MORE THAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Ways to accelerate place-based transformation in the UK

JOHN HITCHIN, EMILY SUN, JO BLUNDELL AND JENNIFER MCCONNEL

April 2021

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

There is a zeitgeist about "place" at the moment, made more meaningful by our shared experience of COVID and how that seems likely to create irreversible shifts in how we work as well as live. At the same time as we witness a worsening of economic and social inequalities impacting on the political as well as economic landscape, we are also experiencing a deepening of neighbourhood ties and sense of collective responsibility for our welfare. The Government has announced an intent to help places "level up", which we hope is a renewed imperative to work with communities to unblock the systemic challenges that have held places back for decades. What we know from the body of collective research in the UK and internationally around place-based social change, is that changing the prospects of communities takes time, a special type of leadership and commitment from multiple organisations to follow the same path, in a collaborative way.

We undertook this research because we are practitioners of place-based change and we saw a need to build capacity for this work in the UK. We wanted to create a clearer narrative beyond our own experience around how to make this form of practice deliver impact at scale, so the research has reached out to projects and practitioners more widely in the UK and overseas.

Our key conclusion is that practice in the UK has lagged behind countries like US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand because the UK has not put the investment in cultivating a network of experienced practitioners, developing the practice of place-based change, and creating the broader conditions to enable this kind of working. As we explored the forms of support available outside the UK and examples of the work undertaken by practitioners, we were struck by the contrast in scale and maturity of practice. We reflected on why this might be the case. In the UK there have been many place-based initiatives funded by Government, but these have come and gone, and many more through individual philanthropic organisations, but these have lacked the resources or the wider mandate transfer and scale the learning and expertise they have developed. This means that UK experience and knowhow over the decades have not had the continuity to accrue into a form of identifiable practice, trusted by funders and places to deliver demonstrable impact.

Our research candidates were projects tackling tough social issues through a multi-sector, systemic response; working with and through communities and at a geographic level communities identify with – generally neighbourhoods or wards. We asked practitioners and those that support them what enabled and hindered their work in general and, in particular, how they worked with communities. We wanted to understand what support practitioners thought would be most important to improve their impact and how they might best receive that support. Many were supported generously through their funders. Others were working in relative isolation. All saw the value of supporting each other and sharing knowhow.

We found 6 broad themes emerging from the discussions with UK projects:

- **Identity**: having a language and identity to explain the work in a way that can be understood and developed. There is a lack of professional vernacular or frameworks for place-based working that steer clear of prescriptive process, but enable 'wayfinding'.

- **Evidence and feedback**: having an effective method of learning and feedback for projects working in complex environments to be able to utilise their own knowhow to adapt and change to maximise their impact, as an enabler of wider learning for others to develop their practice and to create effective accountability with the funders and policy makers who back the work.

- **Power**: tackling unequal power dynamics is one of the foundational challenges in working in partnership across sectors and with communities and those with lived experience. We need to enable partnerships to recognise and address power dynamics in relationships before they work together to tackle their shared ambition for change

- **Relationships and governance**: building and sustaining collaborative relationships across a network of organisations and people is a key skill as most complex change cannot be achieved through bringing together all people and organisations into a single entity. How do we work relationally and hold collective accountability for achieving change?

- **Context**: being led by local context is critical and differences however nuanced, are important. We describe this in the report as understanding the local disposition for change, interpreting historic and present "faultlines" and how and where to leverage the opportunity for change. What are the local contextual issues that really matter, and how can practitioners design the right starting point to create change?

- **Learning**: we see learning as the overarching enabler and capacity builder for developing place-based practice. When understood not as an intervention or output, but as an approach, it is the fundamental key to unlocking new ways of seeing and understanding, building relationships leading to genuine collaboration, trying new ideas, and critically, continuously adapting and improving.

In our view the research indicates a **clear imperative to create a common infrastructure to support UK place-based change that is not owned by any single programme, funder or commissioner**. We think that the UK should build on the experience of organisations outside the UK who have been through this journey of developing the infrastructure of support, but to adapt those models to a UK context to create something unique and which builds on the shoulders of experience elsewhere.

Both the Government's levelling up policy and a broadening interest from philanthropists is bringing an opportunity to invest in a platform that delivers both scale and continuity across different programmes. As the work of changing places is inherently collaborative and multi-sectorial, so, we believe, should be the way the work is enabled. We hope for a coalition of people and organisations that share knowhow and resources openly in the collective interest of accelerating the pace and scale of place-based change and invite you to join us in this conversation about how we can make this happen.

Please get in touch with us via email:

Emily Sun: emilysun07@gmail.com

Jo Blundell: joblundell@futurepublic.org

1. Introduction

In 2019, a roundtable of practitioners, funders and influencers all working to deliver place-based change came together chaired by Danny Kruger – not then MP. From that event a "Project Place" team was formed. The aim was to work together to identify good practice and uncover the barriers and constraints to enabling communities to lead significant and sustainable change through multi-sector partnerships.

The team knew that there was a huge richness of experience and practice across the UK and globally, but found a lack of cohesion and support in the practice of changing places at a community level. We saw projects achieving astounding results often against the odds, but the invaluable learning and experience not being captured and used in a way that enables others to practice better.

The team, namely Jo Blundell, Dame Julia Cleverdon, Graeme Duncan, Lela Kogbara and Emily Sun, and colleagues from Right to Succeed set about understanding how to address that challenge. Through discussions over the first few months of work, the team developed a hypothesis that a centre – meaning a convening capability, that brought together, valued and made legible the learning being accrued across projects, was in some part the answer. The research reported in this publication, with support from colleagues at Renaisi, enabled us to deepen and broaden an understanding of how to help and from that to refine thinking about the centre and what it might do.

The work was generously supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Big Change and Save the Children and we thank them.

The title of this report comes from Getting to the Maybe.[1] It describes the relentless curiousity and openness to change that we found in many of the people we met as part of this research and we thank everyone who informed and inspired us.

---

[1] Getting to the Maybe. Westley, Zimmerman and Patton. Vintage Canada. 2007.

1. Methodology and Approach

The primary aims for this study were to understand what types of support teams tackling place-based change need to succeed. Our hypothesis, based on discussions with practitioners and funders and our initial literature review, was that projects need a broadly based framework of learning and we set out a concept that was tested in the interviews. We defined concepts of learning and approaches, to inform the research. These are:

- **Foundational Learning** – to help establish the environment and skillsets that enable projects to start on the right footing e.g. systems thinking, rapid cycle learning, shared goals (measurement) community engagement, developing collaborative leadership.

- **Network learning** – Co-learning through peer-to-peer learning and Communities of practice. Codifying learning across a network of projects and synthesising that learning so it is relevant to related projects (i.e. by similar goals / sectors). Backed by evidence created by members.

- **On-demand learning** – providing access to coaching, skills and know how that individual projects cannot retain individually because of scale and specialisation e.g. evaluation, establishing a data hub, creating new financial instruments

- **Equity and Access** – learning that enables communities, including people with lived experience, to participate fully and equally as partners to place-based change

- **National Capacity Building –** providing access to learning for all communities, local authorities, funders, government, voluntary sector organisations, around place-based change initiatives to increase capacity, confidence and effectiveness

Core 'lines of inquiry' to inform the interviews were developed between the research partners for the project. These followed the key aims and objectives for the project and then developed into a topic guide. They broadly covered:

- Understandings of 'place' and 'place-based change'

- Barriers and enablers to delivering a place-based programme

- Experiences of 'learning' in a place-based context' including the way projects used insights and feedback to adapt and change, how practitioners developed their skills and how projects learned from each other,

We tested in principle the level of interest in a future 'centre', what people would value most and what their participation may look like.

The learning types described were used as prompts to encourage discussion: e.g. to what extent the interviewee found the concept of peer learning or developing professional understandings of systems learning across the practice, useful. While each interview covered the key lines of inquiry, they were semi-structured to allow conversation to flow. This was important due to the unique experiences of working in each place, or the -perspective from which that particular actor interacted with the different place-based projects, and the social, economic and policy context of the area.

