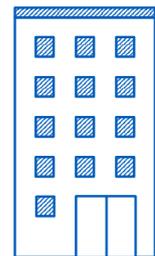


Social Participation

“In order for people to access services they have to be present and local and people have to be able to get to them in ways that meet their particular needs and the needs of their family. When the recent job centre closures were announced and around the city there was huge concern about how would somebody living in the north of Glasgow be able to travel to their new job centre which would be an hour away by bus and there was no way that they would get there on time. Services have to be local and accessible to people and one of the things that many local groups are doing with supporting people is how can a church hall be used for core location services such as citizens advice.”

Socially

“We have community meals that help to bring people together. There are so many micro communities. We have a big Chinese population, there is a big African population and a big eastern European population. So we had these community events to get all the different groups together. And you find once we come together the barriers come down and people start talking. We had a joint Chinese New Year Burns supper and it brings it home to you that actually we are not different.”



Physically

“The local housing association decided that they were going to move the focus of housing from tenements over to semi-detached housing. They knocked the tenements down and moved everybody out with the idea that they build the semi-detached housing and for people to move back in. Then the credit crunch happened and the housing association run out of money. So when they moved people out they ripped a big chunk of the population and the community away. Now they are planning to build a lot of new houses in the next ten years. Some of them shared ownership, some social housing and bought housing. Interesting thing is they are not mixing the housing up. There are going to be bought houses here, shared ownership here and social housing over here somewhere. The bought houses, the ones that are expensive, unless you live in those houses you would not know they were there. They are as far removed from the main roads of the community. It is like we live here but we don’t want to be associated with that lot.”

Economically

“In the 1960s they build these whole communities with no community space and we are still doing it. And we say yeah you will have busses to go somewhere else whereas actually people need spaces to linger in the locality in which they live as much as they need the opportunity to come to the city centre to do things because the relationships in a community are built on the moments of informality. I think it is almost a spiritual thing in that sense. If you want a good community you need spaces where people can bump into each other and where you go not because of a problem that you have. It is a good reason why one of the most important building in a community in a lot of places is the bingo. They do much more than just bingo there. They have a conversation and they will know if someone is not there and then they go and visit them and find out what is going on.”



3.3 Reflections on the stories

The following section discusses (1) how far the stories were able to capture social capital as a concept and (2) if the stories were able to capture process, complexity and build bridges to other policy areas. To conclude, it offers recommendations for future projects.

How did the dimensions of social capital feature in the stories?

The stories offer insights into the dimensions of social capital from unique perspectives and contexts.

James's story includes accounts of people's social networks, participation and volunteering. Descriptions of the local physical and economic environment are tied to a historic view, offering an understanding of how things had been and how they had changed. Additionally, his story highlights affective barriers (feeling judged, stigmatised, 'not feeling I matter') as well as structural and material ones.

The *Starting from Social Connections* and the *Tale of Two Spaces* describe people's social networks and include references to isolation, community cohesion, the importance of places to meet and possibilities for participation.

Kay's Story is about isolation, and describes Kay's experience of public services and community empowerment. In her story the role of structural barriers and hierarchical relationships is central. Both Kay's and James's stories illustrate the connections between structural and affective processes and how inequality affects wellbeing. Listening to people's stories seems to be able to highlight the affective consequences that come with inequality.

It seems that current indicators and sub-indicators used to describe social capital are relevant. However, while all stories describe aspects of social capital, they also move outside of social capital and touch on wider areas.

Building bridges to other policy areas

The stories were written with a focus on social capital but because they are situated within people's lives and within specific local contexts they

move on to include other areas. This shows that social capital is not vast enough to grasp all that which constitutes and adds to inequality and wellbeing.

James's Story touches on drugs, crime, the infrastructure of community services and employment. *Kay's Story* discusses accessibility, lack of information and service provision. Her story questions current service structures and reflects on a transactional model of services compared to a relational one.

Starting from Social Connections raises an awareness of trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), while, the *Tale of Two Spaces* covers funding streams and maintenance of buildings. Finally, the small stories connect to housing, health and social care, transport and cultural differences and inclusion.

To contextualise each story and complement it with quantitative data, researchers will need to draw on wider evidence. References to statistical data limited to social capital indicators will not be enough.

