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Navigating the system vs. Changing the system

A comparative analysis of the influence of asset-based and rights-based approaches on the well-being of socio-economic disadvantaged communities in Scotland

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Abstract

Asset-based and rights-based approaches have become leading strategies in Scottish community development. The asset-based approach seeks to help communities develop skills to provide self-help solutions. The rights-based approach seeks to help communities claim rights and make governments more accountable. These two approaches are based on contrasting conceptions of empowerment, employ opposing methods and lead to different outcomes. However, there is no empirical research that has comparatively assessed the two. This thesis represents the first in-depth exploration of the comparative effects of asset-based and rights-based approaches on the well-being of communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage in Scotland.

The study follows a qualitative design that includes a comparative case study of two projects: the AB project (representing the asset-based approach), and the RB project (representing the rights-based approach). The study also includes the perspectives of a wider pool of practitioners working in a range of community development organisations in Scotland. In total, forty-five participants across seventeen organisations have participated in this study.

To assess the influence of asset-based and rights-based approaches upon well-being, this thesis employs a pluralistic account that combines objective and subjective indicators across three dimensions: material, social and personal. The specific well-being framework employed is the result of combining White's (2010) well-being framework for the development practice and Oxfam Scotland's (2013) Humankind Index.

The results of this study indicate that asset-based and rights-based approaches have important contrasting effects on well-being. The asset-based approach seems to have a more positive effect on project participants and across a higher number of well-being indicators. The rights-based approach has more observable effects on material well-being and a higher impact on the wider community, but across fewer indicators.

My findings also suggest that employing these approaches in community development settings brings different advantages and disadvantages. The asset-based approach

seems easier to apply and to prove the positive outcomes on those involved. This approach, however, risks sustaining the status quo and, by doing so, misses out the opportunity to achieve more transformational outcomes. The right-based approach seems able to address structural disadvantages more effectively. Yet, it is more difficult to apply and to prove a positive impact. Organisations, practitioners, and communities applying it also face higher costs.

These findings have significant implications at the practice level. Asset-based and rights-based approaches are rarely combined in UK community development settings. As a result, practitioners are often left in the position of having to make a trade-off between helping improve the well-being of project participants and helping improve the well-being of the wider community. In theory, practitioners could avoid this trade-off by combining these approaches. In practice, this is not always possible. Asset-based and rights-based approaches represent opposing theories of change. There are also legal and funding requirements that prevent organisations from following a combination of both. Given this, understanding the comparative impact of applying asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development is critical.

Lay Summary

Asset-based and rights-based approaches have become leading strategies in Scottish community development. The asset-based approach seeks to help communities develop skills to provide self-help solutions. The rights-based approach seeks to help communities claim rights and make governments more accountable. These two approaches are based on contrasting conceptions of empowerment, employ opposing methods and lead to different outcomes. However, there is no empirical research that has comparatively assessed the two. This thesis represents the first in-depth exploration of the comparative effects of asset-based and rights-based approaches on the well-being of communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage in Scotland.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Thesis overview

In the last decades, there has been a policy drive to increase the participation of socio-economically disadvantaged communities in development. This drive is based on the premise that communities that become more actively involved in their own development are better able to address their problems and enhance their well-being. In Scotland, policies like the Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015) are aimed at building the capacity of local communities to tackle inequalities and socio-economic disadvantage (Escobar, 2022, p. 149). In the UK, policies like 'Building the Big Society' (UK Government, 2010) and the Local Government Act (2000) are also aimed at increasing the influence of communities in local decision-making processes.

Different community development approaches can help communities become more actively involved in their own development. Amongst them, asset-based and rights-based approaches have become leading strategies. The asset-based approach focuses on helping people identify their strengths, build on existing skills, organise around common interests and take actions to improve services by themselves (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). The rights-based approach focuses on helping communities identify their rights, and the duty bearers responsible for the fulfilment of those rights (Hamm, 2001; Ife, 2009; United Nations Development Group, 2003).

These two approaches have similar goals. They aim to enhance the well-being of communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. However, they employ contrasting methods. Asset-based approaches promote changes at the individual and community level. Rights-based approaches promote changes at the structural level. Community development organisations often apply one or another approach depending on the funding available, policy trends or on whether transformative changes are thought to happen first at the level of individuals or at the structural level. But what does evidence tell us? How do these two approaches influence the well-being of communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, and what are the comparative advantages and disadvantages of applying them?

There is limited empirical evidence on the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on well-being, and no empirical research has compared the two. This thesis provides the first in-depth empirical comparative study of the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on the well-being of socio-economically disadvantaged communities. This thesis aims to help activists, practitioners, and most importantly, socio-economically disadvantaged communities, make more informed decisions about which approaches to follow.

This thesis explores the comparative impact of applying asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development. Specifically, it explores (1) the comparative influence of asset-based and rights-based approaches on the well-being of socio-economically disadvantaged communities, and (2) the strengths, weaknesses, and complementarities of applying asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development practice.

The two main research questions in this thesis are:

RQ1) How do organisations following asset-based and rights-based approaches influence the well-being of socio-economically disadvantaged communities across material, social and personal dimensions?

RQ2) What are the strengths, weaknesses, and complementarities of applying asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development practice settings?

With the first research question, I aim to explore the extent to which each of these approaches deliver what they promise: enhancing the well-being of communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. There are multiple ways of understanding well-being and, as a result, multiple ways of measuring it. The conception of well-being employed in this thesis is a pluralistic account that integrates objective and subjective indicators across material, social and personal dimensions. This is for two reasons. First, pluralistic accounts are more holistic than other accounts of well-being. They capture well-being at different levels (individual and community) and from different perspectives, including what people subjectively care about and what is thought to determine well-being in objective terms. Second, pluralistic accounts are also more opened to consider the specific context in which assessments of well-being are applied

(what matters to people in a particular community and how their understanding of well-being is mediated by the context in which they live).

In operational terms, this thesis employs an innovative well-being framework that combines White's (2010) well-being framework for development practice and Oxfam Scotland Humankind Index (Oxfam GB, 2013). These two frameworks are based on pluralistic accounts of well-being and include multidimensional indicators. Indicators within White's framework are specifically developed to guide development practice. Indicators within Oxfam's Index reflect what constitutes well-being from the perspectives of communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage in Scotland. By combining these two frameworks, I make sure the indicators I employ are relevant to both community development practice (White's framework) and communities facing socio-economic disadvantage (Oxfam's framework).

With the second research question, I aim to explore the feasibility of applying asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development settings. Asset-based and rights-based approaches have gained similar levels of recognition within community development. Yet, their application in practice settings differs. The asset-based approach, compared to the rights-based approach, seems to be more widely applied and to receive the explicit support of policy makers and funders. In this context, those involved in community development might wish to consider other factors beyond the impact on well-being when deciding which approach to follow. Understanding the strengths, limitations and complementarities of asset-based and rights-based approaches, and the conditions under which one approach might be more feasible than the other are essential to ensure that practitioners and communities make more informed decisions about their work.

This thesis follows a qualitative design that includes (1) a comparative case study of two projects in Scotland: the AB project (representing the asset-based approach), and the RB project (representing the rights-based approach); (2) a contextual study to explore the perspectives of practitioners working in a range of community development organisations in Scotland. In total, forty-five participants across seventeen organisations have participated in this research.

A qualitative design was employed to better explore the perspectives of those involved in, familiar with or affected by the work of organisations applying asset-based and rights-based approaches in Scotland. Within a qualitative design, this thesis follows a comparative, case study methodology, that includes two research stages (case study and contextual study) and employs two methods of data collection (interviews and documentary analysis).

The analysis of data was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, I analysed case study data separately from contextual interview data. This stage involved organising my analysis thematically around the specific indicators included in the well-being framework I employed. In the second stage, I analysed contextual data (interviews with a wider range of organisations) and I draw further comparisons between case study data and contextual interview data. Data triangulation then helped explore in-depth the comparative strengths, limitations, and complementarities between applying asset-based and rights-based approaches.

My research findings suggest that asset-based and rights-based approaches have contrasting effects on well-being. Asset-based approaches seem to have a more positive effect on social and personal dimensions of well-being for project participants. They can achieve more immediate outcomes, help people address needs 'here and now' and access more funding. The approach, however, risks sustaining the status quo and, by doing so, misses opportunities to achieve transformational social change. Rights-based approaches, on the other hand, have more observable effects on material well-being, and a higher impact on the wider community. They can address structural disadvantages more effectively, but they are more difficult to apply. They obtain less funding and find it more difficult to demonstrate positive outcomes. Those involved can also experience higher costs at the personal level.

These findings have significant implications at the practice level. Asset-based and rights-based approaches are rarely combined in community development. This can leave practitioners in the position of having to make important trades-off between (1) improving the well-being of project participants over the well-being of the wider community, and (2) addressing people's needs 'here and now' over pursuing more transformational outcomes for the future.

In theory, practitioners could avoid these trades-off by combining approaches. In practice, however, this is not always possible. Asset-based and rights-based approaches are often guided by opposing theories of change. There are also legal and funding requirements that prevent organisations from following a combination of both. Understanding the comparative impact of applying asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development is critical to ensure communities and practitioners make an informed choice.

This choice, I argue, requires assessing the conditions under which one approach might be preferred over the other. There are four factors that practitioners and communities need to weigh up when deciding which approach to choose: (1) the political context and how welcomed rights-based approaches are where they are based, (2) funding requirements, (3) the capacity to combine approaches and (4) the level of urgency that might justify addressing immediate needs over social change. The thesis concludes with recommendations to practitioners, community organisations and researchers.

1.2. Motivations to undertake this thesis

My motivation to undertake this study stems from my practice in community development. Before starting my PhD, I worked as a youth and community worker for over sixteen years. During this time, I worked for a range of third sector organisations in four different countries: Spain, Bangladesh, Ireland, and Scotland. My experience of community development is that, in theory, we are expected to draw upon a range of approaches to ensure the people we work with lead community actions and achieve whatever they wish to achieve. In reality, however, our ability to apply diverse approaches is limited and community workers often end up in projects governed by a single methodological approach.

In my case, I worked in community projects that either helped people 'navigate the system' or helped people 'change the system'. The former involved supporting people to improve areas of their lives they have some power over such as to enhance their social network, gain new skills (often with a focus on employability), engage in positive behaviours, and so on. The latter involved challenging unjust structures, claim rights and advance social justice.

During my practice, I came to realise that projects aimed at helping people 'navigate the system' were more common than those aimed at 'changing the system'. Engaging in campaigning, within my paid work, was often not possible. Yet, ideologically, I felt closer to this side of the practice. Hence, I frequently dedicated time outside of the projects I worked to engage in political and social activism.

Working within this binary, however, made me question my practice (both paid and unpaid). When I worked helping people 'navigate the system', I felt unease since what people can achieve is limited by the structural barriers they face. When I worked to 'change the system', I also felt unease. Addressing structural barriers seemed an overwhelmingly difficult task.

These experiences led me to the broader question underlying this thesis: How can community development practitioners better enhance the well-being of the people they work with: by helping them navigate the system and engage in self-help solutions or by helping them challenge that system by pursuing social and economic rights? In my PhD, I came to see that there were two well defined approaches broadly representing the two kinds of projects I had worked in as a practitioner. The asset-based approach can be understood as a means to help people navigate the system, the rights-based approach as a means to change it. Both approaches have been subject to academic study, but no research has directly addressed my question. Most of the literature discusses the several theories behind community development, or the impact of using specific approaches, methods, and strategies in particular contexts. Empirical comparative research is rare.

This thesis aims to contribute to community development policy and practice by providing a comparative empirical analysis of the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on the well-being of socio-economically disadvantaged communities. The hope is that by undertaking research of this kind, the field of community development will better understand how different approaches work and the conditions under which some approaches might be more feasible or desirable than others. The ultimate aim is to help practitioners and community groups make more informed decisions when facing the difficult choice between which approach to follow.

1.3. The contested terrain of community development

Many of the dilemmas faced by those involved in community development are the result of engaging in a practice that is highly contested. Community development reflects competing ideals, principles, aims and approaches, and as such, the actions of practitioners and community groups can take different directions. In the literature, the contested nature of community development has been extensively covered by discussing the multiple ways in which community development is understood, and how different understandings impact how community development is practiced. In this section, I introduce these debates to highlight that, despite the high level of contestation, empirical comparative research is largely missing. If community development can take different approaches, those involved in community development need to know the implications that following different approaches have. What are the comparative effects of applying different approaches is a question that has been largely overlooked in the community development literature.

Community development scholars frequently emphasize that community development can mean different things to different people. It can be defined as outcome, process, discipline, approach, set of skills and values, occupation, social movement, political activity or professional practice (Banks, 2011; Bhattacharyya, 2004; Craig et al., 2011; Kenny, 2011; Phillips & Pittman, 2009; Shevellar & Westoby, 2018). In the literature, definitions of community development come in all forms, reflecting broad and narrow conceptions of what community development is (or should be).

Broad definitions tend to emphasize competing, multi and transdisciplinary understandings of community development. They often favour a broad notion of community development as a process or as an approach. An example of a broad definition is found in Meade, Shaw and Banks (2016), in which community development is defined as ‘a process through which ‘ordinary’ people collectively attempt to influence their life circumstances’ (p.2).¹

Narrow definitions, by contrast, tend to be more prescriptive and often focus on specific and limited meanings. They emphasize single notions of community

¹ Similar definitions are also found in [Ife, 2016](#); [Kenny et al., 2018](#); [Phillips & Pittman, 2009](#); [Scottish Community Development Centre, 2022](#).

development, for instance, as a professional practice or as an outcome. An example of a narrow definition is provided by the International Association for Community Development (2017):

'a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunity, equality and social justice, through the organisation, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings'.²

Different definitions coexist because community development is thought to 'reflect competing ideals about democracy, social justice and equality and divergent analyses about the role of the state, the market and civil society in promoting the common good' (Emejulu, 2015, p. 2). Given the diversity of interpretations, some question the extent to which defining community development is useful, or even possible. As Mae Shaw (1997) identifies, 'defining the nature of community work is a notoriously unproductive activity and one which has often led to a lowest common denominator approach which is largely meaningless' (cited in Shevellar & Westoby, 2018, p. 5). Others, however, argue that a lack of a definition can increase the risk of co-option (Bhattacharyya, 2004). When community development means anything and everything, it is more likely to be employed as a tool of social control. A large body of the literature has indeed illustrated the multiple ways in which community development has served to legitimize the agendas of elites over the interests of local communities (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Hoggett et al., 2009; McCrea & Finnegan, 2019; Ranta-Tyrkkö & Jojo, 2019; Rodriguez, 2014). Given this, Jnanabrata Bhattacharyya (2004) argues that those directly involved in community development must define it to prevent that others, with questionable purposes, end up defining the practice to their advantage (p. 6)

Bhattacharyya might be right in thinking that there is a moral imperative to define community development to prevent it from being co-opted. Yet, the problem in defining community development stems from the fact that the terms closely associated with it are themselves highly contested (Banks, 2019). Terms such as 'community' and 'development' are often understood in competing ways (Shaw, 2008).

² Similar definitions are provided by CLD Standards Council for Scotland (2022) and Gilchrist (2019).

The term 'community', in the community development literature, is often used to refer to either a location (geographical community), groups of people with shared interests (community of interest) or groups of people with shared identities (community of identity); Community can be used to refer to the idea of 'the collective' (Ife, 2009, pp. 11–12), people's sense of belonging and membership (Block, 2008) or to emphasize an idea of solidarity (Bhattacharyya, 2004). In all its conceptions, the term community involves attending to inclusion and exclusion. Conceptions of community can emphasize ideas of connectedness and cohesion, but also of division, discrimination, and social conflict.³ These different understanding of community ultimately impact how community development is enacted and practiced. For instance, as research has shown, when community is understood as a geographical place, community development can perpetuate inequalities. This is because majority groups, in place-based approaches, tend to retain most of the decision-making power, and as a result, the 'agreed' community actions often prioritise the interests of majority groups over those of minority groups (Emejulu, 2015; Lichter et al., 2012; Matthews & Astbury, 2017; Møller et al., 2019; Zurba et al., 2019).

The term 'development' can also reflect different purposes. Development can refer to the economic growth of a community (Peet & Hartwick, 2009). It can be understood as a process of asset-building (Green & Haines, 2015) or as the outcome of enhanced agency: communities develop when they have more power to make their own decisions and change the world around them (Bhattacharyya, 2004). A popular conception of development is also in relation to well-being and quality of life (see Chapter 3). According to this conception, development is about ensuring that communities have adequate standards of material, social and personal well-being (White, 2016), and that those standards are based on what communities themselves value (Sen, 1999). Again, like with the term community, how development is understood impacts how community development is approached.

Despite the wide diversity of definitions, there seems to be a broad agreement on what is the ultimate purpose of community development: to improve the well-being of communities and advance social change (Bhattacharyya, 2004; CLD Standards

³ For a more in-depth discussion of the different and competing sociological understandings of community see, for instance, Bell & Newby, 1974; Cohen, 1985.

Council for Scotland, 2022; IACD, 2004; Kenny et al., 2018; Phillips & Pittman, 2009). How community development *should* achieve this goal, however, is subject to contestation (Mayo, 2008). Some advocate for approaches that aim to build the capacity of communities to address problems by themselves, such as the asset-based approach. Some advocate for approaches that aim to build the capacity of communities to engage in political actions and rights claims, such as the rights-based approach.

Given the range of approaches and the high level of contestation within community development, the lack of comparative empirical research is surprising. Most of the literature discussing community development tends to focus on theories, or on the effects of using specific approaches, methods, and strategies in particular contexts. How different approaches compare, and the conditions under which some approaches might be more desirable than others, are questions rarely pursued⁴.

If we look at the literature on assets-based and rights-based approaches more specifically, we see a similar trend. Most of the literature discusses asset-based and rights-based approaches from a theoretical perspective. Scholars provide multiple frameworks and explain why one approach or the other might better address poverty, advance social change or help improve well-being (See Dowler & O'Connor, 2012; García, 2020; Haines, 2014; Hickey & Mitlin, 2009). Yet, comparative empirical work is largely missing.

Specifically, the research so far conducted has focused on the benefits of applying these approaches (Haines, 2014; Ife, 2009; Mathie & Cunningham, 2005) or on their limitations (De Andrade, 2016; Friedli, 2013; Gauri & Gloppen, 2012; Gregory, 2014; MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014; Nelson, 2007; Tsikata, 2004). There is limited empirical evidence connecting the use of asset-based or rights-based approaches with enhanced well-being (exceptions are Sano, 2020; Ward, 2019) and no empirical research has so far compared the two. How these approaches enhance well-being across multiple dimensions and what are their comparative strengths, limitations and

⁴ An exception are studies looking at the advantages of bottom-up approaches over traditional top-down needs-based interventions (Ife, 2009; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Nel, 2018; Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003; Uvin, 2007)

complementarities are questions that require further empirical work. This thesis attempts to answer these questions.

Chapter 2: Asset-based and rights-based approaches

2.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces asset-based and rights-based approaches and provides an initial comparison. The chapter has three purposes. The first purpose is to present an overview of the research conducted on asset-based and rights-based approaches and to situate community development practice and the use of the two approaches within it.

The second purpose is to identify initial points of comparison between asset-based and rights-based approaches. This initial comparison lays out the main similarities and contrasts between these approaches as identified in the literature. It also provides a framework from which to discuss research findings in later chapters (Chapters 5 to 9).

The third purpose of this chapter is to highlight what we know (and do not know) about how asset-based and rights-based approaches work in community development. As stated in the initial chapter, asset-based and rights-based approaches have attracted praise and criticism. However, there is no empirical work comparing the two. Laying out what proponents and critics suggest are the impacts of following asset-based and rights-based approaches provides the rationale for my research questions: how do asset-based and rights-based approaches comparatively influence well-being, and what are their comparative strengths, weaknesses, and complementarities?

This chapter is structured as follows. In section 2.2., I discuss the context in which asset-based and rights-based approaches emerged in UK and Scottish community development. I discuss the limitations of the needs-based approach and how the asset-based and rights-based approach were thought to successfully respond to these limitations. In sections 2.3. and 2.4., I discuss the asset-based approach and the rights-based approach in detail. In section 2.5., I lay out an initial comparison between asset-based and rights-based approaches. I argue that these approaches have some similarities, such as a shared concern for well-being and a bottom-up approach. Yet, the two follow opposing methods, employ contrasting conceptions of empowerment and participation, and generate different outcomes. Finally, in section 2.6., I conclude the chapter.

2.2. Before asset-based and rights-based approaches

In community development practice, the asset-based and the rights-based approach have relatively recently gained popularity. For a long time, the needs-based approach was the leading strategy.⁵ This approach involved undertaking needs assessments to identify the problems of communities so that relevant interventions could be designed to address them. It involved working in a mostly top-down direction with external professionals identifying the problems and needs of communities, and designing the interventions, with little or no input from communities themselves (García, 2020; Haines, 2014; Nel, 2018).

In the UK, throughout this period, the state (either as provider or funder of development programmes) and most charitable organisations pursued the needs-based approach (Clarke & Newman, 1997; Tett, 2010). There were some organisations that, whilst following a needs-based approach, avoided the top-down direction, helping communities identify their own needs and take political actions (Craig et al., 2011, p. 35; Nel, 2018). However, this *bottom-up* approach was rarely adopted by statutory community development services.⁶

The needs-based approach, and especially its common top-down direction, drew significant criticisms. It was said to unfairly portray disadvantaged communities as 'objects of charity' (Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003, p. 271), rely on the figure of the 'external expert' (Ife, 2009, p. 132), and fail to involve communities in finding the solutions to their problems (Haines, 2014; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

The main line of argument against the needs-based approach is outlined well by Ivis García (2020): when external organizations and 'experts' provide the resources to help communities meet their needs, it creates a dynamic in which disadvantaged communities see themselves, and are seen by others, as passive recipients of charity. Communities 'think of themselves as not being capable enough to possess control

⁵ As the model adopted by UK welfare state from 1950's (Clarke & Newman, 1997; Tett, 2010) and also in the US (García, 2020).

⁶ The directive top-down approach followed by statutory community development at the time was known for leaving community workers in the conflicting situation of having to work in and against the state (Asenjo, 2015; London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979). They worked against the state because they challenged state policies and the top-down approach, but at the same time they worked in the state because they relied on state funds, facilities and services (Alcock & Christensen, 1995, p. 118).

over their own lives...[and] people start saying to themselves: we are deficient, we are a poor community, we are hopeless' (p. 68). This view of communities as 'dependent' reinforces harmful stereotypes and further stigmatizes disadvantaged communities. 'Residents internalize that solutions come from the outside...that...[they] are merely the recipients of services' (Ibid.). There is also a power imbalance between the community and those in the role of 'experts'. External organizations providing assistance end up having all the power to make decisions about how resources are allocated. As a result, 'resources are targeted to provide the necessary funding to service providers and professionals rather than the residents' (p.69).

In light of these criticisms, there has been a widespread move away from top-down approaches that focus on 'needs' and 'problems'. It was in this context that the asset-based approach first, and the rights-based approach later, gained popularity.

2.3. Asset-based approaches

Asset-based approaches started to gain popularity in UK community development in the 2000's. These approaches focus on helping people identify their strengths, build on existing skills, organise around common interests and take actions to improve services by themselves (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, pp. 5–9). Central to asset-based approaches is the idea of social capital (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003, p. 479). Social capital⁷ refers to 'features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam, 1995, p. 67). Social capital is based on the premise that enhanced social connections help people access a wider range of resources, and these can better help them achieve their goals in life (Adler & Kwon, 2000; Field, 2003).

Following this premise, asset-based approaches aspire to enhance interactions 'between and among local residents, local associations, and local institutions' (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996, p. 26). By doing so, asset-based approaches aim to (1) enable the identification, mobilization, and effective utilization of community assets,

⁷ In the literature, there is no consensus about what social capital is, and different authors hold different perspectives. However, most researchers identify the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986), James S. Coleman (1994) and Robert Putnam (1995) as the founding fathers of the concept of social capital in the social sciences. In the context of asset-based approaches, it is Putnam's work in particular that appears to be the most influential (DeFilippis, 2001; A. Kay, 2006).

(2) foster collaboration and sustainability within the community and (3) help community members take an active role in addressing local challenges.

Asset-based approaches were originally developed by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight (1993b) after they conducted a series of studies on the characteristics of successful community development initiatives in the US. Their findings suggested that communities that took control of their own development were better able to enhance confidence, resilience, and ultimately, their well-being.

At the time that Kretzmann and McKnight were conducting this research, urban communities in the US were facing the consequences of changes in the labour market and welfare state provision that occurred during the 1970's and 1980's. The industrial sector had moved away from central cities and the new jobs created were either highly professionalised and unobtainable to most working class people, or obtainable but precarious (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p. 1). At same time, welfare programmes were significantly cut on grounds of being economically unsustainable and socially damaging. They were considered to perpetuate people's dependency on welfare as a way of life, and to compromise the value of work as a social contribution (Handler, 1995).

For Kretzmann and McKnight, communities facing these conditions had two strategies to choose from. One was to highlight their needs, deficiencies, and problems with the hope that public and/or private institutions would get involved in helping them. The downside of adopting this strategy was the significant risk of perpetuating the perception of disadvantaged communities as passive and deficient. The alternative strategy was to recognise their communities' strengths, skills, and capacities so that they could start guiding their development by themselves. The hope was that by adopting this strategy, disadvantaged communities would project a more positive image, as comprising active citizens instead of passive consumers of services. This strategy, moreover, constituted a better fit within the constraints of the existing socioeconomic context. At the time, the prospect of getting reliable help from outside of the community seemed bleak. If communities were to improve their situation, they would have to do it by themselves, mobilizing their own resources and providing their own community services (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p. 5). It is this second strategy that has become known as asset-based approaches to community development.

Asset-based approaches rapidly gained popularity but they also attracted significant criticisms. For critics, asset-based approaches (1) risk making communities exclusively responsible for providing the solution to their problems, (2) favour behavioural change over structural change, and (3) are abstracted from a focus on social injustice (Berk-Clark & Pyles, 2012; Feeney & Collins, 2015; Friedli, 2013; MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014; Popay et al., 2021). Critics also emphasize the lack of strong evidence on the benefits of asset-based approaches, which they find surprising given the wide application of these approaches in community settings. In their view, evidence is limited and mostly anecdotal (De Andrade, 2016; Ennis & West, 2010). In the absence of such evidence, some question whether the promotion of these approaches have mainly followed ideological purposes to justify further welfare retrenchment and undermine socio-economically disadvantaged communities (Friedli, 2016, p. 210).

To fully grasp these criticisms, one needs to understand the context in which asset-based approaches gained popularity. In the UK, the promotion of asset-based approaches occurred in conjunction with the 2010-2015 Coalition Government's austerity programme. Under austerity, public provision of youth services, cultural activities and community centres was drastically reduced (Gray & Barford, 2018; Hastings et al., 2015). These cuts were legitimised under the premise of enhanced local autonomy and community empowerment. They were framed as an opportunity for local governments to manage their own budgets and for communities to gain decision-making power over service provision (Featherstone et al., 2012).

Yet, as many scholars identify, these austerity policies were part of a wider neoliberal agenda to defuse the responsibility of central governments in a time of economic crisis (Levitas, 2012). Austerity measures were 'ultimately concerned with offloading costs, displacing responsibility [...and] making others pay the price of fiscal retrenchment' (Peck, 2012, p. 632). Austerity was imposed on local authorities, and those most economically disadvantaged ended up paying the price (Gray & Barford, 2018; Hastings et al., 2017).

In this context, the rise of asset-based approaches might not be surprising. At the state level, asset-based approaches connected well to the idea of the 'Big Society': the government's vision of a society in which third sector organisations and

communities play a leading role in delivering public services, improving their local areas and promoting a new culture of ‘responsibility, mutuality and obligation’ (UK Government, 2010a, p. 1). At the local government level, asset-based approaches gave local authorities the means to maintain the provision of community services (mainly through third sector provision and volunteers) in the face of drastic cuts. This created significant tensions within community development practice. For practitioners, asset-based approaches constituted an opportunity to bring community-led initiatives to the forefront of their practice (Arefi, 2008; García, 2020; Haines, 2014; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). However, for policy makers, asset-based approaches were more of an opportunity to legitimize welfare reform (Friedli, 2013, 2016; MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014; Rolfe, 2018).

In Scotland, asset-based approaches also became a leading theme in government discourse and policy (McLean et al., 2017). Two landmark reports, ‘Assets for Health’ (Burns, 2011) and the Christie Commission Report on the ‘Future Delivery of Public Services’ (Scottish Government, 2011) stressed the importance of building on communities’ strengths and assets, so that people could better enhance their own well-being. At the same time, these reports recognized the role that asset-based approaches played in offsetting severe welfare cuts through community participation and self-help provision (See Christie’s Commission Report).

The promise of asset-based approaches was incorporated into several areas of public policy in Scotland, including the Social Care (self-directed support) (Scotland) Act (2013), the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act (2014) and in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015). This support at a policy level had an impact on community development practice. Third sector organisations were urged (mainly through funding) to prioritise asset-based approaches over other approaches and, in this way, asset-based approaches soon became a leading strategy in local community development in Scotland (Pattoni et al., 2016).

Aware of the tensions, proponents of asset-based approaches have sought to disassociate the approach from neoliberalism and DIY community development. In the view of proponents, ‘framing the assets-based approach as simply furthering a neoliberal agenda downplays [...] the agency of practitioners in resisting, (de-)constructing and utilising policy ideas and discourses [...] to benefit the individuals

and communities' (Roy, 2017, p. 462). Proponents note that asset-based approaches do not call for the withdrawal of state's resources; they simply call for an increased participation of communities in decision-making and development (Landry & Peters, 2018b, p. 7). As such, 'working in an assets-based way [...] requires [also] long-term investment, of both time and money, and structural and legislative change to how public services work' (McLean, 2022).

In sum, asset-based approaches seek to overcome the limitations of the needs-based approach and counteract a view of poor communities as dependent and problematic. Asset-based approaches aim to activate the participation of communities, help regenerate disadvantaged areas and boost social participation whilst fitting within a context of public service reform and austerity. Asset-based approaches have become a leading strategy in UK and Scottish community development policy and practice. However, asset-based approaches have proved controversial, with proponents needing to defend the strategy against accusations that its popularity is due more to its ideological appeal than to evidence of its effectiveness.

Assets

To fully understand how asset-based approaches work in practice, and why they have attracted criticisms, it is essential to understand what 'assets' means in the context of community development. The term 'assets' was initially used to refer to the gifts, skills and capacities of people and organisations (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996). The term has come to refer to seven distinct forms of community capital: human, social, physical, financial, environmental, political and cultural (Green & Haines, 2015). Most scholars, however, tend to group all these different forms of assets in three main categories: physical assets, social assets, and human assets.

Physical assets refer to the buildings (schools, libraries, community centres...), natural resources (parks, farmland...), and infrastructures (roads, public transportation, commercial businesses...) that exist within a community (Haines, 2014). From a community development perspective, physical assets are important because they ultimately determine people's access to housing, recreational activities, healthcare, education, and so on (Green & Haines, 2015; Skerratt & Hall, 2011).

Social assets, also known as social capital, refer to the networks and relationships that exist within a community (Haines, 2014; Mattessich, 2009). They include social connections, friendships, community organizations and community leaders, amongst others (Green & Haines, 2015). Social assets are important because they help build more supportive, resilient, and cohesive communities. They enable cooperation and mobilisation, so that communities can collectively address their problems and pursue their common goals (Gilchrist, 2019). Social assets are also thought to contribute to the well-being and quality of life of community members. They help improve people's sense of belonging and support, which further leads to enhanced happiness and life satisfaction (Helliwell et al., 2014).

Finally, human assets refer to the skills, knowledge, gifts, talents and expertise of community members (Haines, 2014; McKnight & Russell, 2018). Examples of human assets may range from personal competence (labour, leadership or communication skills) to people's internal attributes (confidence, self-esteem, resilience) or lived experiences (Arefi, 2008; Green & Haines, 2015; Harrison et al., 2019). Human assets are mobilised in a community, for instance, when people with expertise in a particular area volunteer their time and skills to help support other community members or to create specialised community services. For proponents of the asset-based approach, recognising and appreciating 'the gifts, skills and capacities of community residents' is the first step needed to succeed in any development process (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996, p. 25).

Of all these different categories, social and human assets are often given priority over other forms of assets/capital. This is because, in the view of proponents, community members have more power to mobilise their own skills and relationships (human and social assets) than to have an influence over state buildings or external institutions (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). However, for critics, this focus on human and social assets ends up placing all the emphasis on behavioural change and individual responsibility, overlooking issues such as power imbalances, systemic oppression, and structural injustice (Friedli, 2013; Popay et al., 2021; Rolfe, 2018).

The focus on social assets (or social capital), more specifically, can also be problematic, which is not always acknowledged by proponents of asset-based

approaches. As some scholars argue, the development of social capital can help perpetuate inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986) and prevent dissent (Adler & Kwon, 2000). Social capital can contribute to inequality through the unequal distribution of networks. Access to different types of networks, and the resources that those networks bring, is often highly uneven between different communities (Field, 2003; Volker, 2020). This may make asset-based approaches more likely to succeed in some geographical locations than in others, depending on the access that communities have to other forms of capital (See also Chapter 7.2.). Social capital, when there are strong social ties, can also make people more reluctant to express dissent or to include diverse perspectives, particularly when they challenge the views of majority groups (Field, 2003, pp. 86–87).

2.4. Rights-based approaches

Like asset-based approaches, rights-based approaches seek to activate the participation of communities and enhance the well-being of groups experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. However, instead of focusing on helping people develop self-help solutions, rights-based approaches focus on helping people claim their rights and pressure duty bearers to fulfil their responsibilities (European Network of National Human Rights Institutions, 2022; Hamm, 2001; Ife, 2009). Specifically, they involve helping communities (1) identify their rights and the barriers that might prevent the realisation of their rights, (2) identify duty bearers (community members with positions of power, third sector organisations, local and national government, etc.) and (3) build on the capacities of communities to claim their rights and pressure duty bearers to protect and fulfil those rights (Ife, 2009; United Nations Development Group, 2003).

Rights-based approaches help people identify and claim rights by engaging in a process of critical consciousness⁸. Critical consciousness, in critical pedagogy, is a process in which people develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which power and oppression operate in society and how these shape their lives (Freire, 2000; Hooks, 2014; Jemal, 2017; Prilleltensky, 2003). For critical pedagogists, understanding how power and oppression work is essential. Without this understanding, people might never become aware of their oppressive reality, and

⁸ Conscientização (in Portuguese-Brazilian) as originally termed by Paulo Freire.

subsequently, they might not feel the need to challenge it and transform it (Freire, 2000; Hooks, 2014; Watts et al., 2011).

To understand rights-based approaches, it is helpful to trace its origins. Two developments proved particularly important, the rise in the use of human rights language within community development and the formulisation of the capabilities approach. The use of human rights language goes back a long way. For decades, radical community workers and grass-root organisations have used human rights discourse to mobilize communities and confront power structures, colonialism, racism and discrimination (Cooke & Shaw, 1996; Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004; Craig, 2017; Emejulu, 2015; Ife, 2009; Popple, 2015).⁹ Still, it was not until the 1990s that human rights became a central theme. Before then, there was a split between mainstream development organisations and human rights organisations. The former focused on addressing poverty while the latter focused on advancing political and individual rights (Hickey & Mitlin, 2009). This changed with the inclusion of 'the right to development' in human rights discourse and an understanding of development as a prerequisite for the obtainment of other rights (social, economic and cultural) and fundamental freedoms (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004, p. 1422). Human rights became then a mantra for development organisations (especially in international settings), which incorporated rights as a principle and aim of their practice (Hamm, 2001; Uvin, 2007).

However, this initial move towards human rights attracted two kinds of criticisms. First, it was perceived to be aligned to a top-down approach. Development organisation would use rights as a way of legitimizing their claims and actions to pressure governments, but decisions about which rights to claim were often made without including local communities (Ife, 2009; Uvin, 2007, p. 600). Second, rights language was considered too vague and rhetorical. It did not make clear how human rights would guide community development, which parties bore obligations or how responsibilities would be enforced without a legal framework (Hamm, 2001; Uvin, 2007).

In the early 2000s, the capabilities approach emerged as a human rights framework (see also Chapter 3, section 3.4.2.). The capabilities approach seemed to offer

⁹ See for instance community work initiatives to advance welfare rights, workers' rights, civil rights, disability rights, feminism as well as community organising against racism and so on.

practitioners a way to think about rights that rendered them more concrete. To this extent it answered some of the criticisms made against the use of human rights language. Central to the capability approach is the distinction between functionings and capabilities. Functionings refer to activities and states of existence that people value, such as being well-nourished or being part of a community. Capabilities, on the other hand, refer to people's abilities to achieve functionings. For example, the capability to have access to food is necessary to achieve the functioning of being well-nourished (Nussbaum, 2001; Sen, 1999). The distinction between functionings and capabilities is crucial, as it highlights the difference, between a person who chooses to fast and a person who is forced to starve. By identifying functionings, one can identify capabilities. If human rights are understood as the capabilities for functionings that all humans share, one has a method to identify rights and explain their importance.

This distinction between functionings and capabilities helps us understand not only how rights-based approaches work, but also one of the main critiques of asset-based approaches. As I discussed in the previous section, asset-based approaches aim to improve community well-being by leveraging the assets within a community. From a capabilities approach perspective, however, mobilizing assets does not necessarily lead to achieved functionings (improved well-being) for everyone in that community because structural barriers like discrimination or poverty, restrict people's capabilities to utilize community assets. For instance, a community might enjoy a range of community buildings, strong social networks and diverse skill sets, and yet marginalized groups might still be excluded from utilizing those assets. Hence asset-based approaches, without targeting structural inequalities, cannot ensure that everyone in a community will have the capability to utilize their assets.

Still, the capability approach leaves many issues unresolved. For instance, to apply the approach, one needs a list of capabilities and functionings. It is not clear where this list is meant to come from: external experts (theorists) or the wider public (Claassen, 2020). Without a list of basic capabilities, it is unclear how the approach could be applied (Comim, 2008; Ibrahim & Tiwari, 2014; Robeyns, 2017; Sugden, 1993)

The rise in human rights language and the formulation of the capabilities approach became two important developments proceeding the creation of rights-based

approaches. Common to both is the thought that people are entitled to make certain claims on people in power. It is this thought that is the grounding inspiration for the rights-based approach. Rights-based approaches seek to enable people to claim rights. At the same time, rights-based approaches address some of the criticisms of human rights language and the capabilities approach. For rights-based approaches do not merely hold that people have certain rights. They are also inherently bottom-up and practice focused.¹⁰ They seek to engage communities in participatory processes so that communities, themselves, define their rights from their own perspective (Ife, 2016). They also seek to enhance the power of local communities to make their own claims, take an active role in shaping policies that affect them, and hold decision-makers accountable for the impact of policies on their lives (European Network of National Human Rights Institutions, 2022; Ife, 2009),

Rights-based approaches, like asset-based approaches, rapidly gained popularity amongst development organisations and policy makers. Yet, their popularity was mostly within international community development. At the UK level, rights-based approaches attracted limited attention, particularly when compared to asset-based approaches. There was a recognition of the state's duties in securing political and individual rights of its residents, like the right to freedom of expression, association and property (UK Government, 1998), but a resistance to accept duties towards economic, social and cultural rights (Dowler & O'Connor, 2012). As such, most references to rights-based approaches in UK policy were made in relation to developing countries and the work of NGOs outside of the UK.¹¹

The one area of the UK that rights-based approaches have gained particular traction is Scotland. References to rights-based approaches can be found in the 'National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework' (Scottish Government, 2015b) and the 'Children and Young People's (Scotland) Act' (Scottish Government, 2014). There is

¹⁰ Some would argue that the capability approach can also work bottom-up and in practice settings. A number of scholars believe that the capability approach should involve communities and marginalised groups in determining the list of capabilities from which to assess their well-being and progress (Alkire, 2005; Sen, 1999). There are also several attempts to apply the capability approach in community development practice settings, both internationally and in the UK (Ibrahim & Tiwari, 2014; Kuzhiparambil, 2017; Lewis, 2012; Ward, 2019). However, the extent to which the capability approach can move from theory to practice is highly contested.

¹¹ Except some initiatives such as Unicef's 'Child Rights-Based Approach' which was supported by a number of local authorities in the UK.

a commitment to use the rights-based approach to guide health and social care policy (Scottish Government, 2013) and to ensure that the Scottish Government becomes more accessible and collaborative (Scottish Government, 2021). Most recently, the 'Social Security (Scotland) Act (2018)' has become a leading example of how the Scottish Government seems open to incorporating rights-based approaches to monitor some of its duties towards socio-economic rights (O'Connell, 2019).

However, even in Scotland, the popularity of rights-based approaches is limited. During my fieldwork (2017 to 2019), for instance, I found that only a small number of organisations would openly identify with rights-based approaches, compared to the high number of organisations that would explicitly declare themselves to be following, or influenced by, asset-based approaches. This is because, as I discuss in Chapter 9, community development organisations in Scotland tend to face more challenges and barriers if they follow a rights-based approach than if they follow an asset-based approach. Actions aimed at pressuring duty bearers to fulfil their responsibilities, such as campaigning, advocacy, or direct political/legal actions, are often perceived to be too adversarial, and as a result, policy makers and funders are thought to be less welcoming of rights-based approaches than of asset-based approaches.

In sum, rights-based approaches, like asset-based approaches, seek to overcome the limitations of traditional needs-based approaches. They seek to activate community empowerment and enhance well-being, but instead of focussing on mobilising community assets and skills, they focus on rights and duties. They aim to enhance communities' power to define rights in their own terms, voice their claims and pressure duty bearers to fulfil their responsibilities. Rights-based approaches have gained popularity over the years in development policy and practice. Yet, the application of rights-based approaches in community practice continues to fall behind asset-based approaches.

Rights

In the same way that it is essential to unpack what 'assets' means in the context of asset-based approaches, it is essential to understand what 'rights' means in the context of rights-based approaches. Within the context of rights-based approaches, the rights that are referred to are human rights. Human rights are rights that people have on account of being human. In this regard, they are distinct from particular rights

that people may be able to claim for being a member of a particular country or community. Human rights, themselves, can be divided into moral rights and legal rights. Moral rights are rights based on ethical principles and values, rather than on legislation. They are thought to be universal and inalienable. They apply to all human beings regardless of gender, age, citizen status, nationality, ethnicity, and so on. Legal rights, on the other hand, are rights that are recognized and protected by specific national and international laws. These rights are codified in law and enforced through legal systems (Wenar, 2021).

Another common way of categorising human rights is between civil and political rights, and economic, social, and cultural rights (Ife, 2009; Nickel, 2021). Civil and political rights are based on the idea that individuals have certain fundamental freedoms and entitlements that should be protected by the state. Examples of civil and political rights include the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom from discrimination and the right to vote and participate in government. Economic, social, and cultural rights are based on the idea that all human beings are entitled to meet basic needs and basic standards of well-being (Baderin & McCorquodale, 2007; Eide et al., 2001). Examples of economic, social, and cultural rights include the rights to education, work, food and healthcare, the right to an adequate standard of living, or the right to cultural expression.