Literature Review

A desk-based analysis of existing research was undertaken to ensure that the findings in this project did not duplicate existing efforts, while also providing an evidence base from which to compare the

findings from the interviews. An iterative approach was taken to identify key sources, in which readings were identified from core texts. We started with key documents identified from funders and practitioners in the UK, evaluations of place-based programmes in the UK and global research on place-based approaches in the US and Canada, practice literature from centres that support place-based working in the US, Canada and Australasia. We reviewed the literature against some key questions:

- What are the drivers of place-based change?

- What role has learning played in achieving place-based change?

- What has been the impact and benefit?

- What form and content of learning has been developed?

- What are the models of delivery for learning?

- How do models vary in different contexts?

- What do people and teams need to learn?

These lines of inquiry provided a robust interrogation of different approaches to place-based change and embedded learning – which provided key themes from which to compare findings from the interviews.

A list of literature is provided in Appendix A

Interviews

Interviewees were selected through a snowballing method of recruitment. All organisations who are part of this work are well established in the field of place-based working and were able to draw upon existing contacts and research for the interviews, selecting and approaching places and organisations from a range of geographies, with different approaches and backgrounds.

As part of the topic guide, interviewees were asked for further contacts, either relating to their project (such as partner organisations or board members) or other projects they had previously interacted with. This method of recruitment was effective in securing 23 interviews, from across eighteen projects/places across both England and Scotland and centres of learning for place-based change internationally. We combined this primary research with some relevant findings from previous interviews conducted by Renaisi as part of their 2019 study on place-based systemic change, as this work so clearly connected to that study. The participants themselves will be kept anonymous for the purposes of the research, but the organisations, projects and programmes from which qualitative insights were drawn, were:

Place-based Projects

- (North) Birkenhead – Right to Succeed Cradle to Career

- Coventry - Grapevine Coventry and West Midlands

- Exeter - Wellbeing Exeter and Devon Community Foundation

- Feltham - Feltham Reach Children's Hub

- Hackney (Pembury Estate) – Peabody, Hackney Council, Save the Children Pembury Children's Community

- Ipswich – Volunteering Matters and Community Praxis

- Lambeth - Black Thrive

- London (various) - Peabody Housing

- Lincoln - Lincoln City Foundation

- Newcastle - Crisis and Newcastle City Council partnership

- Power to Change's Empowering Places Programme – several places from the programme

- Sport England

- Warwickshire - National Grid – Warwickshire and Warwickshire County Council

- Watchet - Onion Collective -

- West London Zone

- Wisbech Regeneration – Anglian Water

Centres supporting Place-based projects

- Collaboration for Impact (Australia)

- Family Life (Australia)

- Foundation Scotland

- FSG (US)

- Inspiring Communities (New Zealand)

- Tamarack Institute (Canada)

These projects and programmes represented a wide range of partnership type and project; from large scale investments and partnerships (e.g. Crisis and Newcastle City Council), to smaller scale, community-led projects (Community Praxis). Furthermore, by ensuring a geographic spread of programmes we ensured a mix of rural and urban projects, difference in proximity to Westminster (politically, and physically), and different policy driven contexts (e.g. different levels of local government, and devolution in Scotland and regionally across England).

2. Why is there a problem with place-based working?

There is a clear imperative for place-based working, brought into sharper relief as economic challenges exacerbated by COVID19, deepen inequalities between places. At the same time there is a new optimism and confidence within communities to be agents of their own change, demonstrated by the response to COVID19. Systemic thinking and working is a more generally accepted norm, particularly when tackling deep rooted, complex issues and there is a growing appreciation systemic change must be led by and rooted in communities. But, in looking at the state of practice through this research there is an evident gap in the rhetoric and interest in place-based working, and the practical realities of how it is done and mainstreamed.

There is a growing acknowledgment in the UK that there is an opportunity to tackle certain tough and intractable social problems through communities when given the autonomy and time to make a difference, in a way that builds ownership, understanding and a legacy of change. Common threads of this can be seen in the work of organisations like New Local, the Better Way Network, the Human Learning Systems collaborative and many others.

There are no simple roadmaps or quick fixes, this is difficult work and those involved have to find their way based on local circumstances and the capacity of the community and local partners to make the change happen. We are interested in how this work happens in defined places and communities, in what is often described as place-based working:

> *The term 'place-based', in relation to foundations or national government bodies, is currently used to describe a range of approaches, from grant-making in a specific geographic area to long-term, multifaceted collaborative partnerships aimed at achieving significant change. In most cases, it is more than just a term to describe the target location of funding; it also describes a style and philosophy of approach which seeks to achieve 'joined-up' systems change.[2]*

It is this focus on philosophy of approach which we believe is both important, but hard to pin-down. It is a way of working in clearly defined geographies, that breaks down service and sectoral silos and bureaucracies by posing different questions about change, building new connections and collaborations, and sharing power more equitably within the place to enable change. See Appendix B for a more expansive description of how we are defining place-based work. There are examples of approaches to social change, such as those led by economic infrastructure or regeneration programmes, that can also adopt the language of place. Whilst those approaches can also include the kind of philosophy of approach we're describing here, they do not do so by definition. We are not, in this document, looking at those kinds of projects.

Despite the growing imperative to think and work systemically, place based working that works through communities to deliver bold, visionary change remains an exception to the status quo. We believe that there is a **structural obstacle to shifting this,** which has to do with how this work is perceived, understood, developed and funded. We see learning as being a navigator and enabler of local change so that projects can capture their own insights to improve impact and learn from others. What we see now, though, are people and projects lacking access to learning opportunities, methods and the support and experience of others. This creates unnecessary barriers to the development of effective place-based work.

---

[2] Historical review of place-based approaches. Lankelly Chase. 2017

3. What do we know from literature and practice?

Place-based working is well researched. We have looked again at the literature, but also taken some particular lines of enquiry to build on some gaps around the practice of learning. In this section we highlight four fundamental areas of focus for place-based working that are often under-defined in practice.
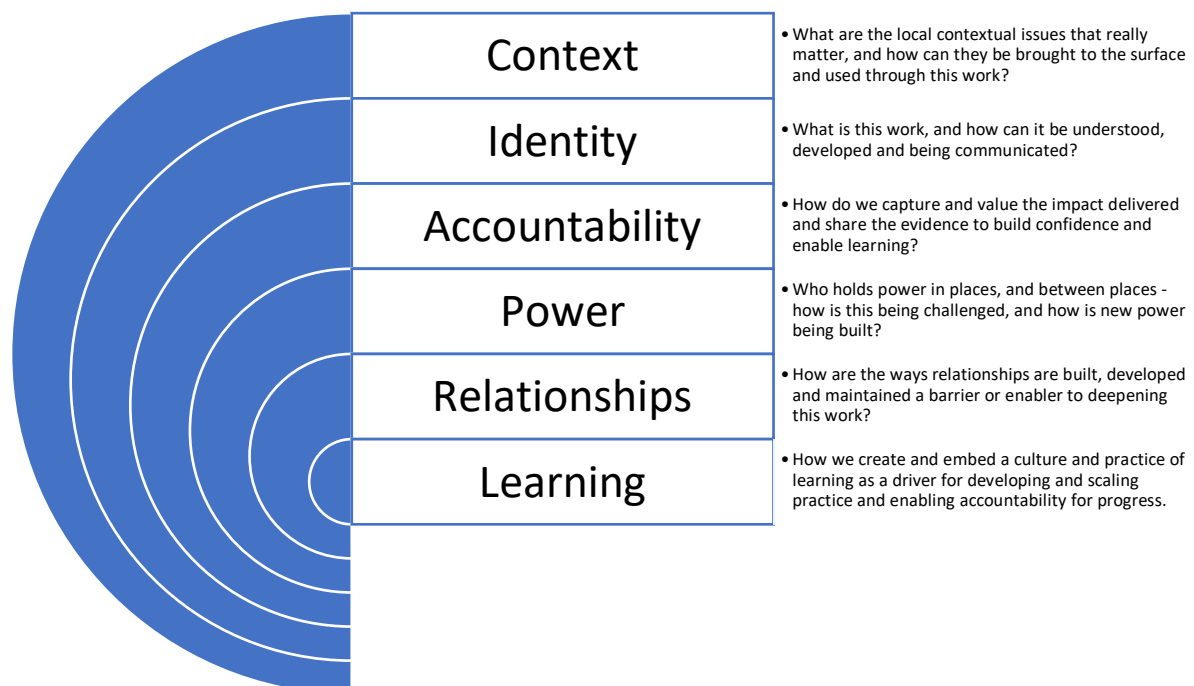
Approach

In trying to unpick the reasons for the challenge that we have identified in the UK, the literature on place-based work and place-based change only takes us so far. It provides frameworks, issues to consider, and some sense of what to navigate, but it doesn't answer some highly practical challenges for many organisations and individuals interested in a place-based approach.

