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Published online: 18 Feb 2025.

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Communities of hope: design-led innovation for landscape decision-making

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ABSTRACT

Questions around future land-use and landscape decision-making pose challenges for communities with an increasing recognition that localised, contextual perspectives and creative modes of engagement have an important role to play. Focusing on landscape decision-making in the context of the Scottish Highlands & Islands, specifically the Northern and Western Isles, this article explores the potential of a design-led innovation approach. The methodological contribution connects design-led innovation and social design as modes of creative engagement that enable communities to play a key role in democratic deliberation. The *Stravaig* Symposium supported communities to engage in rich forms of dialogue and conversations for action across geographic, regional and local scales. Through the co-development of a conceptual Landscape Decision-Making Framework to navigate landscape decision-making the article advocates for the emergence of *communities of hope*, that is, communities capable of realising desirable environmental-cultural futures in relation to the complex systems that determine these futures.

Introduction

The article details the design-led innovation approach explored during the research and knowledge exchange project Design Innovation and Land-Assets (DI&L), which focused on the context of landscape decision-making within the Scottish Highlands & Islands, specifically the Northern and Western Isles. These archipelagos are comprised of culturally rich, geographically distributed communities with attendant challenges regarding landscape sustainability and land futures. The DI&L team worked together with community-based participants in Uist, the Hebrides and Orkney and Shetland in the Northern Isles of Scotland. The selection of these communities was based on their active engagement with land assets, development opportunities and geographic distribution. Whilst there are similarities around issues of land assets and ownership among and between island communities and the Scottish mainland it is important to note that a full discussion is outwith the scope of this article. Suffice to say, while influenced by the same policies as the mainland, Island communities are more likely to be directly employed and reliant upon local industries (The Scottish Government, 2023). This puts significant pressure on Island communities to participate in the complex decisions that affect them and their environmental-cultural futures.

The overarching aim of the DI&L project was to co-develop a Landscape Decision-Making Framework that supported communities to navigate the complexity of landscape decisions, which directly affect them, within a community-based dialogical process. The Landscape Decision-Making Framework situates community-led decision-making as a way of shaping dialogue through grassroots creativity and 'conversations for action' as a form of cultural communing (Manzini, 2017) in response to the inequities island communities face. The methodological contribution resides in explicitly linking design-led innovation (Ellström, 2010; McHattie & Dixon, 2022) and social design (Armstrong, Bailey, Julier, & Kimbell, 2014; Manzini, 2015) as modes of creative engagement that enable communities to play a key role in democratic deliberation. The article concludes by offering the nascent concept *communities of hope*. Drawing on Dewey (1934), hope binds communities and societies together through time, which supports collective community-based deliberation as a conduit, in the development of equitable and impactful models for democratic landscape decision-making.

Landownership in Scotland

The article proceeds by firstly positioning the key tenets that surround land and landownership in Scotland. Centuries of inequitable land access have left Scotland and especially the Highlands & Islands region with fragmented landownership (Glass, McMorran, & Thomson, 2019). Characterised by a high concentration of private landownership; it is estimated that 67% of land is privately owned by 0.025% of the population (Macfarlane, 2023) with 2.7% in community ownership (Environment & Forestry Directorate, 2023). This preponderance of private landownership oftentimes prevents communities from accessing land rights, which limits the sustainable development of both land and communities.

Community reliance on land-based revenue streams such as agriculture, fishing and forestry particularly in distributed island geographies and economies has created a social and cultural impetus for community landownership buyouts (McMorran et al., 2018). Community landownership can enhance local democracy and sustainable development through the co-ownership, for example, of renewable energy, nature restoration and local re-investment initiatives to meet human and nature-based needs (Community Land Scotland, 2017; Land Reform Review Group, 2014). Legislation and policy such as the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, Land Reform (Scotland) Act and the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement (The Scottish Parliament, 2015, 2016, 2021) have responded to the inequity of land access and decision-making powers to support the ambitions of community groups seeking to engage in land and asset acquisition and development.

Currently, a further evolution of the Land Reform Act is being considered through public consultation towards producing a Land Ownership and Public Interest (Scotland) Bill that aligns land accessibility to net zero climate targets and addresses wider inequalities of land ownership (The Scottish Parliament, 2023). The Scottish Government's aims are to increase the diversity of landownership, bring about changes in land use and create more opportunities for communities to engage in decision-making about the land around them and share in the benefits it brings (The Scottish Government, 2022). This extends to exploring innovative approaches and models to support community access to participation in landscape decision-making with a focus on net zero, just-transitions, nature restoration and protecting the environment, biodiversity and wildlife.