These traditional ways of categorising and understanding human rights, however, have been criticised for historically disadvantaging women and minority groups (Bond, 2003; Ife, 2009, p. 82; Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011). Standard lists of human rights tend to assume that people have the same needs and values, failing to consider the different risks faced by oppressed and unrepresented groups. As a response to these criticisms, human rights frameworks have expanded the lists of rights and have gradually included treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) or the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), amongst others (Ishay, 2008; Priyam et al., 2010).

Finally, more recent classifications of human rights have also included environmental and intergenerational rights (Nickel, 2021). Environmental rights are based on the idea that for humans to enjoy all the other rights (civil, political, economic, social, cultural, collective, minority rights, self-determination and so on), a safe and adequate

environment for human life and health is required (Priyam et al., 2010). Environmental rights, for instance, include the entitlement of current and future generations to clean air, water, and soil, and involve taking actions to ensure the long-term sustainability of the planet (Hiskes & Hiskes, 2009).

In the context of community development and rights-based approaches, practitioners and organisations have, in various ways, incorporated and used all these theoretical frameworks to advance well-being and social change. Yet, at the same time, they have challenged top-down definitions and classifications of rights. For instance, community development workers and activists tend to advocate for a more active role of communities in identifying which rights they wish to pursue from their own perspectives (Bartolomei et al., 2018; Ife, 2009).

The rights-based approach seeks to marry a bottom-up approach to activism with the tradition and framework of human rights. Such a marriage, however, is no easy accomplishment. To give one example of the tension between the two, consider the issue of human rights hierarchies. Often, those in power privilege certain rights over others. In many jurisdictions, for instance, only a subset of the human rights listed in international agreements have legal protection. This hierarchy of rights can end up discouraging communities from pursuing rights that are not legally recognised by duty bearers (Ife, 2009). The rights-based approach may attempt to give communities free-reign over which rights they wish to pursue, but the tradition and framework of human rights is one that has already been shaped by those in authority.

2.5. Initial comparisons of asset-based and rights-based approaches

Asset-based and rights-based approaches share several principles but follow opposing methods, employ contrasting conceptions of empowerment and participation, and lead to different outcomes. The three main points of commonality are: a view of communities as active agents, a concern for well-being and an emphasis on what communities can offer instead of on what they lack.

Asset-based and rights-based approaches view communities as active agents in so far as they recognise the importance of empowering communities, and they work to

promote community participation. Both approaches recognise communities as key actors of their own development, involving them in decision-making and allowing their perspectives and priorities to guide the development practice (Ife, 2009; Mathie & Cunningham, 2005). In the case of rights-based approaches, this concern for active participation takes the form of political campaigning. In the case of assets-based approaches, it takes the form of self-help.

Both approaches share a concern for wellbeing against more traditional approaches that focused on the mere distribution of material resources. Well-being reflects a more holistic notion of quality of life. It includes dimensions like social support, living conditions, community services, happiness, sense of belonging and life satisfaction (Hamm, 2001; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996). This focus on well-being is thought to allow both approaches to better address the root causes of social and economic problems, rather than just treating the symptoms (Kirkemann Boesen & Martin, 2007; Pattoni et al., 2016).

Finally, both approaches emphasise what communities can offer, instead of on what they lack, with the thought that practitioners should avoid promoting negative self-perceptions. Communities are often reminded of what their deficits are, and this, beyond being disempowering, stigmatizes communities as dependant and problematic. A focus on communities' assets or rights, by contrast, is thought to help communities build a more empowering view of themselves and encourage a more active participation in development (Ife, 2016; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003)

Despite these commonalities, differences stand out. Asset-based approaches focus on identifying and mobilising the strengths and resources of communities, while rights-based approaches focus on ensuring that communities identify and pursue their rights. Asset-based approaches also tend to be more focused on changes at the micro level (community and individual behavioural change), while rights-based approaches tend to be more focused on changes at the macro level (social, political, and structural change).

These contrasts stem from an opposing view of how well-being is effectively achieved. The asset-based approach seems to hold an internalist view of well-being (see

Chapters 3 and 5) that assumes that it is easier to improve well-being by changing how one perceives one's own life than by changing the external conditions that influence one's own life (Ahuvia et al., 2015). According to this view, learning to appreciate the skills one has or the community one lives in has a more immediate effect on well-being than trying to make structural changes.

Rights-based approaches, on the other hand, take an externalist view that holds that improvements in well-being require improvements in social and material circumstances (income, housing, social protection, services and so on) (Ibid.) Proponents of this view argue that, all things being equal, a person with no access to appropriate housing or experiencing discrimination enjoys lower well-being than a person that does not experience these. Hence, if one aims to improve well-being, one must prioritize access to food, safety, housing or income over perceptions, feelings, or behaviours.

These opposing views of how well-being is achieved also reflect opposing assumptions about where social change starts. Asset-based approaches assume that wider social change starts at the individual and community level. For proponents of these approaches, when people make changes at the individual level (engage in positive behaviours, gain skills or recognise their strengths) those changes scale up to the community level. Communities, for instance, have better community services, improve their perceptions of themselves, enjoy better social relationships, and so on. These changes at individual level (first) and at the community level (second) are thought to have a positive impact on society as a whole. Communities can start addressing the problems of inequality more effectively once they have made the individual and community changes (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

Rights-based approaches, by contrast, are based on the assumption that wider social change starts at the structural level, as opposed to the individual level. No doubt it is a good thing if people can make behavioural changes, but without addressing structural barriers, there is little that people can change by themselves. Unjust structures hinder people's abilities to achieve any meaningful changes at societal level.

These opposing views of how well-being is achieved, and where social change starts, represent two important differences between asset-based and rights-based approaches. In the discussion that follows I want to turn to another set of contrasts by looking at means, conceptualisations, and impact.

Means

Both asset-based and rights-based approaches seek to activate communities. For proponents of asset-based approaches, communities have to actively engage in addressing difficulties by themselves (García, 2020; Haines, 2014; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). To do so, asset-based approaches employ methods to help communities think more positively about the skills and resources they have. For instance, asset-based approaches often employ the technique of ‘assets mapping’ to record the full range of community services in a geographical area and the skills of community residents; or the technique of ‘appreciative inquiry’, which involves asking positive questions to encourage people share stories and experiences that highlight community successes and the positive qualities of the community.¹²

Rights based approaches, by contrast, focus on helping communities take political actions to pursue their social rights and reduce structural injustices (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). For proponents of these approaches, communities have to pressure governments to fulfil their responsibilities and engage in ‘politics from below’ (Gauri & Gloppen, 2012). To do so, rights-based approaches employ methods aimed at helping communities identify their rights, the duty-bearers responsible for the fulfilment of those rights, and the impact that social, political, and economic contexts have on the lives of community residents. For instance, rights-based approaches often employ techniques that promote dialogue and reflection on issues related to social justice, power, and privilege. They also promote campaigning, activism and advocacy work to challenge and transform systems of oppression and injustice.¹³

¹² For a more complete list of methods used in asset based approaches (See Haines, 2014, pp. 45–55; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996; Mathie & Cunningham, 2005; McLean & McNeice, 2012).

¹³ For a more complete list of methods employed in the rights based approach (See Ife, 2009; Nyamu et al., 2004; United Nations Development Group, 2003).

Conceptualizations

Asset-based and rights-based approaches regard 'empowerment' and 'participation' as key terms within their practice. Yet they interpret these terms differently. Proponents of asset-based approaches tend to associate 'empowerment' with 'self-efficiency'. On this interpretation, communities are empowered when they can make informed choices, exercise agency, assert their strengths and provide their own solutions (Foot & Hopkins, 2010; García, 2020; Haines, 2014; Pattoni et al., 2016). Proponents of rights-based approaches, by contrast, associate the term 'empowerment' with 'actions that challenge structural injustice'. On this interpretation, communities are empowered when they confront oppression, initiate political struggle, assert rights and allocate responsibilities (Freire, 2000; Gauri & Gloppen, 2012; Ife, 2009; Uvin, 2004).

The two approaches also offer divergent interpretations of 'participation'. Proponents of asset-based approaches see participation as a matter of choice and responsibility. Communities that choose to play an active role in development must assume the responsibility of leading and improving community services. Only then, can communities participate fully as 'active producers' of development, instead of as 'passive consumers' of services (García, 2020; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Proponents of rights-based approaches, by contrast, regard 'participation' as 'entitlement'. They hold that what communities can achieve is constrained by economic, social, and political structures. Hence, in their view, participation cannot be a matter of choice and responsibility. Communities are *entitled* to participate in development. To do so, duty bearers need to assume their responsibilities and ensure that communities enjoy their rights. Only then, communities can participate as 'right holders', instead of 'the objects of charity' (Hamm, 2001; Ife, 2009; Nyamu et al., 2004; Plipat, 2005).

Impact.

Asset-based and rights-based approaches seek to improve the well-being of communities facing disadvantage. Proponents of both approaches are convinced of their promises to achieve wider social change, especially when compared to the needs-based approach. Yet, critics warn of the potentially undesirable and unintended

consequences of following asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development settings.

Critics of asset-based approaches argue that the emphasis given to self-help can have two negative effects. First, it can encourage people to blame communities for the problems they suffer and, thus, regard them as solely responsible for providing their own solutions (Feeney & Collins, 2015). This, in the view of critics, can stigmatize communities that are unable to make improvements by themselves (Frost & Hoggett, 2008). Second, it can legitimize a reduction of state responsibilities and lead to welfare retrenchment (Friedli, 2016; MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014). Critics note that the rise of the asset based approach coincides with a policy drive to reform welfare and 'promote a DIY response to the loss of services and benefits' (Friedli, 2011, p. 2).

Critics of rights-based approaches, by contrast, argue that an emphasis on 'rights' can (1) limit communities in achieving their potentials and (2) fail to empower them. Some scholars question whether the fulfilment of rights is the only thing communities should strive for. Rights-based approaches, in their view, are based on a minimalist view of what communities can achieve. They are too narrowly focused on meeting minimal standards of living and, as a result, forget more aspirational claims (Thin, 2012). Regarding empowerment, the concern is that while rights-based approaches encourage people to demand rights that are often defined in law, they neglect the fact that those rights have been instituted by elites with their own agendas (Barreto, 2018; Gaventa, 2002). The complexity of the legal system, moreover, can make the process of claiming rights difficult and disempowering (Stulberg, 2005).

In sum, asset-based and rights-based approaches might share principles and aims, but they follow opposing methods, seem to employ contrasting conceptions of empowerment and participation, and might lead to different (unintended) outcomes. Asset-based and rights-based approaches share a view of development as a process that is initiated from below, a concern for well-being and a belief in emphasizing what communities can offer, instead of what they lack. However, these approaches differ significantly. Asset-based approaches focus on strengths and skills, whilst rights-based approaches focus on rights and duties. Asset-based approaches aim to build communities' capacity to mobilise their own resources and provide self-help solutions. Rights-based approaches, by contrast, aim to build communities' capacity to define

their rights and pressure duty bearers to fulfil their responsibilities. The main points of contrast are summarised in the following table (2.1.).

Table 2.1. Main points of contrast.

	Asset Based Approaches	Rights Based Approaches
Focus	Strengths, skills, assets	Rights, responsibilities
Role of communities	Producers, citizens	Right holders
Role of external agencies	Leading by stepping back	Duty bearers
Empowerment	Choice, agency, self-help	Collective mobilisation
Participation	Responsibility	Entitlement

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has introduced asset-based and rights-based approaches. Asset-based approaches focus on identifying and building upon the strengths and skills of individuals and communities. They emphasize self-help and community engagement, and they prioritize changes at the individual and community level by employing methods such as assets mapping and appreciative inquiry. Rights-based approaches focus on helping people claim their rights and pressure duty bearers to fulfil their responsibilities. They involve helping communities engage in critical consciousness, identify their rights and promote changes at the social, political, and structural level. The methods employed are collective political action, community organizing, advocacy, legal mobilization, campaigning, and lobbying.

These approaches seek to overcome the limitations of traditional needs-based approaches, and both have gained popularity in Scottish community development policy and practice. However, these two approaches differ significantly. They follow opposing methods, employ contrasting conceptions of empowerment and participation, and lead to different outcomes. Asset-based approaches emphasize self-efficiency, agency, and responsibility, while rights-based approaches emphasize rights, political action, and structural injustice. They seem to hold opposing views of

how change is achieved, and the role that government, development organisations and community members should play in achieving that change.

Chapter 3: Conceptualising and measuring well-being

3.1. Introduction

As I discussed in Chapter 2, asset-based and rights-based approaches seek to help socio-economically disadvantaged communities enhance their well-being. However, what constitutes well-being is contested. There are multiple ways of understanding well-being, and each has implications at the practice level. For instance, if well-being is understood as feeling good, one might try to improve well-being by changing the way one perceives events or by engaging in behaviours that increase happiness and satisfaction. If, on the other hand, well-being is understood as the satisfaction of material needs, achieving well-being may involve improving living conditions.

Much of the study of well-being involves looking at what well-being is, how it is achieved and how we should measure it. A range of academic disciplines, including philosophy, psychology and sociology offer answers to these questions. However, all answers are subject to debate, not only across disciplines, but also within disciplines. Philosophers disagree amongst themselves over what constitutes well-being and offer multiple theories (see section 3.2.1.). Similarly, psychologists and sociologists provide opposing conceptualisations of well-being, measurements and even reasons why scholars should focus (or not) on well-being (see sections, 3.2.3 and 3.2.4).

Many of the theories of well-being discussed in this chapter reflect some of the main assumptions behind asset-based and rights-based approaches. They also help explain why these two approaches tend to employ contrasting methods when they pursue the same goal: improving the well-being of communities at disadvantage. This is because different conceptualisations of well-being lead to different actions aimed at improving well-being.

This chapter has two main purposes. First, it aims to provide conceptual clarity as to what well-being means by exploring the range of theories of well-being within philosophy, psychology, and sociology. Second, it aims to explain the reasons why well-being, and particularly a pluralistic account of well-being, is used as a framework to compare the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section (3.2.) discusses theoretical conceptualisations of well-being in philosophy, psychology, and sociology, as well as the reasons why theories of well-being tend to fall in two categories: subjective and objective. The second section (3.3.) introduces pluralistic conceptualisations of well-being and explains the reasons why these theories are preferred in applied settings, including social policy and development practice. It is in this section that I lay out the reasons why a pluralistic account is used as a normative framework in this thesis to assess the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches. The third section (3.4.) discusses the inclusion of well-being as a framework to guide community development practice. It looks at the reasons why the focus on well-being within community development has been questioned. It also provides an argument to advance the understanding of well-being as a social right. The final section (3.5.) concludes.

3.2. Approaches to well-being

Philosophy, psychology, and sociology approach the study of well-being from different angles. The philosophy of well-being tends to focus on definitions (what is well-being). Psychology and sociology tend to also focus on measurements (how can one determine a person's level of well-being). While psychologists look at well-being at the level of the individual, sociologists focus more on the study of well-being at a societal level. In this section, I discuss different approaches to well-being by looking at how well-being is conceptualised and measured across these three disciplines.

3.2.1. Well-being in philosophy

In philosophy, theories of wellbeing are commonly divided into three categories: hedonism, desire-fulfilment, and objective list theories. Hedonism holds that people's well-being is determined by the balance of positive and negative experiences (Bentham, 1789). If people increase their level of enjoyable experiences, their well-being will increase as a result. Conversely, if their level of negative experience and suffering increase, their wellbeing will decrease (Crisp, 2006). The key word here is 'experience'. Hedonists argue that what contributes to well-being (what is good and bad for people) must affect people's own experiences, or in other words, what they feel. Being with friends or reading a book are good for us because they are enjoyable,

and as such, they feel good. Toothache and food deprivation are bad for us because they feel bad (Gregory, 2016, p. 113).

One can easily understand why hedonism is one of the most influential theories of well-being. Pleasurable experiences add to the quality of our lives. However, the theory of hedonism has limitations. First, not all pleasures contribute equally to well-being. The pleasure of eating an ice-cream, for instance, is not comparable to the pleasure of being in a fulfilling relationship. Hence, well-being cannot be merely determined by the accumulation of positive experiences and the lack of negative ones. The quality of those experiences must count as well (Fletcher, 2016b, pp. 19–24).

Second, well-being, arguably, is not entirely determined by felt experiences. Consider, for instance, the example of the ‘experience machine’ (Nozick, 1974, pp. 42–45). Imagine two people. One person has a life made up of enjoyable moments. The other person is attached to a sensory machine that produces all the sensations of a vivid life-like experience. According to hedonism, if both people have the same pleasurable experiences, then both will have equal levels of well-being. However, intuitively, the person in the machine has a lower quality of life. This suggests that the balance of positive and negative experiences someone has cannot be the only determinant of well-being. People want to engage in pleasurable activities, not just to have the feeling of doing so (Gregory, 2016, pp. 119–121; Tiberius, 2020).

If we reject hedonism, one alternative is desire-fulfilment theory. Desire-fulfilment theory holds that a person’s level of well-being is determined by the degree to which she fulfils her desires (Heathwood, 2016). If the person fulfils them, she will have a higher degree of well-being than if she does not. In this sense, this theory is considered to be subjective: ‘getting a good life has to do with one’s attitudes towards what one gets in life rather than the nature of those things themselves’ (p. 135). What is good for people depends on what they value (Railton, 1986). Note that for desire fulfilment theory, well-being is not ‘felt experience dependant’. You only increase your well-being when your desires are fulfilled in reality and not when you have the ‘felt experience’ of your desires being fulfilled (Heathwood, 2006). Desire-fulfilment theory can thus avoid the experience machine objection against hedonism.

Nevertheless, desire-fulfilment theory also attracts significant objections. What if people desire something that is bad for them? Or if good things are unknown to them and therefore, they cannot desire them? Or if people desire things that are too remote to affect their lives? Can we say that, in these cases, the fulfilment of desires makes people better off? In the view of critics, determining well-being by just focusing on the fulfilment of people's desires is inadequate (Scanlon, 1993). This takes us to the last theory: objective list theories.

Objective list theories constitute a range of theories that all accept two premises. First, there is a plurality of things that are good for people. Second, things are good for people regardless of whether people desire them (Parfit, 1984, p. 499). Whatever is that contributes to well-being, does so because it is inherently good for people (Nussbaum, 1993).

Objective list theories are thought to have significant advantages over the previous two theories. An advantage objective list theories have over hedonism is that they do not limit well-being to the experience of pleasure. Pleasure can be one item in the list of goods contributing to well-being, but it is not the only thing that determines it. Other plausible candidates include good health, social relationships, a sense of achievement and agency. An advantage objective list theories have over desire-fulfilment theory is that they do not maintain that anything that fulfils a desire contributes to well-being. Some things that fulfil a desire may contribute to wellbeing, but others will have no impact (Fletcher, 2016a; Rice, 2013).

Despite these advantages, objective list theories have also attracted objections. One objection is that they do not always provide satisfactory explanations for why certain goods appear on the list and on how these contribute to well-being (Scanlon, 1993). Objectives lists often include different set of items without explaining why and how those items contribute to well-being, or how those items are weighed against each other (Fletcher, 2016a, pp. 154–156). Another objection is that they can be elitist and paternalistic. For critics, a theory of well-being should include a connection between the things considered to be good for a person and what that person subjectively cares about. By failing to include people's desires, pleasures or concerns, objective list theories could deliver a result in which a person scores a high level of well-being even though she may be extremely unhappy with her life (Crisp, 2016).

This section has presented strengths and limitations of three influential theories of well-being in philosophy: hedonism, desire-fulfilment theory and objective list theories. The next section focuses on the study of well-being within the discipline of psychology.

3.2.2. Well-being in psychology

Broadly speaking, psychological theories of well-being fall into two traditions: the hedonic tradition and the eudaimonic tradition (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The hedonic tradition is associated with subjective well-being (Diener, 1984; Kahneman et al., 1999). The eudaimonic tradition, by contrast, tends to be associated with objective well-being (Ryan & Huta, 2009; Vittersø, 2016).

Scholars within the hedonic tradition argue that well-being is determined by the balance of positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). Positive and negative affect are associated with pleasures and pains or with good and bad experiences (similar to hedonism in philosophy). Life satisfaction is, in turn, a person's overall assessment of her life, which may involve considering the extent to which her desires have been fulfilled.

For hedonic psychologists, both affect and life satisfaction are crucial to determining a person's level of well-being (Kahneman et al., 1999). In their view, it would be difficult to conceive of a high level of well-being if a person experiences lots of pleasures, but is nevertheless deeply unsatisfied with her life (Diener, Scollon, et al., 2003, p. 196). Hence, to measure well-being, hedonic psychologists consider two types of evaluations: affective evaluation and cognitive evaluation.

Affective evaluations refer to a person's own assessment of good and bad experiences at a particular moment in time (Kahneman, 2003). This evaluation is based on the idea that to know how well a person's life goes, we need to record the frequency of positive and negative emotions experienced by that person, which is known as 'instant utility'. In measuring instant utility, we might ask the person 'On a scale of 1 to 10, how much pleasure or enjoyment are you experiencing at this moment?. We can then calculate a person's well-being during an extended period of time. For instance, to know the level of well-being of a particular person, Lucia, in a particular month, March, we need to take records of Lucia's instant utility during that month and then find the average of instant utility that she has experienced in that month (ibid. p. 6).

Cognitive evaluations are a person's own assessment of life satisfaction, which may involve the assessment of her overall life or of her satisfaction with some particular domain such as work, relationships or health. The idea here is that to know how well a person's life goes, we need to 'capture a global sense of well-being from the respondent's own perspective' (Diener, Oishi, et al., 2003, p. 197). In other words, to know how good or bad Lucia's life went during March, one should not just take instant utility readings at various points during the month, we should ask Lucia for her view on how well her life went during the month of March.

Both evaluations rely then on subjective data. Affective evaluations are based on self-reports of good and bad experiences. Cognitive evaluations are based on self-reports of life satisfaction. Yet, affective evaluation is commonly referred to as 'objective happiness' (Kahneman, 2003). This is because 'the aggregation of instant utility is governed by a logical rule and could in principle be done by an observer with access to the temporal profile of instant utility' (ibid. p. 5). For instance, an external observer with access to Lucia's periodical evaluations of instant utility could potentially assess her well-being without requiring any further inputs from her. Cognitive evaluations, by contrast, require the person whose well-being is being evaluated to examine the conditions of her own life and evaluate how satisfied she is with her life overall (Pavot & Diener, 2009).

Since hedonic psychology is primarily concerned with the study of people's own evaluations, they are said to offer a measure of people's "subjective well-being" (SWB). For hedonic psychologists, SWB is important for three main reasons. First, studies show that high levels of SWB lead to significant benefits, such as better health or increased longevity (Diener & Chan, 2011). Second, SWB seems to be widely valued across people, cultures and countries (Diener, 2000)¹⁴. Third, SWB captures crucial information about people's quality of life that other measures cannot provide (Diener, Oishi, et al., 2003). It captures what matters to people from their own perspective.

¹⁴ Although research has shown that what constitutes well-being is strongly mediated by culture, people's evaluations of emotions (affect) and satisfaction are mostly consistent in cross-national studies. (See, for instance, Diener et al., 2010).

Yet, the study of SWB also has significant limitations. For instance, we may ask, how should we determine the well-being of a person if she reports high levels of pain but a high level of life satisfaction? For some scholars, positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction are three separated components that cannot be studied as a single construct (Bussèri & Sadava, 2011; Lucas, 2016). They capture different elements of SWB and lead to different conclusions (Kashdan et al., 2008, p. 222). Affective and cognitive evaluations can also be largely influenced by personality traits (Richard & Diener, 2009) or by salient information at the time of making judgements (Lucas, 2016). We could have different reports of well-being when all other factors are equal, but one person feels more optimistic than another.

Other scholars argue that people can report high SWB while not actually having a good quality of life. One reason why this might occur is because of a problem known as “adaptive preferences” (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Sen, 1999). Adaptive preferences are preferences that arise due to external constraints. Someone who is in a situation of oppression may, over time, come to hold preferences that they might not otherwise hold. Since some goods are denied to them, they adapt their preferences to what is accessible. As a result, they may report that they are happy even though they do not enjoy the same capabilities as those who are not oppressed (Sen, 1999, p. 63). For critics of the hedonic tradition, a person’s own judgments about how well her life goes can thus never be a sufficient criterion of well-being. In their view, there is a difference between well-being as ‘a state of mind’ and well-being as ‘a life that goes well for the person leading it’ (Vittersø, 2016, p. 4). This leads us to psychological eudaimonic well-being.

The eudaimonic tradition in psychology comprises a wide range of conceptions of well-being. Some of the most common are ‘a life that goes well’ (Annas, 1993), ‘a state of flourishing’ (Seligman, 2011a), ‘fulfilment of one’s potentials’ (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Waterman, 1993) or ‘sense of purpose and meaning in life’ (Delle Fave et al., 2011; Kashdan et al., 2008). All these different conceptions have one thing in common: they perceive well-being as a matter of ‘doing well’ rather than ‘feeling good’ (Keyes & Annas, 2009, p. 198).

Eudaimonic theories in psychology hold a view of well-being as the fulfilment of one’s nature. To flourish is to live in accordance to the self (Haybron, 2016; Tiberius, 2016).

Consider, for instance, the following example. Suppose Rhulen enjoys a thriving career, she has good friends, and she spends most of her time doing things she loves. Yet, Rhulen has a non-conforming sexual identity that she has kept repressed since she was a child. Could we consider Rhulen's life to be one of high well-being? For eudaimonic scholars, the answer is 'no'. The fulfilment of one's nature is central to well-being and without an authentic expression of who one is, one cannot fulfil her nature (Haybron, 2016, p. 33). This view of well-being is similar to philosophical objective list theories in so far as the elements thought to constitute well-being have prudential value in themselves, not because people experience them as positive (Crisp, 2016; Kashdan et al., 2008). As Valeria Tiberius (2016) points out, hedonic psychologists may consider physical health to be constitutive of well-being because people enjoy having good health. Eudaimonic psychologists, by contrast, consider physical health to be constitutive of well-being 'because health is objectively good. (...) someone who did not want health would still be someone for whom health is good' (p. 567).

Eudaimonic theories also tend to endorse conceptual diversity (there is a plurality of things that constitute well-being). For eudaimonic psychologists, the diversity of eudaimonic variables allows further progress on understanding quality of life because eudaimonic research asks questions that hedonic psychology would never consider (Ryan & Huta, 2009, p. 203). For instance, eudaimonic researchers are interested in what exactly goes right and wrong in people's lives, and not just the score people give to the level of pleasure they enjoy or overall life satisfaction (Haybron, 2016, pp. 40–41)¹⁵. They focus on 'doing well', and as a result, eudaimonic theories are thought to overcome the problem of adaptive preferences or the problem of having misleading reports of positive affect that do not correlate with high well-being (Haybron, 2016; Ryan & Huta, 2009; Tiberius, 2016).

However, eudaimonic theories also have strong objections. Kashdan et al (2008) argue that the lack of an accepted notion of well-being amongst eudaimonic researchers prevents a meaningful scientific inquiry. If each definition has its own variables, and all of them define well-being, then disentangling correlations,

¹⁵ Although SWB researchers might argue that the measures of life satisfaction across domains provide that limitless variation of what people value, and as such, they give information of what goes right and wrong in people's lives.

antecedents, consequences, and how different factors influence well-being proves difficult (p. 224).

Another criticism of eudaimonic theories is their view of functioning as nature-fulfilment. Eudaimonic theories tend to hold everyone to the same standards even though not all humans enjoy the same capacities. As a result, critics claim, eudaimonic theories fail to recognise the possibility of 'doing well' and 'having a good life' for disabled people (Wasserman & Asch, 2013). SWB theories, by contrast, 'do not imply that people with disabilities cannot live lives that are just as good as the lives of anyone else' (Tiberius, 2016, p. 568)¹⁶.

Finally, eudaimonic theories, like philosophical objective list theories, are regarded by some as elitist and paternalistic. Objective definitions involve imposing certain standards of well-being upon people because their well-being is assessed without reference to people's own experiences (Diener, Scollon, et al., 2003). Even if we accepted that certain objective conditions are universally valued, people may still weight these conditions differently. Some people may be willing to sacrifice social relationships for a high income, whilst others may prefer to have a smaller salary if this allows them to maintain better social relationships. Subjective perspectives, by contrast, allow this differential weighting (Lucas, 2016, p. 407).

This section has presented the strengths and limitations of hedonic and eudaimonic conceptions of well-being within psychology. The next section discusses the study of well-being within the discipline of sociology.

3.2.3. Well-being in sociology

Mainstream sociology, broadly speaking, has neglected the study of well-being (Cieslik, 2021). Many sociologists think that well-being is an area of study that does not concern them. In their view, sociology is about the study of social structures,

¹⁶ There is indeed a large body of literature from critical disability studies that question objective approaches to well-being for treating disability as having an intrinsic adverse effect on well-being. They reject the view of disability as a feature of reduced well-being, and they highlight the wide range of studies that have demonstrated that most of the reduced well-being experienced by disabled people is the result of environmental factors and social attitudes. Some disability scholars and advocates even argue that subjective approaches to well-being (affect and cognitive evaluations of pleasure and satisfaction) can also fail to recognise the possibilities of 'doing well' or having a good life with a disability. For more on this see [Bickenbach et al., 2013](#); [Edwards & Imrie, 2008](#); [Wasserman & Asch, 2013](#).

power, and social problems, and how these shape people's experiences and people's living conditions. Sociology may study topics that are closely related to well-being such as poverty, social exclusion, or conflict. Yet, these topics are traditionally studied in isolation from it.¹⁷ For sociologists, well-being is, at best, only one variable of the many that may determine people's quality of life (Bartram, 2012; Veenhoven, 2008).

The study of well-being has, in part, been neglected because it is commonly associated to the study of subjective dimensions (happiness and life satisfaction). Interestingly, even those sociologists who are involved in well-being research, tend to employ the terms well-being and happiness interchangeably (Bartram, 2012; Cieslik, 2021; Frawley, 2015). Sociologists understand that well-being and happiness are not the same, but sociologists involved in well-being research think that they are mutually connected. For them, happiness cannot exist without well-being, and well-being cannot be achieved in the absence of happiness (Thin, 2012; Veenhoven, 2000, 2013).

Sociologists who are critical of well-being research, however, regard happiness as the individual and superficial mental state of joy and pleasure. As a result, research that focuses on happiness is thought to 'distract [sociologists] from more significant underlying social processes that shape [people's] lives' (Cieslik, 2015, p. 423). For critics, happiness is associated with individualism and the growth of the self-help industry (Davies, 2015; Furedi, 2004). Happiness is also associated with oppressive discourses and structures (Ahmed, 2010).

William Davies (2015) and Mark Furedi (2004) argue that the pursuit of happiness has created a culture of consumerism and materialism in which people are encouraged to seek well-being through the acquisition of material possessions, feel-good experiences and therapeutic engagement. As a result, there is a rise of individualism and self-absorption, in which 'virtues such as hard work, sacrifice, altruism and commitment are frequently represented as antithetical to the quest of the individual for the feeling of happiness' (Furedi, 2004, p. 31).

Sarah Ahmed (2010), in turn, identifies happiness as a discourse used to perpetuate patterns of domination. In her view, 'happiness is associated with some life choices

¹⁷ Although an exception is the contribution of sociology to social indicators research.

and not others'. As a result, happiness is often used to justify oppression by emphasizing, for instance, the figure of 'the happy housewife' or the myth of the 'happy slave' (p. 2). She also notes that discourses on happiness involve making normative judgements about what are the right and wrong ways of experiencing happiness. Only those who follow social norms and enjoy economic security, she argues, can fully pursue the dominant view of the happy life.

Critical accounts seem to object to a particularly internalist view of happiness. Internalist perspectives are those that emphasize the idea that happiness arises mainly from internal factors (Ahuvia et al., 2015; Atkinson et al., 2020). According to the internalist view, it is easier to improve well-being if people change their perceptions, become more optimistic or cultivate their strengths, than if they try to change the external conditions that influence their lives. An externalist view, by contrast, is based on the idea that to improve well-being, people need to advance their social and material circumstances. What critics seem to oppose is an internalist view of happiness. In their view, happiness has contributed to a self-help and self-monitoring culture in which 'changing one's mind' is sold as the path to well-being. As a result, there is a shift of attention from welfare provision to individual responsibility (Ahmed, 2010; Davies, 2015; Ferguson, 2011; Furedi, 2004; Sointu, 2005).

Despite the hostility that sociology has shown towards the study of wellbeing, there are nevertheless some sociologists who incorporate the concept into their research. Using the term 'happiness' often in place of wellbeing, they tend to measure subjective well-being (self-reports of happiness and life satisfaction) whilst employing eudaimonic conceptions. These scholars reject portrayals of happiness in internalist, materialistic and oppressive ways. In their view, sociologists have too often used happiness 'as a vehicle for other arguments about the dark side of modernity', ignoring the complex ways in which happiness is experienced by ordinary people in everyday life (Cieslik, 2015, p. 435). In their view, despite the narratives on happiness, when you ask people directly, they associate happiness more often with an overall state of 'flourishing' than with a superficial state of feeling good (ibid). This is because 'the subjective well-being of individuals [i.e. their perceptions of happiness] entails important information about the quality of the social system in which they live' (Veenhoven, 2008, p. 58).

Indeed, a number of empirical studies seem to support these claims. Evidence shows there is a strong correlation between happiness (measured as SWB) and objective domains such as health and longevity (Diener & Chan, 2011), community engagement (Veenhoven, 2004, 2013), employment (Eichhorn, 2013) and income, particularly amongst the poorest in society (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). Cross-nation studies on happiness also suggest that people live happier in countries that provide adequate living conditions, are politically democratic, have low levels of corruption and experience high levels of trust, tolerance and social responsibility (Veenhoven, 2007; Veenhoven & Ehrhardt, 1995).

Sociologists engaged in well-being research also advocate for a more social and contextual orientation of the study of happiness (Cieslik, 2021; White, 2017). In their view, the psychological study of happiness tends to be too individual-focused and to over rely on quantitative data (Cieslik, 2015; Frawley, 2015). This is a problem, they claim, because measurements of happiness end up 'focus[ing] on "average" individuals that are decontextualized from the surroundings in which they live (Cieslik, 2021, p. 6).

Sociological research on well-being, they argue, is better placed to explore the relational and contextual nature of happiness. Happiness is thought to be relational because an individual's sense of happiness depends significantly on the interpersonal relations they maintain (Pena-López et al., 2017). Happiness is also thought to be contextual because those interpersonal relationships are at the same time influenced by the structural organisation of the society in which they live (Taylor, 2011). Since happiness is influenced by relations and contexts, it is essential to recognise the importance of social networks and the role that people play in enhancing the happiness of others (Thin, 2012, p. 78; White, 2017).

In sum, sociological approaches to well-being emphasize the relational, social and contextual aspects of happiness. They prioritise people's everyday experiences and explore the influence that social structures, social contexts and dominant discourses have upon people's lives (Cieslik, 2021). Sociologists may agree that there are good reasons to be sceptical about well-being measurements and certain narratives, particularly in regard to happiness and self-help. However, in the view of those

engaged in well-being research, criticisms should be ‘treated as reasons to engage with the field [of well-being studies] rather than to shun it’ (Bartram, 2012, p. 645).

3.2.4. Overlaps between these three disciplines

Philosophy, psychology, and sociology, as I have discussed, approach the study of well-being from different angles. Yet, there are some overlaps. One is the use of the terms ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’. Since these are important terms in all three disciplines it is worth exploring their meanings in more detail. The terms ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ are used to distinguish (1) the perspective from which people’s well-being is being evaluated, (2) types of indicators of well-being and (3) the methods used to assess well-being.

First, the terms ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ are often employed to distinguish the perspective from which people’s well-being is evaluated (Sumner, 1996). For instance, a theory of well-being is thought to be subjective if the assessment of well-being relies on people’s own evaluations (Diener, Scollon, et al., 2003; Lucas, 2016). A theory of well-being is thought to be objective, by contrast, if the assessment of well-being relies on objective judgments that are independent of people’s own evaluations (Hurka et al., 2014; Muffels & Headey, 2013).

Second, the terms ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ are also used to distinguish different types of indicators. Subjective indicators include people’s interests, values, preferences, and desires. If the person whose well-being is being evaluated believes that happiness is important, then happiness would count as a subjective indicator. However, if happiness is considered an essential feature of well-being, regardless of whether the person desires it or not, then it would count as an objective indicator. Objective indicators, as a whole, include universally valued features of well-being regardless of what individual people value (Nussbaum, 2006).

Finally, the terms ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ are used to distinguish the different methods employed to measure well-being. For instance, they are used to make a contrast between self-reports (people’s subjective evaluations of well-being) and objective assessments (external evaluations of well-being from an outsider’s perspective) (Gasper, 2004, p. 177). Clarifying these several uses is important

because in the literature, it is not always clear what application of the term scholars are using.

As a result of these uses of 'subjective' and 'objective', conceptualisations of well-being, within and across disciplines, tend to be categorised in two broad groups: the subjective approach and the objective approach. The subjective approach to well-being includes theories such as hedonism and desire-fulfilment theory (philosophy), hedonic well-being or subjective well-being (psychology) and social happiness (sociology). All these theories have one thing in common: they are based on the idea that to know how someone's life is going, one needs to capture the sense of well-being from the person's own perspective (Diener, Oishi, et al., 2003; Heathwood, 2006; Kahneman et al., 1999; Lucas, 2016). The objective approach to well-being, by contrast, includes theories such as objective list theories (philosophy) and eudaimonic well-being (psychology). All these theories are based on the idea that whatever is that contributes to well-being does so because it has prudential value in itself (Fletcher, 2016a; Nussbaum, 1993; Tiberius, 2016; Vittersø, 2016).

Finally, these three disciplines also explore whether subjective and objective approaches can be effectively combined. A number of psychologists, for instance, have questioned the split between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Kashdan et al., 2008; Keyes & Annas, 2009; Ryan & Huta, 2009). They argue that this distinction may be appropriate from a theoretical perspective, but it does not translate well into applied psychology (Kashdan et al., 2008). In their view, hedonic and eudaimonic well-being are complementary and interconnected, and as such, should not be conceptualized as distinct forms of well-being (pp. 227–228). A number of philosophers have also suggest that well-being is 'in part a matter of the objective value of elements of the subject's life, [and] in part a matter of the subjective evaluation of those elements' (Woodward, 2016, p. 177). As a result, they have formulated several hybrid theories that aim to combine the promises of subjective and objective theories whilst minimising their limitations (see Kagan, 2009; C. Woodward, 2016). These debates have contributed to the development of pluralistic accounts of well-being, which I discuss in the following section.

3.3. Pluralistic conceptualisations of well-being

Pluralistic conceptualisations of well-being are those that integrate objective and subjective conditions (Ahuvia et al., 2015; Alkire, 2016; Lee et al., 2014; Veenhoven, 1996; White, 2016). Objective conditions are attitude-independent and externally observable. They contribute to well-being because they improve someone's life irrespectively of whether they are desired by that person. Subjective conditions are, by contrast, attitude-dependent and internally perceived. They are based on a person's evaluations and perceptions of how well their life goes.

Those who favour a pluralistic conception over subjective and objective theories do so for two main reasons. First, a pluralistic conception is thought to be more holistic. Theories that offer either a subjective or an objective account of well-being are thought to give a partial picture of well-being. They are based on reasonable premises but, at the same time, miss out fundamental elements. A pluralistic conception, by contrast, offers a more comprehensive understanding of well-being since it includes elements that are objectively considered to be good for people and what people subjectively cares about (Ahuvia et al., 2015; Gasper, 2004; Tiberius, 2016; White, 2010, 2016).

The second reason is that a pluralistic conception of well-being overcomes the limitations of measuring subjective and objective indicators by themselves. Excluding either measure can yield counterintuitive results. If subjective indicators are excluded, a person may score a high level of well-being even if she is extremely unhappy with her life (Diener, 2000; Kahneman et al., 1999). If objective indicators are excluded, a person may score a high level of well-being because she has adapted to poor living standards or abusive relationships (Sen, 1999, p. 63).

A clear way of representing why subjective and objective conditions are needed in assessments of well-being is provided by Michalos and Robinson's (2012) four scenarios of well-being:

- Real Paradise: people's living conditions are good, and they evaluate their lives as good.
- Real Hell: people's living conditions are bad, and they evaluate their lives as bad.

- Fool's paradise: people's living conditions are bad, but they evaluate their lives as good.
- Fool's hell: people's living conditions are good, but they evaluate their lives as bad.

The danger that a pluralistic conception of well-being tries to avoid is to confuse a fool's paradise or a fool's hell for the real thing. Pluralistic conceptions of well-being emphasize a view of quality of life as necessarily involving both elements of 'feeling good' (subjective well-being) and 'doing well' (objective well-being) (White, 2016). Empirically, for a person to score a high level of well-being, her life must be subjectively evaluated as positive, and objectively meet the criteria of 'the good life' (Ahuvia et al., 2015; Bartram, 2012; Cieslik, 2017).

Although a pluralistic conception of well-being overcomes many of the objections of subjective and objective theories, it also has some limitations. For instance, in pluralistic theories of well-being, it is not always clear why some variables are included and why others are not. There are many different types of pluralistic theories, and each present different lists of what is thought to constitute well-being (see for instance the differences between Nussbaum's (2000) list of goods, White's (2010) indicators of well-being and Veenhoven's (2000) four qualities of well-being).¹⁸

Pluralistic theories also tend to restrict indicators of well-being to what can be empirically measured. As a result, not all that is thought to constitute well-being is included within these accounts. Also, from an empirical point of view, it is often difficult to weigh or aggregate all the different factors that are thought to constitute well-being. For these reasons, some argue, even if one holds a pluralistic conception of well-being, one might nevertheless assess people's well-being by using single indicators, such as happiness, as proxy to understand how a life goes (Veenhoven, 2007, p. 50).

Despite limitations, pluralistic accounts are preferred in applied settings. The capabilities approach (Alkire, 2005; Nussbaum, 2001; Sen, 1985) and the livability theory (Veenhoven, 1996) are, for instance, examples of pluralistic accounts used to guide public policy. White's (2010) well-being framework, Oxfam Scotland Humankind Index (2013) and Community Quality-of-life Indicators (Holden et al., 2017; Sirgy et

¹⁸ This is also an objection of objective list theories (see section 3.2.1. Well-being in philosophy). Yet, from a community development perspective, this is not a strong objection if the diversity lists of variables reflect what communities themselves decide upon what it is that constitutes well-being.

al., 2006) provide some examples of pluralistic accounts used specifically in community development settings.

Pluralistic accounts are preferred in applied settings because they can better capture individual, community and societal levels of well-being given their multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary approach. They include indicators across several dimensions such as material, social, and personal, objective and subjective, at individual, community and national level. Pluralistic accounts tend to better integrate all these different academic perspectives whilst also accounting for the specific context in which they are applied. This interdisciplinary approach involves looking at well-being from a wide range of theoretical and empirical perspectives. Sociologists look at how social structures affect well-being, psychologists at well-being within the mind, anthropologists focus on cross-cultural perspectives and development scholars on how well-being is understood from the perspectives of communities themselves.