After talking directly to 18 different places for this work, interviewing a number of international partners, and building on previous work on funding place-based systemic change which involved conversations with six more places, there are four areas to focus on which build from the literature and which we believe help us to understand why we are not practically seeing a greater confidence and growth in place-based approaches.

The key learning challenges

There are six key challenges to this work which we think can only be meaningfully and practically moved on for places and practice if they are part of a structured process of learning, feedback and reflection.

From the overarching questions of the identity of this work, and how it can be communicated, through the interconnected and human challenges of power and relationships, to the grounded and local context, these four issues came up over and over again in the literature and our primary research.

Context	• What are the local contextual issues that really matter, and how can they be brought to the surface and used through this work?
Identity	• What is this work, and how can it be understood, developed and being communicated?
Accountability	• How do we capture and value the impact delivered and share the evidence to build confidence and enable learning?
Power	• Who holds power in places, and between places - how is this being challenged, and how is new power being built?
Relationships	• How are the ways relationships are built, developed and maintained a barrier or enabler to deepening this work?
Learning	• How we create and embed a culture and practice of learning as a driver for developing and scaling practice and enabling accountability for progress.

Context

Acknowledging that ʿevery place is differentʾ is an unhelpful starting point for the work of place-based change, not least because it hides the fact that in a reasonably centralised country like the United Kingdom there are also a large number of consistencies between them too.

The Strive Partnership in the US, who have scaled place-based projects across over 70 communities tackling "cradle to career" educational outcomes for children, talk about starting by understanding how children learn in places and designing the partnership around how the local system works. Being a member of the Strive partnership means using a standardised framework that builds on the learning of others. Strive codifies learning across the network and requires members to provide "proof points".

What might it mean in the UK to think more clearly about the context of both the place, and the organisations and communities within them to build the foundations for this work?

Firstly, there is the need to think about places as systems, and to bring to this work an appreciation of systems thinking.

Dark Matter Labs in their work on the Winch project in Camden[3] talk about **making the system both human and legible**. Finding ways to understand the complexity so that partners and the community can learn together. Professor Toby Lowe of the Centre for Public Impact talks about the different types of complexity: compositional – how the system is made up; dynamic – a continually shifting system; experiential – the system is experienced differently by different users; governance complexity – it is challenging to engage and include the people and organisations in it. Both point to a key skill being understanding the complex nature of the problem being addressed and making it possible for the system to work with it.

Wellesley Institute in their evaluation of the Vibrant Communities programme in Canada talk about being able to switch focus between the **big picture of systems change and the detail of delivery**, a continuous rhythm of divergent and convergent thinking.

Once the system has been acknowledged, a strong finding from our primary research was a need to surface what are the **incentives at play on the key institutions and actors** involved in the work? This means, for example, surfacing the implications of the statutory responsibilities of a local government team, and how it comes into potential conflict with the business model of the local community businesses that are key actors. This often ends up being about money. What's been the history of funding, and what has that done to assumptions, assets, liabilities and relationships across organisations? But also, what are the financial drivers of the work of organisations. The importance of collaboration will be highlighted below, but if the financial drivers to compete cannot be surfaced, then they will be ignored until collaboration feels impossible.

As well as issues of local institutions and their incentives, there are also the wider societal impacts on the place. For example, **what has ten years of austerity and a year of COVID done to the existing faultlines**? What has that done to inequality and to the community? Without having a clear understanding of this, collaboration will fail over those faultlines. It will miss the fact that specific communities have been excluded for years, but also that austerity has hollowed out the collaborative capacity in local government and parts of the voluntary sector.

---

[3] https://provocations.darkmatterlabs.org/building-impact-movements-ff5df8006d0d. Accessed March 2021

Then there is the question of the scale – what is the right geography? Is it a ward, an estate, a village, a borough or something completely bespoke?

> *"The idea of place is the local authority boundaries… it is an ill-defined concept"* Newcastle City Council and Crisis Partnership.

> *"small and localised… is better because people know you so you can do more"* Lincoln City Foundation.

In many ways that is the easy conversation locally; the scale presents itself through the work and the community, but **how the work deals with that scale with integrity,** is what matters. What does community involvement mean when city wide, compared to an estate? How can governance be designed to reflect that scale?

Conversations about governances often lead to questions about leaders. This is not necessarily positional authority – often place based work is seen as being driven by a particular individual from a charity, or from a community group, rather than a Mayor or CEO figure. But we saw nervousness about this in our research, and an awareness that **leadership has to be held lightly to balance between investing in existing sources and forms of power, building new capacity and *sharing* power**. The way in which appointed leaders hold power is important. Government Outcomes Lab work Are we Rallying Together[4] talked about the emerging models of local leadership as stewards, mediators or catalysts. Having local leaders with a disposition to share power is a key enabler.

> *Andrea: Unhappy the land that has no heroes!…*
>
> *Galileo: No. Unhappy the land that needs heroes.*
>
> **The Life of Galileo (1939) sc. 13, Brecht**

These findings from places underline insight from the literature, which talks about understanding context and the opportunity for change in that context. Liz Weaver of the Tamarack Institute talks about seeing the **leverage points for change** and building a "**container for change"** unique to the context of the place. Harwood and others talks about understanding places through each other's eyes and building a **shared narrative of place** that sets its story – a way of making its history and identity legible.

Ultimately, this whole issue of context is about what is the nature of **the local disposition for change?** What are the factors pushing a place, a community or a group of organisations to demand something different, to have given up on old approaches, or to have a determination to start to work differently? And how does that take them to questions of working across the whole system of place. This story of context, if unearthed and understood, is both a powerful resource to build from, and an essential map of fault lines to navigate.

> *'[There is] a mindset that 'if we have a problem, we need a solution or service' which leads to the same programmes that don't work… we need to transition to seeing problems differently leading to more equitable and inclusive approaches, that leads to structural and systems change'.* – Collaboration for Impact

---

[4] Are we Rallying Together? Collaboration and Public Sector Reform. Jo Blundell, Franziska Rosenbach, Tanyah Hameed, Clare Fitzgerald. Government Outcomes Lab. March 2019

Identity

If local context starts the challenges within the place, then the question is how this kind of work is defined and how a clear identity runs across the practice of places working in this sort of way.

To put it bluntly, there is a **lack of a clear professional vernacular and framework** that helps people to talk confidently about what they are doing (what is place-based working, how can we be concrete and specific), and as a result they regularly get lost in debates that aren't important. Organisations and individuals wanted and needed to have frameworks for what it was that they were doing, to give them the confidence to talk about how what they and their organisation was doing identifies with place-based working. This is underlined by the systems literature. Westley, Zimmerman and Michael Quinn Patton in Getting to the Maybe[5] talk about individuals being the change. But that is harder if you don't have the words.

> *"We don't stand outside the complex system we are trying to change;*
> *when it changes, we do; when we change, it does."*

What is important is to acknowledge that **this is a mindset and a philosophy of working** as much as it is about geography, and it is about how things are done.

Being clear about how this would allow for skills to be organised into a framework of action, of how things get done. However, we mustn't forget it is values led work, and pretending it isn't undermines it. Having **more precise and confident language** would allow for the identity of those working in this way to be developed, and allow them to bring their personal journey and professional history to the work.