For example, while listening to James' story I asked myself if there was information on the number of community facilities that had closed down in Scotland and I was interested to read about existing evidence on community infrastructure and trends. Is there evidence to support the claim that areas which used to experience high crime and drugs now suffer from lower investment by businesses? Are there links between mental health, growing demands on health services and housing, areas with fewer community facilities and poor transport links?

To contextualise Kay's story it will be helpful for readers to have more information about accessibility data and how accessibility is measured (does it only include wheelchair access). Her story might benefit from a discussion around existing evidence on third sector funding trends, an explanation how services operate (specialist vs open to all; short term vs long term) and how public engagement works (including data on which groups are represented and who is not).

To put the other stories into perspective readers will benefit among others from evidence on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)⁴⁴ trends; uptake of community owned buildings and their success; data on

⁴⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/adverse-childhood-experiences/>

housing to explore in how far the importance of spaces to meet and linger is included in current community planning.

What did the stories add to existing accounts?

The story format allowed us to capture the uniqueness of each individual account that the stories represent. The stories demonstrate that social capital is a fluid concept, which is heavily contextual and which connects to wider issues. Therefore, while statistical data will be helpful to contextualise each story and build bridges between policy areas, the stories also challenge the idea of statistical consistency.

In contrast to a static, and fixed account of separate social capital indicators, the stories illustrate how different dimensions of social capital operate and connect in a person's or communities' everyday-life. As Kay says in her story – in life things are messier and smaller and a lot more complicated.

How to present the stories alongside statistical data in a report will be challenging. It will require careful consideration to ensure that the original reasons for choosing stories (to highlight complexity, fluidity and interdependence) will not be lost when trying to make the stories fit into existing report formats.

Recommendations

As argued by Findlay et al (2017) ¹ a participatory approach to writing and developing stories will be the most relevant to promote participation and involvement of people and communities in the research and policy-making process.

Future projects should aim to involve members of the public more directly than we were able to do in this project.

We felt that the two stories that involved direct contact with local people (compared to the stories that only involved direct contact with organisations) were more powerful and provided a more nuanced picture. It will be crucial to include people themselves in the process of writing and communicating their stories and not only rely on the perspectives of organisations. However, we suggest that it will be helpful to work in partnership with organisations who have existing relationships to different communities to make contact with local people and to facilitate collaboration between researchers and communities. All

organisations that took part in the project had previously run and facilitated creative methods and arts based activities for people to express their experiences. It was felt that there was a lot of potential to develop a participatory approach to narrative and storytelling in the future.

For further reading on participatory and community based research, including the use of stories please draw on the following publications:

Higginbottom, G. and Liamputtang, P. (2015). *Participatory Qualitative Research Methodologies in Health*. SAGE publishing;

Stoecker, R. (2005). *Research Methods for Community Change: A Project-Based Approach*. SAGE publishing;

Kurtz, C. (2014). *Working with Stories in Your Community Or Organization: Participatory Narrative Inquiry*. New York: Kurtz-Fernhout Publishing.

4. Appendix 1: Methodology

4.1 The Research Process

The project was based on a small qualitative study that took place over three months. The study had two aims (1) explore the use of stories to communicate complex phenomena and (2) use stories as a research method to explore the concept of social capital.

The first phase of the project involved a literature review on the use of stories and narrative approaches within policy making. A literature search was conducted with support by the government's library team. The search strategy can be found in the appendix.

Once it was determined that stories might be a suitable research method we made contact with four organisations and four researchers whose work was relevant to community wellbeing, social justice or narrative research. We hoped to be able to discuss with organisations and researchers their use of qualitative methods, in particular stories, and to talk about their understanding of social capital.

Organisations were chosen that worked across different areas and with different communities to reflect different experiences. Contact with two individuals, who agreed to share their personal stories, was made through existing links with policy and research teams.

The aim of the stories was to illustrate unique perspectives of social capital – highlighting context and interdependence. Thus, the aim was to illustrate and not to generalize or offer a representative view. The stories may not be representative of other people's experiences and the involvement of further communities and organisations will be of benefit to add to a nuanced and rich view of social capital. Our project aims to begin an exploration of what social capital means for different communities and to explore if a narrative approach might be helpful to facilitate a more in-depth understanding. Starting the project with a small number of selected researchers and organisations will not exclude others to be involved in the future.