Land Reform and community participation

The Land Reform Agenda, exists within a wider strategy of participatory governance in Scotland increasingly supported by the development of policies, programmes and guidance. Examples

include: land management frameworks such as Low-carbon Diversified Farming Systems (Calo, 2020); socially-engaged principles for prioritising community participation National Standards for Community Engagement, the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC, 2020); Island Communities Impact Assessments (Scottish Agriculture and Rural Economy Directorate, 2020); and specific guidance for community land buyouts (Community Land Scotland, 2016). Beyond these policies a number of frameworks, methods and approaches have been developed to support citizens' rights to access information about land decisions and to participate in decision-making processes about local development and public service design (The Scottish Government, 2019).

Recently, attention has turned to how novel modes of consultation, deliberation and decision-making can support land reform and land asset acquisition processes. Approaches such as participatory budgeting, participation requests, deliberative engagement, people's panels, mini-publics and citizen assemblies have been trialled (Pieczka & Escobar, 2013; Policy Lab, 2019; Roberts and Escobar, 2015) with varying degrees of success. In line with the Scottish Approach to Service Design (Digital Directorate, 2019) design consultants and agencies are now regularly commissioned to deliver Human-Centred Design (HCD) and co-design approaches that include public participation (Hinrichs-Krapels et al., 2020). That being said, levels of citizen representation and the politics that surround participation have been increasingly under scrutiny (Williams, St Denney and Bristow, 2019).

The politics of participation

The politics of public participation raises broader concerns around the context of supporting community-based landscape decision-making. A body of extant literature calls attention to avoiding passive participation, consultation fatigue and transactional information-sharing (Arundel, Bloch, & Ferguson, 2019; Escobar, 2011; Williams, St. Denny, & Bristow, 2017). However, ensuring equitable community representation and positive participation can be challenging given recent budget cuts and a perceived lack of transparency in decision-making (Williams, 2022). The Highlands & Islands region and island communities specifically have their own historical and contemporary relationship with representation. Within the context of formal participation and democratic landscape decision-making (The Scottish Government, 2019) a counterpoint can be found in informal community-based grassroot approaches.

Creative activism and decision-making

Creative activism is a grassroots mechanism used by communities and groups in response to the inequities faced by the monopolisation and ownership of land and landscapes. Creative activism mobilises shared expressions of values, cultural identity and *hopeful visions* for the future (Hiltunen, 2010; Kockel & McFadyen, 2019; Rowe, 2019). Creative activism for land and climate justice employs design, visualisation, cultural assets, rituals, language and artistic forms of expression. Examples include, contextually-located creative mapping to visualise and draw attention to the role nature and landscape play within political decision-making (Miles, 2010; Sommer & Klöckner, 2021). Linked to this is 'Who Owns Scotland' part of a mapping project by Andy Wightman (2023) to provide accessible public information on who owns land across rural Scotland.

Literature, prose and poetry within island culture are ubiquitous with the genre of nature writing facilitating an appreciation for place-based and nuanced reflections whilst simultaneously critiquing the constraints that communities face. Nan Shepherd and Kenneth White (Shepherd, 1997; White, 1992) who established the field of geopoetics have archived and documented the 'lived and felt' experience of communities' connections to places across rural Scotland.

Community-led campaigns intended to marshal activism around land reform and agency have been prevalent since political reform cleared the Highlands & Islands of people and their livelihoods in the 17th and 18th centuries. For example, the ceilidh play, '*The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*' (McGrath, 1974) exemplifies how music and poems are embedded within narratives of local identity through folklore and Indigenous place names (Whyte, 2021). These accounts actively challenge the romanticised notion of the Highlands & Islands. It could be construed that creative activism in this context, viewed through an ethnological lens, is the act of taking cultural ownership and consciousness-raising through revisioning the creative expressions of remembering, which evoke the challenges and opportunities that surround landscape decisions (McFadyen & Sandilands, 2021).

The paradox of participation

Two seemingly opposing approaches exist within community deliberation and landscape decision-making in Scotland: top-down policy-driven consultation that invites communities to participate in proposed agendas; and grassroots creative activism driven by community groups with shared cultural ownership. The limitations of policy implementation within the island and distributed geographies mirror the experiences of landowning communities whose progress remains reliant on the skills and capabilities of local individuals and a cohesive approach to change (Dixon, McHattie, & Broadley, 2022). In response, communities are developing grassroot approaches towards the development of collaborative and co-created approaches that connect local issues to external global challenges and the ability of island communities to protect land assets aligned to asymmetric power dynamics between locals and wider stakeholders (Hardyman et al., 2022) towards supporting islanders' agency to engender and effect change.