For these reasons, a pluralistic account of well-being was chosen in this thesis, not only as the normative framework from which to conceptualise well-being, but also as a tool to assess the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches. I employ a pluralistic account that combines White's (2010) well-being framework and the Oxfam Scotland Humankind Index (2013) I chose White's well-being framework because it is specifically developed as a tool for development practice. I chose Oxfam Scotland Humankind Index because it reflects the perspectives of communities experiencing disadvantage in Scotland. A more detailed explanation of the reasons why these two frameworks are employed in this thesis can be found in Chapter 4 (Methodology).

3.3.1. Applications of pluralistic theories of well-being in social policy

One of the areas in which pluralistic accounts have been particularly influential is social policy, especially after the shift of focus from Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to well-being. This shift of focus was motivated by the fact that economic indicators, such as GDP, were not accurately providing information about people's quality of life (Schreyer, 2016). As such, new ways to measure quality of life were needed.

For a long time, economic indicators have been used in social policy as proxy of well-being under the premise that a growing economy leads to better quality of life (Heins & Deeming, 2015). These indicators are appropriate to measure countries' economic

activity and growth. However, they have been found unsuitable to account for well-being because they miss fundamental aspects of what represents 'the good life'. They often fail to consider people's individual circumstances, or how changes in their living conditions affect their well-being. They also often fail to record the distribution of income, consumption, and wealth, and they do not provide a holistic explanation of household welfare (Giovannini & Rondinella, 2018; Stiglitz et al., 2009). Given these limitations, there has been a shift towards having new approaches monitor social progress. Pluralistic accounts of well-being, in this context, are thought to provide what GDP cannot.

Pluralistic accounts, from a social policy perspective, are better suited to measure well-being because they account for key factors such as income inequality, access to healthcare and education, social support networks and environmental factors. They comprise objective and subjective dimensions. They provide information about how countries (and regions) perform by looking at objective indicators (life expectancy, employment rates, wealth, level of education, etc.) and subjective indicators (how satisfied are people with their lives, relationships or work, what are their perceptions of happiness, health and safety, etc.).

Pluralistic accounts of well-being are now employed by high profile international institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission (European Commission, 2007; Stiglitz et al., 2018). They are also used by the governments of Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan or Canada to monitor their citizens' quality of life in (Heins & Pautz, 2021). In the UK, the Office for National Statistics has, since 2011, measured well-being by looking at objective and subjective dimensions. The 'National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework' (Scottish Government, 2015b) in Scotland, in turn, is another initiative to measure well-being in a holistic way.

Pluralistic accounts of well-being are thought to better capture important issues around the distribution and sustainability of welfare (Helne, 2021). Recent developments in social policy have called for a more explicit association between well-being, equality and sustainability. This is because progressive welfare policies, aimed at redistributing resources more equally, correlate with higher levels of well-being at societal levels (Heins & Deeming, 2015).

Social policy scholars also argue that sustainability must be considered to prevent risking the well-being of future generations over the well-being of those living in the present (Büchs & Koch, 2017; Jackson, 2009). Hence, the use of well-being as a framework to monitor quality of life requires looking, not only at the just distribution of resources, but also at the sustainability of welfare policies in the long term (Büchs & Koch, 2017; Dietz et al., 2009; Helne, 2021; Helne & Hirvilammi, 2015).

In light of these concerns, there have been increased efforts to include environmental factors, alongside economic, political and social factors in well-being frameworks designed to guide social policy (Helne, 2021). One example of this can be found in the current Scottish Government's (2022) vision to transition to 'a wellbeing economy' defined as 'an economic system, within safe environmental limits, which serves and prioritises the collective wellbeing of current and future generations' (p. 1)

3.4. Well-being in UK community development

The enthusiasm with which well-being has been received in social policy contrasts sharply with its reception within the field of UK community development. Like some sociologists (see previous Section 3.2.3), many community development scholars have adopted a critical view of well-being. For them, 'the well-being agenda', as it is often called, is based on the premise that well-being is a matter of individual character. The well-being agenda was an initiative introduced by former Prime Minister David Cameron (2010). It sought to shift the UK government approach to measuring societal progress by taking into account the well-being of individuals and communities. Within the field of community development, this was seen as an attempt to legitimise the shift of responsibilities from the state onto individuals (Crowther & Shaw, 2011; Edwards & Imrie, 2008; Ferrier & McGregor, 2016; McCabe & Davis, 2012; Taylor, 2011).

In this section, I argue that even though there are reasons to be sceptical about how well-being is sometimes used, those involved in community development should avoid associating the term well-being with a narrow conception (as 'individual responsibility'). As I have shown in Sections 3.2. and 3.3., there are multiple ways of understanding well-being. The danger, as I see it, is that by systematically opposing the focus on well-being, community development might miss an opportunity to achieve substantive progress.

3.4.1. Well-being as individual responsibility

To properly understand the hostility of UK community development to the concept of wellbeing it is important to understand the context. In the UK, increased focus on well-being within social policy coincided with the implementation of the UK Government agenda to minimise state's responsibilities over welfare (Levitas, 2012; Milbourne & Cushman, 2013; Milbourne & Murray, 2017; M. Scott, 2011). This agenda, conceived under the UK Coalition Government, was strongly influenced by Richard Layard's (2005) claim that prosperity does not bring happiness. In the Coalition Governments' view, enhancing well-being was a matter of individual responsibility, and not of welfare provision.¹⁹

The well-being agenda concurred with significant austerity measures, and the idea of the 'Big Society': the Government's vision of a world in which third sector organisations and communities play a leading role in delivering public services, improving their local areas and promoting a new culture of 'responsibility, mutuality and obligation' (UK Government, 2010b, p. 1). In the view of UK Government, it was entirely possible to pursue higher levels of well-being alongside severe social cuts.

Around that time, another key development concerned critics. This was the rising popularity of positive psychology, an emerging sub-discipline of psychology that seeks to discover the strengths that enable people to improve well-being by themselves. Positive psychology promotes the idea that people can acquire higher well-being by learning certain skills, altering the way they interpret events and changing certain behaviours (Seligman, 2011b; Seligman et al., 2009). Understanding well-being in this way, critics claim, reinforces the view of wellbeing as a matter of individual responsibility (Edwards & Imrie, 2008; Ferguson, 2007, 2011; Ferrier & McGregor, 2016; Taylor, 2011).

Given this context, many involved in community development became critical of the term 'well-being'. In their view, well-being, understood as a matter of individual responsibility, is problematic for several reasons. There is, for instance, the danger of stigmatizing people suffering low well-being. If obtaining well-being is the responsibility of people and communities, those doing badly can become the objects of blame

¹⁹ See Cameron's (2010) speech on well-being.

(Crocker & Major, 1989; Friedli, 2011; Frost & Hoggett, 2008). Another danger is undermining collective responsibility to challenge injustice (Carlisle & Hanlon, 2007; Ferrier & McGregor, 2016). A number of studies suggest that when social problems are framed as individual problems, the solutions people offer also tend to be individualistic (Hawkins et al., 2001). Hence, by emphasizing well-being as an individual responsibility, there is a risk of 'absolve[ing] the state of its own responsibility for addressing social injustice' (Taylor, 2011, p. 293).

Finally, the emphasis on positive thinking, attributed to positive psychology, is thought to limit spaces for dissent and protest, which are essential in community practice. The thought is that anger and dissatisfaction can play an important role in advancing social progress. For critics, positive psychology has a soothing effect on people. It encourages people to see the glass half-full instead of the glass half-empty, and as a result, people learn to cope better with their lives instead of challenging what is not working. Under this influence, it becomes harder for community development to challenge structural injustices and systems of oppression (Ferrier & McGregor, 2016).²⁰

Although critics are right to raise concerns about a conception of well-being as an individual responsibility, their criticisms fail as an objection to well-being itself. Conceptions of well-being are diverse and contested (see Sections 3.2. and 3.3.). For some, wellbeing might be an individual responsibility, but for most scholars working on wellbeing, the concept means something radically different (See for instance Cieslik, 2021; Coburn & Gormally, 2020; Sirgy et al., 2011; White, 2017). Hence, one cannot help but wonder why critics rarely consider more widespread conceptions of well-being.

There are three reasons why critics' objections to well-being fail. First, a broad, and often contested, concept like well-being cannot be reduced to a single conception. What critics find problematic is one conception: one that, according to them, stems from positive psychology and UK Government efforts to avoid responsibilities for welfare. Yet their critiques are often formulated in general terms. This is a problem

²⁰ The focus on well-being, under this account, is thought to have the same negative effects than the use of informal processes of conflict resolution in community development (which I have discussed elsewhere [in Asenjo Palma, 2018](#)). In this sense, both the well-being agenda and conflict resolution are thought to portray a view of anger and dissent as undesirable and unproductive.

because the growing attention to well-being can be an opportunity to make community development policy and practice focus on important areas of people's lives beyond (and not instead of) material living conditions. When critics associate well-being solely with positive thinking, or with individual responsibility, they are effectively surrendering the term to those they are critical of. The danger is that, by opposing a greater focus well-being, those involved in community development miss the opportunity to re-negotiate the terms of the well-being agenda.

Second, what is well-being and what causes well-being are two separate questions. One could think that well-being is a mental state (feeling good or happiness), and at the same time think that what makes someone feel good is caused by structural factors like adequate housing, income or access to public services. Similarly, one could hold the view that well-being can be improved by changing the way one feels (an idea associated with positive psychology) without regarding well-being as an individual responsibility. After all, it could be that well-being is a matter of how one feels but how one feels is determined by, say, the quality of social support that a person receives. Hence, there is no reason to oppose well-being (not even an account of well-being as a mental state) under the assumption that it will necessarily lead to assuming individual responsibilities.

Third, even if some conceptions of well-being might ignore structural factors, and as such, can be used to legitimise a shift of responsibilities from the state to individuals, there is no reason why the field of community development could not endorse a different conception. There are indeed several accounts of well-being that hold a view of the state as a key agent in improving well-being. Some of these accounts have even been specifically developed to guide community development policy and practice (see Section 3.3).

These three points illustrate why a focus on well-being within community development does not necessarily involve ignoring structural factors or accepting the status quo, as Ferrier and McGregor (2016), amongst others, suggest. Rather the opposite is true. A focus on well-being, I argue, may help re-gain the responsibilities of states over well-being if well-being is emphasized as a social right.

3.4.2. Well-being as a social right

In this section, I draw upon the capabilities approach to explain the idea of well-being as a social right. As I discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4), the capabilities approach utilises two core concepts: functionings and capabilities. Functionings refer to activities and states of existence that people value, such as being well-nourished or being part of a community. Capabilities, on the other hand, refer to people's abilities to achieve these functionings. (Sen, 1999). Well-being, on the capabilities approach, involves accounting for people's real opportunities to achieve what they value. In other words, one must acknowledge that 'what people can positively achieve is influenced by economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, and the enabling conditions of good health [or] basic education' (Sen, 1999, p. 5). Associating well-being with individual responsibility, when people's abilities to achieve what they value are constrained by social, economic, or personal circumstances, is therefore not only mistaken but also unjust. Most people, and especially those experiencing disadvantage, have limited freedoms to achieve well-being.

Framing well-being as a social right can help practitioners regain the social purpose of their practice. On this framing, well-being is recognised as a fundamental aspect of human life in which the state plays the role of the duty bearer. The framing offers then a language to challenge the reduction of public expenditure, the erosion of community services and the shift of responsibilities from the state onto individuals. As I discussed in Section 3.3.1., there is evidence suggesting that progressive welfare policies have a direct positive influence on well-being across material, social and personal dimensions, happiness included (Deeming & Hayes, 2012; Heins & Deeming, 2015). Having well-being as a goal of community development then involves challenging the policies and systems that limit communities' opportunities (and freedoms) to achieve what they value. The focus on well-being, far from leading to a de-politicisation of community development, can help reinforce its political stand.

Framing well-being as a social right also involves enhancing the power of communities to define well-being in their own terms. Those involved in community well-being research acknowledge that well-being can mean different things to different people. Because well-being is culturally and collectively mediated, it is essential that communities identify what constitutes well-being from their own perspective (Ife, 2009;

White, 2017). Community development has then the important task of bringing communities understandings of well-being to the forefront of the well-being agenda (see for instance, (Blunsdon & Davern, 2007; Coburn & Gormally, 2020; Lee et al., 2014).

Finally, understanding well-being as a social right should not involve rejecting the science behind positive psychology, but rather learning from it. Experiments in psychology have yielded ideas as to how people can improve their own sense of well-being by cultivating positive emotions and resilience (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Ryff & Singer, 2003). If these studies are correct, and people can improve their well-being by learning certain skills or changing certain behaviours, there is no reason why community development practitioners could not also support people in processes of self-development. Happiness and subjective experiences, even with their limitations, are valuable. Helping people feel better with their lives should need not involve neglecting the social, political, and economic conditions they face.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed different accounts of well-being and the reasons why definitions and measurements of well-being are contested. I have also discussed why well-being has sparked controversy within the field of community development. I have argued that well-being, when framed as a social right, can help practitioners regain the social purpose of their practice and challenge, more effectively, any attempt to shift responsibilities from the state onto individuals.

The chapter has also laid out the reasons why well-being, and specifically a pluralistic account, is employed as a framework to assess the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches. Pluralistic accounts of well-being provide the most appropriate framework from which to conceptualise well-being. They integrate objective and subjective dimensions. They also better capture well-being at different levels (individual, community and societal), whilst accounting for the specific context in which they are applied. This thesis employs a well-being framework that combines White's (2010) well-being framework and Oxfam Humankind Index (Oxfam GB, 2013) to include a focus on development practice as well as the perspectives on well-being of

communities experiencing disadvantage in Scotland. In the following chapter, I discuss the research methodology, the research process and how well-being is operationalised within the context of this thesis.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapters, I discussed how asset-based and rights-based approaches employ different methods to reach the same goal: enhance the well-being of socio-economically disadvantaged communities. I also discussed how assessments of well-being may vary depending on the conceptualisation of well-being one holds, and the approach to measuring well-being (subjective or objective). I drew upon the literature on well-being from various academic disciplines to make two main arguments. First, pluralistic accounts of well-being seem to provide the best approach to explore the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on the well-being of socio-economically disadvantaged communities. Second, employing a pluralistic account of well-being as a framework to guide community development can help communities achieve more substantive progress.

In this chapter, I explain the research methodology I employed to compare the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on well-being. My research has two purposes. First, it aims to explore the comparative effects of asset-based and rights-based approaches on material, social and personal dimension of well-being. Second, it aims to explore the comparative strengths and, weaknesses of following asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development settings. To do so, this thesis employs a pluralistic account of wellbeing and a comparative qualitative design to address the following research questions:

RQ1) How do organisations following asset-based and rights-based approaches influence the well-being of socio-economically disadvantaged communities across material, social and personal dimensions of well-being?

- How do they influence income, housing, and work conditions?
- How do they influence community services: social activities, green spaces, and community facilities?
- How do they influence community environment: safety, community support and inclusion?

- How do they influence skills, level of information and education?
- How do they influence social relationships?
- How do they influence mental and physical health?
- How do they influence happiness and life satisfaction?

RQ2) What are the strengths, weaknesses, and complementarities of applying asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development practice settings?

This methodology chapter is structured as follows. Section 4.2. discusses the interpretative framework in this thesis. Section 4.3. discusses my research methodology and the rationale behind following a qualitative and case study design. Section 4.4. describes the methods I employed for data collection. Section 4.5. describes my approach to operationalising well-being and explains how I developed the specific well-being framework I employ in this thesis. Section 4.6. describes the research process I followed (case selection, recruitment, participants). Section 4.7. deals with data analysis. Section 4.8. discusses procedural ethics and the limitations of my research. Section 4.9. discusses reflexivity by looking at the challenges I faced around positionality and transcriptions. Section 4.10. concludes.

4.2. Interpretative framework

In social research, philosophical assumptions about ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology are thought to reflect specific interpretative frameworks (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 58). In this section, I discuss the interpretative frameworks that underpin my research (pragmatism and the transformative paradigm). I also discuss how my motivations to undertake this research include an aim to contribute to social justice and advance knowledge on 'what works' in community development.

The pluralistic conception of well-being followed in this thesis can help me illustrate my ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions in relation to pragmatism (Blaikie, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Punch, 2013). As I have stated in the literature review (see Section 3.3.), I reject a view of well-being as either objectively determined or subjectively constructed. In my view, it is a combination of both. This multidimensional conception of well-being shares some of the assumptions

underpinning pragmatism, as an interpretative framework. Pragmaticism, broadly speaking, is a philosophical perspective that argues that the value of ideas and theories should be judged by their practical application in solving real-world problems, rather than by their adherence to abstract principles (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Pragmatists tend to reject a dualist view of reality as either objective or subjective (Dahler-Larsen, 2018; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Morgan, 2014). They emphasize the practical application of ideas and theories, and advocate for research that is opened to different methodological and philosophical perspectives. They often apply a plurality of research methods, understanding that the reality can be both objectively observed and subjectively interpreted (Tashakkori et al., 1998).

Besides the well-being framework I employ in this thesis, there are also other elements of my research that appear to reflect the pragmatic approach. For instance, my research, in line with pragmatism, aims to explore social justice issues (Biddle & Schafft, 2015; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Mertens, 2011) and 'what works' in community development practice (Robson & McCartan, 2016). My thesis aims to help socio-economic disadvantaged communities make more informed decisions about the approaches they follow. To do so, I explore the comparative impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on material, social and personal dimensions of well-being.

Although understanding 'what works' is a common goal amongst community development researchers, the focus on 'what works', can have several applications in research. In this thesis I use 'what works' in a different way to how it is normally employed. 'What works' is often used to refer to the decisions researchers make when trying to identify which methodological approach works best to answer their research questions (Creswell, 2009, p. 64). 'What works' is also sometimes used within the context of evaluation research to 'objectively' assess the effectiveness of development interventions (Plath, 2006; Shaw et al., 2006). By what works here, I mean neither of these two uses. In this thesis, 'what works' is used to emphasize the practical implications of my research and to communicate a commitment to contribute to social justice and community development practice. 'What works' is about generating knowledge that can help inform the day-to-day practice of community workers,

activists, and most importantly, communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage (Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

My focus on 'what works' is also more explorative than how it is sometimes conceived in evaluation research. I do not aim to 'objectively' assess effectiveness, but to contribute to community development practice by exploring how asset-based and rights-based approaches work, why the work and for whom they work (Plath, 2006, p. 61). Yet, my research 'aspires to some position of impartiality or fairness, so that [my analysis] can contribute meaningfully to the wellbeing of people' (Shaw et al., 2006, p. 6). To do so, I employ systematic approaches to (1) developing a well-being framework (see Section 4.5), (2) identifying case studies (see Section 4.6.) and (3) analysing data (see Section 4.7). Employing these systematic approaches to carefully monitor all my decisions was essential. I aimed to contribute to 'what works' in community development practice. I was also aware that, prior to this research, I had a preference for the rights-based approach. Hence, it was important for me to find a 'fair' way to conduct the research and analyse the data.

Finally, my focus on 'what works' reflects particular axiological assumptions: the individual values and ethics that underpin any research activity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 229). I understand that my research 'should contain an action agenda for reform' to help socio-economic disadvantaged communities enhance their well-being (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 61). In this sense, my research reflects some aspects of the interpretative framework known as 'the transformative paradigm' (ibid.). The transformative paradigm emphasizes the idea that research, ultimately, should be a tool of social change (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Mertens, 2011). My aim is to contribute to that change by informing those involved in community development about the implications that employing asset-based and rights-based approaches have (1) on the lives of communities facing socio-economic disadvantage, and (2) on social progress.

4.3. Research Methodology

This thesis employs a qualitative research design that involves two stages: a case study stage and a contextual stage. Before explaining these two stages, it is important to establish the reasons why a qualitative design was chosen over a quantitative design and over an evaluation approach. A qualitative design was chosen over a

quantitative design because it allows a more in-depth exploration of the comparative effects of asset-based and rights-based approaches on well-being. As I explained in the introduction in this chapter, my research has exploratory and comparative purposes. It aims to explore the comparative effects of asset-based and rights-based approaches on material, social and personal dimensions of well-being. It also aims to explore the comparative strengths and, weaknesses of following asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development settings. These exploratory and comparative purposes make a qualitative research design the most appropriate strategy to gather rich data on how these two approaches work from the perspectives of activists, staff, project participants, community residents and external agents. A qualitative design also enables a more in-depth understanding of the comparative effects of asset-based and rights-based approaches on multidimensions of well-being.

Following a quantitative design or using surveys as a method of data collection, may have helped me improved the generalisation of findings, if a higher number of organisations and practitioners had participated in this research. However, this approach would have produced less rich information and, as a result, it would have limited the analysis.

A comparative qualitative approach was also preferred over an evaluation approach. Evaluations are systematic assessments of the quality, impact and contributions of policies, interventions or projects (Shaw et al., 2006). Evaluations are popular in community development settings as they help generate rich information about the activities, characteristics, methods and impact of community projects (McDavid et al., 2023; Patton, 2015).

Scholars utilise different types of evaluations depending on what is being evaluated, the aims, the methods employed or the time scale (i.e. before, during or after a project) (Hansen, 2005). Amongst the different types, utilisation-focused evaluations and realist evaluations are commonly employed in community settings (See for instance, Matthews et al., 2015; Ward, 2021). Utilisation-focused evaluations involve stakeholders in designing the methods and in interpreting the results to ensure the evaluation is useful to those involved in or affected by the project being evaluated (Patton, 2008). Realist evaluations, in turn, investigate (1) the mechanisms through

which community projects seek to achieve their outcomes and (2) the contextual conditions that are more conducive to those outcomes (Pawson & Tilley, 1994, p. 300).

Although evaluations are a useful approach to assess what works in community development, they are less appropriate to undertake exploratory research. Evaluations tend to be more oriented to measure programme performance so that judgments about the merit and the worth of the programme can be made (Clarke, 1999; Dahler-Larsen, 2018; Patton, 2015; Rossi et al., 2018; Shaw et al., 2006). My research questions, however, have more exploratory purposes (see Sections 4.1 and 4.2. in this Chapter). I do not aim to measure project performance or to ‘objectively’ assess the ‘effectiveness’ of asset-based and rights-based projects. Rather, I aim to explore how asset-based and rights-based approaches work, how they influence well-being and how their strengths and weaknesses compare. These exploratory purposes make a comparative qualitative approach a more appropriate research strategy than an evaluation approach.

Within a qualitative research design, this thesis involves two stages: a case study stage and a contextual stage. The case study stage involves a comparative case study of two community development projects: the AB project representing the asset-based approach, and the RB project representing the rights-based approach. According to Robert K. Yin (2014), the choice of case study as a research design largely depends on the type of research questions and the nature of the phenomenon studied (p. 34). Case study designs are particularly suitable to conduct research that answers ‘how’ questions, attempts in-depth explorations of particular approaches, focuses on real-life contexts, and aims to inform practice and community action (Schwandt & Gates, 2018; Simons, 2009). In the absence of previous comparative empirical research on the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches, a case study design thus offers the optimal strategy to undertake this in-depth explorative research project.

Within the case study stage, this thesis follows *instrumental*, *embedded*, and *comparative* strategies. *Instrumental* case studies are those in which there is a need for general understanding about a particular phenomenon, and the study of particular cases are instrumentally used to address this need (Stake, 1995). In my research, the two cases studied, the AB project and RB project, were instrumentally selected to study how asset-based and rights-based approaches work. I did not have an intrinsic

interest on the AB project and the RB project per se. These two projects simply provided the means to explore the comparative effects of asset-based and rights-based approaches on well-being (Ibid., p. 3).

Embedded case studies are those in which there are multiple units of analysis within each case. Following an embedded strategy enables a more extensive analysis, since different perspectives and subcases are compared (Yin, 2014). In my research, for instance, the AB project and the RB project were the two broad cases studied, whilst interview data (accounting for the different roles that people played in each project) and documentary data were analysed as sub-units. This embedded strategy enabled the comparison of the perspectives of staff members, participants, residents, and external stakeholders on how the AB project and the RB project influence well-being. It also helped me identify similarities and differences across sub-units (interview and documentary data).

Comparative case studies are those in which examining two or more single cases are required to 'discover contrasts, similarities, or patterns' (Campbell, 2010, p. 174). In my research, the two cases compared are the AB project and the RB project. Following a comparative strategy was essential to establish contrast within and between asset-based and rights-based approaches (Ragin, 2014).

Besides the case study stage, the qualitative design in this thesis also includes a contextual stage. The contextual stage involves exploring how asset-based and rights-based approaches work from the perspectives of a wider range of community development organisations. My aim in the contextual stage is to explore the comparative strengths and weaknesses, and the potential complementarities, of applying asset-based and rights-based approaches from the perspectives of practitioners and activists working in Scotland. In this contextual stage, the organisations selected for the study identified their work as (1) focusing on individual/behavioural change (closer to the asset-based approach), (2) focusing on systemic/structural change (closer to the rights-based approach) or (3) some combination of both approaches. As I discuss in Section 4.6. below, a total of fifteen organisations were included in the contextual stage of the research to better understand how different approaches compare.

Finally, to address my research questions, I followed a combination of deductive and inductive strategies as part of an iterative process (Blaikie, 2010). My research follows a deductive strategy because theories associating the use of asset-based and rights-based approaches with enhanced well-being require further empirical testing. My research also follows an inductive approach because, as stated in the introduction of this thesis (Chapter 1), understanding the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches upon well-being requires exploratory and comparative work. The empirical findings in this thesis are not only used to test existing theories but also to develop new knowledge about how these approaches work in practice.

4.4. Research Methods

I employed two methods of data collection. During the case study stage of the research, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis.²¹ During the contextual stage of the research, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

4.4.1. Interviews

I conducted a total of forty-three in-depth, semi-structured interviews involving forty-five research participants²². Interviews were conducted face-to-face, apart from one interview that was conducted over phone at the participant's request.

Most interviews were held in community development organisations' premises such as staff offices or meeting rooms, whilst a small number of interviews were held in other public venues. For instance, one interview was conducted in a room I hired in the local community centre, two interviews were held in meeting rooms at the University of Edinburgh, and four interviews were held in a local cafe.

I also conducted five interviews in participants' private homes. I did this for various reasons. Some participants had mobility issues; other participants found a home interview more convenient. On one occasion, the local cafe was closed, and the participant suggested having the interview in his flat instead. Although I was not

²¹ I also collected data in a workshop I organised to discuss my research findings and the AB project's approach with staff members and volunteers at the AB project. Although this event informed my analysis, I decided not to analyse it because by the time I conducted the workshop my analysis of the AB project had finished (I reached the point of saturation) and no new data emerged from the workshop.

²² In two instances, interviews involved two participants at the same time.

concerned about my safety when conducting interviews in participants' homes, I decided to follow the same procedures I would have followed as a practitioner in home visiting duties. This involved developing a safety plan for all interviews conducted in private spaces that were unknown to me.²³

During the case study stage, interviews were conducted with project staff, project participants, community residents, partner agencies and external actors. My aim was to obtain a 360-degree view of how asset-based and rights-based approaches may influence well-being from different perspectives. To do so, I used an interview schedule that I had previously assessed with community development practitioners (see Section 4.5.). I used this schedule with all interviewees to facilitate comparisons, with only small variations depending on the role participants played in the project or the community.²⁴ Interview schedules can be found in Appendix 2.

The main aim of the interview was to explore research participants' understandings of:

- The community (the social context, needs and problems).
- How the project works (aims, activities).
- The influence of the project on each well-being indicator.
- The challenges participants experienced (what they felt unable to achieve, negative impact on well-being).
- How they identified the project's approach (closer to 'helping people improve their lives and provide self-help solutions' or closer to 'helping people take actions to challenge unjust structures and secure social rights').
- The advantages and disadvantages of the identified approach.

Although all interviews had a similar schedule, the length and depth of interviews varied significantly amongst staff members, community residents, project participants and external agents. For instance, whilst interviews with project participants and staff members often lasted two hours, interviews with external agents and community

²³ This plan involves having an assigned contact person who knows the researcher approximate location and expects her call at a previously agreed time. If at the time agreed, the researcher does not make the call, then the assigned contact person has to make contact over the phone to check all is OK. If no contact is established, then the assigned person needs to contact the police.

²⁴ For instance, whilst the schedule for project participants and community residents included a question about the project's effect on their own well-being, the schedule for practitioners and external agents included a question about the project's effect on the well-being of project participants and the wider community.

residents did not tend to exceed the hour. The reason of this variation may be explained by participants' different levels of engagement. Interviews with project participants and staff were particularly long because most of them were highly engaged during interviews. I followed, to some extent, a dialogical approach in my interviews. Dialogical approaches to interviewing use dialogue as a tool to promote reflexive thinking and the generation of knowledge between the researcher and the research participants (Chang et al., 2004; Farias et al., 2019). In my interviews, the dialogical approach was employed to ensure research participants had the space to share their experiences and reflections (Costantino, 2008; Frank, 2005; Wiesner, 2021). During interviews, I found that most project participants and staff were keen to share their stories and perspectives. External agents and community residents, by contrast, shared fewer stories, which considerably reduced the time needed to go through the full interview schedule.

During the contextual stage, interviews were conducted with paid and unpaid staff working in a wide range of third sector community development organisations. My aim was to explore the advantages and disadvantages of following asset-based and rights-based approaches from the point of view of those involved in community development. Interviews focused on exploring participants' understandings of:

- How they identified the organisation's approach (closer to 'helping people improve their lives and provide self-help solutions' or closer to 'helping people take actions to challenge unjust structures and secure social rights') and why.
- The advantages and disadvantages of their organisation's approach.
- The extent to which the organisation could follow a different approach.
- How decisions are made regarding which approach to follow.
- The extent to which both approaches are or can be combined in the context of their organisation.

The length of contextual interviews also varied, but most of them took about one hour. I also employed a dialogical approach to enable a deep conversation about the implications of working at the individual level, by promoting behavioural change, and working at the structural level, by promoting systemic change.

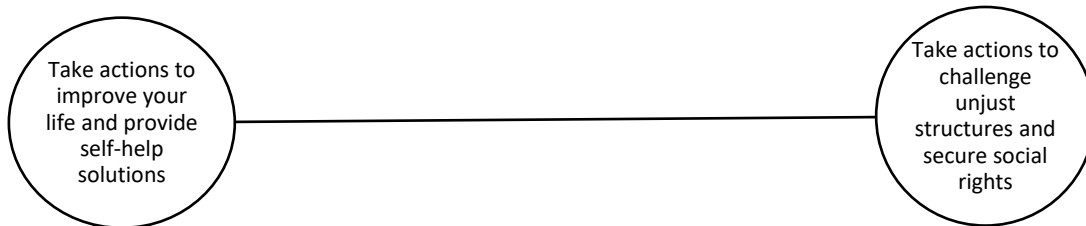
After each interview, I wrote down my reflections about (1) what participants had said, and (2) the interview process. Reflections about the contents of the interviews informed my analysis of data, whilst reflections about the process of the interviews helped me assess (and adjust if needed) the interview questions, my approach to interviewing, the suitability of venues and so on.

Interview tools

To facilitate interviews, I used a range of tools. During the case study stage, I used a set of cards to prompt the discussion about the impact that the AB project and the RB project had on different indicators of well-being. These cards were divided in two groups: well-being cards and impact cards. Well-being cards represented each of the indicators included in the well-being framework (see Section 4.5. for a list of indicators). For instance, there was one card for housing, one card for work (paid and unpaid), one card for social activities and so on. Impact cards represented four different outcomes: positive direct effect, positive indirect effect, no effect and negative effect. Participants then had to organise well-being cards alongside impact cards whilst explaining why they had arranged them in that way.

During this exercise, participants had the freedom to organise cards in a way that made sense to them. Some participants organised first the impact cards and then assigned individual well-being cards to each of the categories they had created. Other participants acknowledged the several effects within one indicator, and they arranged the cards to represent this diverse impact (for instance, positive and negative effect on mental health, or positive direct and indirect effect on community support and inclusion).

Another tool I used during the case study stage was a scale for characterising different approaches. Participants were given an A4 print with a scale on it (see below) and a few colour stickers. They had to identify where, along the scale, the AB project or the RB project sit.



In this part of the interview, participants also had the freedom to arrange the stickers in whichever way made sense to them. Some participants used one sticker to place the project approach somewhere along the line, other participants placed different stickers depending on whether they reflected the project's approach or their views about which approach the project should follow. The same tool was used in the contextual interviews.

4.4.2. Documents

I collected and analysed a total of 35 private and public documents, which included internal project evaluations, published project reports, and transcribed videos (see Table 4.1. below). I collected 29 project evaluation and project reports between 2011 and 2020 from the AB project. I collected four project reports and two video documentaries between 2016 and 2020 from the RB project.

The AB project granted me access to internal reports and evaluations. The project produced four internal reports per community, per year, and one general evaluation every two to three years. I also had access to three full project reports through their website, alongside other available documents about their approach, aims and activities. The RB project, by contrast, did not give me any access to their internal reports or other private data. The documents collected, the reports and video documentaries, were publicly accessible online.

The purpose of collecting documentary data was to get a broader sense of the AB project and the RB project as well as to understand their impact on well-being over time. The documents, which provided a less time-consuming way of obtaining rich information, also helped me complement interview data when information was missing.

To select documents, I followed a version of John Scott's (1990) quality control criteria in data collection, which involves attending to a document's authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (Ahmed, 2010, pp. 3–5). For instance, I only collected documents that were either directly published on the website of the AB project or the RB project, or emailed to me by those involved in the projects. I followed this quality control criteria because during desk-based research, I identified a series of documents that were produced by external parties on the AB project, but I was unsure of the extent to which these documents were authentic or representative from the perspective of those involved in the AB project. Therefore, I decided to only include documents that were either directly produced by the organisations behind the AB project and the RB project or by external third parties (consultancy organisations) if they had been directly commissioned by the AB project or the RB project. The following table describes the documents I collected and analysed for this thesis.

Table 4.1. Documents collected by project.

Case	Type of document	Number
AB project	Quarterly evaluation report (internal)	22
	Full project report (published in 2014, 2019 and 2020)	3
	Economic project evaluation (published)	1
	Approach and framework evaluation (published)	3
Total documents from AB project		29
Case	Type of document	Number
RB project	Full project report (published in 2016 and 2020)	2
	Project summary (published)	1
	Project description (published)	1
	Video project documentary (published in 2018 and 2019)	2
Total documents from RB project		6

4.5. Operationalising well-being

One of the first methodological decisions I made was to develop my own well-being framework. As I stated in the literature review (see Chapter 3), there are multiple conceptions of well-being and multiple frameworks. For this thesis, I developed a framework that combined two well-being frameworks: White's (2010) well-being

framework for the development practice and Oxfam Scotland's (Oxfam GB, 2013) Humankind Index. In this section, I discuss the rationale that led me to combine these two frameworks to create my own well-being framework.

White's framework was developed as a practical tool to guide development practice. It is based on the findings of the ESRC research group on Well-being in Developing Countries (WeD). The WeD group undertook empirical work in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand to explore the social conditions that enable/hinder people's abilities to achieve well-being (White, 2010). In their research, the WeD group identifies three broad dimensions that "any attempt to assess well-being or to understand the processes that affect it" must take into account (WeD, 2008). These are material, relational, and subjective dimensions, which, for analytical reasons, White further labels as material, social and human²⁵.

Each of these broad dimensions have several single indicators that further reflect the idea that what constitutes well-being can be objectively and subjective determined (see Table 4.2. below). White summarizes well-being as the state of 'doing well and feeling good'. Doing well relates to the objective dimension of well-being and material standards of living. Feeling good relates to the subjective dimension of well-being and 'personal perceptions and levels of satisfaction' (White, 2010, p. 160). White also emphasizes the idea that well-being is relational, and as such, it 'exists in the overlap between subjective and objective approaches' (White, 2016, p. 39). Table 4.2. presents in detail the broad dimensions and the single indicators included in each dimension in White's framework.

²⁵ White divides the relational dimension into two domains: the social, which she relates to social relations and public goods, and the human, which she relates to people's capabilities, life attitudes and personal relationships. The subjective dimension is represented across spheres (material, social and human). It includes people's perception of their material, social and human conditions as well as values, beliefs and ideologies.

Table 4.2. White's well-being framework

Dimensions	Single Indicators
Material	Objective aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Income, wealth and assets -Employment and livelihood activities -Levels of consumption
	Subjective aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Satisfaction with income and wealth -Assessment of one's standard of living compared with others -Assessment of present standard of living compared with the past
Social	Objective aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Social, political and cultural identities -Violence, conflict and insecurity -Relations with the state: law, politics, welfare -Access to services and amenities -Networks of support and obligation -Environmental resources
	Subjective aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Perceptions of safety, respect and discrimination -(Di) satisfaction with access to services -Assessment of treatment/support given or received -Perceptions of environmental quality
Human	Objective aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Household structure and composition -Education, information and skills -Physical health and (dis)ability -Relations of love and care
	Subjective aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -(dis)satisfaction with levels of health, information, skills, education -Self-concept and personality -Sense of competence, (in)capability and scope for influence -Trust and confidence -Religious faith

Source: Adapted from White (2010).

White's framework was included in my research for two reasons. First, it is based on a pluralistic conception of well-being that includes both objective and subjective dimensions. Second, White's framework is developed as a tool for the development practice and, although her focus is on international development, the practice of community development is, in many ways, similar in both international and local UK settings. For instance, there are similarities in the way development practice, and

community development in particular, are defined in the wider literature as an approach aimed at enhancing processes of self-determination of disadvantaged groups (Emejulu, 2015; Gaventa, 1982; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; IACD, 2004).

However, White's framework reflects a conception of well-being that comes from the perspective of people living in low-income countries, and Scotland is not a low-income country. In this sense, even if one assumes that community development practice might look fairly similar across countries, people's understandings of well-being are likely to be distinct because what the 'good life' involves is culturally and contextually influenced (Oishi, 2010; White, 2016). Including a framework of well-being that reflects the Scottish context was thus critical. Oxfam Scotland provided such a framework.

The Oxfam Scotland's Humankind Index (2013) is an initiative to monitor Scotland's well-being beyond economic growth. The index is the result of a large-scale consultation process, conducted in 2011, to identify what determines well-being from the perspectives of the people living in Scotland. The consultation particularly aimed to engage communities facing socio-economic disadvantage, and involved organising focus groups, community workshops and street stalls to facilitate their participation.²⁶ In the consultation, communities were asked to identify what factors affect their ability to live well, and to rank these factors according to their importance. Based on people's responses, Oxfam Scotland developed the Oxfam Humankind index. This index includes single indicators such as health, feeling good, green spaces or work amongst others (see Table 4.3.). The index also includes the 'weight' of each indicator, which reflects how important these seem to be for well-being, according to the communities consulted. For instance, as Table 4.3. shows, those consulted thought that housing has a bigger impact on a persons' well-being than feeling good.

²⁶ Although it is important to note that without explicitly accounting for other forms of inequalities besides socio-economic inequality, the Oxfam humankind index might only reflect the views of majority groups (white Scottish/British communities). There seemed to be some efforts to account for gender differences, but no other equality characteristics seemed to be included, which seems a significant limitation of this framework.

Table 4.3. Oxfam Scotland Humankind Index

Indicators of well-being	Weight
Housing	11
Health	11
Neighbourhood/environment	9
Work satisfaction	7
Good relationships	7
Safety	6
Green spaces	6
Secure/suitable work	6
Having enough money	5
Financial security	5
Culture/hobbies	5
Local facilities	4
Skills and education	4
Community spirit	4
Good transport	4
Good services	3
Tolerance	3
Feeling good	2

The Oxfam’s humankind index, however, also has some limitations. In comparison to White’s framework, Oxfam’s index is less comprehensive. It covers areas of well-being that might be important for the people consulted in Scotland, but it leaves out areas that determine people’s well-being even if they are not identified as such, for instance identity, relations with the state or discrimination²⁷. Another limitation is that Oxfam’s index is not specifically developed as a tool to guide community development practice, whilst White’s framework is.

Given each framework has its limitations, I sought to combine them to retain a focus on well-being that is relevant to community development practice (White’s framework)

²⁷ The lack of these domains might also be the result of not accounting for other forms of inequality besides poverty.

whilst including the perspectives of communities facing socio-economic disadvantage in Scotland (Oxfam's framework). To combine them, I took three further steps: identification, adjustment, and evaluation.

Identification. This first step involved identifying the indicators that White's and Oxfam's frameworks had in common. Once I identified them, I arranged them following White's classification of material, social, and personal indicators of well-being (see Table 4.4. below). Categorising single indicators according to White's three-broad dimensions, instead of just having a list of single well-being indicators, was thought to facilitate the comparative analysis of the data. For instance, by following this classification, I was able to compare not only how asset-based and rights-based approaches have an influence on individual indicators (income, health, social activities, and so on), but also their comparative impact across the broader dimensions of well-being (material, social and personal).

Adjustment. The second step involved ensuring that the combined framework did not benefit one approach over the other. Prior studies exploring the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on well-being have largely focused on the dimensions each approach seem to have higher impact on. Studies assessing the impact of asset-based approaches have mostly focused on indicators within social and personal dimensions such as relationships and mental health (See for instance Foot, 2012; McLean & McNeice, 2012). Studies assessing the impact of rights-based approaches have mostly focused on indicators within the material dimension such as housing and income (see for instance Gauri & Gloppen, 2012). To compare the influence of these two approaches on well-being, it was thus essential to ensure that the number of indicators within personal, social, and material dimensions were balanced out. A framework that only included indicators within the personal domain, for instance, could give the impression that asset-based approaches have a higher impact on well-being, but only because indicators that rights-based approaches seem to have a higher impact upon are missing.

Table 4.4. Common indicators of well-being

Broad dimensions	White's indicators	Oxfam's indicators
Material	Income, wealth and assets Satisfaction with income and wealth	Housing Having enough money Financial security
	Employment and livelihood activities	Work satisfaction Secure/suitable work
Social	Violence, conflict and insecurity Perceptions of safety, respect and discrimination	Tolerance Safety
	Environmental resources Perceptions of environmental quality	Neighbourhood/environment Green Spaces
	Networks of support and obligation Assessment of treatment/support given or received	Community spirit Good services
	Access to services and amenities (Di) satisfaction with access to services	Local facilities Culture/hobbies Good transport
	Human	Education, information, and skills (Dis)satisfaction with levels of health, information, skills, education
Physical health and (dis)ability (Dis)satisfaction with levels of health, information, skills, education		Health
Relations of love and care		Good relationships
Trust and confidence Self-concept and personality Sense of competence, (in)capability and scope for influence		Feeling good

Evaluation. The third step involved evaluating the final framework. To do so, I conducted two pilot interviews with community development practitioners working with marginalised communities in Scotland. These pilot interviews, besides helping me draft my final interview schedule, were useful to assess the clarity of the indicators used in the framework. For instance, I asked interviewees the extent to which the wording of indicators was confusing or could mean different things to different people. These pilot interviews also gave me an opportunity to identify potential areas of well-being that could be missing in the combined framework. Table 4.5. presents the combined framework I developed after taking these three steps (identification, adjustment, and evaluation).