Data collection

Conversations with all individuals who took part in the project included loose questions about (i) social capital and about (ii) stories. Questions

about social capital were framed around the four dimensions (social networks, community cohesion, social participation, empowerment) and the social, physical and economic environment. In most cases, the open question, 'Can you tell me about your community or the communities you work with?' facilitated conversations in which the above mentioned dimensions of social capital came up naturally.

Conversations with researchers focused to a larger degree on the benefits and limitations of using stories as a research method and way to communicate complex phenomena, while conversations with organisations and the two individuals had a stronger focus on social capital. However, there was overlap as three of the researchers had been involved in extensive fieldwork around social justice and community wellbeing and all organisations reflected that they used stories in their work with different communities to either evaluate their services or to promote self-reflection and creativity.

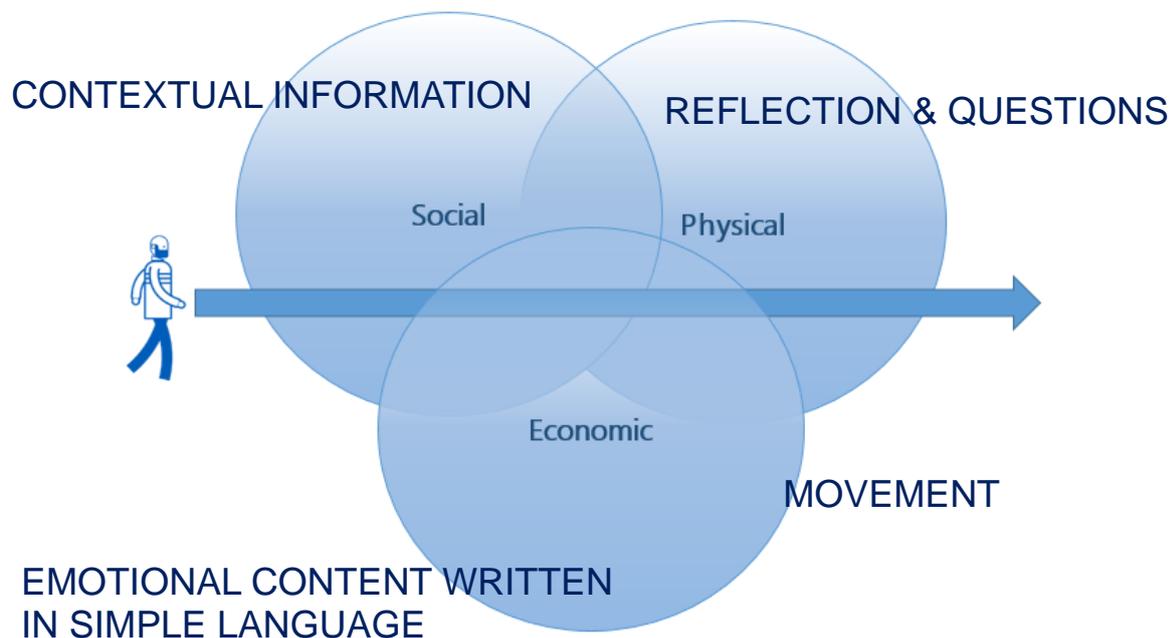
Most conversations were recorded and transcribed after. No identifiable information was included and audio files and transcripts were deleted once the report had been completed.

Reflections on writing the stories

Because social capital is a multidimensional concept we decided early on that it might be helpful to write stories relating to different levels. After initial discussions we then decided to write two stories from the perspective of individuals, one story about communities and one about spaces. Three stories were written based on transcripts and notes from conversations, while the story about spaces needed a different approach. Inspired by ethnographic writing and the book 'Palaces for the People' we identified two community spaces and asked if it was possible to spend some time at the building. The Pyramid and the Eric Liddell Centre agreed to take part and I spent half a day in both buildings. Conversations with visitors were not recorded and the story was completely based on conversations with organisations at both places and notes I took during my visit.

It was challenging at first to sit down and find a way into writing the stories. I went back to the literature review, listened back to my conversations with people and examined existing examples of good practice. This helped me to identify four techniques and characteristics (see figure 1) that I wanted to incorporate into the stories, weaved around the dimensions of social capital.