In summary, whilst a paradox exists between top-down policy implementation and creative activism as a grassroots mechanism both can be employed towards addressing the *silent crises* in local democracy. This provides a fertile context in which to situate a design-led innovation approach to enable communities to engage in meaningful dialogue and conversations for action surrounding local land use and assets.

Linking design-led innovation and social design

Design-led innovation is the means by which new knowledge is generated, shared and applied in practice (Ellström, 2010). The approach is guided by the following methodological principles: endeavouring to pay attention to place-based contexts; asset valuing (Broadley, 2021); community participation; self-actualisation; building sustainable capacity; conversations for action; mutual learning; reflexivity (rigour through); knowledge co-creation; emergence (of insights, consequences, actions) and insights for the long term (for example, policy). Through linking design-led innovation and social design (Chen et al., 2016) methodologically - participatory approaches are foregrounded - that involve people and communities working in collaborative ways (Manzini, 2015) to address shared issues in the 'real world' (Papanek, 1972). Design-led innovation seeks to recognise and make visible the multiple scales and dimensions in which innovation may operate and be catalysed for the benefit of reimagining communities (McHattie & Dixon, 2022). Whilst, social design endeavours to embed sustainable change across and between scales (Armstrong et al., 2014). It can therefore be proposed that a design-led innovation approach informed by social design may have a further role to play in co-developing creative engagement with communities across and between scales while providing facilitated avenues of discourse between multiple stakeholders and decision-making processes. This participatory approach, due to its reflexive and intersubjective positioning, enables participants to navigate different perspectives with minimal conflict, identify and visualise shared understanding

and envisage values and *hopes* for the future. Central to this approach is the positioning of community-led creative activity as an enabler of future envisioning, collective action and capacity building between scales.

Design innovation and land assets

The design-led innovation approach remained cognisant of the various scales of social and cultural interactions across regional and public systems (Koskinen & Hush, 2016). Such interactions are geographically located, inherently complex and socio-culturally interconnected. The approach identified shared land assets as a platform to encourage community decision-making related to land management and development. Thus, prioritising inclusivity with the recognition that oftentimes those referred to as 'marginalised communities' experience significant place-based structural inequalities. In addition to bringing together people's lived experiences, voices and multiple perspectives the approach raises awareness of systems, institutions and world views that value particular people and outcomes yet not others (Kimbell, 2020). DI&L through a design-led innovation approach engaged with communities, creative practitioners, community trusts, stakeholders and policy makers to collectively address challenges regarding landscape, land-use and land assets as a form of cultural communing (Manzini, 2017).

Methodological orientation: creative practice and research

An explicit methodological framing that accounts for creative practice is therefore appropriate in grounding design research in contexts that enmesh the multiple experiences and ambitions of diverse participants, communities and the wider publics. DI&L is an example of situated practice-based research whereby new concepts and knowledge are produced in relation to the domain of participatory landscape decision-making (Kaszynska et al, 2022). Such place-based partnerships can be broadly termed 'collaborative organisations' that result in both tangible and intangible outcomes through the intertwining of socio-cultural interactions and creative practices as 'relational goods' (Manzini, 2017, p.2). Through examining the multilevel challenges surrounding land decision-making DI&L explored how such collaborative organisations might be constructed through the ways communities coalesce and make collective decisions. This extends to the role creative practices, such as, visualising, mapping and filmmaking can play in stimulating, sustaining and embedding inclusivity and connectivity. Creative action as a conduit is positioned to better understand the complex geographic, social, cultural, environmental and overarching political discourses at play within island communities.

Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic: peer researchers

DI&L was originally conceived as site-specific field research with local communities in the Hebrides and Northern Isles of Scotland. The Covid-19 pandemic required the team to take a responsive design approach, which accommodated the mandatory travel restrictions, social distancing and reduced physical engagement. This necessitated the project to reform as a distributed and digital programme of activities. Community-based peer practitioners and researchers replaced location-specific community workshops and site visits by the DI&L research team as a method of engagement.