Table 4.5. Combined well-being framework

Broad dimensions	Indicators
Material and living conditions	Income
	Work (paid or unpaid)
	Housing
Social and community	Community safety (levels of conflict and perceptions of safety)
	Community support and inclusion
	Services and facilities
	Social activities
	Green spaces
Human and personal	Relations with family and friends
	Physical and mental health
	Education, skills, level of information
	Happiness and life satisfaction

I also sought to identify the extent to which the indicators included in my framework are commonly employed in well-being research. I found that most of the indicators I included in the combined framework are frequently employed to assess community well-being and community development programmes (Casas et al., 2007; Coburn & Gormally, 2020; Holden et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2014; Sirgy, 2018; Talmage, 2020). They are included in theoretical well-being frameworks such as the capabilities

approach and the livability theory (Alkire, 2016; Nussbaum, 2001; Veenhoven, 2007a). They are also employed to monitor societal well-being in Scotland and the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2022; Scottish Government, 2015b). These findings helped me further substantiate the well-being framework employed in this thesis.

In sum, to develop the well-being framework I decided to follow a systematic process. On the one hand, I wanted to employ a framework that was not only relevant to community development practice, but also to communities facing socio-economic disadvantage in Scotland. On the other hand, I wanted to be fair to both theoretical approaches. To do so, the identification, adjustment and evaluation of single indicators was essential to avoid building in methodological biases. As I have stated, although I had an initial preference for the rights-based approach, I was strongly committed to produce research that may help communities and practitioners make more informed decisions. Developing a balanced well-being framework from which to assess the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches was therefore critical.

4.6. Research process and case selection

In this section, I describe the process of research and case selection I followed. I explain the reasons why my research was based in Scotland. I describe the mapping and selection criteria. I explain how I selected the two case studies by attending to 'ideal types' and 'equivalence'. I also describe the process of case selection during the contextual stage of the research. Finally, I explain the recruitment process, and I provide a description of my research participants.

4.6.1. Scotland

I based my research in Scotland for three reasons. First, there is a strong tradition of community development practice in Scotland following both asset-based and rights-based approaches. Asset-based approaches became popular in Scotland after a series of reports²⁸ stressed the importance of building on communities' strengths and assets to tackle poverty and health inequalities (Pattoni et al., 2016). Rights-based approaches build on a rich history of community activism and political action in

²⁸ For instance, 'Assets for Health' (Burns, 2011) and the Christie Commission Report on the 'Future Delivery of Public Services'.

Scotland. This history has arguably contributed to the growing recognition of rights-based approaches in Scottish community development (Cooke & Shaw, 1996; Emejulu & Shaw, 2010; Tett, 2010).

Second, there is a particular drive within Scottish policy to promote community-led development, well-being, and evidence-based practice. Community-led development, civic participation and community engagement have been at the forefront of recent Scottish Government policy, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015) being a clear example. The act identifies actions to facilitate the inclusion of communities in decision-making, planning, regeneration and service delivery, and it connects the idea of community involvement with enhance well-being and life satisfaction (Scottish Government, 2015). There are also efforts to monitor well-being (see the National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework) and evidence-based practice. One example of this evidence-based drive is the initiative 'What Works Scotland', aimed at improving decision-making by identifying good practice in local development (Escobar & Watson, 2019).

Finally, the third reason I decided to base my research in Scotland is that I have experience working in Scottish community development as a practitioner. Before undertaking this PhD, I worked as a project worker for a third sector organisation that provided conflict resolution services to help reduce the incidence of youth homelessness due to family conflict in West Lothian and Edinburgh. My work involved collaborating with a range of community development organisations. Through these collaborations, I developed my knowledge of the sector as well as a strong practice network, which was particularly useful during the mapping and case selection process.

4.6.2. Mapping and selection criteria

The insight I had of community development practice in Scotland helped me during the mapping stage, as I was able to use my own networks to create a map of the sector. Mapping procedures are common in qualitative research because they serve as a tool to develop complex databases (Powell, 2010; Schensul, 2008). In the context of my research, mapping helped me develop a database of over 70 community development organisations in Scotland that, at least in appearance, seemed to follow different variations of asset-based and rights-based approaches.

I started mapping organisations by identifying projects that were explicitly framed as following asset-based and rights-based approaches. I identified an initial sample of asset-based projects in reports published by the Scottish Community Development Network (which I am a member of since 2015), the Scottish Community Development Centre, and the Building Safer Communities Programme. I identified an initial sample of rights-based projects in reports published by the Scottish Human Rights Commission, and the Equality Human Rights Commission Scotland.

I also conducted desk-based research and used my own networks in the field to have a more extended map of organisations using one and another approach. For the desk-based research, google search terms included ‘asset-based Scotland’, ‘rights-based Scotland’, ‘community organizing Scotland’ ‘community-led development Scotland’ and ‘community activism Scotland’. For each organisation and project identified, the mapping examined seven areas (see Table 4.6. below).

Table 4.6. Mapping criteria.

Areas
Project aims
Self-identification (how the organisation defined its approach)
Spaces of community participation: invited, created, claimed, closed ²⁹
Typology of community participation: self-organising, delegated power, partnership, consultation, information, passive participation, and manipulation ³⁰
Type of community (geographical community, community of interest, community of identity, and so on)
Project scope (local/neighbourhood, local/city, regional or national)
Project activities

Following mapping, the next step involved a purposive sample strategy. A purposive sampling strategy is a non-probability sampling method used in social research to

²⁹ This classification is based on Gaventa’s (2006) Power Cube: levels, spaces and forms of power, and it helped me identify the role the community played in deciding the approach each of the projects/organisations followed.

³⁰ This classification draws upon Arnstein’s (1969) and Pretty’s (1995) typologies of participation. These helped me identify the role of communities and the extent to which project were community-led.

select participants who are likely to provide relevant data related to the research questions (Vehovar et al., 2016, pp. 330–338). This strategy is suitable in selection processes that involve identifying organisations with specific characteristics (Given, 2008, p. 697) and it was employed in the two research stages I followed: case study stage and contextual research stage.

4.6.3. Selecting organisations: ideal types and establishing equivalence

To select organisations for the case study, I first assessed the extent to which mapped organisations were close to the ‘ideal type’ of asset-based approach and rights-based approach. ‘Ideal types’, in case study research, are commonly used to represent or exemplify a set of comparable cases with specific characteristics, and are useful in case selection processes (Kuiken, 2009). Yet, ‘ideal types’ pose significant challenges. For instance, in the context of my research, community development organisations may not follow a defined approach, and even if they do, there are often multiple understandings of what that approach involves.

Aware of these limitations, in this thesis I used ‘ideal types’ as a methodological tool to assist me in case selection. I do not aim to imply that the two projects I selected as case studies (AB project and the RB project) represent in any sense the ‘purest’ form of asset-based or rights-based approaches. They were selected because, from a methodological point of view, they seemed to include more of the features that are commonly associated with asset-based and rights-based approaches respectively. To establish the closeness to the ‘ideal type’, I ranked mapped organisations according to the following criteria (see Table 4.7)

Table 4.7. Closeness to ideal type

<i>How close to the ideal type of asset-based approach?</i>				
Focus	Strengths	Skills sharing	Social capital	Self-help
Activities	Asset mapping	Appreciative inquiry	Co-production	Capacity building
Score	8			
<i>How close to the ideal type of rights-based approach?</i>				
Focus	Rights	Political literacy	Collective action	Duty bearers
Activities	Protests	Campaigning	Lobbying	Legal mobilisation
Score	8			

This scoring process helped me identify eight organisations, from the initial number of seventy, that most closely met these criteria. To narrow this number down, I then cross-referenced these eight organisations against the broad mapping criteria (see Table 4.6.) following a process commonly referred to as ‘construct equivalence’.

‘Construct equivalence’ is based on the idea that comparative research, unlike single-case studies, requires establishing some sort of equivalence between cases, so that they can be compared (Mills et al., 2006). For instance, a researcher might aim to study how different community approaches work in similar settings, or she might prefer to study how the same community approach works in different settings. In any case, the researcher needs to establish some sort of parameters so that cases can be meaningfully compared.

In my research, those parameters involved distinguishing between what I thought to be relevant and irrelevant characteristics (Van Deth, 1998). My aim was to select two projects that shared as many “relevant characteristics” as possible (dimensions I used to map organisations) but differed in their community development approach, which was the key point of comparison. To do so, I explored the extent to which the projects with higher ‘ideal type’ scores worked with similar communities (either geographical or of interest), represented similar participation typologies (delegated power, partnerships and so on), worked at similar levels (local, regional, national) and had been active for at least three years. Through this process, I narrowed down the number of potential case studies from eight to four, and I established some equivalence parameters to undertake the comparative analysis (see Table 4.8. below).

It is important to emphasize that my aim in establishing equivalence was to select cases in a pragmatic and systematic way. I am aware that the process of establishing equivalence can be extremely complex if the final aim is to determine the validity of a study.³¹ I am also aware that this process can be highly contested. Finding cases that share the same characteristics is mostly unviable in the social sciences. Hence, any attempt to establish equivalence is often seen as artificial and externally imposed (Kosmützky et al., 2020). In this respect, by establishing equivalence, I did not pursue

³¹ Specially in quantitative research in which establishing equivalence between cases and indicators is used to determine the internal and external validity of the study and, as such, influences the prospect of inferring causality from part of the researcher (Denters & Mossberger, 2006).

to enhance the validity of my research. My approach to equivalence responded solely to the need for a methodological tool that would (1) assist me in identifying and selecting cases, and (2) be 'fair' to both approaches. To this purpose, I found the process of establishing equivalence between my case studies extremely useful.

Table 4.8. Parameters of equivalence

Comparison One	Organisation A - asset-based approach - working with geographical communities - partnership participation typology – at least 3 years in practice
	Organisation B – rights-based approach – working with geographical communities – partnership participation typology – at least 3 years in practice
Comparison Two	Organisation C - asset-based approach - working with communities of interest – grassroots/self-mobilisation participation typology - at least 3 years in practice
	Organisation D – rights-based approach – working with communities of interest – grassroots/self-mobilisation participation typology - at least 3 years in practice

To further examine the extent to which these four organisations were suitable to undertake the comparative analysis, I started an initial round of phone calls and informal meetings with staff from these four organisations. My aim was to explore the extent to which staff thought the organisations they worked at represented either asset-based or rights-based approaches. These initial talks also provided me an opportunity to introduce my research further and identify any potential interest to take part in my research as participants.

These calls and meetings were key in deciding the final case selection. For instance, organisation D, a grassroots organisation self-identified with the rights-based approach, expressed interest in the research but could not commit to participate given the vulnerable situation of some of their community members, so they had to opt out. Organisation C, the other grassroots organisation, identified their approach as following

a combination of asset-based and rights-based approaches, and as such, was not suitable for the case study stage. They were, however, included as participants in the contextual stage of the research.

Organisations A and B self-identified with either the asset-based or the rights-based approach and expressed their willingness to participate in the research. They also worked with similar communities (geographical communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage) and followed a similar partnership working approach, which further strengthened their suitability for the comparative stage of the research according to the equivalence parameters I had established.

4.6.4. Case selection in contextual research stage

As I explained in Section 4.1. and 4.3., my thesis has two purposes. One is to explore the influence of asset-based and rights-based approaches on well-being (which corresponds to the case-study stage of my research). The second purpose is to explore the comparative strengths and weaknesses of applying asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development (which corresponds to the contextual stage of my research). This second purpose required including the perspectives of a wider range of practitioners and activists.

To select a wider pool of organisations besides those included in the case study, I followed a purposive sample strategy and, in some instances, a snowball strategy. Yet, this time, the selection criteria was significantly different. Unlike the case study in which the priority was to find organisations that represented 'ideal types' and had some sort of equivalence, my aim in the contextual stage of the research was to include as much variation as possible between organisations. The selection criteria were still aimed at identifying organisations working in community development settings and applying, or at least familiar with, asset-based and rights-based approaches, but that differed in the following:

- Their approach and the extent to which their activities and aims focused on helping people achieve behavioural changes, helping people achieve policy and systemic change, or a combination of both.

- Their community target and the extent to which they worked with geographical communities, communities of interest and identity, or some sort of combination (with a particular community of identity in a particular geographical community).
- Their area of work: poverty, homelessness, faith-based, race, gender, disability, LGBTQ+, information and advice, health, individual support, emergency assistance, policy practice, migration, and so on.

Following this selection criteria, I identified a total of twenty organisations, out of which fifteen ended up participating in my research (see Table 4.10 and Table 4.11 in Section 4.6.6. for the complete list).

4.6.5. Recruitment

I recruited participants in two separate stages. For the case study stage, I recruited participants with the help of project managers, who not only participated in the study as interviewees but also acted as 'gatekeepers'. Once I received a verbal agreement to participate at organisation level, I then established four categories following the embedded case study design. These categories were based on the specific roles that people played in each of the projects: staff member, project participant, community resident and external agent/partner organisation. As I have stated before, I was keen to include different perspectives to enable an in-depth analysis of the influence of asset-based and rights-based approaches on well-being, and allow comparisons within each individual case.

The recruitment of participants within the case study was as follows. Within the AB project, I recruited participants in the role of staff member (n=4), project participant (n= 7), community resident (n= 3) and external agent (n= 2). Within the RB project, I recruited participants in the role of staff member (n=1), partner agency staff (n= 1), project participant (n= 3) and community resident (n=6). I aimed to include external agents within the RB project but the interview I had arranged never took place due to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. In total, sixteen interviews were conducted within the AB project, and eleven within the RB project.

The differences in the number of people interviewed within each role and project was mainly due to internal dynamics. In the AB project, the organisation acted as a "hard

gatekeeper” and all initial communication with external agents, staff, research participants and community residents were done via the project manager or staff members. This limited my ability to make some decisions with regards to who to interview. Yet, it made recruitment and data collection much easier, since interviews were mostly organised with the help of the staff.

The organisation behind the RB project, by contrast, assumed a “hands off gatekeeper” role. As a result, recruiting participants and arranging interviews was more challenging. Staff members at the RB project only facilitated project participants’ contact numbers. Some project participants answered my invitation to participate straight away, but others required several phone calls and informal meetings to develop rapport. I also had to approach community residents without the assistance of the organisation working in the community, which potentially made community residents less likely to participate, since I was an ‘outsider’ with no point of reference besides doing research in that community.

Without a formal introduction from those involved in the RB project, I distributed flyers door to door with information about my research and my contact number (see Appendix 3). A total of eleven residents responded to this initial call, out of which six were finally selected for an interview. This decision was based on resident’s level of involvement in the RB project and the years they had lived in the community. My aim was to find community residents who knew about the RB project but had not been involved in it, and who had lived in the community for at least six years.³²

For the recruitment of participants for the contextual research stage, I contacted organisations identified during mapping via phone and email to invite them to participate. Organisations responding positively to the invitation were further contacted to arrange an interview. Many of those who expressed a willingness to participate had significant decision-making power within their organisations. They held positions such as coordinator, project manager, CEO, or director. As such, they were able to make a decision without having to involve the organisation as a whole.

³² Those who had lived in the community for at least six years were able to assess their well-being before and after the RB project.

Other participants, by contrast, had less decision-making power and had to consult their involvement with their respective organisations. As such, they required extra time to make the decision. Two participants within this group chose to participate at a personal level, instead of at organisational level, for reasons they did not disclose to me. At the end of my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to recruit a policy maker who had held a position within the Scottish Government. This participant was recruited through my contacts at the University of Edinburgh and participated also at a personal level. In total, eighteen interviewees were recruited for the contextual stage of the research.

4.6.6. Participants

A total of forty-five participants across seventeen community organisations participated in this thesis. Of those forty-five, twenty-seven participated in the case study stage of the research, whilst eighteen participated in the contextual stage of the research. Participants included community residents, project participants, practitioners, CEOs, external agents and one policy maker. Distributed by gender, twenty-seven were women and nineteen were men. The following three tables (Table 4.9., Table 4.10 and Table 4.11) include the full list of research participants with the categories I used to contextualise them.

Table 4.9. (below) describes the role of participants within the case studies. The different roles are project participant (people directly involved in the AB project or the RB project); staff member (paid workers from the organisations running the AB project or the RB project), community resident (people living in the community who were not directly involved in the AB project or the RB project); external agent (practitioners based at the community where the AB project or the RB worked); and staff partner organisation (practitioners from partner organisations but who are not directly involved in the AB project or the RB project)

Table 4. 9. Participants by role – case study

Role of participants	Participants AB project	Participants RB project
Staff member ³³	4	1
Project participant	7	3
Community resident	3	6
External agent	2	-
Staff partner organisation	-	1
Total number of interviews	16	11
Number of participants	27	

Table 4.10 (below) describes community organisations participating in the contextual research stage, classified by area of work and approach. I have classified organisations in broad areas of work based on the information I had previously gathered during the mapping stage as well as during interviews. I have also classified organisations' approach by considering interviewees' self-descriptions of their work as either helping people achieve (1) changes at the individual level, (2) changes at structural level, or (3) a combination of both. It is important to clarify that the broad categories representing areas of work, as well as the three working approaches, may not represent exactly how these organisations would themselves describe their area of work and their approach.

Finally, Table 4.11 (below) describes research participants involved in the contextual research stage by attending to the role they played at organisational level. I have grouped them in four broad categories: directors (CEOs, senior managers, coordinators), practitioners (paid staff), volunteers/activists (unpaid staff) and policy makers.

³³ Includes project managers and project workers

Table 4.10. Participants by organisation area of work and approach.

Approach	Organisation's area of work	Number	Total
Focused on individual change	Community development	2	5
	Migration	2	
	Homelessness	1	
Focused on structural change	Advocacy	1	6
	Race equality	2	
	Gender equality	1	
	Equalities network	1	
	LGBTQ+ campaigning	1	
Combination of approaches	Migration	1	4
	BME women of faith	1	
	Community development	1	
	Disability	1	
Total of participants for contextual research			15

Table 4.11. Participants by role.

Role/position	Number	Percentage
Directors	6	37.5%
Practitioners	6	37.5%
Volunteers/activists	3	18.7%
Policy makers	1	6.3%
Total	16	100%

4.7. Data analysis

I analysed two different types of data: Interview transcripts and documents. I did not treat fieldnotes as data, but they nevertheless informed my analysis and helped me complement interview and document data.

To transcribe interview audios, I employed various methods. I used an online transcription company and an automated transcription software to transcribe most audios, which helped me save time. I transcribed a small number of audios that I estimated to be easier to transcribe (short interviews) using Express Scribe Transcription Software, which helped me save money. For a number of interviews, I hired a specialist transcription service based in Scotland. I used this specialised service to transcribe audios that had ‘stronger’ accents or regularly used Scots language, as these were more difficult to transcribe for someone not familiar with Scottish English and Scots.³⁴

I analysed my data in two stages. In the first stage, I analysed case study data separately from contextual interview data and I organised my analysis thematically around the concepts included within the well-being framework. Following the well-being framework helped me pre-structure my analysis and facilitated the comparison between cases (Walliman, 2001, p. 265). I first analysed data from each individual case study (AB project and RB project), and within each, I analysed interview data and documentary data separately, which allowed a degree of data triangulation by method (interview and documents) and source (staff, project participants, external agents and community residents) (Denzin, 1978).

After analysing interview and document data within each case study, I wrote two preliminary case study reports, one for the AB project and one for RB project. To write these reports, I followed Yin’s (2014) analytical technique “Explanation Building” with the purpose of explaining (1) how each of the projects worked, (2) their influence on well-being, (3) the challenges they faced and (4) the advantages and disadvantages of the approach they followed (asset-based approach and rights-based approach).

³⁴ I am aware that the distinction between Scots and Scottish English is not always clear as the way people speak often falls alongside a linguistic continuum with no clear edges (see section 4.9.2. on transcriptions).

Having these preliminary case study reports facilitated the comparative analysis and the writing up of my findings in the empirical chapters within this thesis.

In the second stage, I analysed contextual data and draw further comparisons between case study data and contextual interview data. This involved some level of data triangulation, which deepened my understanding of the comparative effects of asset-based and rights-based approaches from multiple perspectives. In this sense, data triangulation was simply a strategy to acquire deeper knowledge of the phenomenon I was studying. I did not use it to achieve some sort of validity or objectivity (Flick, 2018, p. 784).

Within this second stage, my analysis, in a sense, became even more *pre-structured* than my analysis of case study data. The first stage of data analysis had helped me develop most of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks from which to organise my findings, especially in regard to (1) how asset-based and rights-based approaches work, (2) their comparative influence on well-being and (3) the challenges of applying each of these approaches. Therefore, to an extent, the data analysed within this second stage helped me complement my analysis during the first stage. Yet, the analysis of contextual data also helped develop new conceptual frameworks, and it became critical to understand the advantages and disadvantages of following asset-based and rights-based approaches, which I discuss in Chapter 9.

Within each of these two stages of data analysis, I followed three steps. The first step involved analysing data in tandem with data collection (Dey, 2003, p. 38). After each interview, I dedicated time to reflect upon the data and wrote an initial analysis of each interview in my fieldwork notes. I also followed this process when transcribing interview audios, reviewing transcripts, and reading documentary data for first time. I undertook an initial analysis that involved writing down reflections and identifying common themes which I organised in fieldwork memos and reflective logs.

The second step corresponded to what Saldaña (2013) calls 'first cycle coding' and involved assigning initial descriptive codes (labels) to capture the content of interview and documentary data (Miles et al., 2014, p. 79). This process is often referred to as 'data reduction' (Richards, 2015; Ritchie et al., 2013) or 'data condensation' (Miles et

al., 2014) because it requires selecting and dividing data, to then gather it under specific codes.

To code data, I used Nvivo 11 Pro and employed a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first codes I created were mostly descriptive and helped me organise the data thematically to facilitate initial comparisons. For instance, to start analysing case study data (stage one), I created four broad categories that stemmed from my interview schedule and reflected my analytical priorities (Yin, 2014, p. 211). These categories were (1) how the projects work, (2) influence on well-being, (3) challenges and (4) asset-based vs rights-based approaches. Within each of these categories, I then created thematical sub-categories. Some of the codes included in these sub-categories captured key points of analysis, such as the influence that each project had on individual indicators of well-being. Other codes captured data that I found interesting, surprising, or intriguing, and that I had not previously anticipated. For instance, I created codes that *emerged* from the data around narratives, emotions and impacts beyond well-being.

The third step involved narrowing down codes, recoding and reorganising categories and themes, which Saldaña (2013) calls “second cycle coding”. I looked for patterns and regularities in the data to help me start drawing comparisons within and across cases. I also moved away from descriptions of data onto more conceptual and analytical explanations. To assist me in this process, I developed a system of memo writing and diagramming to record, within each individual category, a summary of contents under each theme, a discussion of ‘what is going on’ and ‘why it is important’, and an explanation of ‘how each theme relates to my research questions’.

To track my assumptions, values and positionality, I also included a section to discuss how data had surprised me, intrigued me or disturbed me (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012 in Saldaña, 2013, p. 23). Tracking my bias was required to be ‘fair’ to both approaches. I was keen to identify how asset-based and rights-based approaches work from a range of perspectives (staff, community residents, activists, and so on). I was also fully aware that, prior to this research, I had an opinion about how these approaches worked. Being aware of my own biases was essential to conduct a fair analysis.

Finally, I recorded the decisions I had made in regards data analysis. For instance, I recorded the reasons why I had changed some codes, included new categories, or rearranged my data. All these memos (analytical, reflective, and decision-making) became crucial to help me progress from coding onto the writing up of my research findings. The table below illustrate the stages and steps of my data analysis.

Table 4.12. Stages of data analysis 1

First Stage Data Analysis	
Analysis of interview data (case study)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data familiarization (in tandem with data collection) • First cycle of coding
Analysis of document data (case study)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data familiarization (in tandem with data collection) • First cycle of coding
Data integration and data triangulation – interview and document data (case study)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second cycle of coding
Second Stage Data Analysis	
Analysis interview data (contextual)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data familiarization (in tandem with data collection) • First cycle of coding
Data integration and data triangulation – Case study and contextual data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second cycle of coding • Memo-writing

4.8. Ethics and limitations

4.8.1. Procedural ethics

In this section I discuss the ethical procedures I followed in regards consent, confidentiality, benefits and risks for participants, reimbursement, and data management.

Consent

In both the AB project and the RB project, the initial decision of whether to participate relied on the project manager, who acted as a 'gatekeeper' and gave consent at organisational level. I do not know the extent to which this decision was negotiated with staff members, and as far as I am aware, community participants were not consulted in this initial stage.

However, I was able to ensure consent at an individual level. All interviewees were provided with a participant information sheet which included information about the purpose of the research, what participating entailed, confidentiality, withdrawing from research, risks and benefits and reimbursement. Participants were also provided with a consent form that they all signed or verbally agreed to³⁵ before conducting the interview (see Appendix 1 for a sample of participant information sheet and consent form).

Consent was also sought before documentary data collection but only at organisational level. I did not require individual consent at this stage because the reports and documents I analysed were already anonymised by the organisations and did not include any personal information about project participants. This consent at organisational level was initially expressed verbally by project managers and later confirmed administratively via email.

Finally, although my research did not involve group observations, I kept a diary of my fieldwork that sometimes included what I had observed during interviews or when visiting projects. These recorded field notes helped inform my analysis. They were not explicitly treated as data, and as such, they were not mentioned in participants information sheets and consent forms.

Confidentiality

Anonymity was ensured at individual, organisational and geographical levels. At an individual level, participants were only identified by the role they played in projects, institutions, organisations, or the community (project staff, project director, project

³⁵ Instances in which consent was made verbally included interviews held over the phone or when participants had an impairment that prevented them from signing.

participant, community resident, external actor and so on). I did not record any personal information during interviews, and consent forms including personal data were not linked to interview data.

I also included in the consent form a clause about protecting the confidentiality of other participants. I included this clause because it was likely that participants within the same organisation, community or area of work would know one another. I asked participants to maintain the confidentiality of other people who they knew had taken part in this research.

At the organisational level, organisations were only identified by their working approach in the case study stage (AB project and the RB project) and by the broad area of their work in the contextual research stage of data collection (poverty, gender, migration, faith-based, race, and so on).

I thought carefully about the level of anonymization I would seek at the organisational level. I was aware that some organisations preferred to be identified since, as they expressed in informal conversations, they hoped to use my research to raise their profile or evidence their outcomes and working approach. As these conversations revealed, community development organisations are increasingly pressured to evidence their outcomes, but they often lack the capacity to conduct in-depth studies of their work.

Although I was eager to allow organisations to draw upon my research in a way that it was most useful to them, I was also aware that my findings could potentially harm their reputation if they turned out to be different to what they hoped. I was also concerned about how an open disclosure of some organisations could compromise the integrity of the study and affect my ability to make decisions and ensure a critical analysis of the two approaches (Giordano et al., 2007).

Identifying organisations, moreover, could put the anonymity at the individual level at risk, since once organisations are disclosed, it is easier to identify individual research

participants within that organisation. For these reasons, I decided to anonymise all research participants also at organisational level.³⁶

Finally, to ensure full anonymity at the at the individual and organisational level, I had to ensure anonymity at the geographical level. I only disclosed whether organisations participating in this research are located in rural or urban areas within the central belt of Scotland. I did not risk revealing more than this. The field of community development in Scotland is relatively small, and there was a potential risk of disclosing organisations and individual participants if the geographical location of communities were identified. This risk was particularly high for those involved in the rights-based approach, as this approach is, by comparison, less common.

Although the anonymization of geographical places is a standard procedure in qualitative research, it has significant downsides. Anonymizing geographical locations ultimately involves omitting the specific histories, identities and contexts of the communities studied. As a result, essential information to understand and interpret research findings may be lost (Nespor, 2000, p. 549). The actions and approaches that communities take may only be fully understood in the context of their local history (Walford, 2005, p. 90).

I am aware that the level of anonymity sought limited my ability to provide valuable insights about the communities involved in my research. Each community had their own historical context and understanding this context may have contributed to understanding why they followed different approaches. However, in the context of this research, I found no alternative way in which I could ensure anonymity and avoid the loss of contextual information.

One possible alternative would have been to disclose all the relevant information but restrict access to the research. Restricting access is a procedure used in the social sciences when there is a need to provide specific data (i.e. contextual information) but there is a high risk of disclosing participants by doing so. In these situations, a researcher might choose to safeguard anonymity by limiting the access to their

³⁶ However, I supported organisations that wished to obtain evidence on their work by making my research findings available to them upon request, retaining the anonymity of participants.

research to a small number of experts (Consortium et al., 2009; Kieseberg et al., 2014).

Restricting access, however, would have prevented me from pursuing an important research goal: to contribute to community development practice. One of my motivations to undertake my research (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2.) is to help communities, practitioners and activists make more informed decisions about the approaches they follow. This requires making my research as widely accessible as possible. To disseminate my research, and safeguard the anonymity of organisations and interviewees, I had no other option than to seek anonymity at the geographical level. As I stated before, the field of community development in Scotland is small and disclosing contextual information would have risked disclosing participants.

Risks and benefits

Both during research design and data collection, I carefully considered the impact that my research could have upon participants. My research involved interviewing people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. Although my research was not aimed at studying participants' experiences of disadvantage per se, I was mindful that these issues could be raised during interviews. Participants were explicitly informed of this potential risk via the participant information sheet. This was also discussed prior to the interview, and I offered support and signposting to specialised support services if needed.

Regarding benefits, the main benefit for individual research participants and community organisations was sharing learning about how asset-based and rights-based approaches influence the well-being of communities facing socio-economic disadvantage. I offered to share preliminary research findings to participants, and I sent draft copies of empirical chapters to those who requested them. I also collaborated in various events with participating organisations to discuss how each of these approaches work in practice.

Reimbursement

To acknowledge and appreciate the time and contributions of research participants, I offered to reimburse expenses (travel) and I offered a £10 voucher to project

participants and community residents. I also offered a small donation to unfunded grassroots organisations (up to £30). My PhD research was funded by the ESRC, and I held a research training support grant to cover some of the fieldwork expenses. This grant, however, was limited and I was unable to reimburse or compensate all research participants. I therefore prioritised those in unpaid roles.

Data management

Although I did not directly record personal identification, interview, document data and fieldwork notes sometimes included sensitive information. To ensure the protection of data, I followed the Economic and Social Research Council (2017) guidelines for the recording, storage and archiving of research data. This involved removing personal identifiers of participants and recording data through password secured devices. I stored electronic data in my own computer protected with two passwords. The first password gave access to the computer. The second to the specific storage file. I stored paper data (signed consent forms and fieldwork notes) in a locked cabinet only accessible to me. Only I, as the main researcher, and my supervisors (if requested), had access to raw data. All research participants were informed of data management and access procedures in participant information sheets and consent forms.

Finally, data collected will not be stored permanently. Paper data including consent forms will be kept for a year after the submission of this thesis. After that period, they will be safely destroyed using a paper shredder. Other forms of paper data (fieldnotes) will be kept for longer (up to five years) as I plan to reflect further upon my research process and fieldwork. Electronic data will be stored in my laptop for as long as I continue to work with the data. After that, data will be kept in a safe server (University of Edinburgh or Brunel University London) in accordance with specific University's data regulations.

4.8.2. Limitations

The research design followed in this thesis has some limitations. One limitation is that, due to having a qualitative design, the generalisation of my findings is limited. Findings on how asset-based and rights-based approaches influence well-being may not be generalizable beyond the AB project and the RB project, and the specific community sites studied. Similarly, findings on the comparative strengths, weaknesses and

complementarities of asset-based and rights-based approaches may not be directly generalizable beyond the organisations and the individuals participating in this research. These findings, however, like other qualitative research, provide valuable insights that help us better understand how asset-based and rights-based approaches work and compare. In this sense, and as I explained in Section 4.3. (research methodology), the exploratory nature of my research questions, and the in-depth analysis required to answer them, made a qualitative methodology the most appropriate approach.

A second limitation of my research design is in regards the comparative case study approach. One of the challenges of qualitative comparative case study research is case selection (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 161). As I explained in Section 5.4., to select the most suitable cases I looked for 'ideal types' and I established some sort of equivalence between cases to facilitate comparisons. I am aware that this construction of ideal types and equivalence is highly contested. Finding cases that represent pure 'ideal types' whilst sharing similar characteristics is unattainable in social science, and as a result, ideal types and equivalence are externally constructed by the researcher. In this thesis, I constructed ideal types and equivalence by imposing, in a way, certain features on the cases I had selected. Those features were based on my interpretation of the literature on asset-based and rights-based approaches given the lack of agreed definition on what these two approaches entail in practice.

This limitation, however, did not make my comparative analysis less meaningful. Comparing these two approaches at different levels (case study and contextual research), using different methods (interview and documents), from different perspectives (staff, project participants, community residents, external agents, activists) and across a wide range of community development organisations (equality, homelessness, advocacy, placed-based and so on) allowed a degree of data triangulation and in-depth analysis that strengthened the methodological approach. Even without an agreed understanding of how asset-based and rights-based approaches work in practice, undertaking a comparative case study at all these different levels helped me identify categories and patterns that further supported my case selection and the construction of the two cases as 'ideal types'.

Finally, there are limitations of the research design relating to the research methods and tools I used during data collection. Document data, for instance, was filtered by the organisations producing the documents, and as a result, key information for my analysis might have been missing (Berg, 2001, p. 221). There is always a risk during interviews in which the mere presence of the researcher can inadvertently influence interviewees' responses, resulting in key data missing (Creswell, 2009, p. 180). The tools I used during interviews, moreover, might have constrained interviewees' reflections. For instance, interviewees might have described their organisations' approach differently had I not asked them to identify their organisations' approach alongside the particular scale I employed.

Despite limitations, using interviews and document analysis as methods of data collection brought significant advantages to this thesis. Interviews allowed gathering rich data and enabled dialogue, in-depth reflections, and the exchange of views between myself and participants. Document analysis also allowed gathering rich data and enhanced my understanding of the impact of the AB project and the RB project beyond the specific indicators of well-being I employed.

4.9. Reflexivity

Attention to reflexivity involves making an explicit connection between my personal and political motivations, and my research project (Dowling, 2008; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Research interests stem 'from the interplay of direct experience, political commitments and interest in practice' (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 25). I grew up in a working-class family that struggled financially due to long term unemployment. I have engaged in community development as both an activist and a practitioner. The research questions that I have attempted to address in this thesis emerge directly from these personal and professional experiences.

In this section, I engage in reflexivity as an uncomfortable practice (Pillow, 2003) by illustrating the tensions I experienced during my research. I focus on two challenges: (1) identifying a framework from which to examine my insider/outsider status and (2) deciding which transcription style I should follow.

4.9.1. Positionality and the insider/outsider status

It is important for scholars to reflect on the extent to which they are either an insider or an outsider when undertaking their research. Reflection on this point is important because a researcher's positionality influence the research process and the interpretation of data (Bourke, 2014). During my research, I have identified both as an 'insider' and as an 'outsider', whilst recognising the problems of identifying myself in 'insider/outsider' terms. Here, I would like to discuss some of these tensions by focusing on 'messy examples' of 'uncomfortable reflexive practices' (Pillow, 2003).

I felt as an insider in the sense that I sometimes perceived that there was an agreement between where I positioned myself and where my participants placed me. This was especially true in relation to some of my interviewees in professional and activist roles. We seemed to share similar questions in regards how to support communities that experience socio-economic disadvantage. We also expressed feeling caught in between two approaches: when our role involved helping communities *navigate* the system, we wondered whether supporting communities to challenge structural injustice would be more beneficial to them; when our role involved helping communities *challenge* structural injustice, we wondered whether supporting them to navigate the system would be more beneficial to them. There were frequent verbal and non-verbal signs of agreement whenever we talked about 'being conflicted', 'having a dilemma', or 'having big discussions' about this issue.

The fact that I am Spanish proved important. In some contexts, my Spanish identity actually made me, feel 'closer' to some participants. For instance, I perceived some complicit understanding and easy-going interactions with research participants who identified as European, especially in a post-Brexit context. I also perceived some degree of 'closeness' with research participants who had been born outside of the UK, although the insider/outsider status I occupied in this respect was strongly mediated by the fact that I am, in most contexts, racialised as white.

There were also occasions in which I was an outsider. Again, my Spanish identity had an impact. I was aware that being Spanish made me 'outsider' from the point of view of some research participants. As one of my interviewees said when I attempted to make a connection between my experiences and his experiences: 'that's a different

country... the only people who can relate to that are the Spanish people, whereas over here the only people who can relate to this is Scottish people.'

This encounter encouraged me to reflect further about the role of personal experiences in positionality. In a sense, I identified as an insider in relation to participants who had experienced poverty. I could personally relate to some of the experiences they shared during interviews about shame and stigma, the negative impact of long-term unemployment, the sense of powerlessness and injustice, and the persistent effects of poverty on mental health and self-esteem. However, I was also aware that, from the point of view of a number of research participants, I was an 'outsider'. My identity was strongly mediated by the fact that they saw me as Spanish, a PhD student/researcher from a prestigious University, and middle-class. I was not a community resident, and I was not a 'service user', i.e. someone who receives welfare or third sector support.

The disparity between where I positioned myself and where my participants placed me led me to question the extent to which I could, or even should, identify myself as an 'insider'. If I was now no longer experiencing poverty, to what extent my past experiences were enough to grant me an 'insider' status?

To help me reflect about this issue, I examined other aspects of my identity. For instance, my gender identity was in a sense stable and consistent. It had not varied over the years and that placed me closer to the 'insider' status in relation to research participants who identified as women, and closer to the 'outsider' status in relation to research participants who identified as men, non-binary, or gender fluid. Age, on the other hand, was an identity aspect that had changed. I had experienced being a young person, but I would never consider myself as an 'insider' in relation to young research participants only on the basis that I had once experienced being young. To what extent was my experience of poverty different to my experience of youth if, at the time of the research, I was neither 'poor' nor 'young'?

Maybe, one way of understanding the difference between poverty and age was to examine the identity marks that different experiences leave on us. For instance, my experiences of being a young person had not strongly conditioned my current identity. However, my experiences of poverty did, and up till now, they continue to shape what I do, how I relate to other people and how I see myself.

In a sense, this explanation helped me understand, and to an extent justify, why I perceived myself closer to the 'insider' status in relation to poverty but not in relation to age or another identity. However, it also made me realise that there was no reason why my 'insider' status should be acknowledged by my research participants. I understood that, from the point of view of many of them, I was still an 'outsider'. My 'insider' and 'outsider' status existed then simultaneously, and my positionality inevitably evolved and changed during the research process. The way positionality changes in research is well documented in the literature (Merriam et al., 2001; Soni-Sinha, 2008). The boundaries between what means to be an 'insider' and an 'outsider' are unclear, hence the different spaces that researchers occupy in relation to their research and research participants need to be continually reviewed and negotiated (Merriam et al., 2001).

4.9.2. Transcriptions

Attention to reflexivity also made me realise that my audio transcriptions were more problematic than I had initially anticipated. To help me with transcriptions, I employed various transcription methods (see Section 4.7.). This resulted in a diversity of transcription styles, which made me realise that transcribing interviews was not just a technical procedure, as it is often characterised in research textbooks (See for instance, Dey, 2003; Lune & Berg, 2017; Ritchie et al., 2013). It involves ethical and political decisions.

As a non-native English speaker, I found that all my interviewees sounded different and unique: those whose accent could be identified as middle-class and those whose accent could be identified as working-class; those who used words in the Scots³⁷ language and those who spoke Scottish English. Yet, when I looked at the transcripts, only a specific number of interviewees had been transcribed representing 'how they spoke'. These transcripts were mainly of community participants and of community residents, which raised a question in regards whether there was a lack of consistency in transcription and whether it would be ethical and justifiable to have this variation.

³⁷ Scots is one of the three native languages spoken in Scotland. The other two are English and Scottish Gaelic (Scots Language Centre, 2022).

To explore this issue, I turned to the literature on transcription. I found that in discourse and conversation studies, there is often a distinction between “naturalised” and “denaturalised” transcriptions. Naturalised transcriptions prioritise readability, “privileging...written over oral discourse features” (Bucholtz, 2000, p. 1461). Denaturalised transcriptions, by contrast, prioritise accuracy over readability and encourage the representation of oral language and how people speak (Ibid.). According to proponents of denaturalised transcriptions, researchers should stay true to participants’ speech since, by doing so, they allow their participants to “have a voice” and “to speak for themselves” (Schegloff, 1997).

I found this debate particularly relevant because I could see how transcription could ultimately influence data analysis and data dissemination (Davidson, 2009). For instance, an interviewee’s direct quote could be interpreted differently if, besides what they said, it gave contextual information about their social class or the geographical area they lived in by reflecting ‘how they spoke’. Given this, and as suggested by Oliver et al. (2005), I decided to reflect on the choice between a consistent transcription approach and one allowing a diversity of transcription styles (some naturalised and some denaturalised). Two issues seemed central: authenticity and language validation.

In terms of authenticity, the issue I faced was to decide what authenticity meant in the context of my research. For instance, to what extent direct quotes in my PhD would be more authentic if I transcribed them accurately? Or in other words, what would give authenticity: what people said or how they said it? To make this decision, I had to weigh another issue: readability (Duff & Roberts, 1997). For instance, many of my interviewees used words in Scots such as ‘tae’ (Scots for ‘to’), ‘dinnae’ (Scots for ‘do not’) or ‘hoose’ (Scots for ‘house’). I had to decide the extent to which transcribing those words accurately (Scots form) could compromise readability. I examined the extent to which I could retain some of my interviewees’ original pronunciations without compromising readability, and I found that, in most cases, this was not a problem if I supported direct quotes with sufficient contextual information.

In terms of language validation, I understood that my decision on whether to represent only what participants had said (the content) or what they had said in the way they had

said it (how they spoke) had political implications. As Jaffe (2000) puts it, “the way in which speech data is written down ... shapes the interpretation and evaluation of speakers, relationships and contexts depicted in the transcript”(p. 500).

This was an issue because many of my research participants used Scots language, and as a result, representing ‘how they spoke’ could be justified as a political act to validate a language that has been actively suppressed and marginalized (Kay, 2012; Nihtinen, 2005). Yet, Scots, is strongly associated with urban working-class people in Scotland, despite the efforts to recognise it as an official language alongside Scottish Gaelic (Matheson, 2002; Matheson & Matheson-Monnet, 2020). In this context, by representing the Scots language of some of my participants (mainly community residents and project participants), I could unintentionally contribute to the idea that Scots is only the language of working-class people in Scotland, as it has been historically portrayed due to the strong intersection between language and class.

To add complexity, there is often no clear distinction between Scots and Scottish English despite the different pronunciation, characteristic words, and expressions (Kay, 2012; Nihtinen, 2005). This is because the way people speak largely falls alongside a linguistic continuum with no clear edges.

The particular issue for me then was to work out the extent to which, in my dissemination of the research, I could end up re-creating a situation in which only urban working-class interviewees were transcribed as ‘how they spoke’ because they were more likely to be heard as speaking Scots than middle-class interviewees. For instance, to me the word ‘to’ was often pronounced similarly by staff members and project participants. However, I found that in transcripts, this word was more often transcribed as ‘to’ for staff members and as ‘tae’ for project participants. Was this the result of using different transcription companies (one based in Scotland and others based outside of Scotland), the result of me hearing a similar pronunciation when a Scottish English speaker would hear a different pronunciation, or was this another example of the strong intersection between the Scots language and class? If the latter, were working-class interviewees more likely to be represented as speaking Scots and middle-class interviewees more likely to be represented as speaking Scottish English?