> *"Qualification… gives you a narrative to hang your work off. It gives you a*
> *philosophy, a methodology and a broader brush to understand the pro-*
> *cess, because all of this place-based work is process orientated, not out-*
> *come focused. That's the challenge we have… so I believe [in] investing*
> *heavily in practitioners" – Community Praxis*

It would also give **language for engagement with stakeholders**. The right language is needed to talk to local commissioners, local partners, the community, and also national funders about what they are doing, why, and where this is headed. This cannot be done from one place at a time, because it engages in language and evaluation judgements that need collective buy-in and engagement. Many places feel isolated by these challenges.

Identity is about personal, collective and relational definitions for this work, and a shared language enables a shared conversation about value and measurement. No one area, organiastion or project can do this work.

Accountability, measurement and impact

Kania and Kramer in the seminal article[6] that launched the concept of Collective Impact, laid out five principles of practice of which shared measurement is one. What is evident from several case studies across different sources, is that developing a **shared measurement system** is one of the toughest challenges. Something that seems on the face it to be a methodological challenge is in practice a

---

[5] Getting to the Maybe: how the world is changed. Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman and Michael Quinn Patton. Vintage Canada. 2006

[6] Collective Impact. Stamford Innovation Review Winter 2011. John Kania and Mark Kramer. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact Accessed March 2021.

moment of reckoning. The process calls out some of the most fundamental questions: whether partners see the problem in the same way, whether they agree on what should be achieved and have the same sense of a just outcome or entitlement, how success is framed and who or what matters in that framing. On a more practical level it requires a sharing of data and the willingness of organisations to be open which is somewhat of a bellwether for the quality of partnership.

The majority of projects we engaged with were funded by grant funders who accepted and expected the uncertainties of predicting either a pace of change or what quality outcomes ultimately will be delivered. In our discussions we found a tension between those that saw results based or otherwise pre-defined expectations of performance and value to be out of kilter with the ethos of working relationally, systemically and collaboratively. But, also others who wanted to demonstrate impact and value to their communities and those who consider the discipline of articulating that value and impact to be essential to build trust and scale in this way of working. The common ground across projects is acceptance that there needs to be a different form of defining and measuring success and those approaches should be informed by the context and ambitions of projects. As Alnoor Ibrahim noted in his work on measuring social change:

> *"The vast literature on organisational performance and effectiveness appears to converge on one key insight: there are rarely any singular or unambiguous measures of success in organisations…..These challenges are even more pronounced and complex in the social sector."*[7]

Power

Running across and between the local context and the identity of the work is power and relationships, and although we have separated them here, they often intertwined and reinforce the other.

When we are talking about power, this could be positional and political power, it could be power differences between racial or religious communities, it could be class based inequities or it could be the power of assets and infrastructure ownership by certain organisations. Acknowledging these and working with them is at the core of the challenges facing any organisation doing place-based work, but simply saying that power and relationships matter is not enough.

One of criticisms of the collective impact methodology when it was originally defined is that it didn't **emphasise working with and sharing power with communities** and this is where the collective impact method diverged most significantly from the community development and empowerment practices that preceded it[8]. Practitioners using collective impact have sought to adapt it subsequently to be more community-led, whilst retaining the clarity of a framework of practice.

In terms of this challenge of power there were five key areas to focus on for place-based working from our primary research.

Firstly, it is important to **both influencing those in power, and to develop new sources of power in places and communities**. It is not an either/ or, and sometimes these two roles require different work. The first is more programmatic and hierarchical, whereas the second is about community development, organising and ownership. Place based working must engage in this tension.

---

[7] Measuring Social Change. Performance and accountability in a complex world. Stamford University Press. 2019. Alnoor Ibrahim.
[8] Widening the view: situating collective impact among frameworks for community-led change. Community Development. Christians and Inzeo. https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2015.1061680

Secondly there is the common **challenge of existing governance structures**. Place based work should be about how power is shared in partnerships and communities, but often the existing structures are about how existing power is managed and maintained.

Most projects we spoke to were dependent in some way on local government and other parts of the public sphere as key partners and their willingness to share power and flex ways of working to create common ground was a key enabler.

> *"Competing geographies… CCG and the NHS do not coincide with anything else that exists. They operate in a different way, with a top down hierarchical structure. There might be separate places, but their catchment area is enormous. The project is therefore driven by imposed structures"*

Some of the arguments for taking time on the foundational work of place-based approaches point to the the difficulty of rebalancing power where very probably no individual organisation holds the reach, governance structures or processes to make change happen. Those who lead the change have to influence in order to change the whole system and that means creating trust, shifting the dominant narrative, building coalitions and in some cases, building a movement for change in communities.

Building this movement is so important because it enables place-based partnerships to tackle systemic challenges. Organisations have to punch more than their usual reach to achieve change and there is a certain audacity required by people and organisations in reaching beyond a given remit or responsibility. Change can start with an organisation or community leader stepping out of line, doing something differently and creating a "ripple". Richard Harwood in the Ripple Effect[9] talks about starting small.

> *Start smaller and "win" to go much bigger: start with those who are ready, willing, able to take action and build trust/relationships/confidence before scaling*

If local governance stifles this ability to go both 'big 'and 'small', then the opportunities for this approach will be weakened.

Thirdly, it is essential to look at **balancing individual and thematic power**. This is explored more in the relationship section below, but balancing the power of individuals within a place, with the power of narratives of need, or historical powers of organisations all begs the question of how do these relationships work, what are the structures that enable the current power structure to be maintained, and what do we want to do to challenge that balance?

Fourthly, and building from the context section above, working with **hierarchical power dynamics is the norm but they are often not explicitly tackled and need to be reexplored and reengaged with constantly**. It is the job of this work to try to challenge unequal power dynamics, but it can be draining.

And finally, this work should aim to be **inclusive by definition**. Unlike programmes which may recruit specific people based on a need, it should be asking who is not 'in the room 'at all times. Whose voice isn't being heard, and why not?

---

[9] The Ripple Effect. How change spreads in communities. Richard Harwood. The Harwood Institute. 2015

There was a reasonably strong sense that the UK does not have the same depth of experience of really engaging in some of these questions of inequal power in communities, when compared to other countries. International examples of places seem more willing to engage with the complex power dynamics of race-based discrimination, for example, whereas the UK context was more focused on 'community engagement 'generically.

Relationships

Relationships are frequently referred to as being important, but conversations about them can fall into glib positivity, or the kind of magical thinking that doesn't examine the work. The question of how to act in a "relational" way and the individual qualities and behaviours needed, are more elusive questions. Dartington Social Innovation Labs[10] (now Dartington Service Design Lab) talk about the difficulty of articulating what being relational is and therefore thinking about how to teach those skills to individuals. It is easier to see perhaps what being relational isn't and they observed that practitioners who adopt a risk lens in their relationship with service users, creating a distance and hierarchy that they consider the opposite of "relational".

> *"We know little about who is good at relating. We don't know whether people trained in social work or psychiatry are better at relating than the next-door neighbour who relies on life skills. We might assume training can improve people's ability to relate, but we don't know how much training matters. We might assume that relating comes 'naturally' to some – perhaps reflecting their own relationship history – but we don't know how critical such natural skills are, or who tends to have them."*

Exploring relationships is intrinsically linked to the power challenges above, but there are four key points from our research.

First, trusting **relationships is the currency of this work**, as it enables sharing, confidence and collaboration. It is an ongoing cycle that needs maintaining and understanding. It is never completed and needs explicit mechanisms to maintain.

> *'Not all partners see themselves as part of the partnership yet… there is an element of suspicion'*

This is strongly supported by wider research[11] which refers to the necessity of developing resilient relationships capable of sustaining tough conversations and challenges. Systems working means rocking the status quo and that can create uncomfortable moments. Foreseeing the necessity of this and building both a culture and way of working that enables this to be done "safely" was observed as an example of good practice in managing partnering relationships.

> *'foundations need to anticipate and prepare for conflict to arise as well as taking risks that traditionally they may have avoided but which are critical to community change (ASDC, 2007).'[12]*

---

[10] Bringing Everything I Am Into One Place. An Inquiry into how we can all better support young people facing severe and multiple disadvantage. Michael Little, Rebecca Sandu, Beth Truesdale. Dartington Social Research Lab. 2015.