Creative practitioners in three island archipelagos – the Hebrides, Uist; Orkney, Papa Westray; and Shetland, Lerwick – were commissioned as community-based peer researchers. They were critical to fulfilling DI&L's ongoing endeavours towards informing community-based landscape development and decision-making. The peer practitioner's and researcher's role encompassed co-creating with communities to capture the diverse experiences of people and places through

film, sound and moving images. The series of three films function as visual narratives (Lueck, 2007), which capture prescient issues around climate change, community resilience and island survival. The three films convey the intimate lived and felt experiences within island communities and wider human-nature relations through creative responses to environmental and cultural challenges. Adopting this responsive and iterative practitioner-researcher double-loop approach (Kimbell, 2020; Milic, 2021) allowed DI&L to mitigate the limitations of Covid-19 and foreground innovative methods that emerged with and from the local context.

Contextual grounding: methods

The research followed a phased approach (Table 1) as follows: six stakeholder interviews; three commissioned films; and the *Stravaig* Symposium.

Six interviews were conducted with: stakeholders in community trust leadership roles with expertise in hyper-local sustainable land use, democracy and influencing policy; private landowners; and participants within their individual community settings. Three films were commissioned by: Beatrix Wood, 'Wandering on Uist', Hebrides; Saoirse Higgins: 'Between Seas [Is-Land]', Papa Westray, Orkney; and Keiba Clubb: 'Spinning Yarns', Lerwick, Shetland. These place-based visual narratives were embedded within a two-week virtual symposium of talks and events entitled 'The Summer *Stravaig*'. (*Stravaig* derives from 18th century Scots *extravage* meaning 'wander about; digress, ramble in speech', in turn from Medieval Latin *extravagari* 'wander, stray beyond limits). The *Stravaig* brought together over 40 contributors including community trusts, land management experts, local governance and policy makers. Together with participatory and co-design practitioners, designers, activists, writers, creative practitioners and local and international researchers and academics to discuss and debate the challenges and opportunities faced within participatory and sustainable landscape decision-making. Diverse contributors included creative land activists and authors Alastair McIntosh and Dr Lesley Riddoch, Scottish Land Commissioner Dr Sally Reynolds and participatory democracy expert Dr Oliver Escobar; International academics included Design for Social Innovation author Professor Ezio Manzini, Politecnico di Milano and Dr James Oliver, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. During the first week, each day was choreographed around a specific theme that had emerged from the synthesis and analysis of the interview and film transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2022) namely: Land in Scotland; Cultural Assets; Dialogue, Policy and Governance; [Design for] Reimagining Communities; and Hope and the Future. The three films were showcased throughout the *Stravaig* to instigate plenary discussions. The plenary focused energies on the opportunities to enhance community participation within landscape decision-making. The second week invited academics, specialists and experts within sustainable land management, participatory democracy, creative

Table 1. A phased research approach, Authors, 2021.

Phase	Methods
Phase One: March – May 2021	**Six Stakeholder Interviews**
	Interviews with community trust leaders including the Galson Estate in Lewis, private landowners including island landowners in Scotland, community development agencies, third sector land engagement and policy experts including Community Land Scotland and Community Land Outer Hebrides.
Phase Two: March – July 2021	**Three Commissioned Films**
	Beatrix Wood: Uist, Hebrides
	Saoirse Higgins: Papa Westray, Orkney
	Keiba Clubb: Lerwick, Shetland
Phase Three: Two-week Summer *Stravaig* July 2021	***Stravaig* Virtual Symposium: Key Themes**
	1. Land in Scotland
	2. Cultural Assets
	3. Hope and the Future
	4. Dialogue, Policy and Governance
	5. [Designing for] Reimagining Communities