Given this, I began wonder whether the issue I was finding in my research was generalised. Could working-class accents be unjustifiably over-represented in social science research? Based on my own experience, researchers may only hear ‘accents and pronunciations’ that are different to their own. This is a problem if most researchers have middle-class backgrounds. As a result, could it be that working-class accents are more likely to be represented than posh or middle-class accents in social science research?

Unfortunately, this issue went beyond the scope of my research project, and I had no capacity to investigate this matter further. In the end, I decided, for pragmatic reasons, to go ahead with the transcripts I had without making any variations and accept that some of the transcriptions would reflect the Scots language and others would not. Yet, the issue remains one that troubles me.

My decision not to alter transcripts also applied to other interview audios of non-Scottish participants who also spoke with a diversity of accents and pronunciations. In this sense, I decided to use transcripts as I had received them or as I had originally transcribed them myself (verbatim). I found this decision easier at this stage because I understood that it would not be possible, or desirable, to record every single ‘way of speaking’. My research questions did not specifically require the analysis of ‘how people spoke’, and subsequently, a denaturalised approach to transcription was more of a choice than a requirement. Since most of my transcripts had already been transcribed verbatim, there was no need for me to re-arrange the transcriptions differently to how I had received them in the first place.

4.10. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the research methodology followed in this PhD. My research follows a qualitative research design that involves two stages: a case study stage and a contextual stage. In the case study stage, I compare the impact of two community projects (the AB project and the RB project) on the well-being of socio-economically disadvantaged communities in Scotland. These two community projects were selected as they represented the closest ‘ideal types’ of asset-based and rights-based approaches from the range of mapped organisations. To explore the impact on well-being, I use a framework that combines White’s (2010) well-being framework for

the development practice and Oxfam Scotland's (2013) Humankind Index. In the contextual stage, I explore the strengths and limitations of applying asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development settings. For this stage, I recruited fifteen organisations that identified their work as (1) focusing on individual/behavioural change (closer to the asset-based approach), (2) focusing on systemic/structural change (closer to the rights-based approach) or (3) some combination of both approaches.

The research methods employed in this thesis are interviews and documentary analysis. A total of forty-five participants across seventeen community organisations were interviewed for this thesis. Of those forty-five participants, twenty-seven were interviewed during case study stage, whilst eighteen participants were interviewed during the contextual stage of the research. I also analysed 35 documents, which included internal project evaluations, published project reports, and transcribed videos.

I analysed my data in two stages. In the first stage, I analysed case study data separately from contextual interview data and I organised my analysis thematically around the concepts included within the well-being framework. In the second stage, I analysed contextual data and draw further comparisons between case study data and contextual interview data. I coded data using Nvivo 11 Pro, and I employed a thematic analysis throughout.

Finally, in this chapter, I have discussed ethical procedures, limitations of my research and reflexivity. I described my decisions on consent, data management, benefits and risks and reimbursement. I also discussed the limitations of my research by looking at three issues: generalization of findings, challenges in case selection and the limitations of my research methods. I explained the problems I encountered in positioning myself in insider/outsider terms. I also discussed the ethical dilemmas I faced during transcriptions.

In the following chapters, I discuss my research findings. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 discuss the comparative impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on material, social and personal dimensions of well-being. Chapter 9 discusses the comparative

strengths and limitations of applying asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development settings.

Chapter 5: The AB project, the RB project and well-being

5.1. Introduction

In Chapter 2, I introduced asset-based and rights-based approaches. I described their aims, methods and how these approaches contrast. Asset-based approaches help people build their strengths and skills. These approaches prioritise self-help actions and community relations. Rights-based approaches help people identify their rights and build on their capacity to make right claims and to pressure duty bearers. These approaches prioritise collective political action and structural change.

In this chapter, I describe the two cases I selected to assess the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on well-being. These two cases I shall term the 'AB project' and the 'RB project'. The AB project represents the asset-based approach. The RB project represents the rights-based approach. I discuss the extent to which these two projects (the AB project and the RB project) reflect the principles, methods, and purposes of asset-based and rights-based approaches below. I particularly focus on how the AB project and the RB project share the narratives, conceptions of well-being, and theories of change that characterise asset-based and rights-based approaches respectively.

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 5.2. describes the AB project and the extent to which the project represents the asset-based approach. Section 5.3. describes the RB project and the extent to which the project represents the rights-based approach. Section 5.4. discusses how the AB project and the RB project approach well-being differently, and how their different understandings of well-being correlate to distinct theories of how change is best achieved. Section 5.5. concludes.

5.2. The AB Project

The AB project is a community development project run by a third sector organisation and implemented in partnership with local charities. The AB project works with urban and semi-urban communities in Scotland that are identified as being highly deprived, according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). The AB project holds a view of 'the community' as a geographical place. People belong to 'the community'

because they share the place where they live. At the time of the research, the AB project worked in nine geographical communities, three of which participated in this study. The project has operated for over ten years (since 2011) and continues to run in parts of Scotland with the support of local charities.

Aims and activities

The AB project aims to contribute to the reduction of poverty in Scotland by helping people take individual and community actions to address the problems they face. To achieve this aim, the AB project follows an asset-based approach. In the documents I analysed, the project is commonly defined as an asset-based programme or as following the asset-based principles. Interviewees also emphasized the similarities between the AB project and the asset-based approach. As Cormac, a staff member on the AB project, said:

'it's an asset-based community development project, although, the AB project, as an organisation, has sort of stopped calling it that [but] it still works in that way and I will always see that I work in that way.' (Cormac, staff, AB project)

The AB project follows the methods of asset-based approaches. It brings people with similar interests together, encourages them to form a community group and helps them run social activities and community events. There is a wide range of activities created by these community groups. These can be categorised in four broad types: learning activities, peer support activities, community events and community services.

- Learning activities. Project participants get together around common interests. People might share an interest to develop skills or expertise in a particular sport, hobby, or project. Examples include archery, photography, and community history.
- Peer support activities. Project participants get together around a shared identity, background, experience or need. Examples of these community groups include a women's club, recovery group and the parents and toddler group.

- Community events. Project participants get together to run events for the wider community. Examples include community cinema, potluck dinners and music events.
- Community services. Project participants get together to provide a service to the wider community. Examples include community garden, litter picking sessions or a food bank.

Paid staff in the AB project provides individual and group support work. They may signpost participants to specialised services. Staff also help run activities to identify what people would like to do and what community resources the community has available (This activity is known as 'asset-mapping').

Participation

According to the AB project, most of the people involved in the project are between 18 and 64 years old, with a slightly higher participation of women than men. No other equality characteristics, besides age and gender, are monitored. The level of involvement of participants varies. Those more actively involved tend to be members of community groups. There are some participants that only get involved in community events. There are also some people who only participate sporadically in project activities.

5.2.1. The AB project and the asset-based approach

The AB project seems to share the narratives of asset-based approaches, especially on strengths, active citizenship, and economic sustainability. One of the leading narratives in asset-based approaches is that a focus on strengths, instead of problems, activates communities to develop their own solutions. For proponents of asset-based approaches, 'a recognition of strengths and assets is more likely to inspire positive action for change ... than is an exclusive focus on needs and problems' (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003, p. 477). Alison, a staff member, said something similar when asked about the work of the AB project:

You start creating the positive sense of self and through that, you can stop saying "Hey, actually I'm not just [a] loser [...], I've got a lot to

offer". And so... that grows their motivation, it grows their confidence, it grows their self-esteem, it gives them an idea that they can be something else and then you start having much more of a fertile ground to potentially direct them towards more specific interventions, or even you see them taking those up more naturally because they want to live, they don't want just to struggle along, they want to thrive. That's the idea. (Alison, staff, AB project).

Another key narrative in asset-based approaches is the idea of an 'active citizen' as someone who does not rely on public and third sector services. For proponents of the asset-based approach, communities aiming to improve their well-being have two options (see also Chapter 2). One is to act as 'passive consumers' of external services. The other is to act as 'active citizens' and provide their own solutions to their problems (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996). A similar conception of 'active citizenship' is held by the AB project. As one of the analysed documents puts it:

'[the project] brings people together to create activities and events by and for the community. Through this, we enable people to reinvent themselves from passive recipients of external help into active change makers and actors in their own life and community.' (Evaluation report, 2020, AB project).

Finally, in the AB project, the idea of 'active citizenship' is also closely related to a narrative on economic sustainability, which is common narrative of asset-based approaches. For proponents of the asset-based approach, community projects that provide their own solutions are more economically sustainable. The idea is that communities that learn to address problems by themselves do not need to rely on external services, which are often expensive and limited (Haines, 2014; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). The AB project used a similar argument when describing the promises of its approach:

[The AB project] is highly cost-effective. Because people make the changes they want for themselves, rather than turning to more expensive interventions, it also reduces the burden on statutory services. [The AB project] provides a sustainable path to long-term

improvements... (Evaluation report, 2019, AB project).

These quotes suggest that there are significant similarities between the narratives of asset-based approaches and those of the AB project. However, when staff members were asked directly, they were keen to state that the AB project is not a 'pure' case of an asset-based approach. Interviewees thought that even if the AB project adopts the methods and principles of asset-based approaches, their work is also open to applying other community development approaches, as required. This is because applying asset-based approaches can be challenging in certain contexts. As Cormac said:

There's a lot of people talking about the sort of miracle of asset-based development.... but in a community like this, there are so many complications and barriers and difficulties [...] So many different things going on, that the idea that you can remain [asset-based] pure, it doesn't really work like that. We always start where people are, we always start with what they would like to do, what would work for them, what's going to be beneficial for them. (Cormac, staff, AB project)

Thus, even though the AB project shared the principles and methods of asset-based approaches, those working in the AB project acknowledged the challenges of applying a 'pure' asset-based approach. The AB project shared the narrative of asset-based approaches on strengths, active citizenship, and economic sustainability, but those involved claimed to be opened to use other approaches if needed.

5.3. The RB Project

The RB project is a community development project run by a group of residents and supported by two external organisations: one voluntary organisation (a housing association) and one public sector human rights organisation. The RB project is based in a small urban area that has been identified as highly deprived according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). Most residents in the area are council tenants and experience poor housing conditions.

The RB project holds a view of 'the community' as a geographical place, although there is also an important identity component: community residents of council owned

buildings. At the time of writing, the project had formally concluded its activity, but some of the people involved in the RB project have started similar projects elsewhere in Scotland. The RB project ran from 2015 to 2019.

Aims and activities

The RB project aims to improve the well-being of people affected by poor housing conditions. To achieve this aim, the project follows a rights-based approach. The RB project uses a human rights framework to monitor the fulfilment of community residents' housing rights and the responsibilities of the local authority as the main duty bearer. It helps people identify their rights and the barriers they face. It also helps community residents gain skills to make right claims and effectively pressure duty bearers. These are all common actions in rights-based approaches (Hamm, 2001; United Nations Development Group, 2003). Those involved in the RB project had little doubts about the approach the RB project followed. As Rowan, a staff member, said:

The aim of the project is to use human rights and human rights-based approaches to challenge some poor housing conditions that people are experiencing there (Rowan, staff, RB project).

The range of actions employed by those involved in the RB project can be grouped in three categories: critical pedagogy on human rights, participatory action research and lobbying/campaigning.

- Critical pedagogy on human rights. Project participants get together to learn about housing rights and the experiences of other community groups undertaking a rights-based approach.
- Participatory action research. Project participants, supported by partnership agencies, undertake research to identify the problems the community face and the institutions responsible to provide solutions. Based on their research, they then develop a series of human rights indicators from which to monitor the council's response to their claims.
- Lobbying and campaigning. Project participants, with the support of partner organisations, undertake campaigns to make visible the problems they face and

the lack of responses from duty bearers. They also lobby councillors of all political parties, and members of the Scottish Parliament. Amongst the actions they take are organising meetings, writing letters, running community events and organising joint actions with other community groups around rights issues.

Paid staff also provide human rights awareness training. They work with councillors and council administrators to help them apply a human rights lens to their work.

Participation

Although the RB project seemed to monitor equality characteristics of community residents, I had no access to internal data on participation, so it is difficult to state the demographics of participants. In terms of levels of involvement, only a small number of people seemed to be actively involved in the RB project. This number went down from 10, at the beginning of the project, to two, at the time of my fieldwork. Some community residents attended meetings regularly and participated in the events and activities organised by the RB project, but they did not form part of the 'core' group of activists. Most of the residents only attended some meetings and responded to surveys, but overall, their participation was low.

5.3.1. The RB project and the rights-based approach

The RB project shared the narrative of rights-based approaches, especially on accountability, empowerment, and participation. One of the leading narratives within the rights-based approach is the claim that institutions such as governments, third sector organisations and private companies are not neutral actors. They have a duty to protect economic, social and cultural rights, and guarantee people's full access and fulfilment of those rights (Gauri & Gloppen, 2012; Kirkemann Boesen & Martin, 2007; Vizard, 2020). References to the accountability of powerful institutions were frequent in the documents I analysed. As one of those documents stated:

Under human rights law, the state is not a neutral actor. It is a duty-bearer, with an obligation to take positive action to realise economic and social rights, particularly for its most vulnerable groups (Evaluation report, 2016, RB project)

Interviewees also made frequent references to the accountability of state institutions. As Ben, a community resident, put it:

We are humans, we have rights, this country has signed the human rights, [...] You only have to get institutions to comply, that's all (Ben, community resident, RB project)

Another key idea rights-based approaches employ is that of empowerment as 'political mobilisation' (Broberg & Sano, 2018). For the rights-based approach, empowerment is about taking actions to challenge structural injustice. People and communities are empowered when they get together to confront duty bearers and assert their rights (Gauri & Gloppen, 2012; Ife, 2009; Uvin, 2004). This notion of empowerment was embedded in the way the RB project worked with participants and community residents. The aim was to encourage residents to speak up and demand change. As Elspeth, one of the RB project participants, said:

[The RB project] just gave us the power to ask questions (Elspeth, participant, RB project, quote extracted from multimedia document, 2016)

Finally, the RB project tended to characterise participation as 'entitlement'. This contrasts with the idea of 'responsibility' adopted by asset-based approaches. According to rights-based approaches, what people and communities are able to achieve is influenced by economic, social, and political factors. If communities are to participate in development, duty bearers must address structural barriers that hinder people's participation (Hamm, 2001; Ife, 2009; Nyamu et al., 2004; Plipat, 2005). One of the aims of the RB project was to facilitate participation by helping people identify their problems and those accountable for them. As Rowan, a staff member on the RB project, said:

It's about people being able to say, "actually I have a right to adequate housing, and I can make a demand on ... the Council to fulfil those conditions" (Rowan, staff, RB project)

As these quotes suggest, the RB project seemed to closely reflect the principles, methods and narratives associated with rights-based approaches, and those involved in the RB project seemed to have little doubt about the approach they followed.

5.4. Different approaches to well-being

Although the AB project and the RB project do not formally include a definition of well-being in their project reports or websites, the narratives, methods, and activities they employ reflect particular views of well-being. On the surface, both projects seemed to have a similar conception of well-being. Staff members from both projects talked about well-being as the ability of people to achieve whatever is important to them. The two projects, then, focused on helping people identify what they wanted to pursue. For Alison, a staff member from the AB project, helping people identify what ‘*they really enjoy doing*’ was the first step to contribute to people’s well-being. As she said:

We often talk about the passions and the skills of the people. It might sound like a grand term, the passions, but often [...] people [are] frustrated because they've not really been able to harness something that they really enjoy doing or care about, [...] and it's maybe something that's quite easy to set up. (Alison, staff, AB project)

For Rowan also, helping people identify what they wish to achieve was key:

I think well-being would be around probably the abilities to live your life in a way that you choose, maybe with the support that you need. That it would be about [the] ability to flourish and do what it is that you want to do with your kind of talents and your skills and how you interact in your community, your kind of relationships, etcetera. (Rowan, staff, RB project)

In this sense, Alison’s and Rowan’s understandings of well-being seem to include elements of subjective well-being and eudaimonic well-being (see Chapter 3). They include elements of subjective well-being because they both seem to imply that well-being is determined by what people care about, want and like (Heathwood, 2014). Alison and Rowan also echo eudaimonic well-being because they refer to people’s abilities to fulfil their wishes and needs (Ryan et al., 2013). Well-being is related to having the autonomy and self-determination to do what one aspires in life. As proponents of eudaimonic well-being claim, autonomy, self-determination and other mental states such as purpose, meaning, engagement and self-acceptance determine well-being because they ensure people’s ability to flourish (Vittersø, 2016).

However, if one focuses on the methods, activities and narratives employed by the AB project and the RB project, one realises that what may appear as a similar conception of well-being is in fact an opposing view. The AB project holds the view that people are more likely to improve their well-being if they make changes at the individual level, since these changes are easier to achieve. The RB project, on the other hand, holds the view that in order to improve well-being, one has to transform socio-economic structural factors and people's material conditions. These two views of how well-being is achieved are known, in the sociology of well-being, as internalist and externalist perspectives.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, internalist perspectives are based on the premise that it is easier to improve well-being by changing how one perceives one's own life than by changing the external conditions that influence one's own life (Ahuvia et al., 2015). This internalist perspective was visible in the work of the AB project. The project assessed its impact on well-being by mainly recording changes in participants' behaviours and feelings. As Cormac explained, the AB project staff paid special attention to changes in participants' physical activity, routines, confidence and self-esteem:

We've got the transformational indicators, which are about big changes in people's lives: reductions in smoking, reductions in drinking, changes in medication, but mainly, changes in the way people feel: if you are more confident, if you are more able to be part of the community... it's focused around how the individual feels. (Cormac, staff – AB project)

Likewise, for Alison, there were obvious advantages in helping people improve areas of their life they have more power to transform:

It's within their gift to start effecting [change], they can go much further in terms of effecting change in their own lives (Alison, staff, AB project).

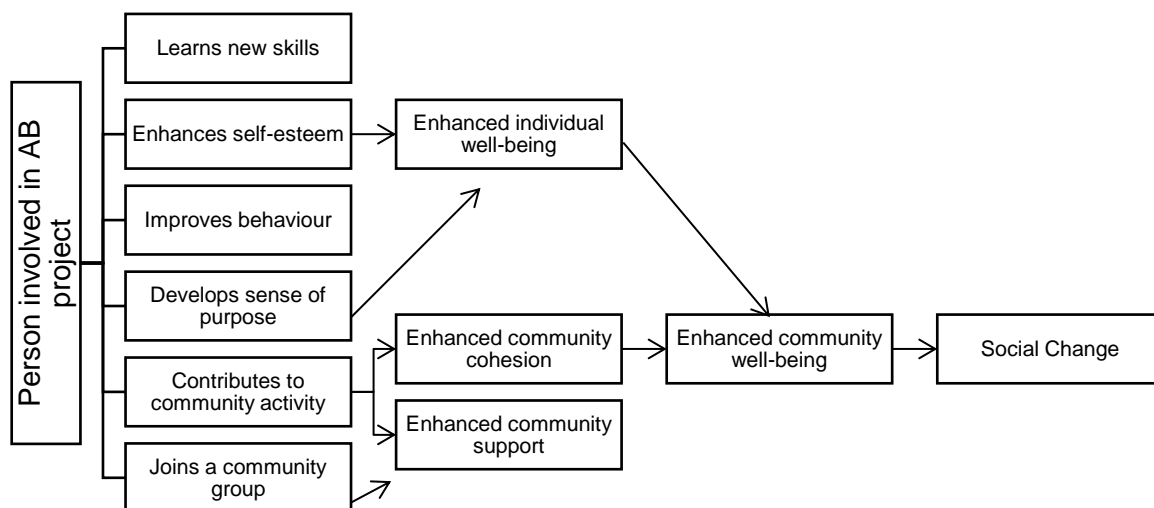
The RB project, by contrast, seemed closer to the externalist perspective on well-being. The RB project held the view that to improve well-being, people need to advance their social and material circumstances (Ahuvia et al., 2015). For the RB

project, this required helping people identify their unmet needs and rights. As Rowan said:

Our approach would tend to be around kind of rights realization. [This] has been the kind of core marker of whether an individual or community is sort of able to live their lives in peace and security, basically. [...] it also comes with a recognition about the interdependence of rights: if you're not able to realize what it's in one area that might have a significant effect on your well-being in other areas. (Rowan, staff, RB project).

These different perspectives on well-being influenced what each of the projects pursued at the community level. For the AB project, the path to improve the well-being of the wider community started at the individual level. The project, in line with the narrative of asset-based approaches (see Chapter 2) was based on the premise that individual behavioural changes scale up to the community level. As illustrated in Graph 5.1., there is an assumption that individual behavioural changes are a prerequisite of wider social change.

Graph 5.1: Summary of the AB project’s theory of social change



Source: Adapted from AB project internal report, 2016

For the RB project, by contrast, improving community well-being, and advancing social change, starts at the structural level. Making improvements at a personal level are important. However, in the project’s view, to enhance people’s wellbeing, one must first

change the structures that limit their ability to achieve a better quality of life in the first place. The assumption is that if people face structural barriers, then people have limited power to make any changes at the individual, community, or societal levels. As Rowan said:

It's about powerlessness. It's about how well you're able to kind of activate all of the things that you want to do (Rowan, staff, RB project)

Ben, one of the community residents within the RB project, also thought that to improve well-being one must look beyond people's actions and focus, instead, on structural change. He drew upon institutional racism as an example:

You can't protect an individual person against [institutional racism] only [on] an individual basis. You have to eradicate it from the institution. You have to get the institution to have a completely new set of thinking whether that is with racism or with human rights (Ben, community resident, RB project).

This focus on promoting structural and institutional change underpinned many of the activities run by the RB project. The project pressured local authorities to use a human rights framework in service provision. As one RB project staff member explained:

This project has been all about raising awareness of housing as a human right for people living in communities like this and for the public authorities that are working to support them and deliver the services. We've seen some real improvements here and that's been really positive. The challenge is bringing long term culture change to embed a rights-based approach into the heart of policy making, service design and delivery (video extract – staff, RB project).

It is interesting how, the AB project and the RB project seemed to hold similar understandings of well-being and yet opposing views of how well-being is achieved. For the AB project, improving well-being involves making changes in individual behaviours and perceptions. For the RB project, improving well-being involves making changes at the structural level. These two views closely reflect the assumptions and narratives of asset-based and rights-based approaches discussed in Chapter 2.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced the two case studies employed to compare the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on well-being: the AB project and the RB project. I described their aims and activities, and I discussed the extent to which these two projects seem to reflect the principles, narratives and methods that characterize asset-based and rights-based approaches respectively.

I also introduced how well-being is understood in the context of both projects, and of asset-based and rights-based approaches more generally. I argued that, even though both projects seem to have similar conceptions of well-being (subjective well-being and eudaimonic well-being), they hold opposing views when it comes to how wellbeing is achieved. The AB project adopts an internalist perspective of well-being, assuming that it is easier to improve well-being by changing how one perceives one's own life than by changing external conditions. The RB project adopts an externalist perspective, assuming that increasing wellbeing requires improvements in social and material circumstances.

These two views of how well-being is achieved help explain the opposing theories of change held by the AB project and the RB project. For the AB project, changes must start at the individual level, since they are easier to achieve, and these changes scale up to the community and societal levels. For the RB project, changes must start at the structural level, since it is at this level that people's abilities to achieve a better quality of life are limited.

Chapter 6: Comparative impact on material dimensions

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I compare the impact of the AB project and the RB project on three indicators within the material dimension of well-being. These indicators are housing, income, and work (paid and unpaid). As I discussed in Chapter 4 (Section 4.5), these three indicators are included because they are thought to contribute to people's well-being from an objective and a subjective perspective. Housing, income, and work are objectively good for people; they enhance people's well-being regardless of whether they are desired. Housing, income, and work are also subjectively good for people; when people are asked directly, people identify these three indicators as being integral to their well-being.

Housing, income and work are common indicators in pluralistic well-being frameworks. They are identified in the two well-being frameworks I combined for this thesis (White's (2010) well-being framework and Oxfam's (2013) Humankind index). They are also defined in the broader well-being literature as being integral to people's well-being (Coburn & Gormally, 2020; Gasper, 2004; Lee et al., 2014; Nussbaum, 2001; Sirgy, 2018; Talmage, 2020).

I discuss the material impact that the AB project and the RB project had by looking at three different effects. The first effect, which I call 'observable material well-being', refers to the 'real' effect that the AB project and the RB project had on participants' housing, income and working conditions. The second effect, which I call, 'perceived material well-being', refers to project participants' perceptions of whether the projects improved their housing, income and working conditions. The third effect, which I call 'community well-being', refers to the impact that the AB project and the RB project had upon the material conditions of those not directly involved in the projects.

6.2. Effect on observable material well-being

According to my data analysis, the AB project and the RB project had contrasting effects on the material well-being of project participants. The AB project had a limited effect on housing, income, and paid work for most project participants, and a positive effect on unpaid work. The RB project, on the other hand, had a significant positive effect on housing, an indirect positive effect on income, but no visible effect on work.

The AB project had a limited effect on material well-being because the project did not explicitly target people's material living conditions. The AB project helped participants manage expenses, find alternative accommodation, volunteer, and gain employability skills. The project did not directly augment participants' income but helped them keep track of their living costs and prioritise bills. This support, in the view of some interviewees, had an observable effect. As Elaine explained:

[AB project had a positive effect on income because it] helped me manage my money better [...]. I get paid monthly, I'm on that Universal Credit. It used to be, when I first started it, I says, "oh, I've got all this money. I'd go and buy messages [phone credit] and whatever." Now I manage to put it away and just take what I need. (Elaine, participant, AB project)

Staff at the AB project thought that the project had some indirect effect on housing and income. The AB project influenced people's material living conditions when it acted as an intermediary between participants and specialist services. Staff signposted project participants to other services when they needed emergency accommodation or extra income. For Finn, a staff member on the AB project, the support they offered in these situations proved the project had an indirect effect:

It's kind of an indirect effect, when people become linked in with other community workers who help them with benefits and help them to get grants and improve house and things, so we do have a positive effect, but we are not doing anything direct about housing. (Finn, staff, AB project)

Another staff member, Leslie, said something similar in regard to income:

Whilst [the AB project] has no say over the income that people have coming into their houses, we do work very closely with organizations to support people with perhaps their benefits and help them make sure that they're claiming everything that they should be. (Leslie, staff, AB project)

However, most project participants interviewed thought that the AB project had not changed their housing and income conditions. They acknowledged that the staff were sometimes able to help some participants in some situations, as described above, but for most of the people involved, the AB project had no effect. As two participants, Anne and Eve said:

No, the house I'm in, I've been in there for 15 years and I've only come into this group just over a year, so no, it hasn't affected that. (Anne, participant, AB project)

Income, I don't think [the AB project] had any effect. (Eve, participant, AB project)

Regarding work, the AB project seemed to have a positive effect on unpaid work, but limited effect on paid work. The project helped project participants take volunteering positions, and as a result, participants gained skills that were thought to improve their employability. For instance, as Finn, a staff member, mentioned, the project had sometimes helped people gain the skills and confidence needed to successfully apply for jobs:

We have one story of a Chinese lady [...] she got involved with lots of stuff here [...] and she ended up getting a job and I said to her "what was it that made the change that enabled you to do that?" and she said "it was purely confidence of knowing people, of having friends, of doing things, of kind of being recognised from who I was." That enabled her to do that. (Finn, staff, AB project)

For most participants, however, the positive impact that the AB project had on unpaid work (volunteering) did not lead to any observable effect on their working conditions. As most interviewees reported, their employment situation had simply not changed as a result of getting involved in the AB project. This was also the case of those more

actively involved as volunteers. According to the AB project evaluation records, around ‘34% of project participants ended up taking an active role as volunteers’ but only ‘6% of project participants [were thought to] get a job as a result of participating in the AB project.’ (Evaluation report, 2014, AB project)

The limited effect of the AB project on employment, despite the positive effect on volunteering, seems consistent with the findings of other studies. Volunteering, as I later discuss in Chapters 7 and 8, may have several positive effects on happiness (Borgonovi, 2008), physical and mental health (Grimm et al., 2007; McDougale et al., 2014), and sense of belonging (Brown et al., 2012). However, evidence shows there is a small causal relation between volunteering and employment progression (Paine et al., 2013; Penny & Finnegan, 2019). Engaging in community activities, like those provided by the AB project, can help people feel more confident to apply for jobs, but ultimately, the deciding factors have more to do with structural issues than with the number of volunteering experiences or the employability skills of job seekers (Crisp & Powell, 2017; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Penny & Finnegan, 2019). For these reasons, even if the AB project was thought to have a more direct effect on work, the *observable* impact, as project participants highlighted, was small.

The RB project also did not seem to have an observable effect on paid work. My data analysis suggests that people involved in the project had not experienced any changes in their working conditions. At most, like the AB project, the RB project helped project participants develop transferable skills. As Rowan said:

‘Work, I am going to say positive direct effect ... [this project helps] building confidence... [and] skills [...]. The kind of demands and the rigor [it requires], I think that people will be able to say I learned that from this process (Rowan, staff, RB project).

There was a significant difference between the skills project participants gained in the RB project and the AB project (see also Chapter 8). RB project participants gained skills to make right claims, and some thought these skills might potentially be more useful to improve their working conditions. Elspeth, for instance, thought that the RB project had some positive effect on her work because it had helped her acquire the confidence she needed to speak up and raise concerns when needed. As she said:

Before, I would have probably just went wi' the flow right, because that was the way we were brought up, even although the manager's no right, right? Before, I probably would have put up wi' it, no now. Now I'll say to them, I'll say, "well what do you want me tae do?" (Elspeth, participant, RB project)

As Elspeth quote suggests, her being more aware of her rights was thought to help her improve her working conditions because she felt more capable of speaking up. Yet, she did not specify in what way her working conditions had improved. My analysis of interview and document data suggested that the effect the RB project had on work was more of a 'hoped' effect than a 'observable' effect. In this sense, the RB project seemed to have a similar effect on (paid) work than the AB project.

The RB project, however, had a more observable positive effect on housing and income. The RB project had pressured the local authority to undertake flat renovations and solve issues around mould, dampness, insulation, and poor heating. These actions, as Rowan reported, resulted in the council investing money and addressing the housing problems community residents faced:

[Council tenants] have all had a new kitchen and bathroom, new windows fitted, the dampness problems are being addressed and they are getting a new roof on their building (Rowan, staff, RB project)

Duncan, a project participant in the RB project, had no doubts that all the flat renovations happened because they followed a rights-based approach. He acknowledged people had a right to adequate housing that needed to be fulfilled and the rights-based approach had helped them realise it. As he explained:

I feel very privileged having this...renovation, the changes they put in the building, [and all of this is] because we started a human rights way of looking at things, because every human being has a right to a house, a safe, warm house, you know, and we've done it (Duncan, participant, RB project)

My analysis of data also indicates that the RB project had, to some extent, a positive indirect effect on income. The documents I analysed stated that residents reported having reduced their fuel consumption as a result of the installation of more efficient heating and better insulation in their flats. Interviewees also made similar remarks. Ben

thought that the renovations carried out in his flat had helped him reduce energy costs, and this had a positive impact on his income. Yet, he also recognised that there were undesirable effects of having better insulation that required further work:

Basically, the council was at work, which is great in some respects, you know, the flats are better insulated, lower heating costs, no damp but they have created cavities in which the mice live [...] and they kind of refuse to acknowledge [this] (Ben, community resident, RB project)

As this quote suggests, those affected by the RB project acknowledged the improvements made on their material well-being, but they also acknowledged that further work was required. This is a key point of contrast between those involved in asset-based approaches and those involved in rights-based approaches. I return to this point later in this chapter and in Chapter 8.

6.3. Effect on perceived material well-being

Even though the RB project had a more observable positive effect on material well-being, those involved in the AB project seemed to have a more optimistic perception of what their project was able to achieve. This was even the case for interviewees who had not experienced any significant changes in their material well-being after being involved in AB project.

For the AB project participants, knowing that the AB project was able to help people secure emergency accommodation or apply for welfare benefits was enough to make them feel safe and optimistic about their material well-being. Murray, a project participant, for instance, thought the AB project had a positive effect on housing because he knew some people had been supported. He had not experienced any changes in his housing situation himself, yet he thought the AB project had a 'massive effect on housing'. As he explained:

I know people that came along tae the groups that have had nothin' in the hoose. They've just moved into the area and [the AB project worker] spoke tae like the housin' organisation. They've got a big unit where they keep furniture, carpets and all that f'ur people that are in need. So aye, they'll

help other people, but me personally, no. It's not helped me with my housing situation (Murray, participant, AB project).

Graeme also thought the AB project had a positive effect on employment despite his own work situation had not changed. In his view, the project acted as a 'confidence builder'. The AB project helped him, and other participants, feel more positive about themselves. It also helped participants gain skills that were hoped to eventually lead to employment. For these reasons, he thought the AB project had a positive impact on work:

[The AB project worker] and the club are here for me to get me stronger. I can say to myself, "Listen you. Get back to work." you know what I mean? That's what I like about the club, that's what I like about [the AB project] They're here to get me stronger and they're getting me stronger. (Graeme, participant, AB project)

As this quote suggests, the narrative on strengths associated with asset-based approaches (see Chapter 2) seemed to have an effect on interviewees' evaluations. In a sense, interviewees appeared to find it difficult to disassociate what they hoped the AB project would help them achieve from what the project had helped them achieve. This was also visible in some of the documents I analysed, in which aspirational outcomes were sometimes presented as project outcomes. As the following extract states:

The [name] club has allowed a number of participants to develop the skills and confidence to enter or return to work (Internal report, 2014, AB project)

Helping communities see "the glass half-full instead of half-empty" is indeed one of the goals of asset-based approaches (Foot & Hopkins, 2010). For proponents, helping people think more positively and become more hopeful is what makes asset-based approaches transformative. They encourage people to imagine their future and believe that their circumstances can improve (Pattoni et al., 2016, p. 47). This focus on the 'positives' had seemed to influence how AB project participants assessed the impact of the AB project. In a sense, AB project participants magnified the achievements. The project had helped them feel more optimistic about their future

and what the project was able to achieve. As a result, when they assessed the impact on material well-being, they seemed to focus more on their aspirations (what they hoped to achieve as a result of being involved in the AB project) than on their realities (what they had achieved).

I find this interesting because participants in the RB project seemed to take an opposite angle. The RB project had achieved some remarkable positive outcomes on material well-being, however interviewees appeared more critical and frequently downplayed their achievements by stating the problems they continued to face (such as the mice problem Ben referred to when discussing the improvements around insulation). This tendency to highlight what is not working was also visible in the documents I analysed. A survey conducted by the organisations involved in the RB project indicated that ‘the proportion of [community residents] who were satisfied with the Council’s response to flat repairs went down after the work had taken place’ (Evaluation report, 2020, RB project).

Why would RB project participants express more dissatisfaction than AB project participants? In her research on community education, Lynn Tett’s (2010) presents an argument that might help explain this result. According to Tett, people who engage in processes of critical consciousness are more likely to point out the gap between what their living conditions are and what their living conditions could and should be (Ibid, p. 97). They come to have a better sense of their entitlements, or in Tett’s own phrase, they learn to “desire better”. If Tett is right on this point, when interviewees highlight the limitations of the RB project, they may be giving voice to their own realisation that they are entitled to more. I discuss this point in depth in following chapters (particularly Chapter 8).

My analysis also indicates that the critical lens of those involved in the RB project could be influenced by the way the local authority handled their claims. Amongst interviewees, there seemed to be a general sentiment of distrust. The communication with the local authority was difficult, and interviewees thought there had been a lack of transparency. Residents were rarely informed during repairs, and many felt they had to be in a constant ‘fighting mode’ to get things done. As Jane explained:

“I do a lot of complaining [...] I still say we shouldn't be living like this. No way, it shouldn't be. [...] the minute I see a corporation man passing, I jump out [to complain] because I'm just getting sick, is getting worst. [...] I think if I stop [complaining], there's nothing going to get done.” (Jane, participant, RB project).

In a way, participants within the AB project and the RB project seemed to learn how to assess the impact on well-being differently. Those involved in the AB project had learned to assess their reality in a positive way, focusing on ‘what they had’ instead of on ‘what they lacked’. They were optimistic about their future, and that influenced how they assessed the impact of the AB project on material well-being, despite many acknowledged a lack of real effect. Those involved in the RB project, by contrast, had learned to ‘desire better’ and as a result, they assessed more critically the impact of the RB project on material well-being, especially in regard the role that the local authority had played.

RB project participants also seemed more aware of the limits of their power. Interviewees within the RB project felt that, even though their right claims were legitimate, and they had the support of the staff, their material well-being still depended on the actions of external actors such as the council and housing officials. As one community resident suggested, project participants had the power to come together and complain but not the power to make the relevant decisions:

I mean, you can try and try but like I say the [institutions] ha[ve] the last word (Lucy, community resident, RB project).

Participants’ sense of power, thus, seemed to influence their perceptions. Participants within the AB project thought they had the power to improve their living conditions. As I discussed in Chapter 5, the AB project is focused on making changes at individual level because these changes were thought to be easier to achieve. This sense that individual change is doable is something that seems to have been transmitted to project participants. AB project participants felt they had some agency to make meaningful changes in their lives (improve their employability skills, for instance). They thought the AB project could support them in making those changes. As a result, they

felt hopeful and optimistic about the impact that the AB project had on their material well-being, even when they had not experienced any changes themselves.

Participants within the RB project, by contrast, seemed more aware of the obstacles they faced. They had experienced significant improvements as a result of their mobilisation, but they sometimes felt powerless because they understood that their material well-being ultimately depended on the actions of external actors. They had developed a sense of distrust. They were aware of the tactics commonly used by duty bearers to avoid their responsibilities and they did not know the extent to which their local authority would go back to ignoring their claims in the future. For this reason, they felt they had to constantly be on a 'complaining mode'.

This contrasting effect between the AB project and the RB project raises an important question. What matters most when assessing the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on well-being: people's perceptions (how they assess their well-being) or people's living conditions (regardless of how people perceive them)? As I discussed in Chapter 3, this is an important point of debate between proponents of subjective and objective conceptualisations of well-being. Although entering this discussion goes beyond the scope of this thesis, I believe this question is relevant to help us understand (1) the different impact that asset-based and rights-based approaches have and (2) the different perspectives that proponents of one and the other approach may take when discussing the promises and limitations of these approaches. This is something I discuss further in the concluding chapter (Chapter 10).

6.4. Comparative effect on material community well-being

The third contrasting impact between the AB project and the RB project was on the material well-being of the wider community. This refers to the material conditions of community residents who were not directly involved in the projects. According to my analysis, the AB project did not seem to have any effect on the material well-being of community residents. The RB project, on the other hand, had a similar effect on project participants and community residents.

The AB project was thought to have an observable effect on material well-being when it signposted participants to specialized services or provided volunteering

opportunities. Thus, for people to experience any impact, they had to be involved in the project. Community residents needed to join community groups to receive peer support. They needed to enrol as volunteers or to work with staff members. It seemed unlikely, interviewees suggested, that the AB project would have a positive effect on the material conditions of people who were not directly involved in the project. As John, a community worker in the area, said:

[I] don't know whether you actually get [the wider community] to benefit from the AB project. The people involved, yes (John, external actor, AB project)

This lack of effect on the material well-being of the wider community may not be surprising. Most of the people directly involved in the project, as I discussed above, did not experience any substantial changes in their material well-being. Hence it seems implausible that the wider community would experience changes when most participants had not. For community residents, Abeni and Janet, the only way in which the AB project could have an effect on the material well-being of community residents would be if the project provided services such as a job centre or social housing. However, the project did not provide such services, and it was not directly involved in actions that targeted the housing, income, or work of the community as a whole.

The RB project, by contrast, seemed to have the same effect on the material well-being of project participants than of community residents. This effect was acknowledged by everyone I interviewed in the community. Lucy, a community resident who was not involved in the RB project, talked about how she got a new kitchen and a heater, like all the other residents in the area:

[My housing is] a lot better cause we've got new kitchens which are gorgeous, and we've got new storage heaters. There's new smoke alarm and there is a heat alarm in the kitchen, so they're all working properly now. They weren't before (Lucy, community resident, RB project)

Another community resident, Harris, also thought the RB project had a positive direct effect on his housing conditions. He mentioned having been offered a new bathroom, a kitchen and new radiators:

They offered [me] a bathroom, kitchen... but I didn't take all of them up. I did actually have good decorated new radiators, which I'm delighted with, so yes, definitely a positive effect [on housing]. (Harris, community resident, RB project).

Harris thought these improvements had happened because the RB project pressured the local authority to undertake repairs. In his view, if project participants had not taken any action, the local authority would have kept repairs to a minimum, as mere displays.

I think [the local authority] may under law have been prepared to at least make some sort of change. Whether they'd have gone quite so far or whether they did it just for cosmetic effect...I think, people made it clear they wanted the whole hog. That's had an effect, yes. (Harris, community resident, RB project).

As these quotes suggest, the benefits project participants experienced as a result of getting involved in the RB project (improved housing conditions) were also experienced by the wider community. These benefits, moreover, went beyond housing. Evidence suggests that improved housing conditions have a wider effect on well-being. Housing is a core life domain for most people (Pavot & Diener, 2009; Sirgy, 2021). As a result, improved housing conditions also influence relationships, health, sense of safety and happiness (Clapham, 2010; Gür et al., 2020; Pevalin et al., 2017) These were all positive effects that the wider community had experienced within the context of the RB project, as I discuss later in Chapters 7 and 8.

The effect the RB project had on housing also had an impact on the income of community residents. Like project participants (see section above), community residents thought that the improved housing conditions had an indirect effect on their income. In a survey conducted by the RB project, community residents reported higher disposable income as a result of reductions in heating costs resulting from improved housing.

Overall, the survey results show that the project led to a positive impact on key aspects of the residents' right to housing, in particular the habitability of their housing and availability of services. [...] Residents [also] reported

being able to heat their homes [and] reduce fuel poverty (Evaluation report, 2020, RB project)

For Liam, a human rights practitioner from a different organisation, there was no doubt of the positive effect that the RB project had on community material well-being. He was sure of it because there were residents who reported the results who may not even know the RB project existed. As he said:

There is change at every level [...] New windows, new doors, new bathrooms. [...] The person who measures success is not the community organisation, is not the council, is not the government, is not in the abstract, it is the very tangible person, rights holder who sees success or not. And some of [the community residents] might not even have been aware that there was [an RB project] going on in the community. (Liam, external actor, RB project)

The different impact made by the AB project and the RB project on community material well-being echoes other research findings. Sarah Ward (2019) found that without explicitly targeting structural factors, asset-based approaches are unable to address the material living conditions of socio-economic disadvantaged communities. Similar arguments have also been made by critics of asset-based approaches (Ennis & West, 2010; Friedli, 2013). Studies exploring the use of rights-based approaches, on the other hand, have shown that these approaches can have a wider positive impact on material living conditions (Gauri & Gloppen, 2012; O'Leary, 2017; Sano, 2020). There are a number of scholars who, for these reasons, advocate for an extended use of rights-based approaches to address people's material living conditions (Al-Mahaidi, 2021; Dowler & O'Connor, 2012). Although my findings are consistent with the existing literature, it is important to note that empirical research evaluating the effects of asset-based and rights-based approaches on material well-being is still limited. This contrasts with the larger body of theoretical literature exploring the two approaches.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter has compared the effects of the AB project and the RB project by discussing contrasting effects on three kinds of material wellbeing: observable material well-being of project participants, perceived material well-being of project participants, and community material well-being.