[11] Historical review of place-based approaches. Lankelly Chase. 2017

[12] Historical review of place-based approaches. Lankelly Chase. 2017 p25

Liz Weaver of the Tamarack Institute[13] talks about change going at the "speed of trust" and the importance of investing in building trust with partners and the wider community as a precursor to delivering significant change.   The Tamarack Institute[14] also talk about individuals going through an "inner journey of change" that enables them to look at problems differently. We saw examples where whole teams had been through a journey of change together to create a common mindset.

Secondly, the social sector is often good at partnerships, but that's different from collaborative and long-term relationships. To **collaborate across a place, means to give up a little of one's own mission in the service of something shared and collaborative**. This is a risk to the business models, and incentives of all involved, but if this isn't faced down then the relationships will remain shallow.

"working at the pace of the community… speed is sometimes where collaboration is with the statutory sector" – Foundation Scotland

"we know that it isn't quick, it takes a while to build relationships with people" – Lincoln City Foundation

"a downside is that coalition building can take a long time – several years" – National Grid

Thirdly, to prevent that shallowness, **sharing hidden beliefs and values must become a part of the work**. This underlying sense of mission and justice is too often hidden from view in management conversations, but it is what will build deeper relationships.

Finally, consensus-based working is needed, but that only comes with **uncomfortable challenges and a shared understanding of reality**. This often means challenging what had seemed to be an assumption, but now clearly isn't shared. Relationships change, and that can mean going back as well as going forward to develop understanding.

Reflections from places

The four themes from our research are not new, but they push forward our understanding of the challenges involved in place-based working because of our focus on the practical needs of the place. In looking at them, there are two core reflections – one about funding, and another about learning.

Funding

The more places wanted to work in this way, the more it was clear that traditional funding mechanisms are not fit for purpose because some look for success based on pre-defined outcomes within pre-defined timeframes. This does not fit with the approach and philosophy described here.

There is a need to create a different paradigm and common language for funding based on different forms of evidence of progress, and a common language for funders that allow them to engage in place-based approaches and to work with the values of it. There is existing research work that explores this, such as by IVAR[15] and Renaisi[16].

---

[13] The Journey of Collective Impact. Ed Liz Weaver. Tamarack Institute. 2019
[14] Building Containers and Co-design: Transforming Collaboration. Liz Weaver. Tamarack Institute. https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/paper-creating-containers-and-co-design-transforming-collaboration. Accessed March 2021.
[15] Working in Place: Collaborative funding in practice, IVAR, 2017.
[16] Funding Place Based systemic change, Renaisi, 2019.

This means funding in partnership, thinking about what that means for relationships, and being willing to see work adapt. It also means projects being able to evidence impact, using methods and sources of feedback that reflect the complex, adaptive environment of most projects, but which demonstrate the value delivered and the positive impact of working in this way

Learning to learn

What is also clear is that learning for these places is key. A thread that runs through the literature and the primary research is the need to think of learning as an intrinsic part of the process of doing this work. It is not an add on for the benefit of a funder, or a process that would be good to get to should there ever be enough time. It is both, at the micro scale of individual practice and the macro scale of work across the UK, necessary **as one of the most important** enablers of **the kinds of social outcomes that organisations and places want to achieve.**

It can also, and we have seen this in funding programmes such as Empowering Places from Power to Change and Place Based Social Action from DCMS and The National Lottery Community Fund, be a way to transfer knowledge and practice between places. At the moment, this tends to happen within programmes, and is hard for single places to know where to go to take part in this learning with other places.

Collectively this can drive the professionalisation of systems change skills in places and build the common language and recognition of the emotional, diplomatic and empathetic skills that are required. In the following section we substantially flesh out this role for learning.

5. What is learning in this context?

Our discussions with practitioners and learning organisations, and our review of the literature on place-based change initiatives, reveal that learning, when understood not as an intervention or output, but as an **approach**, *is fundamental to unlocking new ways of seeing and understanding, building relationships leading to genuine collaboration, trying new ideas, and critically, continuously adapting and improving. We believe that Learning, understood in this broader sense, is a key missing link in effective place-based work, and needs to be intentionally developed as a critical enabler by all those who have a stake in this practice, including practitioners, places, funders and policy makers. It is through a learning approach that truly collaborative partnerships can be built, power dynamics shifted, and the identity of the practice defined.*

As Toby Lowe of the Centre for Public Impact articulates, 'in complex environments, continuous learning is required because there is no such thing as "what works" at a programme level – there is no standardised programme which is "best practice" for all times and in all places. In complex environments "**what works"** *is the continuous process of learning and adaptation*.[17] Given the inseparability of learning with 'what works 'and ultimately, achieving desired outcomes, practitioners, funders and commissioners can no longer afford to see learning as a 'luxury 'that many practitioners described as too often falling 'to the bottom of the list, 'but must invest in it as a key success factor of place-based working.

This section lays out some key learning approaches identified from our research, which were noted to be of particular importance in place-based work. They are organised across the various nested levels of a system, beginning with the individual practitioner, often in roles of leadership, to the place initiative as a whole, and finally across places in the broader system.

Learning at the Practitioner level – The 'inner Journey of Change'

As we referred to earlier in this report, a critical area of place-based work that is under-developed in the UK compared to other countries, is the awareness of and willingness to openly discuss and address unequal power dynamics, even though power dynamics are very much present between the lines of how practitioners perceive some of the major challenges to their work. It is a reminder that for this to take place, change needs to occur not just at the organisation, structural and cultural level, but first at the individual practitioner level.

Research into effective leadership in the area of place-based healthcare initiatives shows that a *necessary pre-condition* is for the individuals involved, particularly those in positions of leadership, to have: 'an awareness of one's own social location, power, and privilege,' 'an ability and commitment to analyze and reorganise power, 'and 'a commitment to social justice equality, inclusion and the empowerment of disenfranchised communities.[18]'

These pre-suppose a set of corresponding beliefs, values and mind sets that develop and transform over time, a process that Tamarack Institute refer to as an 'inner journey of change, the discovery and letting go of [our] own mental models and cultural/emotional biases, required for [us] to be open to fundamentally new ways of doing things. at *,journey learning* a as interpreted be can This [19]'

---

[17] https://www.humanlearning.systems/overview/

[18] Claire Reinelt, Dianne Yamashiro-Omi, Deborah Meehan, Learning-Circle Partnerships and the Learning-Circle Partnerships and the Evaluation of a Boundary-Crossing Leadership Initiative in Health, The Foundation Review Vol 1 Iss 1

[19] Weaver, Cabaj 'Collective Impact 3.0'

some of the more profound levels, and Tamarack's view is that this sort of learning is often enabled by 'backbone 'support that provides a 'strong container 'for change, including the *facilitation* of the participants 'inner journey of change. 'This container for change allows 'participants [to] feel enough protection and safety, as well as enough pressure and friction, to be able to do their challenging work. [20]'

Learning at the Place level – learning to build a common frame of reference

As important as the *individual* journey is, a parallel 'journey of change 'at the *collective partnership* level is equally critical to the kind of place-based work that seeks to *improve and transform* the place in ways that are meaningful to its communities. Donald Schön, a pioneer in the theory and practice of learning connected the ability of a system to transform itself with its ability to learn in this way:

> *'Our society and all its institutions are in continuous process of transfor-*
> *mation. We must learn to understand, guide, influence and manage these*
> *transformations. In other words, become adept at learning....we must in-*
> *vent and develop institutions which are 'learning systems,' that is to say,*
> *systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformations.* '[21]

This sort of learning includes forming resilient relationships, developing a common frame of refer- ence and trying new ways of working to tackle deep and complex issues through *genuine collabora- tion*. Perhaps enabling this collective journey of change is one of the most foundational roles of *col- lective learning* in place-based change.