Figure 1. Multilayered analysis map of key themes and their interconnections with community needs within landscape decision-making: Image Credit Zoë Prosser, 2022.
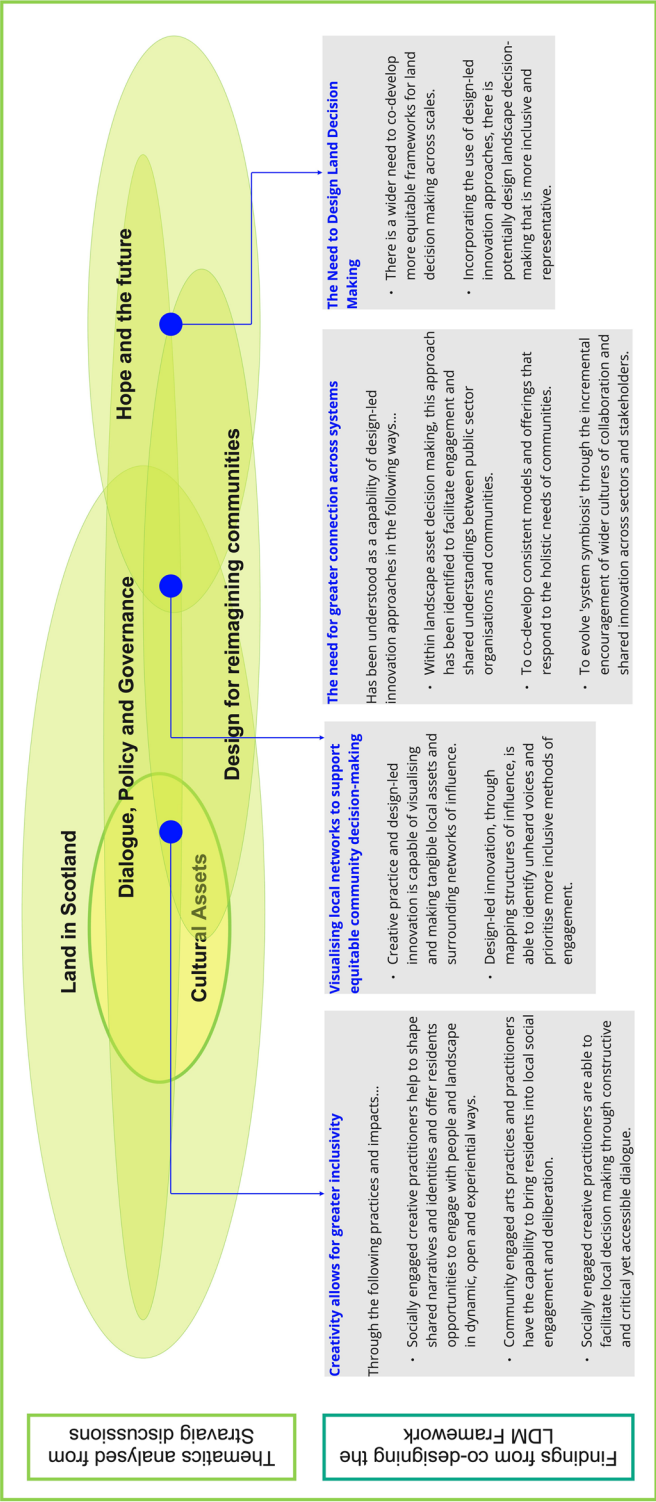
Figure 2. Multilayered analysis map of key themes and their interconnections with community needs within landscape decision-making: Image Credit Zoë Prosser, 2022.
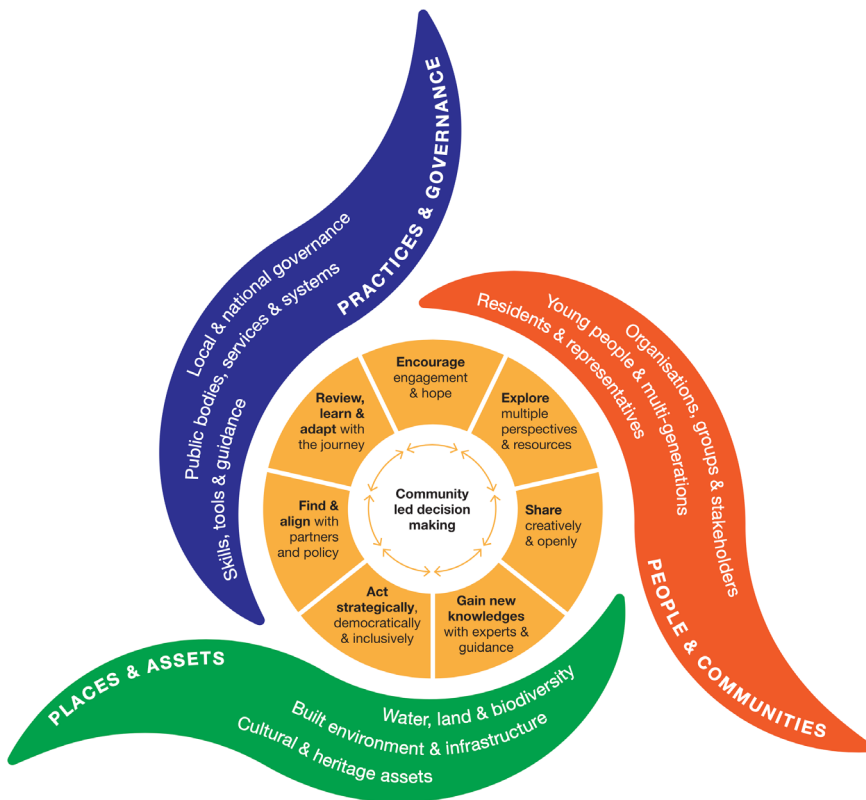
Figure 3. Conceptual landscape decision-making framework. Image Credit Authors, 2021.

ecologies and land economics along with the peer practitioner-researchers and participants to join the discussions and to inform the subsequent visual mapping.