Findings suggest that the AB project had a limited effect on the material well-being of project participants (mainly on unpaid work), and no effect on the material well-being of the wider community. Yet, the AB project seemed to have a more consistent and positive effect on people's perceptions across the three indicators: housing, income, and work. The project was perceived to have a positive impact on material well-being despite the lack of evidence to support this claim. The mismatch between perceptions and observable effects can be explained by the strong narrative on positive thinking and hope characterizing asset-based approaches. Those involved in the AB project had learned to assess their reality in a positive way, focusing on 'what they had' instead of on 'what they lacked'. They were optimistic about their future, and that influenced how they assessed the impact of the AB project on material well-being, despite most interviewees acknowledged a lack of effect on their living conditions.

The RB project, by contrast, had an observable positive effect on housing and income, and this effect was equally experienced by project participants and community residents. Yet, the perceived impact of the RB project on material well-being seemed to underestimate the achievements made. The mismatch between perceptions and observable effects may be explained by the critical awareness of those involved in the RB project. Interviewees within the RB project seemed to have learned to 'desire better' and as a result, they assessed more critically what they had achieved. They also seemed more aware of the obstacles they faced. They acknowledged the improvements made but they were realistic about the limited power they had. They understood that their material well-being ultimately depended on the actions of external actors (local authority). As a result, those involved in the RB project felt they had to be on a constant 'complaining mode'.

The following table (6.1.) summarises the effects of the AB project and the RB project on indicators within the material dimension of well-being.

Table 6.1. Comparative effect on material well-being

Material well-being	Effect upon	Type of effect		Main point of contrast
		AB project	RB project	
Housing	Participants	Perceived positive	Positive	Perceived/Observable
	Community	No effect	Positive	No effect/Positive
Work	Paid	Participants	Perceived positive	Perceived/ Potential
		Community	No effect	None
	Unpaid	Participants	Positive	Positive/No effect
		Community	No effect	None
Income	Participants	Perceived positive	Positive indirect	Perceived/Observable
	Community	No effect	Positive indirect	No effect/Positive

Chapter 7: Comparative impact on social well-being

7.1. Introduction

After comparing the impact of the AB project and the RB project on indicators within the material dimension of well-being, in this chapter I discuss the comparative impact on social well-being. Social well-being, as identified in the well-being framework (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5.), includes five indicators: community safety, community support and inclusion, services and facilities, social activities, and green spaces. These five indicators, like the indicators within the material dimension of well-being, were included because they are thought to contribute to people's well-being from an objective and a subjective perspective (see also Chapter 3).

In this chapter, I compare the impact of the AB project and the RB project on social well-being by grouping these five indicators in two broad categories. The first category, which I call *community services*, includes three indicators: (1) green spaces, (2) community services and facilities and (3) social activities. The second category, which I call *community relations*, include two indicators: (1) community safety and (2) community support and inclusion. I decided to structure the discussion around these two broad categories (community services and community relations) to better highlight the range of contrasting and overlapping effects between the AB project and the RB project.

It is also important to highlight here that I discuss the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on indicators within the social dimension of well-being by drawing upon the literature on social capital. Social well-being and social capital share similar indicators. The study of social capital aims to capture the quality of relationships, community trust, social support or community involvement (Bjørnskov & Sønderskov, 2013). The social dimension of well-being, as White (2010) notes, tends to comprise 'the classic "social capital" components of social networks, along with access to [...] social and welfare services, the quality of the physical environment, and access to amenities' (p. 163).

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 7.2. discusses the comparative effects on community services by highlighting projects' aims, limitations and achievements.

Section 7.3. discusses the comparative effect on community relations by looking at perceptions of community safety and community support and inclusion. Section 7.4. concludes.

7.2. Effect on community services: facilities, green spaces, and social activities

As with material well-being, the AB project and the RB project had different effects when it came to community services. The AB project aimed to increase the provision of social activities and to improve *participants'* access to green spaces and community facilities. The RB project, by contrast, aimed to improve the provision of community services for the *wider community*, especially community facilities and green spaces. In this section, I compare the impact of the AB project and the RB project on community services by focusing on (1) each project's aims, (2) the limitations of each approach and (3) the extent to which the two projects achieved the outcomes they sought.

One of the most remarkable effects on community services was achieved by the AB project. According to my analysis, the AB project successfully increased the number of activities run by community residents. Project reports estimated that around '*1,300 participants across all sites had been actively involved in social activities since the project started in 2012*' (*Evaluation report, 2019, AB project*). Activities ranged from community cinema to arts and crafts, sports, dance, music, and photography.

For many participants, the AB project marked the first time they had become actively involved in their community. According to the AB project's records, around '*66% of participants had never taken part in social activities before the AB project started*' (*Evaluation report, 2019, AB project*). For interviewees, the key to this success was that all social activities run by the AB project were based on residents' interests, reflecting what they wanted and needed. People in the community had an opportunity to get actively involved in activities that, before the AB project, were not an option for them. As one member of the staff, Leslie, put it:

We do have quite a positive direct effect on [social activities] because we are creating those kind of spaces for people to come along and take part in activities that, perhaps, they wouldn't normally have done. (Leslie, staff, AB project)

According to Elaine, a project participant, the project had been particularly successful in including people who had been previously isolated. In her view, all the activities run by community groups gave people a reason to leave their houses, socialise and get more actively involved in their community. As she explained:

I used to just sit in the house all the time [and now] I've been [participating in the AB project for] about four or five years. It's great company, and it's good things that we do. We go on day-outs to explore different things, go to fire stations, make things... (Elaine, participant, AB project)

Interviewees also thought that the positive impact on social activities was experienced by both project participants and the wider community. There were more social activities and community events available and open to everyone, and as they said, these would not exist without the AB project:

[Apart from the social activities run by AB project community groups] there is nothing. We used to have the [community] centre, but they shut it down, [so without the activities run by community groups] there'll be nothing. (Abeni and Janet, community residents, AB project)

This positive impact on social activities seemed to have, in turn, a positive effect on two other indicators within the social dimension of well-being: green spaces and community facilities. Many of the social activities run by community groups involved visiting green areas and using local facilities. Activities such as archery, photography and music were held in sport centres, local parks, and community hubs. For some participants, getting involved in these social activities meant that, for the first time, they were using community spaces they had not used before. As Eve said:

There are [local green spaces] which [my family] will use anyway [...] but there are other families who come to [the community group] that wouldn't normally go to the park, possibly (Eve, participant, AB project).

Alison also referred to how the project helped participants access services. In her view, the AB project had an enabling effect. It did not change the provision of services per se, but it facilitated participants' use of them:

We don't change anything about the access [to community services] because the access is there often, if you think about the universal services, you know, they're there for people to use, but people don't engage with them because they don't work. The services don't work for them, you know, they don't or they're too shy or don't have the confidence to go to the library, you know [...] It's not that we create the access but we enable it (Alison, staff, AB project)

As these quotes suggest, the AB project seemed to have the goal of 'enabling access' of project participants instead of 'increasing provision' for the wider community. For interviewees, enabling access of project participants was something the AB project had the power to improve. However, a self-help approach to improving community services was 'way too big for the AB project' (Graeme, participant, AB project). Providing their own community services (besides social activities) required material resources the community and the AB project did not have. Hence, the AB project focused on what project participants could provide by themselves: running social activities and facilitating people's access to services that were already available.

The RB project, by contrast, aimed to improve the provision of community facilities and green areas, and not just to facilitate participants' access to what was already available. The RB project put pressure on the local authority to improve the provision of communal spaces so that everyone, regardless of their involvement, could access them. An example of this was the renovation of the communal laundry room. As Harris said:

There's a launderette which I've only recently started using. Before, I just went outside [...] but now I use the one down there, which is excellent. Yes, that's a positive direct effect [on community facilities]. (Harris, community resident, RB project)

Interviewees also hoped that the success achieved on housing would inspire residents to take further actions to improve other facilities, besides the laundry room. For instance, some interviewees talked about *'getting back the community flat'*. This community flat used to run as a community health service, but it was closed due to lack of funding. For Elspeth, it was now time to demand the service to be re-opened:

There was a community health flat, an NHS community health flat. It was very much needed [but] they shut it down. [...] Now that, because a' this project people are asking, 'can it get, can they come back?' right. So access tae services and facilities, well I'm gonnae say: easy, it's there. It's all set up, ready tae get the services in place. (Elspeth, participant, RB project)

Similarly, other interviewees talked about pressuring the council to improve communal green areas. As Rowan, a staff member, said, the flat renovations had made people more aware of the state of communal spaces, and improving green areas was now more of a concern for those involved in the project.

The residents are starting to engage with what should an outside space be like. They're getting some of the trees trimmed because it makes it very dark for people. There is a community garden there [and] a conversation about actually what could [they] use that space for [...] The residents are starting to think about what could that community garden be, in the context of a set of people in food poverty not eating properly. [...] I think a positive indirect effect is starting to happen there. (Rowan, staff, RB project)

There was, then, a significant difference in what the RB project pursued in terms of facilities and green spaces compared to the AB project. The RB project sought to improve the provision of facilities and green spaces for the wider community. Those involved in the project helped improved the material well-being of residents, and they felt empowered to take further actions to address facilities and green spaces as well. Despite these aspirations, however, the RB project had achieved a limited impact on community services. The project had only managed to improve the laundry room and few other communal areas. The project had no effect on social activities.

Liam, a human rights practitioner from another organisation, had an explanation for this lack of impact on social activities. In his view, it reflected residents' priorities. Had they made social activities a priority, they would have pressured the local authority to do something about it.

If the public authority is responsible for [the provision of social activities], any group of rights holders in the constituency who believe that that's an issue impacting on them can develop a methodology to draw down resources and deliver those activities they require into their community. For example, measures at increasing social interaction like providing forums for people to meet, and providing activities for people to do, and then facilitating all of the technical end of that, transport, and yada, yada, yada (Liam, external actor, RB project)

It seems then that the impact the AB project and the RB project had on community services (facilities, green spaces, and social activities) was, to an extent, constrained by the approach each project followed. The AB project was able to support participants to create their own social activities and to access community facilities and green spaces that were already available. Yet, it was unable to change the provision of community facilities and green spaces because it relied on self-help provision. As interviewees had said, improving the provision of community services would require significant material resources that they did not have. For this reason, the AB project focused on what project participants could provide by themselves (social activities).

This is indeed a source of debate between critics and proponents of asset-based approaches (see Chapter 2). For critics, the emphasis on self-help unavoidably encourages neoliberal policies and welfare retrenchment (Friedli, 2013; MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014). For proponents, this is a mistake. The asset-based approach, they argue, is not an alternative to public services, but an opportunity for communities to play a role in how those services are delivered (Hopkins & Rippon, 2015; Pattoni et al., 2016).

What my findings suggest, however, is that the potential withdrawal of public services might not come as a top-down (neoliberal) decision, but because of a lack of demand for public provision by communities themselves. This is because communities

following an asset-based approach may stop asking for the improvement of public services provision because they are too focused on generating what they can provide by themselves (see also Chapter 9).

The RB project, by contrast, helped project participants pressure duty bearers. The project helped participants (1) identify there was a lack of provision, (2) assess how the lack of provision affected them, and (3) frame it as a human rights issue. Participants and community residents seemed aware of the lack of provision of community services (facilities, green spaces, and social activities) in their community. They were also aware of the negative effects this lack of provision had on them. Yet, the RB project had a more limited effect on community services, compared to the AB project. Interviewees felt hopeful about expanding their rights claim to include community services, but they were also aware of the difficulties involved in taking a rights-based approach. As I shall explain in Chapters 8 and 9, making rights claims can often be exhausting for project participants. Perhaps for this reason, those involved in the RB project had not taken actions to improve the provision of community services (community facilities, green spaces, and social activities) at the time of my fieldwork, beyond the demand for a laundry room as part of the housing renovations.

So far, I have discussed how following asset-based and rights-based approaches influence the aims project participants pursue. I have also discussed how asset-based and a rights-based approaches may also limit what project participants are able to achieve. There is another issue worth considering when comparing the impact of the AB project and the RB project on community services. This is the extent to which the impact made on community services was strictly the result of the approach followed.

As I discussed before, the AB project had managed to increase the provision of social activities for the wider community. By helping participants arrange their own activities, the AB project was able to improve service provision without communities needing to depend on the actions of external agents (waiting for the council to provide social activities). However, the way the AB project had helped improved the provision of social activities involved providing practical and financial support to community groups. For project participants, the help received from the AB project staff was crucial to keep

social activities going. Without them, as Murray said, community groups would struggle, and many would disappear:

I think [without the AB project, the activities] would collapse. I 'hink a' the groups would collapse. And you could dae it as much as you want tae support them. It's like when I was talking aboot that funding thing wi' wee start up groups. It's alright saying, "there's a couple, couple a' grand, go set up your ain group". But if they've no got that additional support, just to show them how tae dae stuff then it's not gonnae exist. (Murray, participant, AB project)

I found this particularly interesting because one of the most popular slogans in asset-based approaches is 'to lead by stepping back' (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Proponents of asset-based approaches claim that socio-economic disadvantaged communities are often perceived to be passive and dependent because they have learned to rely on external knowledge and funding (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie et al., 2017). The AB project, as I discussed in Chapter 5, sided with this narrative, and assumed the idea of helping communities '*reinvent themselves from passive recipients of external help into active change makers*' (Evaluation report, 2020, AB project).

Yet, my analysis of data suggests that the positive effect that the AB project had on social activities was largely due to the practical and financial support the project provided to community groups. The AB project worked in communities that experienced high levels of socio-economic inequality and a lack of material resources. In these contexts, what participants are able to do is constrained by the disadvantages they face (Hastings & Matthews, 2015). As Callum, a community worker based in the community, said:

To be honest, groups just can't be set up and then be left alone. They need on-going support to give them that wee bit of stability.

Later in the interview, he said:

This isn't a middle-class area where you get people with maybe a lot of experiences in committees and running things. [...] Maybe the motto would

be that [AB community groups] get to set up [and] run [activities by] themselves [...] but in reality, they tend to need ongoing support. (Callum, external actor, AB project)

Cormac, a staff member in the AB project working in a different geographical community, said something similar:

It needs an awful lot of support to keep it happening and for it to keep it going because people just need a lot of support to get to the point where they can really start to move things forward (Cormac, staff, AB project)

The success of the AB project, increasing the provision of social activities, did not seem then the result of 'leading by stepping back', at least not in the sense proponents of asset-based approaches claim. Community groups needed practical and financial support throughout, and the AB project, by playing the role of the 'external agent', did not seem to follow the idea of 'self-help' promoted by proponents of asset-based approaches.

Given this, one could argue that neither of the projects had seemed to have a significant impact on the provision of community services for the wider community. The AB project had been unable to improve the provision of green spaces and community facilities because these required resources that project participants did not have. The AB project seemed to have helped increase the number of social activities available in the community and the number of participants involved in them. Yet, this success did not seem to emulate an asset-based approach, since many of the social activities were, to some extent, managed more by the staff than by project participants. The AB project, in this sense, had to play the role of the 'external agent' to keep social activities running. The RB project was, likewise, unable to improve the provision of community services, besides the laundry room. The approach had the potential to improve the provision of other community services, but those involved in the RB project had not pursued these claims.

This limited effect on community services can also be explained in reference to social capital. As stated in Chapter 2.3., the distribution of social capital, like other forms of

capital, is often unequally distributed (Adler & Kwon, 2009; Field, 2003; Volker, 2020). This idea was to some extent acknowledged by participants within the AB project, who realised their community lacked the networks and resources needed to improve the provision of services at the community level. Similarly, a higher level of social capital with the effect of 'bridging' external resources could have helped those involved in the RB project improve the provision of community services alongside their housing rights.

Despite the similar limited effect on community services for the wider community, my analysis of data suggests that for project participants, the AB project had a higher impact across the three indicators (facilities, green spaces, and social activities). The AB project helped participants attend community events, join community groups, and enrol in social activities. The project also helped participants access green spaces and community facilities. For project participants, the AB project had a positive effect on community services.

7.3. Effect on community relations: community safety, community support and inclusion.

Regarding the impact on community safety, community support and inclusion, both projects helped project participants feel safer and more supported. Yet, the RB project seemed to have a wider effect than the AB project. Besides having an impact on participants, the RB project also seemed to have a positive effect on residents' sense of safety and support. This section is organised as follows. I start with a discussion on the effects that the AB project and the RB project had on perceptions of community safety. I then follow with a discussion on the effects that both projects had on community support and inclusion.

7.3.1. Community safety

Both the AB project and the RB project seemed to have a positive effect on perceptions of community safety. Yet, whilst the AB project only seemed to influence the perceptions of project participants, the RB project had an effect of the perception of the wider community. The effect the AB project had on perceptions of community safety was the result of helping project participants improve their community relationships and develop social networks (also known as social capital). The AB

project helped participants get to know each other, and as interviewees said, the more people one knew in the community, the safer one felt:

If you think about how do you create safety in the community, a lot of it is about people knowing one another. So that's where the AB project has got a very powerful contribution to make, simply by enabling people to know one another so that they can look after each other, so that they can relay information and so that they just feel safer walking down the streets because they might just see familiar faces around rather than strangers (Alison, staff, AB project)

One project participant gave an example of the positive effect that knowing people has on perceptions of safety. This example was collected in one of the documents I analysed:

I wasn't too sure of the area to begin with...it can be a bit rough but mainly at night. Being involved [in the AB project] showed me that there were people in the area who were friendly and nice and wanted to help, and wanted to work together to make the area better (Internal report, 2017, AB project)

The idea that people feel safer when they know more people in their community is reflected in the literature. A number of studies suggest there is a positive correlation between people's social networks (social capital) and perceptions of community safety (Baum et al., 2009; De Jesus et al., 2010; Oidjarv, 2018; Somarriba Arechavala et al., 2021). This is also an argument made by proponents of asset-based approaches (Kreitzer et al., 2020; Lawrence et al., 2015; McKnight, 2013; Russell, 2011). In their view, increased neighbour interactions and improved community relationships contribute to residents feelings of trust and safety (McLean et al., 2017). Some proponents of asset-based approaches go even further and suggest that increased social networks can also help reduce levels of violence, crime and anti-social behaviour (Jack et al., 2020; Payne, 2006).

However, I did not find evidence that the AB project had an observable effect on community safety beyond participants' perceptions. The communities where the AB

project was based consistently rank amongst those with the higher levels of conflict and crime according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (Scottish Government, 2020). AB project participants acknowledged the little effect the AB project had on community safety. For them, their communities experienced many problems with drugs, alcohol, and gang violence, and the AB project had not helped improve these issues. As Murray pointed out, one just needed to walk around to notice there were safety problems:

[This community's] got a lot a' issues in it where there's drugs and alcohol. And it's quite clear as you walk about, you dae see it. [...] I think at one time, [this community] was notorious for the drugs, and it still is now, cause you've got two running families that are clashing wi' each other on a daily basis, you know what I mean? And it's no daft 'hings, it's like shooting and all that. (Murray, participant, AB project)

Cormac, a staff member, thought it was difficult to prove an effect beyond changing project participant perceptions:

It's really difficult to know if we are really making things safer. We definitely make it safer for the people who are involved, and maybe for the people around them, and that's likely to have an effect, it's just...it's difficult to measure and to know we are doing that. (Cormac, staff, AB project)

Establishing the extent to which improved community relations can reduce levels of conflict and crime is extremely complex. Some studies have found that improved social capital can reduce crime in a given area (Buonanno et al., 2009). Yet, studies have also found that communities that are safer, and feel safer, are also more likely to nurture community relationships. Safe communities make it easier for neighbours to interact with each other and to develop stronger social networks (Oidjarv, 2018; Wood et al., 2008).

For interviewees within the AB project, the problems experienced by the community were so engrained that improving community safety was simply out of reach. The project, however, had the power to help project participants improve their perceptions of safety, and this was a valuable outcome. Improving people's perceptions, some

interviewees claimed, had significant positive effects on project participants: they were more willing to go out, meet other people and participate in community events. As one member of the staff saw it, even if the AB project had no impact on community safety, the impact on perceptions was nevertheless worth pursuing:

I think some of [the issues around community safety], we can't have control over, but what we can have control over is that people feel safe in a community. So for example, some of the older ladies that used to come to knitting, they'd say to me "oh, I got the bus back from town on Friday night and I saw two of the lads that used to be at knitting and we sat down and we chatted and they told me about this, that and the other". And so it's that sense of like, you could go out, you can see somebody and say hi, you know, I think that's really important. (Finlay, staff, AB project)

Turning to the RB project, we find the same lack of an observable impact on community safety. The community where the RB project was based also ranks amongst those with the highest levels of conflict and crime according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (Scottish Government, 2020). For interviewees, the RB project had not managed to solve the problems community residents experience regarding antisocial behaviour and drug related crimes. Elspeth, a project participant, described how some of the walkways between the buildings are secluded, attracting drug dealers and consumers, which made residents feel unsafe:

See, at night, you try no use that middle stair, right, because the last time I went tae take the dog down, about back a' nine, there was a girl shooting up. She got a fright, and I got a fright, and she went like that...and if I [had come], any closer, she would have injected me. (Elspeth, participant, RB project)

Despite the non-observable effect on community safety, the RB project seemed to have a positive effect on the perceptions of both project participants and community residents. This positive effect, however, was not associated with helping people improve their social networks. The RB project had contributed to people's perceptions of safety because residents had new doors installed and they felt their problems were 'more visible' to the local authority.

A number of interviewees thought that their improved sense of community safety stemmed from having safety doors installed as part of the flat renovations. As Lucy, a community resident, said:

We did get a new front door and it's a real, solid heavy one, so there's no way, I don't think, anybody could kick that in, and it's a good fire door as well so that's a big improvement, and I do feel safe with that. (Lucy, community resident, RB project)

Brodie, another community resident, also referred to the new door:

I've got a new door. Yes, it feels safer because it's a heavier door, it's got more locks on it, basically it is safer (Brodie, community resident, RB project)

Other interviewees thought that their improved sense of safety stemmed from the fact that their concerns 'were more heard'. In their view, the RB project had helped the community become more visible to the local authority. As a result, project participants felt more capable to pressure the council to improve the walkways and other areas community residents had identified as unsafe. As one project participant said:

We're forcing [the council] tae listen at the impact o' how we feel, right. It's having a positive indirect effect because they are starting tae listen whether they want tae or not. [...] We've been telling them it's not safe, we're not safe, we don't feel safe. (Elspeth, participant, RB project)

Finn, a community resident, seemed to agree with Elspeth. In his view, having concierges in the buildings was key to ensure the safety of residents. He was aware that this service could be cut at any time, but he thought the RB project had made this outcome less likely. In his view, the local authority would now think twice before cutting any service because they knew there were residents willing to fight:

I'd say [the RB project has a] positive indirect effect [on community safety]. A large part of the safe community environment is the fact that we have concierges in the flats but it's difficult to know, you know, perhaps the

provision would be reduced if they didn't know that the residents would protest (Finn, community resident, RB project)

What I found interesting, again, was the extent to which asset-based and rights-based approaches influence what communities pursue. Those involved in the AB project pursued changes in the perceptions of project participants because they were thought to be easier to achieve. Those involved in the RB project pursued more tangible outcomes. They pressured the local authority to improve the walkways and areas that made them feel (and be) safe. These different approaches help explain why the AB project had a smaller impact at the community level than the RB project.

7.3.2. Community support and inclusion

The AB project and the RB project also had different effects on community support and inclusion. As with other indicators, the AB project only appeared to have an effect on project participants. Yet, this positive impact was higher than the one achieved by the RB project. The AB project helped participants socialise and improve their networks of social support. For project participants, having that social support was vital. Graeme, a project participant, said that being part of his community club meant he had more people he could reach out if he needed help:

We all help each other in the club, so we dae. If there's a problem with one we're all just like "What's the problem? Sit down, there's many here tae talk tae. Talk tae us. It's not as if you're suffering it alone because we've all got what you've got, but at this moment in time it's hitting you more than it's hitting us. (Graeme, participant, AB project).

Other interviewees gave similar accounts. They thought that the project facilitated support and inclusion. Anne, a participant with an impairment, mentioned how members in her community group would always try to include her in activities, even when she was not able to participate. This made her feel supported and included:

Some weeks we have [activities that I cannot do] but one of the girls always plays for me [...] so I still feel as if I can win. They don't exclude me, and I go through, and I sit with them. I don't feel excluded. (Anne, participant, AB project)

The documents I analysed also reflected what interviewees had said. People participating in the AB project reported feeling more part of their community:

I feel more part of my community now than I ever have...you get to know everybody...I go out and there's always people talking to me and kids shouting, "there's Alan" and I talk to their parents about how they're getting on (Internal report, 2017, AB project)

The RB project also had a positive effect on support, and this effect was experienced by the wider community. The RB project brought the community together to claim housing rights and, even though most residents were not actively involved in the project, residents reported feeling supported as a result of the mobilisation. As Lucy, a community resident, explained:

I think it makes me feel part of [the community] even though I don't [participate in the project]. Like I say, I do get to hear what's going on and it's a positive thing. It does make you feel a bit protected that there's somebody that's got your back, you know what I mean. (Lucy, community resident, RB project)

Finn, another community resident, also thought the community mobilisation had an impact on his sense of community support and inclusion:

It reminds one that one is part of the community and that the community is active as an entity. And that is a positive inclusive effect. (Finn, community resident, RB project)

Project participants also mentioned having developed more supportive relationships with fellow residents. For Elspeth, before the RB project, residents were just neighbours. Now they all felt part of the same community:

I know it sounds silly what I'm gonnae say tae you but that was the tiny wee seed that needed planted to make this community grow, and it is starting tae grow. (Elspeth, participant, RB project)

Yet, the RB project had also led to conflict situations that, at the time of the data collection, were having a negative impact. The project, Rowan explained, had estranged some relationships and it was creating significant tensions amongst residents. There was, as a result, a few 'interpersonal conflicts' that were damaging community relations:

I don't know whether this is inevitable, but there were interpersonal relationships that aren't particularly good between people. This process has kind of strained those relationships further in terms of what people think we should do about something or how the residents association is kind of managing the process and what's important. There are many positives, but I do think also that it has hugely revealed tensions and that is very difficult to support people around, apart from saying "actually we don't all need to be friends and that's okay anyway, you're working together on a thing".
(Rowan, staff, RB project)

The AB project, by contrast, seemed to have no such negative impact on community relations. There were some references to specific conflicts every now and then, but none had lasting damaging effects. Most of the conflicts were the result of people having different opinions about which activities to pursue or how to run the community group. As Anne explained:

We did have a couple of wee disagreements within the group. We were just starting out, like I said, we didn't really know how to organize a group. We did have a couple of people snapping at each other, a couple of people talking behind each other's backs, but it all came to a big explosion. Then we all sat down, and we all decided that if we had anything to say, it had to be said in the group at the monthly meetings. That was all sorted out and the atmosphere is totally different now. (Anne, participant, AB project)

Perhaps, the reason why conflicts within the RB project were more damaging to community relations had to do with the response of the council to the rights-based approach. The RB project aimed to transform the way the council worked with housing tenants, and specifically, with RB project participants. The project aimed to shift the council's view of right claimants from being 'adversaries' to being 'decision-makers'.

The council, however, found difficult to work with RB project participants as decision-makers, and it often stayed 'on the defence' (Evaluation report, 2020, RB project). The council undertook flat repairs, but it did not seem willing to work collaboratively with the RB project. This created, as I discussed in Chapter 6, a sense of distrust amongst community residents. There was a lack of transparency, and the local authority often mishandled the communication with tenants. As residents complained, they were rarely informed of how decisions were made (how renovations would be carried, and which flats would be prioritised).

The poor communication from part of the council, and the growing sense of distrust among residents, seemed to fuel some of the conflicts that were labelled as 'interpersonal'. Elspeth talked about how community relations were sometimes difficult. She mentioned how a number of community residents had directly accused her and other project participants of withholding information and benefiting from their position in the 'committee'. Elspeth described this conflict as follows:

Everybody [started saying], 'oh you're getting your [windows] first'. I says, 'no', I says, 'I'm no getting ma windows first'. When I got the letter [from the council], it said a date [and] it was Christmas. And I thought, 'that's weird, I'm gonnae phone them up and see if I get an answer eh'. So I phoned them up tae take the appointment and they says tae me, 'you're the first one tae phone up tae book an appointment'. So I ran round everybody saying, 'right, phone them now, book, ken, your date'. [...] somebody that doesnae even live here walked through, 'oh aye, you first'. I went, 'no', I says, 'I just happened tae book my appointment first'. And then folk were saying, 'aye you're getting...'. I says, 'I'm getting nae money for this'. (Elspeth, participant, RB project)

Those involved in the AB project seemed less likely to experience these types of conflict because they did not need to deal with powerful actors. The AB project also dealt with issues that appeared less critical: social activities rather than housing. In this sense, participants within the AB project had less to lose if the project did not achieve its expected outcomes. The different challenges faced by those involved in asset-

based approaches and those involved in rights-based approaches is something I discuss more extensively in Chapter 9.

Regarding inclusion, neither project had seemed to succeed in including people of colour. Those involved in the projects were mostly white Scottish and white British.³⁸ This is despite the fact that the AB project and the RB project were based in geographical communities that were relatively diverse. The lack of diversity was something that some interviewees seemed aware of. Finlay, a staff member within the AB project, referred to the lack of participation of people of colour:

We've not connected that well with the BME community. So that's been a bit that we could've done better. Although we're doing it now, so that's getting better. (Finlay, staff, AB project)

This same awareness was not shared by everyone. Some AB project participants thought that the AB project had a positive effect on inclusion. *Their* experiences of the project were positive. The project had helped *them* feel more included and supported. Yet, what they missed, is that most were members of the majority group. As such, their experiences were conditioned by the fact that they did not face the barriers that intersectionally marginalised people experience.

Interviewees who were not part of the majority group were far less positive about the AB's project effect on inclusion. For them, there were significant barriers that limited their participation and prevented them from feeling supported and included. Abeni, a community resident of colour not directly involved in the project, explained how those involved in the AB project sometimes overlooked, and even neglected, minority groups:

*For people who've grown up in [here], you can get inclusiveness in it.
For somebody who's new, the only inclusiveness you would get is when*

³⁸ There are some differences in how this data was recorded. The AB project did not directly monitor equality characteristics besides age and gender, so the claim that most project participants were white and Scottish or British was based on interviewees' own perceptions. The RB project had monitored equality characteristics, but I did not have access to the data. Staff members gave me a break down of the equality characteristics they had recorded, but these included both project participants and community residents. All my interviewees, the only data I had, belonged to this dominant group (i.e. White Scottish and White British).

you have to come [to the community centre], but otherwise, the social aspect within the community, sometimes you don't know if you don't have an organization that is for minorities. (Abeni, community resident, AB project)

And on this topic, she later added:

There's a high percentage of minorities that would be coming here and mixing but they're not doing it [...] sometimes it's because organizations don't understand. (Abeni, community resident, AB project)

Another interviewee, Niamh, raised concerns about the inclusion of disabled people. For Niamh, disabled people found it difficult to participate in activities because those leading the activities did not always know how to accommodate the needs and safety of all participants to ensure full inclusion. As she said:

The obstacle there is I need to make sure the belly dance [teacher] is fully aware of the physical needs and safety of people with disabilities. That can be quite a challenge because they might feel that they're not included, so they don't want to go. I have not felt included in, when some people say, "Whoa, let's go to the jam session. (Niamh, participant, AB project)

Although interviewees within the RB did not explicitly reflect upon the observable lack of involvement of minority groups, the accounts from Abeni and Niamh could easily apply to this project as well. In the RB project, like the AB project, those more actively involved were also white Scottish and white British, and as members of the majority group, were also likely to be unaware of the barriers that minority groups experienced.

The lack of involvement of minority groups in the AB project and the RB project is not exceptional. This is something that place-based community development projects experience often. In the literature, the lack of involvement of minority groups is explained by the fact that there is a long history of misrecognising and homogenising minority groups in approaches that address the community in geographical terms, as opposed to identity or interest (Emejulu, 2015; Matthews & Astbury, 2017). There is a tendency to emphasize people's shared experiences of poverty and class without explicitly recognising that such experiences are shaped by intersecting factors of race,

gender, sexual orientation, faith, disability and migrant status (Emejulu, 2011; Emejulu & Scanlon, 2016). This lack of intersectional approach unavoidably leads to situations in which those belonging to the majority group get to prioritise their claims and experiences. At same time, the experiences of those whose inequalities manifest at the intersection of two or more marginalised identities (i.e. sexuality, race, class, gender, faith, disability, and so on) are ignored (Christoffersen, 2020). In light of this, intersectionally marginalised people often prefer not to take part in placed-based projects that seek their involvement but do not grant them power to set the agenda (Emejulu, 2015). This is because, as some of my interviewees had said, their experiences and perspectives are not taken into consideration when those leading the actions do not represent them. Placed-based community projects, as Shaw, Howard and López Franco (2020) suggest, should aim for more than merely including marginalised groups, especially when those projects have not been directly initiated by them.

7.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the comparative effects of the AB project and the RB project on five indicators within the social dimension of well-being: social activities, green spaces, community facilities, community safety and community support and inclusion. These five indicators were grouped in two categories (community services and community relations) to facilitate the analysis and the discussion of my findings.

My findings suggest that the AB project and the RB project had a similar limited effect on the provision of community services for the wider community. The AB project had not improved the provision of green spaces and community facilities because doing so required resources that project participants did not have. The project had increased the number of social activities available in the community, but this success was not entirely the result of taking an asset-based approach. The social activities were run by community groups, but the AB project had to provide material resources and practical support to maintain most of these social activities going. In this sense, social activities were not strictly a 'self-help' provision, at least not under the principles adopted by asset-based approaches.

The RB project also had not improved the provision of social activities, green spaces and community facilities (apart from a communal laundry room). Some interviewees hoped to take a rights-based approach to improve the provision of community services in the future. Yet, at the time of data collection, those actions had not been taken. Those involved in the RB project were mostly focused on housing rights, and they had little capacity to make any further claims in relation to community service provision.

At the participant level the AB project seemed to have a higher impact across social activities, green spaces, and community facilities. The AB project helped participants attend community events, join community groups, and enrol in social activities. The project also enabled participants' access to green spaces and community facilities available in the community. As such, the AB project had a more significant effect on community services than the RB project.

In regard community relations (community safety, community support and inclusion), the AB project and the RB project had some similar and some contrasting effects. Both projects seemed to have a positive effect on participants' perceptions of community safety, but a no effect on community safety per se. Neither the AB project nor the RB project had seemed to influence the levels of crime, antisocial behaviour, or conflict experienced in the community, according to interviewees. However, they had helped participants feel safer. The AB project helped participants feel safer by providing them opportunities to meet and develop relationships with other community members. This was especially beneficial for participants who were new to the community or experienced loneliness. The RB project also had a positive effect on the perceptions of community safety of the wider community. Community residents felt safer because they had new doors installed and the RB project had made their concerns be 'more heard' by the local authority.

Another similarity between both projects was the low impact on inclusion. In both the AB project and the RB project, those more actively involved represented majority groups. Their approach to the community in geographical terms, and the lack of an intersectional approach, moreover, made it difficult for intersectionally marginalised groups to participate in these two projects. Those belonging to the majority group felt

included, but disabled participants and community residents of colour gave different accounts.

The AB project and the RB project also had some contrasting effects. The AB project had a positive impact on project participants, but not on the wider community. The RB project had a positive impact on the wider community, but also a negative effect on project participants. The RB project led to some conflict situations that had damaged community relations. However, my data analysis suggests that these ‘interpersonal conflicts’ were fuelled by how the local authority mishandled the communication with community residents. The following table (7.1.) summarises the comparative impact of the AB project and the RB project on community services and community relations within the social dimension of well-being.

Table 7.1. Comparative effect on social well-being

Indicators	Effect upon	Type of effect		Main point of contrast	
		AB project	RB project		
Green spaces	Participants	Positive	No effect	Positive/no effect	
	Community	No effect	No effect	None	
Facilities	Participants	Positive	(small) positive	Positive/small	
	Community	No effect	(small) positive	No effect/small	
Social activities	Participants	Positive	No effect	Positive/no effect	
	Community	Positive	No effect	Positive/no effect	
Safety	Perceptions	Participants	Positive	Positive	Both positive
		Community	No effect	Positive	No effect/Positive
	Observable	Participants	No effect	No effect	None
		Community	No effect	No effect	None
Support	Participants	Positive	Positive/negative	Positive/also negative	
	Community	No effect	Positive	No effect/Positive	
Inclusion	Participants	Low (positive)?	Low (positive)?	Both questionable	
	Community	No effect	No effect	None	

Chapter 8: Comparative impact on personal well-being

8.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the similar and contrasting effects that the AB project and the RB project had on indicators within the social dimension of well-being. In this chapter, I compare the impact of these two projects on the personal dimension of well-being. This dimension includes four indicators: (1) level of skills, information (knowledge), and education, (2) relationships, (3) mental and physical health, and (4) happiness and life satisfaction. These four indicators, as I discussed in previous chapters, are included in the framework of well-being I employ in this thesis because they contribute to people's well-being from an objective and a subjective perspective.

This chapter has four sections. Section 8.2. discusses the comparative effects of the AB project and the RB project on skills, information, and education. Section 8.3. discusses the impact on relationships. Section 8.4. discusses the impact on mental and physical health. Section 8.5 discusses the impact on happiness and life satisfaction. Section 8.6. concludes.

8.2. Effect on skills, information, and education

According to my data analysis, both the AB project and the RB project had a significant positive effect on the skills and knowledge³⁹ of project participants, and a small to no effect on their education. Regarding skills, both the AB project and the RB project helped project participants develop new skills and build on the skills they had. Participants developed communication, organisational and leadership skills. They learned how to work with other people, organise events, make decisions and apply problem-solving techniques. As one of the analysed documents from the AB project put it:

Developing new skills is central to the experience of being part of [a community group]. These include organisational development, financial management, people management, administration, record keeping, conflict resolution, child protection, relationship building and many other skills in the

³⁹ Note that although the original name of the indicator includes the term 'information', in the discussion of my findings I sometimes use the term 'knowledge' for stylistic reasons.

organisation and development of such a large [community group]. (Internal report, 2017, AB project)

Participants from both the AB project and the RB project also gained skills related to specific activities. Participants within the AB project involved in peer support activities gained coaching and listening skills, whilst those involved in cooking activities learned how to cook and sanitize utensils. Elaine, a project participant within the AB project, gave an example of some of the skills she and other participants had developed as a result of getting involved in specific community groups:

[There is] a group to learn [sic] men how to cook and [another to teach] people to use computers that have never ever used a computer before. [...] I've done a first aid not that long ago as well. If anybody collapses or anything, I can do that. You'd better not [laugh]. (Elaine, participant, AB project)

RB project participants developed skills associated to campaigning. They learned research skills, lobbying skills and other skills to help them make their campaign more effective. As Rowan said:

They've learned about doing participatory action research, they've learned about analysing information, about presenting, about demanding change [...] I think [the effect on skills], competently, is a positive direct effect. (Rowan, staff, RB project)

The impact that engaging in collective actions and community groups have on skills development has been well documented in the literature. A number of studies have found that people who participate in collective actions develop a range of organisational and leadership skills (Doel, 2005; Laal & Ghodsi, 2012; Van Dyke & Dixon, 2013; Vestergren et al., 2018), conflict resolution skills (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Laal & Ghodsi, 2012; Macgillivray, 2005; Montague & Eiroa-Orosa, 2018) and other transferable skills (Vestergren et al., 2017). Studies on asset-based and rights-based approaches also suggest there is a positive impact on skill development. People involved in these approaches learn skills related to community organising, problem solving, communication, advocacy, capacity building and group work (Blanchet-Cohen

& Bedeaux, 2014; Bull et al., 2013; Curtice & Exworthy, 2010; Dewi et al., 2016; Foot, 2012; Ife, 2009; Vaquero et al., 2014).

Besides helping participants gain new skills, the AB project and the RB project also helped those involved acknowledge the skills they already had. Asset-based and rights-based approaches are based on the idea that people have valuable skills that enable them to run their own social activities or to create their own political campaigns (Foot & Hopkins, 2010; Ife, 2009; Kretzmann et al., 2005). For interviewees, helping participants identify their own skills was a core aim in both of the projects. As Leslie, an AB project staff, said:

[We] help people in this area realize they have skills, they have experiences that are very, very useful.[...] It's about working with people to make them realize that the simplest little skill or little piece of knowledge and experience that they have is actually very relevant to the wider community (Lesley, staff, AB project).

Elsbeth, a project participant in the RB project, also talked about how the project had helped her value her own skills:

[The RB project] is really giving me a use a' the skills that I had but I just didn't really know that I had them (Elsbeth, participant, RB project)

Regarding knowledge, the AB and the RB project also had a positive effect on project participants. Both projects helped participants increase their knowledge on issues that mattered to them. The AB project provided information about activities, events, and services available in the community. It helped community groups advertise their social activities and provided information points such as community panels. As a result, people involved in the project felt more knowledgeable about the activities and services available. As Finlay said:

We do a lot of information sharing, word of mouth. People say to us, we never knew about x, y, and z until we got involved with you (Finlay, staff, AB project)

One of the AB documents I analysed indicated something similar:

Members of the group are now more aware of what's happening in the community centre, and many encourage their friends to get involved in the group and other events. [As participants had said]: 'In the past I wouldn't have known about the Fun Days and the other events which happen here...it's great to be able to get involved' (Internal report, 2018, AB project)

The RB project provided information about human rights, housing, and political participation. It offered information about flat renovations and the actions the council took to respond to residents' concerns. Like the AB project, the RB project had a significant impact on those more actively involved. Yet, the RB project also seemed to have a positive effect on the wider community. As stated in one of the RB project documents:

Residents [...] reported increased awareness and understanding of human rights, and increased confidence in using human rights to achieve change. (Evaluation report, 2020, RB project)

Ben, a community resident, also thought the RB project had helped him understand what human rights frameworks and rights-based approaches involve:

Yes, I've really [learned] a lot of things about human rights, rights-based [approaches] and so on. I think it's a positive direct [effect], yeah. (Ben, resident, RB project)

Although both projects had a positive impact on participants, there was significant differences. AB project participants gained skills and information that helped them *get on with their lives*. RB project participants, by contrast, gained skills and information that helped them *challenge their living conditions*. This difference, I argue, was the result of three intersecting factors: different activities, contrasting project aims and a different engagement with the process of critical consciousness (Freire, 2000).

First, participants gained different skills and knowledge because they engaged in different activities. AB project participants developed skills associated with social and leisure activities. RB project participants, by contrast, developed skills associated with political campaigns. The information each of the projects provided was consequently

influenced by these types of activities. AB project participants learned about community events and services available in their community that helped them increase their community involvement and support networks. RB project participants learned about rights, legislation and policies that helped them run their housing rights campaign.