Learning as a way to seeing and thinking together

Many have commented on the difficulty of articulating *how* to build such resilient relationships, and David Bohm's 'On Dialogue 'provides great insight into *dialogue* as a key *learning process* through which a common understanding can be built amongst diverse and often siloed stakeholders:

> *'The object of a dialogue is not to analyse things, or to win an argument, or*
> *to exchange opinions. Rather, it is to suspend your opinions and to look at*
> *the opinions – to listen to everybody's opinion, to suspend them, and to*
> *see what all that means. If we can see what all of our opinions mean, then*
> *we are sharing a common content, even if we don't agree entirely. And if*
> *we can see them all, we may then move creatively in a different direc-*
> *tion.* '[22]

The Harwood Institute[23], with decades of experience in community based work in the US, reminds us that the voice and opinions of the *community* must be at the centre of these dialogues: 'Make *the community the frame of reference* to align action 'and 'bring the community's 'narrative 'into the

---

[20] https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/collective-impact-3.0-an-evolving-framework-for-community-change

[21] Schön, D. A. (1973) *Beyond the Stable State. Public and private learning in a changing society*, Harmonds-worth: Penguin

[22] David Bohm (1996). *On Dialogue.* Routledge Great Minds. p30

[23] Richard Harwood (2015). *The Ripple Effect. How Change spreads in communities*. Harwood Insititute

centre of a collective view of both current reality and future vision.'   Harwood continues by reinforc-ing that '*learning* plays a key role in achieving a common frame of reference around the challenge and what to do about it.'

Given the fundamental necessity of dialogue to enable collaboration, how it can become the norm across place-based projects? What role can backbone organisations and facilitators play in accelerat-ing this core learning practice?

Learning and Evaluation

The purpose of evaluation in the context of place-based work has recently begun to shift away from *only* measuring impact and providing evidence, to focusing more on enabling reflection, learning and improvements. As Toby Lowe articulates, this is vital because 'in complex environments, *continuous learning drives performance improvement*. In complex environments which are characterised by va-riety and change, it is not possible for management to specify what 'good 'looks like from above, and in advance, and to monitor performance against those criteria. Continuous learning enables work-ers 'practice to improve – through experimentation, gathering data, sense-making and reflective practice.[24]'

This doesn't mean that defining the desired impact and articulating these through a set of output and outcome metrics will not continue to be important, both to practitioners, organisations and fun-ders; it means that how evaluation is valued and practiced needs to be broader and more flexible, given the nature of the work. The practitioners we spoke to were unanimous in valuing learning and reflective practice, however, most mentioned that they lack the time, processes and frameworks to make learning systematic and to capture its fruits. Secondly, we learned that as the purpose of eval-uation broadens out from management and control to include learning and improving, it becomes even more critical to bring the perspectives of the community itself into all evaluative and learning processes. We found an example of how learning and evaluation are coming together in both of these ways in Black Thrive in Lambeth, London.

Black Thrive is a multi-sector partnership in Lambeth, London that works to reduce the inequality and injustices experienced by Black people in mental health services, and purposefully applies collec-tive impact principles to address systemic barriers to health and wellbeing. From the inception of the programme, they designed a developmental evaluation approach that underpins and structures their learning processes. Black Thrive have recruited and trained a team of local community re-searchers with lived experience of the issues they seek to address, to ensure that community per-spectives remain at the centre of the programme's learning and evaluation processes. Community researchers, along with other members of the Black Thrive Working Group also engage with an ex-ternal evaluation organisation who facilitates multiple learning practices including peer to peer learning platforms, surveys and qualitative interviews on the experience and outcomes of the pro-ject, and reflections reports, all of which help to identify better ways of working across the partner-ship and identify further learning needs of the group.

Black Thrive provides an example of what Lankelly Chase calls 'building in learning from the start, ' which they feel 'is essential and should involve all stakeholders, *especially community members*, in defining both learning objectives and how to capture learning. Tamarack of illustration an also is It [25]'

---

[24] https://www.humanlearning.systems/overview/
[25] Lankelly Chase (2017). *Historical review of place-based approaches*

Institute's reflection that embedding learning in a systematic way, requires 'creating [an] *infrastructure* of learning [which] takes considerable skills and resources. be places more can How [26]' supported to create their own learning 'infrastructures 'and learning systems?

Learning from beyond the Place

While the rhythm and character of any place-based change work are unique to each community and its context, our interviews with practitioners and learning centres affirm the impact of also looking beyond one's place for further learning, support, and validation. The four main learning needs met from beyond the place distilled from our research are: 1) methodology and frameworks for place-based change work 2) access to expertise and experience in specific areas and topics 3) access to coaches or 'critical friends 'who provides guidance and a sounding board 4) through a community of practice, connecting with other practitioners and places who are traveling a similar journey.

Frameworks for place-based change

Given the uniqueness and complex nature of the work in each place, a manual of standardised processes would not be appropriate; however, practitioners noted that having a form of 'high level playbook 'that articulates key principles, frameworks and ways of working, the typical phases of place-based work, key success factors and common pitfalls, would serve multiple useful purposes. Besides the ability to recruit, train and scale their work, they also mentioned the role of frameworks in providing a shared language and common methodology, accelerating collaboration amongst partners. Frameworks can also add definition and validity to the practice of place-based work which we identified earlier as still very much in development.

Access to expertise and experience

In our research, practitioners often expressed the desire to access expertise and experience in a variety of areas, at different points in their journey, but a common challenge is not knowing who and where to go to access these. Without a central, convening 'platform 'for learning that accrues knowledge, develops practice, and connects communities to resources, there is limited visibility for expertise and projects to find each other, and places must depend on the networks and connections they happen to have access to. With great variations in levels of network 'capital, 'communities that need the most resources and know-how are often getting the least.

We found a significant repetition in terms of the areas of expertise and experience that places would like access to:

- Engaging with communities, including shifting power dynamics and increasing equity and inclusion
- Learning and evaluation
- Relationship and partnership building, including influencing decision makers
- Systems change and systems thinking
- Fundraising and accessing resources

Interestingly these are also areas of common interest for places in Canada, Australia and the US. Learning centres such as Tamarack Institute and Collaboration for Impact are experiencing increasing demand for their services which include coaching and consulting on place-based work, brokering

---

[26] McConnell Foundation, Tamarack Institute, Caledon Institute for Social Policy (2012). *Inspired Learning: An Evaluation of Vibrant Communities' National Supports 2002-2012*

relationships between communities and those with relevant experience and expertise, and group learning forums and communities of practice.

Learning through coaching relationships

Coaching moves learning into a more bespoke space, predicated on a relationship of trust and credibility, and can be highly impactful in terms of learning outcomes. Coaching can be particularly effective in helping individuals and groups to progress along their 'inner journeys of change, 'both by building a greater awareness of mind sets, beliefs and assumptions, and by supporting the development of their own skills and systems for reflection and learning. In the context of place-based work, it is important that coaching is about co-learning and collaboration, 'walking alongside 'the place, from a position of equality.

Practitioners think about coaching in a variety of ways, using different terms such as mentoring or guiding, and with varying objectives. On the more informal end of the spectrum, practitioners spoke about coaches offering support, a 'safe space to chat, 'acting as a critical friend to help the group think better for itself. On the more structured end of the spectrum, practitioners who worked with Right to Succeed which provides a coaching and backbone role to collaborative cradle to career projects, described that they: '*connect* us to relevant learning from other places across the UK and internationally, and *help translate the learning* to our local context; 'and 'use their experiences to help us see the bigger picture, anticipate common obstacles, persevere on the path when the going gets tough. 'This is an example of coaching that enables not just replication of good practice, but adaption of practice to local contexts.

Learning through peers

One of the most powerful forms of learning identified from the research is the sharing of experiences with peers from other places and projects who traveling a similar journey as one's own. Peer-to-peer learning provides not only access to new ideas and practices, but also a powerful catalysing effect through the inspiration, validation and recognition gained by being part of a larger effort.

The practitioners we interviewed unanimously expressed a strong interest in being a part of a community of practice around place-based work. They spoke of the benefits of 'getting out of the office to get a good look at other projects 'which leads to the 'sparking of new ideas 'and energy, as well as some very practical benefits of learning how to approach common processes such as evaluations or tenders. Several practitioners mentioned that they felt communities of practice were most helpful when they enable the building of mutually beneficial relationships over time. Other practitioners see a community of practice as a much needed platform to amplify the voices of communities seeking to achieve similar visions and outcomes, to influence both policy and funding decisions impacting place based transformation efforts.