Modes of analysis: visual mapping

The research team analysed the transcribes from the interviews and recordings of the *Stravaig* to inform the multiple layers of the visual map. The *Stravaig* thematic discussions were visualised to map the social connections between multiple stakeholders utilising a method of actor-system mapping (Latour, 2007; Stuyfzand, Jönsson, & De Götzen, 2022). In order to recognise and make visible the scales of activity and interconnections, which exist around people's distinct experiences (Kimbell, 2020), multilayered maps were constructed (Figures 1 and 2). The visual maps convey how these discreet layers function at different scales: hyper-local; community-level; regional; system-wide; and national (Johnson et al, 2019; Stuyfzand et al., 2022).

Categories of key stakeholders and their networks of influence were mapped across geographic and island communities. The broader interconnections of policy, governance, legislation, institutions, infrastructure and mechanisms that enable participation in landscape decision-making were also mapped to provide a contextually-located system-wide view of stakeholders with attendant questions for communities involved in land decision-making. This method of analysis through creative visualisation and map-making was initially undertaken by the DI&L research team to provide a framework that communities could contribute to. The maps were then reviewed, iterated and evaluated with two participants; a community trust manager and a private landowner who represented different perspectives within community and land asset management.

Conversations for action

Following the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, collaborative sessions were conducted in person to allow participants to test and develop the maps by adapting them to suit their local community context. This form of visual mapping facilitated multiple perspectives viewed through people's accounts, communities' lived and felt experiences and stakeholders' perspectives. This mode of engaging participants in landscape decision-making that emerged from the *Stravaig* offered opportunities for refinement and evaluation of the map(s). Conversations for action revolved around a series of questions, prompts, values and beliefs towards shaping collective activities, hyper-local vision-setting and change-making. As part of these conversations' participants were invited to validate, re-map and re-imagine the connections between stakeholders and engagement mechanisms relating to their experience of community land participation and how these could inform a collective approach to support community-led decision-making activities.

Landscape decision-making framework

The layers of visual mapping were combined and simplified in a conceptual Landscape Decision-Making Framework (Figure 3) aimed at communities to navigate the complexity inherent within landscape decision-making. The framework positions the central principles of *people and communities, places and assets* and *practices and governance* (McHattie, Champion, & Broadley, 2018) towards mobilising communities' grassroots creative action and culture-making within the rubric of participatory land asset and landscape decision-making.

Navigating complexity: insights and findings

An extensive array of public mechanisms to support community participation were identified. These include, policies and governance structures that influence funding and incentivisation produced by public and third-sector organisations for community groups (The Scottish Government, 2018; Scottish Government, The National Islands Plan, 2019; Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC), 2020; Scottish Land Commission, 2020). Conversations with participants around these wider systems of support revealed contradictions and duplication between the public sector and support organisations often as a result of competitive local funding processes. Participants also noted that the lack of clear direction through the policy system creates confusion and limits community groups' participation in landscape decision-making. During discussions around the density of policy and governance involved when engaging in local decisions, a series of stories from successful land decision-making community groups demonstrated non-linear pathways through these systems of support; with the end of one land acquisition regularly becoming the starting point for the next proposal or project. Depending on a particular community's readiness for participation they may enter into land-decision making through public consultation related to a predetermined issue or alternatively self-organise in response to a shared issue and seek to find leverage for change through policy or third-sector support organisations.

These conversations with communities highlighted the need for continuous community engagement, encouragement and motivation. The process of forming a community group, establishing a shared vision, navigating political systems at different scales and facilitating participation was emotionally taxing and resource-heavy for communities and people who are often involved on a voluntary basis and where encouragement was largely not recognised, rewarded or implemented within policy, tools or guidance. In these moments social support as a form of communing (Manzini, 2017) offered emotional relief and motivation in centring communities' aspirations.

Centring communities

The Landscape Decision-Making Framework was introduced as a mode of framing community participation at the centre of the wider landscape and land asset decision-making and as an evolving resource repository. The Landscape Decision-Making Framework enfolds the functions of various tools, toolkits and templates, such as, community engagement best-practice principles, creative engagement methods, business modelling canvases and evaluation templates. In this form, the Landscape Decision-Making Framework enables geographic and regional connections between existing policies and legislation, infrastructure and organisations and stakeholder groups as a fulcrum for successful planning and participation in land, landscape and asset development. As a conceptual framework, the intention is to centre communities, their lived and felt experiences, aspirations and ambitions. Thus, laying the foundations for collaboration and multiple perspectives between stakeholders, organisations and communities that can provide pathways through the complex system of land decision-making.