Second, participants gained different skills and knowledge because, besides engaging in different activities, the projects had contrasting aims. As I discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, the RB project aimed to make changes at the structural level. The skills and knowledge participants gained were not only designed to help them pressure the council more effectively but also to promote wider social change. This is reflected in one of the documents I analysed:

Our long-term aim includes bringing cultural change, so that the rights-based approach becomes embedded into the heart of policy making, service design and delivery (Multimedia extract, 2020, RB project)

The AB project, by contrast, aimed to make changes at the individual level. The skills and knowledge participants gained were designed to help participants improve their social relationships, self-esteem, employability, and so on. As Leslie said:

It's about providing a safe environment, a nurturing environment where people can come along and develop themselves at a personal level (Leslie, staff, AB project).

Third, participants gained different skills and information because the projects involved a different level of engagement with critical consciousness. As I discussed in Chapter 2 and 6, critical consciousness involves developing a deeper understanding of the ways in which power and oppression operate, and the skills to challenge and transform oppressive conditions (Freire, 2000; Hooks, 2014; Jemal, 2017; Prilleltensky, 2003). For critical pedagogists, helping people become aware of their oppressive reality is what encourages them to challenge oppression and transform their realities (Freire, 2000; Hooks, 2014; Watts et al., 2011). RB project participants, by engaging in participatory action research, developed a degree of critical consciousness. They

reflected upon their living conditions and identified ways in which they could act upon them (McIntyre, 2007). As Rowan, a staff member on the RB project, explained:

The approach is, basically, the idea that rights holders are people who are affected by the problems. [They] are the people that should be able to name the change and that should be able to engage with and kind of mobilize human rights in a way that supports their kind of cause. (Rowan, staff, RB project).

For some participants, as the following quote suggests, engaging in this process of critical consciousness made them realise their living conditions needed to improve:

Many people living in our community just thought our situation was normal. We didn't realize that it wasn't right. Now, if we feel something's not right, we try to fix it. (Elspeth, participant, extracted from evaluation report, 2016, RB project)

The AB project also encouraged participants to reflect upon their lives and the ways they wished to improve them. Yet, unlike RB project participants, AB project participants did not undertake an analysis of power, oppression, and the impact on these on their social and living conditions. Instead, the project focused on helping participants reflect upon their behaviours and attitudes, and to find ways to manage their lives better.

The AB project helps people improve their lives by helping them make small individual changes. Through our support, encouragement, and the facilitation of social activities in a safe and non-judgemental way, participants meet their needs, build supportive networks, and find ways to cope. (Evaluation report, 2019, AB project).

The lack of direct engagement in critical consciousness is a common criticism of asset-based approaches. For critics, the focus of asset-based approaches on behaviours and attitudes is problematic because these approaches seem to ignore the influence that structural factors have on what communities can achieve (Friedli, 2013; MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014). In the view of critics, asset-based approaches contribute to

promoting the idea that the problems people experience are the result of their behaviours instead of structural injustices (Ennis & West, 2010; Levitas, 2012).

My data analysis suggests that the AB project did indeed encourage people to focus on themselves rather than on structural injustice. This showed up in how they talked about their aspirations for the future. AB project participants talked about employing their skills and knowledge to further their own personal development. Interviewees talked about how they would like to support community groups, apply for jobs, or keep improving their social networks. Eve, for instance, said she would like to keep being an active member in her community group.

My aspirations are that [my community group] will just keep on going, that my children will stay connected to that group, that my children will see me being involved with a wider group of people, than just us and their home and their school (Eve, participant, AB project).

Graeme, likewise, talked about returning to work and helping his community group:

I would go back tae the kitchen again. That way [participants in his community group] get a decent meal (Graeme, participant, AB project).

These personal aspirations contrasted with the political aspirations of RB project participants. RB project participants talked about employing their skills and information to demand further social change once they finished the housing campaign. Elspeth, for instance, talked about how she would like to take actions around social security.

I've already got a plan for what I'm going tae [laughs], I'll dae it, cause I've already, I've already looked intae it and I know how tae go about right. Do you know what my next plan is? Social security, and I know exactly what tae dae (Elspeth, participant, RB project)

The different types of aspirations that people acquire as the result of being involved in different processes has been highlighted in other empirical studies. A systematic review on the effect of social activism conducted by Vestergren, Drury and Hammar Chiriac (2017) found that people involved in political campaigns tend to experience

behavioural and attitudinal changes that make them more likely to carry out further political actions in the future.

The implications of developing different set of skills and information in relation to the idea of critical consciousness are important from a well-being point of view. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 10, the types of aspirations people develop not only have a direct impact on people's own subjective well-being, but also on the well-being of the wider community because skills and information influence what communities aim to achieve in the future.

In sum, to understand the comparative impact of the AB project and the RB project on skills and knowledge, one needs to distinguish two types of effects. The AB project and the RB project had a similar effect in the sense that project participants improved their skills and knowledge. The projects, however, had a contrasting effect in the sense that project participants developed different skills and gained different information.

Although both the AB project and the RB project helped project participants develop new skills and become more informed, these projects seemed to have no effect on project participants level of education.⁴⁰ Most interviewees thought that the projects had not helped them improve their academic qualifications or credentials. However, some interviewees within the AB project thought that helping people become more confident could have a positive indirect effect. Staff at the AB project provided individual support to project participants. One project participant, Murray, thought this support had made a difference in his case:

'Well look at me, they ask me would I a' went to college, would I a' went to uni. Never in a million years. So if it wasnae for [the AB project staff], I wouldnae be sitting here, so it was. Well, I'd probably be sitting here but I wouldnae be at college or uni, so it is. I'd just be volunteering' (Murray, participant, AB project)

⁴⁰ Understood as formal education.

Murray's case, however, may be uncommon. I did not find evidence of this indirect effect for other project participants.

8.3. Effect on relationships

The AB project and the RB project both had a positive effect on personal relationships for project participants. Both projects encouraged people to come together to participate in collective actions, and as a side effect, those more actively involved developed friendship. Eve explained how her community group went from being a group of fellow residents to becoming an 'extended family':

It's like a family. It's like a big family. Although we're all strangers, we're a family when we're all in here together, so we are. (Eve, participant, AB project)

Anne also had a similar experience:

Well, we're like a wee family. When we go to trips and one of us can't make it, you feel somebody's missing. (Anne, participant, AB project)

Interviewees within the RB project also mentioned this positive effect. The project had helped residents come together to claim their housing rights, and those more actively involved had developed a closer relationship as a result. As Duncan said:

I've developed friends from this, yeah. Certainly Elspeth, [and] I would've never met Rowan and [other staff] (Duncan, participant, RB project).

Another positive effect was on participants' relationships with family. Participants within the AB project who participated with other family members in a community group reported developing stronger bonds. As the following document extract indicated:

'The whole family have taken part in trips to visit other groups and events and competitions. This has brought them closer together and [Paul] feels the bond with his daughter has grown stronger.' (Internal report – Community Two)

Some interviewees within the RB project also mentioned having improved their

relationships with family and close friends. The flat renewals, they said, had helped some residents have a better social life inside of their homes. Residents felt less embarrassed about their living conditions and more prepared to have people around. As Rowan said:

There are some stories about people having their families at home for Christmas, for the first time ever. (Rowan, staff, RB project)

Both projects seemed to have some effect on the wider community, although this effect was smaller by comparison. The projects benefited those directly involved the most because developing closer relationships was a side-effect of engaging in the projects. But the AB project and the RB project also facilitated meetings amongst people not directly involved. These meetings were thought to potentially help residents develop closer relationships with each other. The AB project organised community events that were sometimes attended by residents who were not involved in the project. As Anne explained:

Any time we have an open day, where other different groups can come along and just let the community know what they do, what their services are, that's usually really popular. We'll get bouncing castles and things for the kids and it's usually really popular with all the different groups. I do feel that when we do host something, the community does come in, does get involved. (Anne, participant, AB project)

Interviewees within the RB project also thought there was some influence on the relationships of the wider community. For interviewees, the housing campaign brought neighbours together and changed the conversations they had. As Harris said:

Well, we meet each other going up and down in the lifts, so instead of talking about the weather [laughs], we were able to talk about the renewals (Harris, community resident, RB project)

For Ben, the RB project also made residents be more aware of their “shared interests” and people met their neighbours more often. As he said:

I didn't know Duncan at all until the general meeting. And because we live

next door to each other, essentially at the moment, we are doing things together. Of course, there has been a relationship developed but it does not extend to anybody. [Duncan and I have a] joined interest. (Ben, community resident, RB project)

The influence the projects had on personal relationships was not always perceived to be positive, however. Interviewees within the AB project and the RB project thought that the projects had also triggered conflict situations that had a negative impact on their personal relationships. Those involved in the AB project experienced conflict within their community groups. As stated in one of their internal reports:

Some members have become slightly isolated from other members of the group, and this has created tensions in the group. (Internal report, 2017, AB project)

RB project participants felt that having a closer relationship with other residents was not always positive since it sometimes put more pressure on those more actively involved. Elspeth reported that her neighbours were often coming to her house to make complains, and for her, this was difficult to manage:

Relations wi' family and friends, that was good and bad. It was good that we all got.. like you can invite people, people want tae come tae your house. Instead a' going, 'oh I'm no coming tae you'. So that was positive, and it was also negative in the fact that [residents] were constantly coming tae ma door and constantly phoning me. (Elspeth, participant, RB project)

Having positive and negative relationship experiences, as a result of engaging in collective actions, is not unusual. Other studies indicate that engaging in collective actions can help people build stronger bonds and expand their social support networks, but these can also damage relationships (Aceros et al., 2021; Harrison et al., 2019; Vestergren et al., 2019). Participants can experience disagreements, misunderstanding, exclusion, and conflict as the result of engaging in community groups and collective campaigns.

This negative effect, however, seemed to be more prevalent amongst those involved in the RB project, as I explained in Chapter 7. RB project participants challenged

powerful institutions, and as such, experience tensions and struggles that AB project participants did not seem to experience. RB project participants felt pressured by both the council and community residents. What was at stake in the RB project (people's housing conditions) was also arguably more important than improving social activities and community relations. As a result, RB project participants were more likely to experience burn out, anxiety and stress, factors which often trigger conflict. Other studies have also found that the multiple pressures that those involved in political activism experience can create conflict amongst them (Aceros et al., 2021). Despite these conflicts, however, the overall impact of the RB project, like the AB project, was thought to be positive.

8.4. Effect on physical and mental health

Both the AB project and the RB project were thought to have a positive effect on mental and physical health, but whilst the AB project only had an impact on project participants, the RB project also had an impact on the wider community.

According to my analysis, the AB project had a positive effect on the physical health of some participants, although this outcome largely depended on the type of activities participants were involved in. For instance, only participants involved in sports, walking groups or dance sessions were thought to experience improved physical health as a direct result of the project. Euan was one of these participants:

'It had a positive effect on me [...] you don't realize how much walking you actually do when you're doing archery even on a small range.' (Euan, participant, AB project)

The effect on mental health, by contrast, was thought to be experienced by a wider range of participants, regardless of the activity they were involved in. The AB project helped participants feel supported, develop a sense of purpose, reduce isolation and gain coping skills. As a result, project participants improved their mental health. Graeme, an AB project participant, referred to how the support he received from his community group helped him feel better with himself and his mental illness:

If I wasn't at the [community group], I would still be in my hoose in my depression mode because, that's where it was. I just wanted tae stay in. The [community group] actually took me away from that [...] I'm actually in a place where people are the same as me. I'm not feeling segregated against because of my illness. They don't make me feel like "he suffers from depression, don't go near him." (Graeme, participant, AB project)

Some participants also reported having fewer crises or needing less medication as a result of participating in the AB project. As the following document extract indicates:

'I do feel better and I can prove it...my depression has lifted a great deal...I haven't had an attack in 3 week, I used to get them 3 or 4 times a day'
(Lucy, Internal report, 2015, AB project)

Other studies have also found that asset-based approaches have a positive effect on mental health. Asset-based approaches tend to help participants improve core psychological areas such as self-esteem, support networks and resilience, and as a result, those involved report improving their mental health (Foot, 2012; McLean et al., 2017; McLean & McNeice, 2012; Sigerson & Gruer, 2011).

The RB project was also thought to have a positive effect on mental and physical health. Yet, unlike the AB project, this positive effect was experienced by both project participants and the wider community. A survey conducted by the RB project indicated that the improvements in heating and the reduction of mould and dampness had *"improved [residents'] mental and physical health"*.

If you have an adequate house, it reduces your fuel poverty, which means you are not starving or cold, which impacts on health in a positive way.
(Evaluation report, 2020, RB project)

Elsbeth said something similar. For her, being able to keep her house warm and dry not only helped her reduce the incidence of respiratory illnesses but also improved her mental health. As she said:

I've no had as many chest infections. I've no had any breathing problems right. [The house] is dry, there's no mould, right? That's [positive on] both physical and mental [health]. (Elsbeth, participant, RB project)

For Rowan, a staff member, it was clear that poor housing conditions were having a negative impact on the physical and mental health of residents. The RB project had contributed to improving those housing conditions and they expected that improvements in health would follow, although they did not have all the evidence yet. As she said:

I've definitely seen some progress in some people. I think maybe the process of the project has given people something to think about and to hold on to and a bit of hope. [...] On the physical health side, people are saying, "I cook more, I use my kitchen". Hopefully, the improvement to the fabric of the buildings does have a positive effect on mental health. We knew that it had a really negative effect on people. Whether the changes are enough to support people's improved mental health [we still don't know] (Rowan, staff, RB project)

The negative impact that poor housing has on physical and mental health has indeed been documented in the literature (Bonney, 2007; Pevalin et al., 2017; Shaw, 2004; World Health Organization, 2018). Damp and mould, which residents within the RB project experienced, are related to respiratory illnesses (Bonney, 2007; Evans et al., 2000). There is also a relationship between inadequate housing and poor mental health (Cattaneo et al., 2009; Clapham, 2010; Pevalin et al., 2017). The positive expectations that staff and participants had in regards health improvements, therefore, did not seem unrealistic. Yet, understanding the extent to which the RB project had a visible and long-term impact on health, beyond interviewees' perceptions, would require further evidence.

Besides the positive effects on health, some interviewees within the AB and the RB project thought there were also negative effects of project involvement on the mental health of project participants. The focus on self-help of the AB project was thought to put too much pressure on those more actively involved. A number of interviewees mentioned the challenges of expecting project participants to run their own events or

support their peers without having any training or qualifications to undertake these tasks. In their view, the people involved in the AB project often had complex needs that required specialised support work. However, the expectation was that community groups would work autonomously. This had a negative effect on some participants, who felt that running their own events or engaging in peer-support work was too stressful and demanding, given their skills and their own personal circumstances. They felt unprepared, anxious and incapable of managing certain situations. Finn referred to the feedback he had from a project participant who stopped participating in the project:

'I remember I asked a mum, if she'd look after a couple of boys that had come without their parents, which normally we wouldn't do, and she seemed okay with it but afterwards she was like, " I hated it Finn. Why did you ask me to do that? Because the kids were up and down all the time and everybody was looking at me thinking that were my kids". And after a while that person just said, "I don't want to be part of this."' (Finn, staff, AB project)

Isla, a community resident familiar with the AB project, also raised concerns:

'A lot of people don't know how to deal with people's mental health. How to cope, how to deal with them, because if someone's asking for help, alright you're trying your best to help them, but you've got no experience. [or maybe] your head's messed up, do you know what I mean? and then try to deal with other people's problems, it just gets a bit much.' (Isla, community resident, AB project)

Interviewees within the RB project also had experiences that they thought detrimental to their mental health. Those more actively involved talked about feeling pressured and fearing retaliation from the council. They believed the council did not want to engage with the rights-based approach, and as a result, was reacting defensively. Elspeth talked about how she had felt threatened:

Now it is because the council, right? are sending me letters, threatening letters. Every other week, right? [...] Because they want me to be quiet, shut up and don't get this project spread [...] They find anything tae come at you for, right? which is where a lot a' people will drop below the parapet,

you know what I'm meaning? (Elsbeth, participant, RB project)

Rowan also mentioned the challenges participants experienced as a result of engaging in rights-based approaches:

I think it's probably fair to say that every single person involved with this project has cried at some point because of mainly the response of power [...] I think it reveals in general to me that public authorities are much less ready to accept criticism than you might think or hope in 21st-century wealthy democracy. (Rowan, staff, RB project)

For some residents, it was understandable why those more actively involved experienced frustration, anger and even fear. Even though they thought it was unlikely that the council would take direct actions against residents for simply engaging in the RB project, this was a genuine fear for project participants and community residents. Neil said:

Majority of residents are frightened, frightened of the Council. You look at it this way, there's no many Council houses. There's thousands and thousands of people choking to get a Council house. Now, you get people who complain, the Council will put you in a certain category on the list: complainer (Neil, community resident, RB project)

To summarise, the AB project and the RB project both seem to have had significant positive effects on health. The AB project seems to have improved the mental health of project participants and the physical health of those involved in activities such as sports or walking groups. The RB project seems to have improved the mental and physical health of both project participants and the wider community as a result of improving their housing conditions. Yet, both projects also had some negative effects on those more actively involved. Participants within the AB project thought the focus on self-help sometimes put too much pressure on them. RB project participants talked about how feeling pressured, and fearing retaliation from the council, negatively impacted their mental health.

8.5. Effect on happiness and life satisfaction

The AB and the RB projects also seemed to have a positive effect on participants sense of happiness and life satisfaction. As other studies have indicated (See Bamberg et al., 2018; Nouvilas-Pallejà et al., 2018; Vestergren et al., 2018) being part of collective actions can make people feel happier and more satisfied with their lives. According to my data analysis, those actively involved in the AB project and the RB project had an improved sense of happiness and life satisfaction as a result of their involvement. Duncan, an RB project participant, said that getting involved in human rights *had made him 'feel happier'*. AB project documents also stated that project participants reported 'feeling good' and 'happier'. Elaine, an AB project participant, thought that participating in the AB project had helped her become more satisfied with her life. She particularly enjoyed meeting new people and engaging in social activities.

I'm more satisfied with my life now by coming to things like this 'cause I used to just stay in the house, watch grand-kids all the time and stuck in. I feel now that I can get out more, and I just tell the grand-kid, "No. Don't come. I'm not staying in." (Elaine, participant, AB project)

The impact the AB project and the RB project had on happiness and life satisfaction seemed mostly associated to three factors: purpose, relationships and a sense of accomplishment and pride. Most interviewees thought that the projects gave participants a sense of purpose. Anne, a participant within the AB project, felt happier because the project gave her a reason to be active in her community:

I do feel [the AB project] gives me a purpose [...] it makes me get up and get out however I'm feeling. I always feel better after being [in the community group]. (Anne, participant, AB project)

Duncan thought that the RB project had given him a direction and new set of goals:

I was thinking of going to ask [RB project staff] if I could become more involved with Human Rights. Even if it's only a couple of days a week, you know, because I feel like I'm not finished doing what I am doing (Duncan, participants, RB project)

The role that 'purpose' plays in well-being is widely acknowledged in the well-being literature, especially amongst those adopting eudaimonic conceptions of well-being (see Chapter 3). Purpose is thought to be a core component of psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryff, 1989; Waterman et al., 2010) and one of the most important predictors of happiness and life satisfaction (Bronk et al., 2009; Kiang & Fuligni, 2010). Studies within psychology have found that purpose leads to higher levels of optimism, enjoyment and self-esteem (Irving et al., 2017) and improved health (Boyle et al., 2009, 2010). Purpose also offers a sense of meaning and direction that helps people overcome negative emotions and life crisis (Burrow et al., 2014; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

Interviewees also referred to the positive effect that having improved relationships and a sense of accomplishment had on their happiness. As I discussed in the previous section, both the AB project and the RB project had positive effects on relationships. This positive effect also led to an improved sense of happiness and life satisfaction. Graeme, an AB project participant, explained how relating to people made him happier:

Because I come here, I'm happier, so am I. I can go out there. I can relate tae people there, so I can. Whereas before it was just, "No I don't want tae talk tae anybody." I don't want tae go out, I don't want tae go near anybody".
(Graeme, participant, AB project)

Interviewees within the RB project emphasized the positive impact of developing a sense of pride and accomplishment. Elspeth explained how the RB project had helped become prouder of her identity as a council tenant. As she explained, she no longer felt she had no right to complain just because she lived in social housing and received welfare benefits. This made her feel happier with herself:

Life satisfaction, happiness, [the RB project] just gave me... I'm going tae be truthful wi' you...it gave me the confidence that, yeah, [...] I'm a council tenant. I was getting housing benefit but actually, wait a minute, I'm the one [the council] answer[s] tae. I dinnae answer tae [the council], [the council] answer[s] tae me, do you know what I'm meaning. (Elspeth, participant, RB project)

Duncan talked about his improved sense of accomplishment and how proud he was of what the RB project had achieved:

Every human being has a right to a house, a safe, warm house, you know...[...] and we've done it. That's a legacy. (Duncan, participant, RB project)

My findings are thus consistent with previous research. Similar to what my interviewees suggested, a number of studies have found that developing positive relationships and a sense of accomplishment leads to higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction (Au et al., 2020; Burrow et al., 2014; Compton & Hoffman, 2019; Deci & Ryan, 2012; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009; Myers, 2000; Ryff, 2014; Seligman, 2012). Developing positive relationships is thought to be a strong predictor of subjective well-being (Cummins, 2005; Diener, Oishi, et al., 2003) and is also associated to higher optimism and self-esteem (Compton & Hoffman, 2019). Having a sense of accomplishment, in turn, is thought to help people create a more positive narrative of themselves and their lives achievements, and as a result, people tend to report higher levels of happiness (Compton & Hoffman, 2019, p. 407). Given this, eudaimonic well-being scholars identify purpose, positive relationships and sense of accomplishment as core components of well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011a; Waterman et al., 2010).

So far, I have discussed how both the AB project and the RB project had a similar positive effect on participants' happiness and life satisfaction. Yet, these projects also had a contrasting effect. As with other indicators, the AB project did not seem to have an effect beyond participants; the RB project did. This positive effect was not the result of residents developing a sense of purpose or accomplishment, but the result of having improved housing conditions. Housing is a core life domain for people, and as such, housing conditions strongly correlate with happiness and life satisfaction (Diener, Scollon, et al., 2003; Sirgy, 2021).

According to my interviewees, the RB project had helped community residents feel happier and more satisfied because it had helped residents enjoy being inside their houses and flats. Lucy explained how she loves cooking, but she could not cook in her kitchen before. Now, she was able to do what she loved:

Definitely [happier and more satisfied]. The kitchen, I really enjoy cooking but when I moved in here, I stopped because the kitchen was horrible, I hated being in it, but now it's all changed, it's lovely. (Lucy, community resident, RB project)

Rowan, a staff member in the RB project, also thought that residents had improved their happiness and life satisfaction as a result of being more satisfied with their housing. As she explained:

Satisfaction and happiness, I'm going to [say] between positive direct and positive indirect. I think lots of people haven't been directly involved in the [project], but when we do the survey, we can see that there is an increase in regard for where they live, and we can see from people's qualitative comments as well [...] people said "it's fantastic", "it's like living in a new house", "I'm really happy". (Rowan, staff, RB project)

These findings match other studies finding that housing conditions correlate with happiness and life satisfaction. Housing is important for most people because it provides refuge and safety (Després, 1991). It is where people undertake activities they love, express themselves and experience intimate relationships (Adams, 1984). As such, when housing conditions improve, people's sense of overall happiness and life satisfaction improve as well (Cattaneo et al., 2009; Clapham, 2010; Gür et al., 2020; Tran & Van Vu, 2018).⁴¹

Despite this correlation (satisfaction with housing and satisfaction with life), improved housing conditions, in themselves, are not sufficient to improve a person's satisfaction with life as a whole. Income, relationships, community environment, and employment, for instance, are also important life domains that, in addition to housing, can influence a person's overall judgement of life satisfaction and happiness (Diener, Scollon, et al., 2003; Rojas, 2006). This might explain why some of my interviewees, despite of acknowledging their improved satisfaction with housing, did not feel happier or more satisfied with their lives. For Neil, his distrust of the council and the problems other

⁴¹ Although it is also important to note that these effects are not always long term. There is evidence suggesting that people who experience increased levels of happiness due to improvements in their housing conditions can go back to previous happiness levels after a phase of adjustment to their new conditions (Diener et al., 2009; Wolbring, 2017)

people experienced prevented him from feeling happier, even though his housing conditions had improved. As he said:

See at the end of the day, everybody's satisfied now, because...it's been done. But the point is, you've got to think, that one percent that's not been done, there's still somebody [with] a problem. At the end of the day, I'd like somebody to come in and find that person who has a problem and fix it. Because every day, there's gonna be a problem. (Neil, community resident, RB project)

For Jane the problem was that she kept feeling lonely. Her housing conditions had improved, and she felt happier in that respect, but she could not say she was more satisfied with her life:

I'm happy with [my housing] but lonely, 'cause there's nothing for us. [...]. I don't tend to see anybody [apart from family]. (Jane, community resident, RB project)

Hence, it is important to note that when community residents interviewed said they felt happier and more satisfied, they might have been assessing how they felt in regards their housing, and not how they felt in regards their life as a whole. Having said that, for some community residents, housing conditions were one of the more important domains in their lives, and in these cases, improved satisfaction with housing could correlate more strongly with improved life satisfaction (Rojas, 2006).

8.6. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the comparative effects that the AB project and the RB project had on four indicators within the personal dimension of well-being: (1) level of skills, information and education, (2) relationships, (3) mental and physical health, and (4) happiness and life satisfaction. My findings suggest that the projects had similar positive effects across these four indicators. Both the AB project and the RB project had positive effects on participants' skills and level of information, their mental and physical health, relationships and on their sense of happiness and life satisfaction. Both projects also seemed to have a positive effect on the relationships of the wider community.

Despite these similar effects, there were some significant differences. Participants in the AB project and the RB project acquired different skills and knowledge, which led to differences in their aspirations for the future. Whilst participants within the AB project aimed to make further changes in their own personal lives, those involved in the RB project aimed to make further changes at the community and societal level.

As with other indicators, the RB project had a wider positive effect, compared to the AB project. The RB project had a positive impact on mental and physical health, and on the sense of happiness and life satisfaction of community residents not involved in the project. The AB project only had an impact for project participants.

Finally, the AB project and the RB project had some negative effects on some participants. Those more actively involved in the projects sometimes experienced significant pressures that they thought had a negative impact on their mental health. Those involved in the RB project also experienced difficult conflict situations.

The following table (8.1.) summarises the effects of the AB project and the RB project on indicators within the personal dimension of well-being.

Table 8.1. Comparative effect on personal well-being

Indicators	Specific	Effect upon	Type of effect		Main point of contrast
			AB project	RB project	
Skills Information Education	Skills	Participants	Positive	Positive	Different skills
		Community	No effect	No effect	None
	Information	Participants	Positive	Positive	Different information
		Community	Potential effect (no evidence)	Positive	Potential/positive
	Education	Participants	Positive (small)	No effect	Small/ no effect
		Community	No effect	No effect	None
Relationships		Participants	Mostly positive	Positive and negative	RB project more negative effect
		Community	Positive (small)	Positive (small)	None
Health	Mental	Participants	Mostly Positive	Mostly positive	None
		Community	No effect	Positive	No effect/positive
	Physical	Participants	Positive	Positive	None
		Community	No effect	Positive	No effect/positive
Happiness Life satisfaction		Participants	Positive	Positive	None
		Community	No effect	Positive	No effect/positive

Chapter 9: Strengths, limitations, and complementarities

9.1. Introduction

As I have discussed in the previous three chapters, the AB project and the RB project had some similar and some contrasting effects on well-being. Similar effects included a positive impact on participants' perceptions of material well-being, perceptions of community safety, support, skills and level of information, relationships, physical and mental health and sense of happiness and life satisfaction. Amongst their contrasting effects, the RB project had a more significant impact on material living conditions. It also had a wider effect, benefiting not only project participants but also community residents. The AB project, on the other hand, had a positive impact across more well-being indicators but that impact tended to be restricted to project participants. (Table 9.1. below illustrates the effect of the AB project and the RB project across indicators).

Based on my analysis, there may be a trade-off between (1) making a positive impact on participants across a wide range of well-being indicators and (2) making a larger impact on a small range of indicators but for a wider group of people. This is no easy trade-off. In confronting that trade off, it is important to consider other factors beyond the impact on well-being. In this chapter, I explore the comparative strengths and limitations of applying these two approaches in community development settings. To do so, I draw upon interview data collected amongst staff and activists from fifteen community development organisations working in Scotland (contextual research stage). Most of these organisations, as I explained in Chapter 4, were identified as following an approach that is either (1) closer to the asset-based approach, focussing on *helping people take actions to improve their life and provide self-help solutions*, (2) closer to the rights-based approach, focussing on *helping people take actions to challenge unjust structures and secure social rights* or (3) a combination of both approaches.

Table 9.1. Effect across well-being indicators

Indicators of well-being		Type of effect	
		AB project	RB project
Housing		Perceived positive effect on participants	Positive effect on participants and community
Work	Paid	Perceived positive effect on participants	Potential positive effect on participants
	Unpaid	Positive effect on participants	No effect
Income		Perceived positive effect on participants	Positive effect on participants and community
Green spaces		Positive effect on participants	No effect
Facilities		Positive effect on participants	Small positive effect on participants and community
Social activities		Positive effect on participants and community	No effect
Safety	Perceptions	Positive effect on participants	Positive effect on participants and community
	Observable	No effect	No effect
Support/Inclusion		Positive effect on participants (Except minorities)	Positive effect on participants and community (except minorities). Negative on participants as well
Skills, information		Positive effect on participants	Positive effect on participants and (small) community
Relationships		Positive effect on participants and community	Positive effect on participants and community. Negative on participants as well
Mental/Physical health		Positive effect on participants	Positive effect on participants and community
Happiness		Positive effect on participants	Positive effect on participants and community

This chapter has five sections. Sections 9.2. and 9.3. discuss the comparative strengths and weaknesses of asset-based and rights-based approaches. Section 9.4. discusses their complementarities. Section 9.5. focuses on the challenges that organisations face in combining these. Section 9.6. concludes.

9.2. Comparative strengths

Staff and activists interviewed in the contextual stage of the research thought that asset-based approaches and rights-based approaches have different strengths. Asset-based approaches were thought to be ‘*easier*’ and ‘*nicer*’ to employ. They provide more immediate and tangible outcomes, help people ‘*here and now*’ and are more likely to obtain funding. Asset-based approaches were also thought to avoid the negative effects of confronting powerful institutions. The rights-based approaches, by contrast, were thought to be more transformational, achieving long-term effects at the community level. Rights-based approaches were also thought to avoid the negative effects of blaming people for what they cannot achieve. Let me discuss these reported effects in turn.

9.2.1. Strengths of asset-based approaches

Most of staff and activists interviewed thought that asset-based approaches are ‘*more direct and simple*’. They pursue more reachable goals and, as a result, they are more likely to achieve a positive impact. By focusing on what people can achieve by themselves, participants are able to address their immediate needs. As Rebs said:

If you are doing things that are more immediately gonna have an impact on your life, your family's life, your community's life, that's something that you will feel the benefits of a lot quicker (Rebs, practitioner, LGBTQ+ organisation).

Asset-based approaches are also thought to offer a much nicer experience for those involved. They do not require challenging structures or confronting powerful actors. As such, those involved avoid the negative consequences of engaging in adversarial processes. This idea that asset-based approaches are a nicer experience echoes some of my findings in previous chapters. The AB project, as I discussed in Chapters 6 to 8, focused on making improvements on areas that seemed easier to achieve for

project participants. The project did not need to challenge powerful actors, such as the local authority, and as a result, participants did not feel they had to be in a '*constant fight mode to get things done*'. This was something that those involved in the RB project acknowledged. As Rowan indicated:

Asset-based approaches tend to be a little less confrontational. They might be a bit more cuddly and a bit less challenging to power (Rowan, practitioner, RB project)

For staff and activists interviewed, having an approach that is easier to apply and quicker to yield results explains why asset-based approaches have gained more support from policy makers and funders. Rights-based approaches, by contrast, involve '*difficult conversations about structural inequalities*' (Emma and Helen, practitioners, racial justice organisation). They also take time to be effective. As Rebs pointed out, people prefer to hear positive stories of what communities have achieved than having to reflect about what is wrong with the system.

People would rather see something tangible, that they've supported a community to do something nice rather than people getting involved in more campaigning to highlight the things that are wrong (Rebs, practitioner, LGBTQ+ organisation)

A large body of literature has highlighted the existence of a bias towards projects that are able to demonstrate positive stories and short-term outcomes. Funders and policy makers, for instance, seem to prefer projects that can prove immediate results (Duncan, 2004; Mollick, 2014) and that promise a tangible impact (Aknin et al., 2013; Verkaik, 2016). This bias is a problem for organisations engaging in activities such as advocacy and campaigning because they require longer-term interventions and find more difficult to prove their impact (Munro, 2009; Suárez, 2012; Teles & Schmitt, 2011). For instance, it is easier for organisations to prove the impact of a project on individual people than on policy or structural change. As a result, organisations following rights-based approaches are often overlooked by funders who prioritize measurable results over 'potentially' successful projects, even if the latter are likely to have a more transformational impact in the long term (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Gabriel & McElwee, 2019; Maier et al., 2016).

Indeed, such is the enthusiasm for asset-based approaches among funders, that they seem willing to accept anecdotal evidence as evidence of success. Asset-based approaches are often criticized by scholars for relying on anecdotal evidence of their impact (Friedli, 2013; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Ward, 2019). They may provide evidence based on personal experiences or staff observations that are not systematically gathered. When it comes to obtaining funding, however, anecdotal evidence seems to suffice.

The fact that asset-based approaches appeared to have short-term successes thus enabled practitioners to pursue funding. But the concern for the short-term success was not merely a funding concern. Some of my interviewees thought that helping people here and now should be prioritized over wider social change. Alan, the director of a homeless charity, thought that engaging in campaigning can be problematic if it shifts the focus of an organisation away from addressing people's immediate needs.

People now won't get the benefit of [a system] change, and we want to help people now, not in 20 years' time when we change the system. (Alan, director, homeless charity)

Other interviewees shared this view. Rights-based approaches can take too long to achieve an outcome, and this is a problem if people have pressing needs that need to be addressed right now (see also next section on limitations). As Emma, a practitioner working for a racial justice organisation, argued:

To be honest, if everybody ran away from doing [support] work and things like the small-scale community stuff, things would fall apart for individuals and we can't be having that (Emma, practitioner - racial justice organisation).

Deepa, the director of a women's faith organisation, agreed. In her view, asset-based approaches, and their focus on self-help, allows people to meet their needs when certain services are not provided, which is often the case when it comes to specialist services for minority groups. As she said:

[The advantage of self-help is that] we need to have something of our own that addresses our needs because nobody else is doing it, and that's it. (Deepa, director, women's faith organisation)

In sum, interviewees thought that asset-based approaches have three main advantages: they are easier to employ, they can better provide evidence in the short-term and they help address people's immediate needs. These advantages may explain why asset-based approaches gain the wide support of funders and policy makers.

9.2.2. Strengths of rights-based approaches

Staff and activists thought that rights-based approaches can more effectively advance social justice. Interviewees thought that, compared to asset-based approaches, rights-based approaches help achieve transformational outcomes that ultimately lead to wider social change. For interviewees, changes at the individual level might help people cope with their lives better, but they do not transform their lives. Such transformation requires addressing structural barriers. As Hannah, the coordinator advocacy organisation, said:

You can only expand your life so far when you're up against something that gets in the way, whether it's kind of poverty or other (Hannah, coordinator, advocacy organisation)

Rights-based approaches are thought to achieve more transformational outcomes because they directly address the institutional arrangements that sustain structural barriers. Kareem, a practitioner in a migrant's organisation, for instance, talked about how people's lives improve dramatically when there is a systemic change:

Your whole life will change, you know, if you are succeeding [at] challenging the system [and] get to the place where you want to be. That's the best way. (Kareem, practitioner, migrant's organisation)

Other interviewees offered concrete examples of how rights-based organisations have helped influenced 'law around housing' (Sandra, volunteer, community organisation), 'employment practices' (Lila, director, equality organisation) and

'migration control policing' (Micah, volunteer, refugee organisation), to name a few. In these cases, the transformational effects rights-based approaches achieve go beyond participants. They are experienced by the wider community. As Hannah said:

The repercussions that [our work] had goes far wider than any of us [...] It covers one in 20 people who come into contact with the [specific policy] Act. It's had a huge impact (Hannah, coordinator, advocacy organisation).

The claims made by these interviewees, emphasizing how rights-based approaches have more transformational effects than asset-based approaches, echo what I found in my comparison of the AB project and the RB project. As I discussed in Chapters 6 to 8, the impact of the RB project on well-being was experienced by the wider community, whilst the impact of the AB project was limited to project participants.

Staff and activists interviewed in the contextual stage also said that a further advantage of rights-based approaches is that they involve engaging in critical consciousness. This was also a difference between the AB project and the RB project (see Chapters 6 and 8). For interviewees, helping people understand how the barriers they face are created and sustained it is essential to achieve social justice. Dunia, an activist in a migrant's organisation, highlighted the importance of making the connections between people's individual experiences and the political and historical contexts:

When we talk about challenging [they system] we're not just talking about confronting the system, we're talking about replacing it. [...] So in order for people to get to [challenging unjust structures] is crucial that people [know] the implication and understand it in a political context and in a historical context and also how the politics impact their daily lives. (Dunia, activist, migrant's organisation)

Engaging in critical consciousness, in the view of interviewees, helps people experiencing disadvantage challenge situations in which they are blamed for the injustices they suffer. As Kat said:

That's one of the things that we want to do, is for disabled people to realise it's not their fault. You are isolated and, you know, you're in the position

you're in because of the barriers [you face], not because of you. (Kat, project manager, disabled people's organisation)

In sum, interviewees thought that rights-based approaches have significant advantages over asset-based approaches. Rights-based approaches achieve more transformational outcomes and facilitate critical consciousness. They are also thought to advance, more effectively, wider social change.

9.3. Comparative limitations

Staff and activists interviewed also thought that asset-based and rights-based approaches have significant limitations. Asset-based approaches can help sustain the status quo. Rights-based approaches can be draining for practitioners and activists.

9.3.1. Limitations of asset-based approaches:

Although most staff and activists interviewed thought that asset-based approaches have more advantages than disadvantages, they acknowledged that these advantages were at the expense of promoting wider social change. In their view, asset-based approaches work well to improve the well-being of those involved, but they have significant downsides for everyone else. One of those downsides is that the focus on self-help and service provision can sometimes '*silence what it is not working*' (Deepa, director, women's faith organisation). These approaches help participants meet their needs, but they do not address the root causes of their problems. As Sandra, a volunteer at a community organisation, said:

In the longer-term, we're not really doing very much to kind of change the context in which the kinds of problem that we tackle will arise. And to be honest, we're not even necessarily creating the conditions in which this context can be changed because we're not even managing to make [participants] more politically active. (Sandra, volunteer, community organisation)

Dunia agreed. In her view, organisations that do not explicitly challenge the system end up managing problems instead of solving them:

If [helping people provide their own solutions] is all you focus on, then you can appear stagnant, and it means that you're not addressing [the problem], you are managing poverty and you're managing the inequality (Dunia, activist, migrant's organisation)

Hannah wondered whether the focus on what people can achieve by themselves limits people's aspirations. In her view, asset-based approaches encourage people to pursue 'smaller dreams'. People focus on improving their behaviours and attitudes instead of aiming for more transformational and substantive changes.

"I can't change the world around me, but I can change how I react" which is true to a certain extent but it's very narrow and it causes people to just kind of stay small. (Hannah, coordinator, advocacy organisation)

What Hannah said echoes some of the findings I discussed in Chapter 7 and 8. My analysis suggested that the AB project, by prioritising goals within the reach of project participants, influenced participants' aspirations for the future. Project participants did not seek to make more transformative change beyond personal development. Other studies have found this effect. When organisations aim to achieve behavioural changes, they may slow-down the advancement of social justice (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Milbourne & Murray, 2017).

The focus on promoting changes at the individual level, interviewees said, is what limits the potential of asset-based approaches to achieve more substantial change. As staff and activists suggested, without explicitly targeting structural change, communities might improve their coping strategies or achieve some improvements in their lives, but nothing really changes at the wider level.

I think for the community that I work with, which has faced a lot of discrimination over the years, this kind of strategy [on self-help], it kind of helps people get through the day, but it doesn't change anything. (Rebs, practitioner, LGBTQ+ organisation)

Another downside of asset-based approaches is that disadvantaged communities can be made responsible of solving problems they have little power to act upon if nothing else changes (Frost & Hoggett, 2008). For interviewees, this helps minimise state

responsibilities and justify further welfare retrenchment. As Rachel, the director of a women's organisation, said:

Women's self-organising is really important but pushing all social change onto individuals to change themselves [can] displace the burden of change onto the people with the least power and the resources to make change happen (Rachel, director, women's organisation)

The critique that asset-based approaches can shift the responsibility onto communities is well established in the literature. Scholars studying the impact of asset-based approaches in community development settings have previously raised concerns about the dangers of overlooking socio-economic causes of disadvantage (Ennis & West, 2010; Friedli, 2013; Ward, 2019) and other structural injustices on marginalised communities (Emejulu, 2015; MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014).

A related, but less common critique, however, is the negative effect that not addressing structural injustices have upon the work of asset-based approaches themselves.⁴² As some interviewees suggested, sustaining the status quo ultimately undermines the work that asset-based approaches do at the individual level. The status quo is the root cause of many of the problems marginalised communities face and the reason why communities cannot solve these problems by providing self-help solutions. Organisations aiming to help communities address the problems they face are destined to fail if they only follow asset-based approaches. This is because what people can achieve is externally limited by the structural barriers they face (poverty, racism, discrimination, sexism, migration status, and so on). As Helen said:

There's enough evidence out there to show that regardless of the amount of personal capacity building you do, racism at institutional, social and a personal level is gonna hamper your opportunities in life. [...] you can give someone the tools they need to get a job, to speak English, to understand how the systems work, but if they're still gonna face barriers throughout their lives even after that [work you do], then we have a serious problem (Helen, practitioner, racial justice organisation)

⁴² An exception is Ward (2019) who makes a similar argument.

As the quote above suggests, asset-based approaches have reasons to widen their focus from the individual to the structural level. Yet, for some of my interviewees, given the cost of challenging structures is so high, and the prospect of successfully achieving structural change is so bleak, working at the individual level, even if it has a '*sticking plaster effect*', is more realistic. As Holly, a practitioner in a community organisation, said:

We're just sticking plasters [and] that's not really going to solve the bigger problem, but I think that the bigger problem is so big that, you know, something is better than nothing (Holly, practitioner, community organisation)

Holly's view was shared by other interviewees. As I discuss in the section below, many of the organisations that justified working at the individual level did so because achieving structural change was thought to be daunting for both organisations and activists.