This leads to a related and perhaps more subtle impact of communities of practice: the development of a sense of identity, common language, and a 'practice vernacular 'as place-based change makers, which we referred to in an earlier section. A community of practice brought together by a common approach to place-based change, could provide a kind of validation and identity to an emerging profession in need of greater definition and recognition. Not only would this collective identity bolster a practitioner's confidence and ambitions in their own places, but it would also be a foundation for taking place-based work from a series of isolated initiatives, to building a movement across the UK, that elevates our view of all that is possible through genuine collaboration at multiple levels. Liz Weaver and Mark Cabaj's 'Collective Impact 3.0 'compellingly articulates the possibilities of taking a movement approach:

'In a movement-building approach, by contrast [to an improvement approach], the emphasis is on reforming (even transforming) systems where improvements alone will not make a difference. Movements 'open up peoples' hearts and minds to new possibilities,' 'create the receptive climate for new ideas to take hold,' and 'embolden policy makers' and system leaders. Movements change the ground on which everyday political life and management occur.'[27]

---

[27] https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/collective-impact-3.0-an-evolving-framework-for-community-change

Reflections on the research

This research, alongside the broader experience of the research team in their work with places, points to a growing tension and perhaps a tipping point in place-based working. The combination of a renewed optimism in communities about their power and capacity to be agents of change and an acceptance that complex problems need a systemic response, is building significant interest in place-based working. But, as our research has shown, there is much to do to redress the history of fragmented funding and the apparent lack of patient policy making needed to back projects that take time to produce normative "results". As we said at the start of this report, there is a zeitgeist at the moment around place-based working and it is important that we harness this opportunity to build momentum for changes that can only happen at a local level, with and by communities.

Reflecting on the findings in our research, we see a clear case for action on several fronts.

Identity and capability. The research shows that whilst distinct elements of place-based working as a form of practice are recognized, e.g. thinking systemically, working relationally, being collaborative; it falls short of practitioners having a clear identity and value. The skills being learned by those working at place needs to be organised into a framework of action and practice that builds on what has gone before them. They need the means to do this beyond the confines of particular time-bound funding programmes and to share a common vernacular that recognises and values the unique aspects of place-based practice and enables it to be shared and developed. One of the key challenges we need to address to enable place-based practice to scale, is to recognise the unique attributes and skills inherent in this work and giving the practice identity and value will attract new talent.

Strengthen and share the evidence base to build confidence. The evidence that this way of working delivers better outcomes for communities is not compelling in the UK. The uncertainty of the work challenges linear processes of measurement which look to tangible results or outcomes rather than the messier reality of work that tackles change in underlying systemic issues. We found thought and practice leaders in the UK and elsewhere were all evolving their approaches to measurement and this is a shared challenge where would seek wider collaboration.

Sharing power with communities. We need to fully value and recognise that working with and through communities, establishing belief, ambition and optimism for change, enabling the skills and capacity to lead, is a necessity to shift the fortunes of places. This is an emerging discipline and most of the projects we spoke to acknowledged they were still developing their ways of working with and sharing power and responsibility with communities and people with lived experience. This is work that needs to be developed together as a practice.

Relationships and governance. Learning creates a common golden thread that enables shared practice to emerge between projects and practitioners without institutionalising or simplifying either the practice or structures of place-based working. In the context of a complex journey of change, learning plays a critical role as a source of accountability. Accepting the uncertainties of predicting results in a given timeline, quality of learning and the agility with which teams adapt and respond to that learning is arguably a more effective foundation for governance and accountability.[28]

---

[28] Keeping Public Officials Accountable through Dialogue: resolving the accountability paradox. Nancy C. Roberts Calhoun. 2002. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/36731196.pdf

Context. This is work that is difficult to document as a process meaningful to others, because differences of context create profound differences in the way change works in places. Learning how to interpret and adapt to different contexts is a key skill in this work. Most projects we spoke to were not seeking prescription or replication, understanding themselves to be wayfinders, sense makers and coalition builders, but in order to share and learn they recognised the need to "codify" what they know or want to know.

Learning. We found learning in its broadest sense to be a critical enabler of this work where it is embedded into the way projects work, whether about creating the feedback loops that enable projects to find their way through change or the personal journey of change that shifts mindsets and creates common cause amongst practitioners. It's about building a common consensus around change by shifting perspectives and dominant narratives. It is also about learning from others. Those we interviewed were consistent in a view that learning from other projects is the most valued and absent source of support.

More broadly learning is about properly valuing the experience and knowhow in the UK. In the UK, the funding environment means that this way of working is fragmented across different funders and projects and learning is supported for the duration of the work, not more widely captured and absorbed with hard won experience and expertise lost.

In our view the research indicates a clear imperative to create a common infrastructure to support place-based change that is not owned by any single programme, funder or commissioner. International experience in US, Canada and Australia ,in particular ,demonstrates the value of this infrastructure in improving capacity, quality of practice and giving confidence to funders that working in this way will deliver better and more sustained outcomes over the long-term. It is equally important that any initiative to enable and support practitioners, operates in a way that is consistent with the ethos that we found identifies place-based practice. Specifically, working openly and inclusively with a range of organisations, putting communities and projects at the heart of defining and delivering learning, having a shared purpose and mission to deliver impact.

Appendix A - Literature

Behaving Like a system - pre-conditions for Place-based change. Sarah Billiald, La Toyah McAllister-Jones. Collaborate CIC. 2015

Bringing Everything I Am Into One Place. An Inquiry into how we can all better support young people facing severe and multiple disadvantage. Dartington Social Research Unit. Michael Little, Rebeca Sandu, Beth Truesdale. 2015.

Building Collaborative Places. Infrastructure for Systems Change. Lankelly Chase and Collaborate CIC. Anna Randle and Hannah Anderson. 2017.

Building Impact Movements: Place based systems change for children and Young People in Camden. Dark Matter Labs. Joost Beunderman, Orestes Chouchoulas, Indy Johar, Eunji Kang, Esther Norman, Paul Perkins, and Chloe Treger. June 2017

Building on Assets. The Local trust Approach. IVAR. 2015.

Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Non-profit Management Articles. Fay Hanley-Brown, John Kania, Mark Kramer. 2012. Accessed March 2021. Nonprofit Management

The Coalition Technical Assistance and Training Framework: Helping Community Coalitions Help Themselves. Health Promotion Practice. Frances Butterfoss. 2004.

Collaboration and collective impact: how can funders, NGOs and governments achieve more together? Geoff Mulgan. Nesta. January 2016.

Collective Impact. Stamford Innovation Review. John Kania and Mark Kramer. Winter 2011

Collective Impact 3.0. An evolving framework for community change. Mark Cabaj and Liz Weaver. Tamarack Institute. 2016

The Collective Journey of Collective Impact. Tamarack Institute. Liz Weaver. 2019

Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Lessons learned, potential and opportunities moving forward. Bob Gardner, Nimira Lalani, Cristina Plamadeala. Wellesley Institute. May 2010.

Community Change Initiatives from 1990-2010: Accomplishments and Implications for Future Work. The Aspen Institute. Anne C. Kubisch, Patricia Auspos, Prudence Brown, and Thomas Dewar. Community Investments, Spring 2010 Volume 22, Issue 1. 2010

Capacity Building for Collaboration. Leigh Goldberg Consulting. 2018

Co-operative Activity in Preston. Psycho-social research unit. University of Central Lancaster. Julian Manley and Lynn Froggett. 2016

Creating containers and co-design. Tamarack Institute. Liz Weaver. 2018. **https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/paper-creating-containers-and-co-design-transforming-collaboration.** Accessed March 2021.

Exploring the New World. Practical Insights for funding, commissioning and managing in complexity. Toby Lowe and Dawn Plimmer. Collaborate CIC, Northumbria University. 2019.

The Fifth Discipline. The Art and Practice of The Learning Organisation. Peter. M Senge. Random House. 2006.