Key insights

The key insights that emerged from DI&L position meaningful participation in land decision-making as contingent on creative methods that involve visualisation and system-wide collaboration. These methods were supported by the alignment of community-based peer researchers and networks to the resources, knowledge(s), skills and the recognition of the multiple roles involved in land, landscape and asset decision-making. Community representation, established through relationships and built over time, is and remains fundamental, which extends to the involvement of land trust representatives, collaborative partners, arts organisations, creative practitioners and stakeholders.

Community-based peer practitioner-researchers

The community-based peer practitioner-researchers employed creative methods grounded in participatory approaches (Bannon & Ehn, 2012) concomitant with sustainable social innovation (Manzini, 2015). In this manner, creative expression within communities can be situated as a form of activism and culture-making (Julier, 2013). The lived and felt experiences of communities and their intimate relations to place have been expressed through filmmaking facilitated by community-based creative practitioners as peer researchers. Collaborative visualisation has been used as a method of sense-making (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007; Robson, 2022), which elucidated the visual and verbal narratives, social and cultural relations, hyper-local landscape decisions and community-based opportunities and challenges. This method of situated practice-based community-led research highlighted the role design-led innovation (Kaszynska et al, 2022) can play in supporting communities to actively participate in landscape decision-making. Whilst specific to landscape decision-making, it is likely that these insights hold general relevance for those seeking to pursue a collaborative design-led innovation approach mobilised through and with community-based creative practitioners.

Creativity allows for greater community representation

The role of creativity as a tool for expressing the lived and felt experience of participants and connection to the landscape within communities through design-led facilitation can be seen to shape shared narratives and identities. These shared narratives offer communities the opportunity to engage in dynamic, open, emergent and experiential ways. Throughout the Stravaig the value of creativity, experience-sharing and conversations for action was demonstrated by examples of community-engaged arts and creative practitioners' ability to facilitate cultural events, dialogue and deliberation towards enabling equitable

community representation. Creative practitioners' use of visual methods stimulated shared local perspectives, for example, with Community Land Scotland, such collective creative expressions resonated with multiple stakeholders from communities to policy and public sector decision-makers. These carefully guided conversations for action engendered collaborative solutioning (Elstub & Escobar, 2019) towards envisioning environmental-cultural futures that support collective community-based landscape decision-making. As indicated in the section Methodological Orientation a design-led innovation approach informed by social design may have a pivotal role to play in co-developing creative engagement with communities through providing facilitated avenues of discourse and dialogue allowing land decision-making opportunities to surface. This approach, due to its reflexive and intersubjective positioning enables creative practitioners to navigate different perspectives, minimise tensions and conflict and visualise shared values and visions for the future.

Visualising local networks supports equitable community decision-making

Successful examples of collaboratively developing local assets include community centres, seaweed farms, renewable energy initiatives, affordable housing programmes and social enterprises. These collaborative endeavours were successful through visualising local networks towards gaining deep understanding of communities' existing assets. Equitable community decision-making was enabled through engaging with relevant local stakeholders who influenced and were influenced by community transformation. Through this process of hyper-local informal engagement under-represented voices such as residents impacted by developments were more likely to be identified. This in turn involved more diverse participation in decision-making processes including the visualisation of local stakeholder networks and their relationships to land assets.

Visualising these networks through collaborative mapping supports community groups to understand who influences what and vitally who is impacted by such decisions. This approach positions and amplifies underrepresented voices towards increasing inclusive and equitable engagement through facilitated deliberation. Visualising local networks through mapping as a collaborative activity creates shared understanding through identifying cultural assets as sights of informal knowledge across contextually-located island, regional and hyper-local scales.

The need for greater connectivity across systems

Scottish policies and local governance structures influence community land decision-making via national targets that bind funding offers, incentivisation and available support (Aitkin, 2010). At a national Scottish-level, public organisations influenced by policy agendas support community groups to access and participate in formal decision-making processes through the development of tools and guidance. Examples include community planning tools and best practice guidance for community engagement through the SCDC's National Standards for Community Engagement (2020) and The Scottish Government's Guidance on Engaging Communities in Decisions Relating to Land (2018). Stakeholders at regional and national levels therefore hold influence on what can be achieved within community-based decision-making. This wider network of policies, public organisations and resources exists to support community groups to increase their participation capabilities. However, the challenge of navigating the system without a clear direction often leaves communities confused, frustrated and exhausted in their journey towards more equitable land decision-making. Third sector organisations who seek to support communities in this public realm, such as SCDC, Community Land Scotland and various development charities, experience competitive funding processes marred by a duplication of efforts and contradictions that increase the complexity already inherent in the system.