Figure 1: Writing stories of complexity



Movement and context

When writing each story I started by thinking about its flow and structure. I used the transcripts and notes to identify main points of the conversation and then highlighted those relating to social capital. I paid particular attention to connections and looked for sequences and references to one area influencing another to build movement. This is how the middle part of the stories was written. Writing the beginning and end was more difficult. After my conversations with researchers, I decided to start stories by offering a description of the physical space to give readers an orientation. All stories start, albeit in different ways, with a physical description and orientation of space and circumstance.

Space for reflection and questions

I was hoping to find a way to connect all four stories and after some thought I felt that I myself was the most obvious connection between the stories. A number of examples that I had identified during the literature review also utilised this technique: writing yourself into the story. This felt uncomfortable at first but it also felt truer, offering a true reflection of the research process. Furthermore, reading and listening to similar examples I realised that by writing myself into the story, my voice could build a bridge between the reader and the stories and I could use it to offer reflections and pose questions.

Emotional content in simple language

Allowing readers to connect to the stories on an emotional level was one of the aims of the project. Therefore bringing in people's and my own emotions and feelings was important. At the same time we did not want the stories to seem 'cheesy' or theatrical. Making reference to emotions while using a simple and 'matter of fact' style of writing seemed to be a technique used by many authors.

The end of the story

The ending seemed to be the most important and powerful part of the story, this would be the point that would stay with readers the most. Two researches asked me to think about what seemed to be the most important part for the person I had talked to for the story. What was the main thing they would like to bring across. This informed my choice of ending the stories. For example, in James story I originally ended the story with his experience of the black cloud, as I felt it was a powerful image. But looking back at our conversation I realised that it had been more important for James to look at the efforts that were made by people in the community and how he was concerned with moving forward and I re-wrote the ending.

Each story was sent to the people who participated in them (organisations in the space story) and in some cases people made suggestions to change parts. Three of the stories underwent a process of co-editing the story and sending drafts back and forth.

The small stories of social capital were developed out of extracts from the conversations. Extracts were identified that described one or more dimensions of social capital.

ETHICS

The project highlighted a number of important ethical considerations. As with any other research study issues around anonymity and confidentiality were taken into account and an internal ethics application was submitted before the start of the study. However, two concerns were identified that require further discussion:

- (1) Ownership of stories, and
- (2) Future use of stories.

The project was an initial exploration of the use of stories and as we have discussed in the recommendation section, we suggest for future stories to be written with local people. Participatory research does not only relate to the process of data collection but researchers will need to think about how to involve people in the design of the study, in the analysis and in the dissemination phase. It will be important to involve local people and organisations at the outset and to discuss how they would like to be involved in the different phases of the research project.

Within research on community wellbeing we envision that it will require careful consideration to think about what counts as a 'community' and who is able to represent groups or communities.

Whose story is it?

Questions around the ownership of results has been identified as one of the most problematic areas within participatory research (Quigley, 2006; Durham community research team). Stories portray personal experiences and we suggest that it is important to ensure that people feel able to have ownership of their stories and to be able to share them with others outside the project. While the stories might be written for a particular purpose, e.g. for a report, from the perspective of the policy research team, they might be valuable for people on other levels. Yet, this might raise issues around confidentiality and anonymity if stories are written from the perspective of more than one person and if the self-identification of one person (this story is about me) compromises the anonymity of others. It will be important to reach an agreement with organisations and local people at the start of future projects.

What will happen to my story?

Towards the end of our project, one person felt hesitant about how her story might be used in future reports. She was concerned that her story might get fragmented and future reports or media coverage might selectively use quotes from the story. She felt that it was important to honour the full story and to stick with its complexity, as a fragmented version would not give a fair reflection and findings could easily be misinterpreted. Working on the draft stories with people and organisations showed how small changes to sentence structures, or the choice of a word, could make a big difference. We therefore added a statement before the stories to stress that the stories should be read in full and not split into smaller sequences in any future publications.

5. Appendix 2: Further reading

Further information about the work of the four organisations

Cyrenians:

<https://cyrenians.scot/>

<https://cyrenians.scot/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Impact-Report-2017-digital.pdf>

The Eric Liddell Centre:

<https://www.ericliddell.org/>

<https://www.ericliddell.org/about-us/annual-report/>

Faith in Communities:

<https://www.faithincommunityscotland.org/>

<https://www.faithincommunityscotland.org/publications/>

Link Up (Inspiring Scotland):

<https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/what-we-do/thematic-funds/link-up/>

<https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/hub/link-background-rationale-logic-model/>



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