Funding Place Based systemic change. Renaisi. 2019

Getting to the Maybe. Wesley, Zimmerman and Patton. Vintage Canada. 2006.

Historical review of place-based approaches. Lankelly Chase. Professor Marilyn Taylor, Eliza Buckly and Dr Charlotte Hennessy. 2016

Identifying training and technical assistance needs in community coalitions. Health Education Research Vol 8. Paul Florin, Roger Mitchell and John Stevenson. 1993

Inspired Learning: An Evaluation of Vibrant Communities' National Supports 2002-2012. McConnell Foundation, Tamarack Institute,Caledon Institute for Social Policy. Tamarack Institute. 2012

Leadership and Large Scale Change - how to accelerate learning and deepen impact. Leadership Learning Community. June 2015

Learning-Circle Partnerships and the Learning-Circle Partnerships and the Evaluation of a Boundary-Crossing Leadership Initiative in Health. The Foundation Review Vol 1 Iss 1. Claire Reinelt, Dianne Yamashiro-Omi, Deborah Meehan. 2010.

Lessons from a National Scan of Comprehensive Place-Based Philanthropic Initiatives. Urban Ventures Group. December 2019

Meaningful Measurement. Part of Upstream Collaborative reports. Collaborate CIC, Nesta and Centre for Public Impact. 2020.

The need for an Honest Broker: The Impact of the Prince of Wales Charities in Cross - Sectorial Partnership Working for Urban Regeneration. Cass Business School. Peter Grant, Paul Palmer.

Needle moving Collaboratives. Bridgespan group. Michele Jolin, Paul Schmitz, and Willa Seldon. https://www.bridgespan.org/bridgespan/Images/articles/needle-moving-community-collaboratives/needle-moving-community-collaboratives.pdf Accessed March 2021.

New Operating Models in Local Government. Part of Upstream Collaborative reports. Collaborate CIC, Nesta and Centre for Public Impact. 2020.

Not always movements: Multiple Approaches to Advance Large-Scale Social Change. ORS Impact. Sarah Stachowiak, Anne Gienapp, & Nikki Kalra. 2020.

On Dialogue. David Bohm. Routledge Classics. 1996.

Rallying together—The rationale for and structure of collaborative practice in England. Clare Fitz-Gerald, Franziska Rosenbach, Tanyah Hameed, Ruth Dixon & Jo Blundell. Public Money and Management. 2021

The Policies of Belonging. Onward Foundation.   Will Tanner. 2020.

The Ripple Effect. How Change spreads in communities. Richard C. Harwood. Harwood Institute 2015

The Strive Partnership - case studies. E3 Alliance, Austin Texas. https://www.strivetogether.org/our-impact/case-studies/. Accessed March 2021.

Ten Places Where Collective Impact Gets It Wrong. Global Journal of Community Psychology 7(1). Practice. Tom Woolf. 2016.

Unlocking capacity. Learning from four Connecting Communities areas. CLG (MHCLG). OPM. 2012

Voices from the Field III. **Lessons and Challenges from Two Decades of Community Change Efforts.** The Aspen Institute. Anne C. Kubisch, Patricia Auspos, Prudence Brown, Tom Dewar. 2010.

The Water of Systems Change. FSG. John Kanis, Mark Kramer and Peter Senge. June 2018

A Wayfinder's Guide to Systems Transformation: 18 insights for catalysts and convenors. Report from the Workshop 'How might we approach transformational change for complex challenges in the

future?'. London. McKenzie, F[1]., Beaudoin, Y., Birtles, J., Chatterton, P., Gillinson, S., Killick, S., Mannov, A., Munk, J., Roberts, A., Rose, V., Seneque, M., Siodmok, A., Trebeck, K. and Van den Broeck, D. 30-31 August 2017

Widening the view: situating collective impact among frameworks for community-led change. Community Development. Christens and Inzeo. 2015
https://www.myctb.org/wst/CEJ/SiteAssets/Widening%20the%20view.pdf

Working in place: collaborative funding in practice. Learning from 5 case studies. IVAR. 2015.

Appendix B
What do we mean by Place Based Working?

Defining Place-based Working

The concepts of 'place', 'place-based working 'or 'place-based systems change 'are frequently used in the social sector, and the wide literature on the topic can uncover many similar definitions and synonyms for them.[29] In recent years it has become an increasingly popular term to employ in social change projects, and it is important to establish a working definition. In their work for Lankelley Chase, Buckley and Taylor (2017) stated that:

> *The term 'place-based', in relation to foundations or national government bodies, is currently used to describe a range of approaches, from grant-making in a specific geographic area to long-term, multifaceted collaborative partnerships aimed at achieving significant change. In most cases, it is more than just a term to describe the target location of funding; it also describes a style and philosophy of approach which seeks to achieve 'joined-up' systems change.*

It is this focus on philosophy of approach which cuts across many of the explorations and definitions of the practice. There are examples of approaches to social change, such as those led by economic infrastructure or regeneration programmes, that can also adopt the language of place. Whilst those approaches can also include the kind of philosophy of approach we're describing here, they do not do so by definition. We are not, in this document, looking at those kinds of projects.

In 2019, Renaisi took part in a research project chaired by Save the Children to explore how best projects can deliver long-term, place-based systemic change, and how those projects can be funded. A series of learning papers were developed which explored the perspectives of funders and practitioners, alongside exploring theory based challenges in defining 'place', 'systems 'and 'change. [30]' That included a working definition of five features, developed in partnership with a range of stakeholders and place-based working practitioners, which emphasises the style and philosophy of approach for this work.

---

[29] A small selection of the wide grey literature includes: https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/insights/place-based-working, https://lankellychase.org.uk/resources/publications/historical-review-of-place-based-approaches/ https://www.anewdirection.org.uk/asset/4117

[30] Renaisi (2020) Funding Place-based Systemic Change [https://renaisi.com/2020/08/28/funding-place-based-systemic-change/]

1. Focus	It is not limited to a single organisation or service, but rather about collective and interrelated practice within a geography
2. Time horizon	It is long-term in ambition and practice, although it may well achieve things in the short-term
3. Approach	It is engaged in building and developing ongoing and evolving relationships between people and organisations, it is flexible and responsive, and it explicitly engages in questions of complexity
4. Scale	It is focussed on geographies that are understood by those who live in them, and to the systemic challenge.
5. Intentionality	It is attempting to unlock structural change, and is conscious of the different roles that need to be taken to achieve this. As a result it builds learning and adaptation into its work.

A key finding from that research was that place-based systemic change is a *way of doing* social change, as opposed to an *outcome of it*.[31] The diagram below presents a framework from which to consider different stages and approaches or ways in to place-based systemic change.

Place-based Systemic Change Framework

In that definition, approaches refers to the different ways into place base systems change. The levels outlined relate to the different layers of work that are moved through as practice gets deeper. Step-**changes** are how systems change projects move to further degrees of sustainability (financial and

---

[31] Renaisi (2020) Funding for Systemic Change: Learning Paper 4 [https://renaisi.com/wp-content/up-loads/2020/08/Learning-Paper-4_A-frameowrk-for-PBSC_0607.pdf]

environmental). Renaisi and partners have yet to encounter any organisation that sees itself as working completely at a systematic level: rather, it is an aspirational way of working for organisations to eventually get to.

What this work all highlighted, was a feeling that the philosophy of the approach needed a clearer grounding for it to develop, and the above framework would not be sufficient, without much greater capacity for places and funders to learn about practice, share it and build it. The findings from that research connected with a range of others who were exploring similar questions, and hypothesising the value of a Centre for place-based Learning.

Within that range of approaches, there are perhaps two poles:

Firstly, there are those approaches to working in place which are more structured and designed. Whilst they have their own starting points and heritages, many of them share something like a use of the Collective Impact principles, and try to think about designing long term work from the start.

Then there are those that are much more organic in nature, that may be community-development led, or grow out of local work and practice. These are rooted, but not necessarily as structured.

This report attempts to include both kinds of approach, as they share enough about the philosophy of place-based working to be grouped together. It is, at times, important to emphasise the differences that those approaches can bring, but our definition of this important practice to social change include all that take this philosophy, as this is what really defines the work.