Collaboration, creativity, communication and conversation

Moving to conclude it can be contended that a design-led innovation approach that encompasses creative practice and visualisation can act as a conduit to facilitate engagement for participants, communities and stakeholders to develop shared understanding towards navigating the complexity within wider landscape decision-making structures. Relational approaches between public sector organisations and communities that respond to the real needs of communities are key towards developing consistent models of support.

As demonstrated by the DI&L project, participants and community groups who engaged in creative activity and shared endeavours, collectively reflected on and celebrated the rich lived and felt experiences of people relating to land and place as a form of environmental-cultural activism. The inquiry foregrounded questions around how cross-disciplinary and grassroots creative practice(s) can support the development of inclusive democratic land asset and landscape decision-making. This included how design-led innovation approaches can encourage dialogue and embed collaborations between practitioners, researchers, community and land stakeholders and policymakers. The focus on supporting cross-stakeholder dialogue around the current issues faced within each community aligns with notions of design for the common good (Kaszynska, 2021). Through which success is contingent on the increased ability of communities to envision shared positive change through actively participating in land and asset decision-making. Embracing such modes of collaboration, creativity, communication and conversations for action across island communities can mobilise transformation shaped with and through political intervention and multi-level cooperation whereby the necessary and resultant outcomes of innovation can be realised.

This framing is further developed as a mode of social and cultural communing (Manzini, 2017) through which social values, cultural production and creative practices are collaboratively cultivated as conversations for action by a community of people working together towards a shared goal. In doing so, our contribution to the field resides in linking design-led innovation and social design whereby such approaches can be embedded in communities to achieve optimum influence in 'reimagining communities' aligned to appropriate and agile democratic and governance structures. Building on this approach (Broadley, 2021; McHattie et al., 2018, 2022) we contend creative methods, novel modes of communication and the resultant visual materials can enable people and communities to bring to bear their diverse voices, desires and hopes for the future.

A future vision: communities of hope

In this final section, the concept of *communities of hope* is given form, a future vision that arises from the findings described in the previous section. Though this concept may at first appear abstract, it is grounded in pragmatic and practical design-led innovation approaches involving ideas of rich, group-based communication alongside the planning and pursuit of shared activities and creative action. In doing so it is connected to the work of the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. For Dewey, strong communication, based on robust forms of democratic deliberation was seen to allow for meaningful cooperation in a shared endeavour, a *deciding* on desirable future courses of action (Dewey, 1927) as well as the identification of shared values. Following this understanding, hope emerges in the ever-progressing push towards the realisation of these ideals; it is the project that binds communities and societies together through time (Dewey, 1934).

The article contends that a design-led innovation approach informed by the application of social design practice can support more equitable and accessible participation in land asset and landscape decision-making. This approach is aligned with Dewey's work (Dixon, 2020) and can be understood to engender a form of community-based democratic deliberation, albeit restricted in remit. In highlighting opportunities to bring together shared networks, dialogue, knowledge(s),

skills, roles and resources across island communities the DI&L project evoked inter- and intra-actions between people, places and practices (McHattie et al., 2018). It is at the nexus of these inter-relations that the communities of hope concept is located. In this framing, communities of hope are defined as communities that are enabled through the conceptual platform offered by the Landscape Decision-Making Framework, which supported communities in navigating the complex systems that ultimately determine their environmental-cultural futures. In doing so, it allows communities to find ways of laying the foundations for collaboration as a means to becoming communities of hope. It provides a platform for communities to collectively and carefully explore their options, envision and agree on shared ambitions and act together to achieve change by engaging appropriate stakeholders in conversations for action. In other words, to realise their ideals and values together. This emancipatory enabling contributes to community-based asset valuation in terms of impact through proposing how creative methods and approaches can be applicable within wider public service and governance ecosystems.

Disclosure statement

Funding

Research ethics and consent

This research was undertaken and approved in line with The Glasgow School of Art's Ethics Policy: https://gsadocuments.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/gsa-research-ke-ethics-policy-2016.pdf
Written informed consent was provided by the research participants to use anonymised audio recordings and transcripts from interviews and discussions to be used for research purposes and publications.

Notes on contributors

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Data availability statement

No data to declare.

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