9.3.2. Limitations of rights-based approaches

Most of the staff and activists interviewed acknowledged the challenges faced by those aiming to confront the status quo. Some agreed with Holly (quoted above) and thought that focusing on what people can improve by themselves is more practical. As Alan pointed out:

[Changing the system] is something that will take so long, and it's so complex, that it's easier to try and help people [at the micro level] (Alan, director, homeless charity)

Interviewees directly involved in rights-based approaches also agreed with the view that challenging the status quo is more difficult to do. As Emma said, '*getting involved at a structural level is time consuming [and] there's never an easy and straightforward way to get your voice heard*' (Emma, practitioner, racial justice organisation). Yet, for those involved in rights-based approaches, pursuing goals that are more difficult, complex, or time-consuming are not reasons to give up on them. In their view, more achievable goals, such as those of asset-based approaches, do not help advance social justice.

These interviewees, however, identified other problems with rights-based approaches. Rights-based approaches, they said, can put organisations funding at risk. Organisations following rights-based approaches tend to have more difficulties to obtain funding, not only because evidencing their outcomes is more complex (see above), but also because their approach is perceived to be too adversarial. Interviewees claimed that community projects are more likely to experience a reduction, or even withdrawal, of their funding if they become too critical.

I think a lot of public authorities who used to fund some of the right-based approach organisations feel that, "well, all you do is complain. You just keep sending us complaint letters after complaint letters, and then you take us to court. Why would we want to fund you?" (Lila, director, equality organisation)

Hannah made a similar claim. She talked about how undertaking advocacy work can end up in a loss of funding. As she said:

An organization can be very effective [doing their advocacy work but] might be pissing off commissioners who would be less than favourable to them getting the next contract. (Hannah, coordinator, advocacy organisation)

Other interviewees described how there are even explicit funding requirements that prevent organisations from undertaking campaigning and lobbying. Dunia talked about how her organisation is simply not allowed to take part in any campaigning. As she said:

What they said is that they cannot fund us to do campaigning, they can only fund us to do awareness raising (Dunia, activist, migrant's organisation)

Although funding restrictions to undertake campaigning might be less explicit in Scotland than in other countries in the UK,⁴³ the fear of losing funds is an issue that most community organisations following right-based approaches experience at some point regardless of where they practice. A number of scholars have noted the negative impact that engaging in advocacy and campaigning can have on project funding

⁴³ There are legal differences in Scotland and in England in regards organisations' ability to campaign whilst receiving public funds.

(Bassel & Emejulu, 2014; Christoffersen, 2020; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Skloot, 2000). In England, the Charity Act (2016) imposes restrictions on organisations wishing to undertake campaigning and lobbying activities (Milbourne & Murray, 2017, pp. 7–8). Given this funding environment, community organisations, especially those with limited resources, may end up dropping their plans to follow right-based approaches.

Although I did not find that the RB project had experienced a problem with funding, this was something that one of the organisations supporting the project feared. As I discussed in Chapter 5, the RB project was supported by two organisations: one was a statutory institution focused on human rights issues, and the other was a housing association. The financial support of the statutory institution was not at risk, but, according to the interviewees, the housing association involved in the project feared some form of retaliation from part of the local authority. At the time of my data collection, the organisation had not experienced any changes in its funding.

Besides funding concerns, another problem with rights-based approaches is that they can have a negative effect on participants. This negative effect is widely identified in the human rights literature (Bennett et al., 2015; Hankey & Ó Clunaigh, 2013; Ife, 2009, p. 219; Kindornay et al., 2012). Since the goal of realising systemic change is much more difficult to achieve than behavioural change, it makes them more likely to experience burnout and anxiety (Aceros et al., 2021, pp. 2914–2916; Gulliver et al., 2021, pp. 21–22). Such negative effects were identified in my study of the RB project. As I discussed in Chapter 7 and 8, many project participants experienced higher levels of conflict. They also felt threatened. They worried how the local authority might react. As Rowan said:

Unfortunately, we have seen some people in a situation where the Council have tried to come back at them for participating in this (Rowan, staff, RB project)

Staff and activists interviewed during the contextual stage of my research said something similar. Kat talked about how some activists in the organisation she works for, which is run for and by disabled people, can face negative consequences if they take part in protests and direct actions. As she said:

They are part of [name of the activist group] but when they come and do their stuff, we have to ask people not to take photographs or to film [them], because if the DWP sees [them], they'll say "well, you're capable of working". So that's an ongoing issue. (Kat, project manager, disabled people organisation)

For some interviewees, the negative impact that rights-based approaches have on participants pose a dilemma for organisations and practitioners. Rights-based approaches must ensure that marginalized groups lead actions so that meaningful change is achieved. This principle is rooted in the idea of self-determination and the belief that those most affected by social injustices are best positioned to address them (Collins, 2002; Freire, 2000; Hooks, 2000). If marginalized communities are not at the forefront of the actions, their experiences and perspectives are likely to be misrepresented, and their needs and rights will remain unaddressed (Crenshaw, 2013; Emejulu, 2011; Shaw et al., 2020; Yeo & Moore, 2003).

However, those more actively involved in rights-based approaches (disadvantaged and marginalised groups) are also more likely to experience the negative effects of confronting powerful duty bearers. Given this, some interviewees wondered whether there might be an unequal (and unfair) distribution of the costs of pursuing social justice. This raised ethical concerns for practitioners in a privileged position. As Rebs pointed out:

For us [practitioners] to make a change in the society, I need you [participant] to open up all these wounds and talk about all the difficulties that you've experienced so that someone who has more power than you is moved to make a change. And there's a difficulty there, because it's a very effective technique but it can be very difficult for communities. (Rebs, staff, LGBTQ+ organisation)

Rowan also highlighted this problem in reference to the RB project. In her view, one of the biggest challenges she faced was protecting the wellbeing of project participants when following the right-based approach. She questioned the extent to which practitioners, in a position of privilege, should even promote the use of right-based

approaches if they are unlikely to suffer the negative consequences of applying them. As she said:

How you manage [the impact of power responses] coming from the perspective of a human rights institution where your responsibility is towards other people? Because as [a rights organisation], we are free to say what we want [but] we have to use that freedom responsibly [because] we are supporting people to engage in rights processes that challenge power and authority and decision making. That has a consequence for the people who've been involved. (Rowan, staff, RB project).

Similar concerns have been raised in the literature on collective action and allyship. It is widely acknowledged that the risks that disadvantaged groups take when engaging in collective actions, especially if they involve confronting powerful institutions, are higher than the risks advantaged groups take (Droogendyk et al., 2016). This is also a problem when those in a position of privilege, including practitioners with no personal connection to the communities they work with, assign the responsibilities of combating injustice to those experiencing the injustice (Sumerau et al., 2021).

In community development settings, for instance, dominant discourses of practice often position practitioners in the role of 'giving agency' and 'empowering' disadvantaged groups to pursue 'their' claims (Emejulu, 2011). Such discourses position practitioners as 'outsiders'. This position can lead practitioners to believe that their role is to support disadvantaged groups, instead of to 'act in allyship' and prevent them from bearing all the costs. This relates to Rowan's question in regards her duty to ensure the well-being of the community she works with.

Yet, the literature also identifies the problem of acting as an 'ally' when practitioners are not part of the disadvantage group they work with. Groups in a position of privilege, including practitioners, can contribute to deepen inequalities when working alongside disadvantaged groups (Radke et al., 2020). Activist and practitioners, in a position of privilege, have historically co-opted the collective actions of marginalised groups by prioritizing the goals and needs of those in privileged positions, even if unintentionally (Bernstein, 2005). They tend to be motivated by their emotional needs (minimise their sense of guilt), place themselves at the centre of the action or expect gratitude for

supporting marginalized group causes (Christoffersen, 2020; Droogendyk et al., 2016; Park et al., 2022). Given this, community organisations that aim to balance the representation and participation of disadvantaged groups and the responsibilities of practitioners acting as ‘allies’ are likely to experience tensions (Radke et al., 2020; Sumerau et al., 2021).

In this section, I have stressed the emotional and mental costs that right-based approaches can have on participants. It is worth noting, however, that, in my study of the RB project, I did not find evidence suggesting that those involved in rights-based approaches regret adopting it. In fact, as I discussed in Chapter 8, the opposite is true: those involved in the RB project hoped to pursue further claims and become more involved in these types of actions.

Given each of these approaches carry significant limitations, interviewees thought that one possible way of avoiding the trade-off between improving the well-being of project participants ‘here and now’, or improving the well-being of the wider community, was to combine both approaches. In the next section, I discuss the extent to which both approaches can be combined and whether, by combining them, organisations can overcome the limitations of each approach.

9.4. Complementarities between approaches

Many of the staff and activists I interviewed thought that asset-based and rights-based approaches are not mutually exclusive. Communities might achieve better outcomes if they applied them in combination. For some interviewees, both approaches should be simultaneously employed. As Hannah said:

I think in the ideal world, we'd be doing both. (Hannah, coordinator, advocacy organisation)

Other interviewees thought that organisations and community activists should be able to follow one or the other approach depending on their energy levels and their personal circumstances. Dunia thought that participants involved in rights-based approaches might need the space to engage in self-care and boost their energy to keep confronting the status quo. The asset-based approach, in her view, can provide that safe space to

focus on yourself, and gather the social and emotional momentum to challenge the system.

If you're gonna do [a rights-based approach] and stand outside and say "oh, I'm an asylum seeker" you're exposing yourself to the world, so the only way you can do that successfully is if you take actions to improve your life and provide self-help solutions. Because [challenging unjust structures]... there are times you gonna have a setback, be broken, be exhausted, be depleted and this [self-help] is the place where you [go then] (Dunia, activist, migrants' organisation)

Other interviewees thought that, rather than pursuing both approaches together, one approach should precede the other. Interviewees more actively involved in asset-based approaches thought that working at the individual level is the first step needed to move towards a rights-based approach. In their view, both approaches need to be combined but disadvantaged groups cannot engage in rights-based approaches if they do not have the skills, knowledge, and confidence required to confront the status quo. The asset-based approach, in this sense, is thought to be 'the first step needed' to help people build that confidence and capacity. As Kareem pointed out:

I think you need to start here ideally [referring to 'take actions to improve your life and provide self-help solutions']. You know, build experience, knowledge and then gradually move towards ['take actions to challenge unjust structures and secure social rights'] (Kareem, practitioner, migrants' organisation)

This was also an idea suggested by those involved in the AB project. For Murray, an AB project participant, it was essential to meet people's individual needs before engaging in actions to pursue structural change. In his view, it is not realistic to ask people to engage in campaigning when they have more pressing needs to attend to:

You cannae' expect somebody to go intae the community and start challenging to get that road open when their ain needs arenae met, know what I mean? They're no interested. The last thing they want tae think about

*dain' is writing a campaign letter tae y'ur local councillor, know what I mean?
(Murray, participant, AB project)*

However, for other interviewees, rights-based approaches should come first. In Holly's view, it is difficult to help people meet their needs if nothing is changed at the structural level. Both approaches need to be combined but pursuing structural change is '*the first step needed*'. As she pointed out:

I would say the underlying ethos of the project would be around providing local people self-help solutions [but] to get there, we have to do a bit of campaigning and activating and challenging some of the strategies, policies, legal stuff, laws, whatever. (Holly, practitioner, placed-based community organisation)

Although there were disagreements as to which approach comes first, most interviewees thought that both approaches complement each other. A number of scholars have made similar claims. In their view, when both approaches are combined, the strengths of each approach remain, but limitations are reduced (Landry & Peters, 2018b, 2018a; Ward, 2019). Julien Landry and Brianne Peters (2018b) argue that there are significant synergies between the two approaches. In their view, when these approaches are combined, community projects achieve a higher impact on well-being. Ward (2019) also argues that an asset-based approach may achieve wider social change if it incorporates a right-based framework, such as the capabilities approach.

Although the arguments in favour of combining approaches can be persuasive, these arguments are largely theoretical. Scholars acknowledge this and recognise that, in practice, combining approaches might be more challenging than it appears in the theory (Landry & Peters, 2018a, p. 14). This is, indeed, what my findings suggests. These two approaches might seem compatible, but as I discuss in the section below, combining them has significant disadvantages in practice.

9.5. Barriers to combining approaches

My analysis of data suggests that community organisations wishing to combine both approaches face four significant barriers. These are: lack of capacity/skills, external requirements, managerial restrictions, and ideological constraints.

Lack of capacity/skills. Interviewees thought that community organisations, and especially small grassroots organisations, might find it difficult to combine these two approaches because they lack the relevant skills and resources. As Kareem pointed out, engaging in campaigning requires specific skills and resources that many organisations do not have.

Ideally [community organisations] do a bit of both but in reality, of course, it's not possible for each organisation to have the arm, you know, for campaigning. (Kareem, practitioner, migrants' organisation)

Lila also thought that community organisations wishing to combine these approaches would require additional resources that are not always available:

I think it is possible [to combine them], but I think you then need something that helps in terms of resources. [For instance], there's a lunch club that we are aware of that they work with minority ethnic older people. We've been trying to get them to be more active in terms of taking part in consultations. The worker only get[s] paid for doing four hours a week, [the time for] organizing the lunch club and nothing else. So, then they would need additional resources. (Lila, practitioner, director, equality organisation)

As these quotes suggest, combining approaches is not easy. Rights-based approaches tend to be more difficult to apply because they are resource intensive and require specific skills and knowledge (Androff, 2015). Rights-based approaches can also have negative consequences on those applying them. Combining approaches would not make the rights-based approach any easier to follow. Organisations aiming to combine approaches will need to find extra resources to undertake campaigning activities. They will also need to increase their capacity to provide individual and group support given the negative impact that engaging in rights-based work can have on those involved.

External requirements. Interviewees also thought that the requirements imposed externally on organisations create obstacles to combining these approaches. Community organisations need to comply with certain regulations. These regulations sometimes act as straightjackets confining organisations within a particular approach.

As Hannah explained, the advocacy organisation she works for has tried to include other activities besides advocacy but had to label everything they did as advocacy work because, legally, that is what they are required to do.

If we were to drop advocacy we'd have to wind down because our purpose is advocacy. We are not allowed legally; we can't do anything except advocacy. Some of [the] stuff [we try to do] is probably a bit blurry and we call it 'advocacy', but I know some other advocacy organizations think it's not really [doing advocacy] (Hannah, coordinator, advocacy organisation).

Interviewees also talked about funding as one of the external requirements that prevent organisations from combining asset-based and rights-based approaches. Yohara thought that the ability of an organisation to combine approaches depends purely on their funders. As she said:

Funding. It's as simple as that. It's based on funding. For grassroots organizations or not even grassroots, third sector organizations, community organisation, everything is based on funding. What are they funded to do? (Yohara, practitioner, minority ethnic grassroots organisation)

Other interviewees suggested that aiming to combine approaches can even be more detrimental to an organisations' funding than following a single approach. As I have discussed, organisations following rights-based approaches tend to find it more difficult to secure their funding. Yet, once their funding is secured, they have no problems in this respect. This is because they have been funded to follow a rights-based approach. Organisations that decide to combine asset-based and rights-based approaches can struggle, however, if different funders pull them in different directions or if they are traditionally funded to undertake only one of the approaches.

To give one example of this problem, Holly works in a place-based community organisation that claims to combine both approaches. The organisation follows, mostly, an asset-based approach, but it is also active in community campaigning. When I interviewed her, she was not sure whether her organisation would continue to receive funding from the council. She thought that combining both approaches might have put

funding at risk because her organisation was partially funded by the local authority they were critical of:

We probably shouldn't be as critical or as active as we are in terms of calling to question some of the decisions and the impact of the decisions because we probably wouldn't be in this funding situation that we're in at the minute if we were less critical. [...] Bottom line is that this is about a local authority, who are partly claiming that the reason [of reducing our funding] is that the government is not giving them enough money, but [the local authority] also reduces the opposition of the voices that might actually question what they're about. (Holly, practitioner, place-based organisation)

As these quotes suggest, organisations wishing to combine both approaches might experience a drop in funding. They might also need to make administrative changes. These obstacles, according to my interviewees, are not easy to overcome.

Managerial restrictions. Interviewees thought that organisations aiming to combine both approaches can face internal obstacles. Many community development organisations are managed top-down, and those in managerial positions tend to make most of the decisions regarding which approach an organisation follows. As Alan admitted:

If you take [our homeless organisation] as an example, the decision in the end largely falls to me. I listen to staff, I listen to those who we journey with, I listen to volunteers, I hear what their passion is, I hear what they care about, I hear the difference they want to make, and I conclude that putting ourselves in a campaigning space would mean that they are less likely to do things they're passionate about. (Alan, director, homeless charity)

Emma and Helen also thought that the decision of which approach to follow largely depends on what those in managerial positions want to do. As they said:

[It'll depend on the] ethos of your founder and your board [and] what the people who are involved in your management actually believe in (Emma and Helen, practitioners, racial justice organisation)

Community organisations that function vertically (not everyone involved has the same decision-making power) might thus experience their managers as the first main barrier to combining both approaches. Those in managerial positions might justify their decisions by referring to the historical identity of an organisation, or in Holly's words '*how [a project] is originally set up*' (Holly, *practitioner, place-based organisation*). Managers might also base their decision on more pragmatic concerns, referring to external requirements such as funding or legal restrictions.

Ideological constraints. For my interviewees, inevitably, the decision of which approach to follow reflects a particular view about how change is achieved. As I discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, if an organisation adopts the view that social change starts at the individual level, this organisation is more likely to follow an asset-based approach. If an organisation adopts the view that social change starts at the structural level, this organisation is more likely to follow a rights-based approach. Reconciling these contrasting views of how change is achieved is not easy because they are often based on opposing ideological perspectives. For Emma and Helen, this is the reason why combining these approaches is not as easy to do:

I think you're heading in two different directions. It's gonna be crazy but I think it's about where you believe the blame for the inequalities lie. Does it lie with the people experiencing disadvantage or does it lie with the people who created the disadvantage. And I don't think you can work towards both those ends effectively at the same time. (Emma and Helen, practitioners, racial justice organisation)

Rebs also thought that the ideological perspectives of those involved in the community projects will ultimately influence the direction the project follows:

I think it's probably based on personal understandings of how you make a difference in the world. So my background is in a very particular kind of activism [that targets structural change] which makes me feel that this is the most effective way to change the world. (Rebs, practitioner, LGBTQ+ equality organisation)

To add complexity, managers, funders, staff, volunteers, and community participants might all hold contrasting perspectives that pulls them in different directions. Some interviewees talked about the difficulties they experience when they feel their ideological perspectives do not match the direction of the organisation they work in. As Sandra pointed out:

Most of us feel quite uncomfortable and feel a bit disconnected between our political views and ideas and motivations, and the day to day of [service provision] (Sandra, volunteer, grassroots community organisation).

Some organisations might be open to having an ideological debate, but even debating the issue can conflict with urgent priorities. Sandra reports this tension within her organisation:

We would like to be able to have broader discussions with people about a political situation, their role, what they can do etcetera. But the truth is that our drop ins are always so full of people waiting outside [that] everything has become very just down to the bare minimum service provision essentially. So just like, 'what's your problem, how can we help you', solve it, 'okay bye', 'next one', you know. At the end of the day, that is what we're doing at the moment. (Sandra, volunteer, grassroots community organisation).

Therefore, although most of my interviewees thought that asset-based and rights-based approaches should ideally be combined, they were aware of the challenges in doing so. For them, organisations aiming to combine approaches are likely to face significant barriers. These barriers may be practical such as lack of capacity or funding restrictions, or they may be ideological.

Are these barriers insurmountable? It is important to acknowledge that some sectors within community development have combined different approaches. A notable example is the equality sector, which has historically combined self-help solutions, service provision and campaigning (Christoffersen, 2020, p. 144). Yet, even this sector experiences significant challenges as the result of undertaking different approaches. Equality organisations tend to be overstretched in their capacity

because they have to offer the provision of services that marginalised communities are excluded from, while also seeking to campaigning to advance rights. They are also comparatively underfunded and under-resourced (Craig, 2017; McCabe et al., 2010; Witter, 2017). As Ashlee Christofferesen (2020) identifies, even though equality organisations are more likely to combine approaches, they often specialise across three main functions: community engagement, campaigning and service delivery (p. 144). Perhaps, given the challenges of engaging in self-help and campaigning, many organisations, including even equality organisations, end up focusing on one or the other.

In sum, combining asset-based and rights-based approaches does not seem to address the limitations that each approach has when applied independently, as some scholars hope. My analysis of data suggests rather the opposite. Instead of reducing limitations, combining approaches might increase the problems organisations face. Organisations wishing to engage in rights-based approaches will still need to find ways to secure their funding and the well-being of project participants, as I discussed in Section 9.3.2. They will also need to increase their capacity and skills, while navigating funding requirements and legal restrictions. Even if they manage to overcome these barriers, the decisions of managers and board members might still prevent them from undertaking a combination of approaches, especially if following one or another approach is based on ideological perspectives of how change is achieved.

9.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have compared the strengths and weaknesses between asset-based and rights-based approaches, their potential complementarities, and the barriers that organisations trying to combine both approaches face. Applying asset-based and rights-based approaches independently have some advantages but also significant limitations. Asset-based approaches seem more effective at improving the individual well-being of project participants in the short-term and tend to access more funding. However, these advantages come at the cost of missing opportunities to pursue more transformational change. Organisations following rights-based approaches, by contrast, might achieve more transformational outcomes but these advantages can

be at the expense of those directly involved in rights-based approaches, who tend to experience the negative effects of confronting the status quo. These negative effects can be experienced by organisations (lack of funding or fear of losing funding) and participants (retaliation or fear of retaliation).

One might think that combining the approaches would be the correct solution. However, my analysis of the data suggests that combining the two approaches is difficult. Organisations can be prevented from combining the approaches by external barriers (funding, legal restrictions) and internal barriers (lack of capacity, managers, and ideological constraints). Even were organisations to find ways to overcome external and internal barriers, they still need to deal with the limitations of each approach. In the final chapter of this thesis, I make some suggestions to help community development organisations address the question of which approach to follow by assessing the conditions under which one approach might be preferred over the other.

Chapter 10: Conclusions

In the last two decades, there has been a policy drive to increase the participation of communities in development, often with a focus on communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. The rationale behind this drive is that communities that become more actively involved in their own development can better address their problems and enhance their well-being. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015) and 'Building the Big Society' (UK Government, 2010a) are two examples of policies aimed at increasing the participation of communities in local development.

Several approaches can help communities become more active players in their own development. Amongst them, asset-based approaches and rights-based approaches have become leading strategies. Both follow a bottom-up approach that places communities at the centre of decision-making. Both seek to enhance the well-being of communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. However, these approaches employ different methods. Asset-based approaches prioritize change at the individual and community level. Rights-based approaches prioritise changes at the structural level.

This thesis provides the first in-depth empirical comparative analysis of the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on the well-being of socio-economic disadvantaged communities. In this final chapter, I provide a summary of my key findings and I discuss the implications and contributions of my research.

10.1. Key findings

My findings suggest that asset-based and rights-based approaches have different effects on the well-being of socio-economic disadvantaged communities. I summarise my findings by making a distinction between (1) observable impacts on the well-being of project participants (2) perceived impacts on the well-being of project participants, (3) impact on the well-being of the wider community. My findings also suggest that, beyond the effect on well-being, these approaches have different implications for the people and organisations applying them.

10.2.1. Observable impact on the well-being of project participants

Evidence suggests that rights-based approaches and asset-based approaches have different effects on material and social well-being, but a similar effect on personal well-being. Rights-based approaches seem to have a higher observable impact on the *material dimension of well-being* of project participants. In my study of the RB project, I found that by following a rights-based approach, the project was able to improve participants' housing conditions. These improvements in housing also had a positive effect on income, perceptions of community safety, community support, skills and knowledge, mental and physical health, relationships and sense of happiness and life satisfaction. The AB project, by contrast, had a more limited effect on material living conditions. At most, it gave participants opportunities to engage in unpaid work, and it provided support when participants needed emergency accommodation or extra income by signposting them to relevant services.

Asset-based approaches, however, seem to have a higher observable impact on the *social dimension of well-being*. In my study of the AB project, I found that by following an asset-based approach, the project was able to help project participants increase the provision of social activities and improve community support networks. As a result of this work, the project also had a positive effect on green spaces and community facilities, perceptions of community safety, skills and knowledge, relationships, physical and mental health, and sense of happiness and life satisfaction. The RB project, by contrast, had a smaller positive impact across indicators within the social dimension of well-being. The project did not improve the provision of social activities or community services (apart from a communal laundry room). The project also had a negative effect on community support since RB project participants were more likely to face conflict with other community residents.

My comparison of the AB project and the RB project also found that both projects seemed to have a similar effect on indicators within the personal dimension of well-being. Project participants, in both projects, reported having improved their skills, and level of information, relationships, physical and mental health, and their sense of happiness and life satisfaction. Many of these positive effects, as I have stated before, were the by-product of improved living conditions (in the case of the RB project) and improved social well-being (in the case of the AB project). RB project participants felt

happier and healthier because they had better housing conditions. AB project participants felt happier and healthier because they felt more socially connected. Some of these positive effects were also the by-product of engaging in collective actions and developing a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Both the AB project and the RB project offered participants a sense of purpose. They also helped participants develop new sets of goals and acquire a more positive narrative of themselves and their achievements.

Despite these similar effects on indicators within the personal dimension of well-being, there were also some significant differences. AB project participants gained skills and knowledge that helped them cope with their lives. RB project participants gained skills and knowledge that helped them challenge their living conditions. Both projects encouraged participants to reflect upon their lives and the ways they wished to improve them. However, The AB project focused on behaviours and attitudes, encouraging participants to develop skills and to find ways to manage their lives better. The RB project encouraged participants to engage in a critical consciousness. The project helped participants analyse their social conditions and the ways in which they can act upon them (Freire, 2000; McIntyre, 2007).

Finally, evidence suggests that both approaches had some negative impact on the well-being of project participants. The AB project, with its emphasis on self-help, sometimes put too much pressure on those more actively involved. Project participants were expected to run their own events and support their peers autonomously. This sometimes made them feel stressed and anxious. RB project participants also felt pressured. In their case, the pressure came from community residents and duty bearers. Community residents often directed their frustration with the local authority towards those more actively involved in the RB project. This had a negative impact on project participants' relationships with residents and their mental health. The local authority tended to react defensively to the claims made by the RB project, which made project participants feel threaten and unsafe. In both projects, however, the positive impacts on well-being outweigh these negative effects.

10.2.2. Perceived impact on the well-being of project participants

Evidence suggests that asset-based approaches have a more positive effect on the perceptions of project participants. In my study of the AB project and the RB project I found that those involved in the AB project had a more optimistic view of what they were able to achieve. Those involved in the RB project, by contrast, were more likely to express the limitations they faced and to downplay their achievements. In both projects, the perceptions of project participants of what they had achieved sometimes did not match what they had actually achieved. I argue that this mismatch can be explained by the different narratives and conceptions of well-being adopted by asset-based and rights-based approaches.

Assets-based approaches promote *positive thinking*. They aim to create a more positive vision of communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; McKnight & Russell, 2018). They emphasize ‘the good’ in communities, encouraging people to focus on the knowledge, skills, and assets they have, instead of their problems (García, 2020, pp. 69–70). They encourage communities to re-imagine their future and become more hopeful about what they can achieve (Pattoni et al., 2016, p. 47). Rights-based approaches, by contrast, promote *critical thinking*. They encourage communities to analyse how power and oppression operate. They also encourage communities to become more aware of the impact that social, political, economic and cultural contexts have upon their lives (Freire, 2000; Hooks, 2014; Jemal, 2017).

In my study of the AB project and the RB project I found that these narratives were internalised by participants. AB project participants had experienced almost no changes in their material well-being, and many acknowledged the limited effect of the project on the provision of community services. However, the AB project helped them feel better about their lives and their community. For them, the AB project was a ‘confidence builder’. It helped them feel more optimistic about their future and what they were able to achieve. As a result, they assessed the impact on well-being by focusing on their aspirations (what they hoped to achieve) and less on their realities (what they had achieved).

Interviewees within the RB project assessed the impact on well-being from a different angle. RB project participants acknowledged the positive achievements made on material well-being and were keen to apply rights-based approaches to improve community services and other areas besides housing. However, their assessments were rooted more in their realities than in their aspirations for the future. They understood that duty bearers (in their case, the local authority) limited their ability to achieve positive changes. They were also more likely to highlight the areas of well-being the RB project had not improved. To this extent, they were less optimistic than AB project participants.

The different perceptions between those involved in the AB project and those involved in the RB project can be partly explained by the different conceptions of well-being adopted by participants in each of the projects. AB project participants seemed to understand well-being as a *goal*. They assessed the project's impact by capturing the gap between their level of well-being (before the AB project) and the level of well-being they hoped to achieve (as a result of the AB project). Playing up the achievements of the AB project was their way of asserting their hopes and aspirations for the future. RB project participants, by contrast, understood well-being as a *right*. They assessed the project's impact by capturing the gap between their current well-being and the level of well-being that, in their view, they are entitled to. Downplaying the achievements of the RB project was their way of asserting that they were entitled to better.

The AB project and the RB project also seemed to influence participant's perspectives of how well-being is achieved. Those involved in the AB project seemed to adopt an internalist view of well-being based on the premise that people can improve their well-being by changing perceptions and how they feel (becoming more optimistic) (Ahuvia et al., 2015; Atkinson et al., 2020). Those involved in the RB project, by contrast, seemed to adopt an externalist view of well-being based on the premise that for people to improve well-being, the external conditions that limit people's autonomy (and capabilities) need to be addressed (Alkire, 2005; Haybron, 2016; Nussbaum, 2001; Sen, 1999).

Understanding the reasons behind the mismatch between what the projects achieved and what they were perceived to achieve is key to assessing the impact of asset-

based and rights-based approaches on well-being. Failing to understand this mismatch, I could have concluded that asset-based approaches have a higher impact on well-being, but only because those involved developed a more optimistic view about what the project was able to achieve. Conversely, I could have concluded that rights-based approaches have a lower impact on well-being, but only because those involved were more likely to emphasize the challenges and problems they experienced.

The mismatch between perceptions and reality can be particularly problematic for communities following an asset-based approach. As some critics have argued, when 'changing one's mind' is viewed as the path to well-being, people's assessments of well-being might not represent their realities. People might develop a false perception of their quality of life and overlook their problems (Ahmed, 2010; Ferguson, 2011; Friedli, 2013).

Yet, the positive impact that asset-based approaches have on perceptions are also meaningful from a well-being point of view. A number of studies suggest that when people become more optimistic, they can better cope with stress and adversity, they are more likely to engage in positive behaviours, and they also tend to have better health (Diener & Chan, 2011; Seligman, 2011b; Tugade et al., 2004). The impact the AB project had on perceptions can be problematized, but it should not be discounted.

10.2.3. The impact on the well-being of the wider community and potential to achieve wider social change.

Evidence suggests that asset-based and rights-based approaches had contrasting effects on the well-being of the wider community. Asset-based approaches have a positive impact on participants' perceptions and on participants social and personal well-being. Yet, they do not seem to have an impact on well-being beyond participants. The lack of effect on the well-being of the wider community is the consequence of prioritising changes at the individual level.

Asset-based approaches encourage participants to reflect upon their lives, their communities, and the ways they wish to improve them, with an emphasis on behaviours and attitudes. They help project participants develop new skills and relationships, create their own social activities and community events, and enhance

their support and social networks. Because asset-based approaches do not tend to directly challenge service provision or structural inequalities (Fisher & DeFilippis, 2015; MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014), only those who participate benefit from these approaches.

In my study of the AB project, I found that only those who were more actively involved in the project had improved their well-being as a result. Those who joined social activities and community groups experienced benefits on their sense of community support, mental health, skills, happiness and life satisfaction, community safety, relationships and so on. Those who did not get involved in the AB project, at most, may have witnessed a growth in the number of community events going on around them, but little more. The AB project did not change the provision of community services, housing conditions, employment, green areas, or the income of the wider community.

Rights-based approaches, by contrast, seem to have a much larger effect on the wider community. Rights-based approaches challenge structural inequalities and the social conditions that communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage face. These approaches encourage participants to reflect upon how power and oppression impact their lives. They help project participants take actions to identify their rights and pressure duty bearers to fulfil those rights (Androff, 2015; Broberg & Sano, 2018; Ife, 2009; Plipat, 2005). Because rights-based approaches seek to make changes at the structural level, the wider community can benefit from their achievements, and not just those directly involved in these approaches.

The RB project provides a good example of how rights-based approaches achieve this wider effect. The RB project pressured the local authority to improve the housing conditions of council tenants in a particular geographical community. As a result, the council undertook housing renovations that improved the housing conditions of all council tenants (and not only those involved in the RB project). The improved housing conditions had positive effects on other areas of well-being. Residents reported having improved their income, health, sense of safety, and happiness and life satisfaction. Residents also talked about having improved their sense of community belonging and

support. For them, knowing that people involved in the RB project were willing to fight for the rights of everyone in the community, made them feel safer and more supported.

The different impact of the AB project and the RB project on the well-being of the wider community also provides an indication of the potential for asset-based and rights-based approaches to achieve social change. Proponents of asset-based approaches have claimed that improving the well-being of project participants can scale up to the community and societal level. In this thesis, I found no evidence that this was the case. My findings suggest that asset-based approaches only have an impact on those directly involved. One of the reasons is that these approaches pursue changes that people have the most power to accomplish. They focus on what people can achieve by themselves, and as a result, they are better able to address people's immediate needs. However, the focus on improving the well-being of project participants comes at the expense of achieving wider social change. This limitation is clear from my interviews. Other studies have found similar results (Fisher & DeFilippis, 2015; Ward, 2019, 2021).

I found that rights-based approaches, by contrast, achieve more transformational outcomes at the community level, which suggests they have a greater potential to achieve wider social change. This was acknowledged by most of the staff and activists I interviewed. Interviewees provided examples of how organisations following rights-based approaches have been able to transform housing conditions, employment practices, gender policies and migration control policing. Rights-based approaches can achieve wider social change because they directly challenge social injustices. Other studies on rights-based approaches have reached similar conclusions (Noh, 2022; Schmitz, 2012). Yet, there is also a broad agreement that further evidence on the impact of rights-based approaches at the structural level is required (Broberg & Sano, 2018; Plipat, 2005; Sano, 2020).

10.2.4. The impact of applying asset-based and rights-based approaches at the organisational level

Evidence suggests that asset-based approaches are easier to apply than rights-based approaches. Asset-based approaches involve activities that are simpler and more direct. They help people come together to organise community events, social activities

and provide social support. They also pursue more attainable goals. As a result, asset-based approaches seem better able to address the needs of communities 'here and now'.

Community development organisations applying asset-based approaches also seem to find it easier to obtain funding. They benefit from a bias in favour of projects that can more quickly demonstrate success (Aknin et al., 2013; Duncan, 2004; Mollick, 2014; Verkaik, 2016). This bias is a problem for organisations engaging in rights-based approaches because they tend to require longer-term interventions, and they often find it more difficult to prove that they have had the effects they claim (Munro, 2009; Plipat, 2005, pp. 29–32; Teles & Schmitt, 2011). As a result, organisations following rights-based approaches tend to be overlooked by funders, who often prioritize measurable results in the short term over transformational outcomes in the long term (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Gabriel & McElwee, 2019; Maier et al., 2016).

Even putting funding aside, organisations applying rights-based approaches face additional barriers. Legal and funding restrictions hinder organisations from undertaking political actions, campaigning and adversarial strategies to promote structural change (Bassel & Emejulu, 2014; Milbourne & Murray, 2017, pp. 7–8; Skloot, 2000). The methods rights-based approaches can be resource intensive. Organisations often require more knowledge, skills, and material resources to apply rights-based approaches than asset-based approaches.

Finally, evidence suggests that rights-based approaches take a larger toll on participants, compared to asset-based approaches. Because achieving systemic change is more difficult than achieving behavioural change, those involved in rights-based approaches were more likely to experience burnout, stress and anxiety (Aceros et al., 2021; Gulliver et al., 2021, pp. 21–22). The staff, activists, and project participants that I interviewed acknowledged this. They felt threatened by duty-bearers. They experienced higher levels of conflict. This had a negative impact on their individual well-being.

10.2. Implications for community development practice

My findings suggest that organisations applying asset-based and rights-based approaches must make trade-offs when deciding which approach to follow. Organisations following asset-based approaches seem to have a more positive effect on social and personal dimensions of well-being of project participants. They also have a more positive effect on the perceptions of those actively involved. They can achieve more immediate outcomes, help people address needs ‘here and now’, and access more funding. However, these advantages seem to be at the expense of achieving more transformational outcomes and improving the well-being of the wider community. Organisations following rights-based approaches, by contrast, seem more effective at achieving transformational outcomes and improving the well-being of the wider community. Yet, these advantages may be at expense of the well-being of activists and project participants.

One might hope that combination of asset-based and rights-based approaches could address these trade-offs. Such a combination might allow organisations to both address immediate needs whilst pursuing wider social change. But the evidence suggests that combining approaches is not easy. To be successfully accomplished, it might require organisations to have different teams engaging in different activities, developing specific skills and knowledge. This is not something a typical resource-stretched community organisation can afford.

Indeed, even in theory, the combination is not easy. The approaches are, after all, grounded in opposing narratives, conceptions of well-being (internalist and externalist) and beliefs about how social change, and well-being, is achieved. Nor can we assume that combining the approaches will overcome the limitations of applying each separately. Community projects may still face the negative effects that following rights-based approaches can have on funding and participants, for instance.

Given the limitations of applying asset-based and rights-based approaches in combination, and the limitations of applying them independently, perhaps there is a more important question to address than ‘which approach to follow?’. This question is: under which conditions might one approach be preferred over the other? To answer this question, I suggest that practitioners, activists, and socio-economic

disadvantaged communities weigh four different factors: political context, funding available, capacity and support, and urgency of needs.

Political context.

Those involved in community development need to get a sense for how right-based approaches might be received in the geographical area in which they work. If duty bearers, such as local authorities or national governments, seem open to a rights-based framework, then community organisations should consider taking this opportunity to apply rights-based approaches. Applying rights-based approaches, in this context, might be more desirable for two reasons. First, duty bearers that are used to work under rights-based frameworks may be less likely to respond adversely to community organisations claiming rights or engaging in campaigning and advocacy. As a result, organisations may minimise the negative impact that engaging in rights-based approaches can have on those involved, whilst also maximising the advantages of achieving transformational outcomes for both project participants and the wider community. Second, duty bearers used to work under rights-based frameworks might also be more sensitive to right holders' claims. If this is the case, organisations pursuing structural change may find it easier to achieve their goals.

Funding available.

Those involved in community development also need to consider funding limitations. As I discussed above, rights-based approaches, despite advantages in terms of pursuing transformational outcomes, find it more difficult to obtain funding. If there happens to be a source of funding that would allow an organisation to undertake a rights-based approaches, either as a single approach or in combination, they should consider pursuing this option.

Is there a way rights-based organisations could better overcome the 'funding obstacle'? Perhaps so. Although the main focus of rights-based approaches is to achieve change at the structural level, these approaches also achieve positive outcomes at the individual level. My findings suggest that the RB project had a similar effect to the AB project on indicators within the personal dimension of well-being, and these effects were not only a side-effect of improved housing conditions. The RB

project helped participants enhance their confidence, skills, and level of information, sense of happiness, mental health, relationships, and community support. These are all outcomes that can be evidenced more easily than outcomes at the structural level. Organisations following rights-based approaches may want to use these outcomes to report success in the short-term. By doing this, they might minimise the funding bias that often favours immediate results.

Capacity and resources.

Community development organisations also need to assess what each of these approaches involve in regard to their capacity and resources. If organisations have the capacity to combine both approaches, this option may bring significant advantages for project participants. As my interviewees reported, participants might need to move between one and the other approach depending on the risks involved, their energy levels, and their potential vulnerabilities. Some project participants may need to engage in self-help when services are needed but not provided, whilst other project participants engage in campaigning. Some project participants may be able to bear the costs of challenging duty-bearers when others cannot. If organisations do not have the capacity to combine approaches, then those involved in community development must carefully consider the trade-offs of following the approaches independently. They will need to weigh the likelihood of achieving transformational outcomes at the community/social level, and the urgency of addressing participants' immediate needs.

Urgency of needs.

Those involved in community development might need to weigh the pressure of addressing immediate needs 'here and now' against addressing structural injustice 'in the longer term'. There will be times, as my interviewees suggested, in which communities might need to prioritise responding to people's immediate needs, and in these cases, asset-based approaches might be more appropriate. Communities are more likely to address their immediate needs if they focus on what they can change by themselves. Yet, organisations aiming to address immediate needs should find ways to avoid the 'sticking plaster effect' of working at the individual level. One way they can avoid it is by working in direct coalition with organisations engaging in rights-

based approaches. For instance, organisations that strategically decide to follow an asset-based approach to address immediate needs might be able to support rights-based organisations, either directly or indirectly, in their right claims. Organisations that strategically decide to follow an asset-based approach to increase their likelihood of obtaining more funding might be able to share part of their funding or resources to support underfunded organisations taking rights-based approaches. In this sense, coalition and solidarity can help those involved in community development address, as a collective, immediate needs and social justice when both approaches cannot be combined by single organisations.

10.3. Contributions to research on community development and well-being

Besides the contribution to community practice, this thesis also aims to contribute to academic research on community development and well-being. Within community development, this thesis contributes to the study of asset-based and rights-based approaches. It provides the first in-depth empirical comparative study of the impact of these two approaches on the well-being of socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, there are multiple approaches employed in community development practice. Most of these approaches are aimed at facilitating the inclusion of communities in decision-making processes, enhancing well-being and advancing wider social change. There are some studies exploring how asset-based approaches work (Cassetti et al., 2020; Foot & Hopkins, 2010; Hopkins & Rippon, 2015; McLean & McNeice, 2012; Ward, 2021; J. Woodward et al., 2021). There are also some studies exploring how rights-based approaches work (Dowler & O'Connor, 2012; Ife, 2009; Noh, 2022; Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003; Sano, 2020). Some of these studies have assessed the impact of these approaches on some areas of well-being. This thesis builds upon these previous studies and expands our knowledge of how asset-based and rights-based approaches impact material, social and personal dimensions of well-being.

However, the most significant contribution of this thesis is on how the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches compare. Research on community development tends to focus on the study of single approaches, methods, and techniques. Comparative research is rare. This thesis contributes to the study of asset-based and rights-based approaches by comparing their impact on well-being at individual, community, and organisational level. The thesis employs an innovative well-being framework that combines White's (2010) well-being framework and the Oxfam Scotland Humankind Index (Oxfam GB, 2013). By combining these two frameworks, my thesis retains a focus on well-being that is relevant to community development practice (White's framework) whilst including the perspectives of communities facing socio-economic disadvantage in Scotland (Oxfam's framework). This framework allows for an in-depth comparison of the influence that asset-based and rights-based approaches have on (1) single indicators of well-being, (2) broad dimensions of well-being (material, social and personal), (3) different perspectives (objective and subjective) and (4) different levels (project participant and community). Other studies aiming to compare the impact of community development approaches on well-being might benefit from employing the framework developed in this thesis.

By drawing upon the experiences of community projects applying asset-based and rights-based approaches, this thesis also contributes to understanding 'what works' in community development. Evidence in this thesis could be used to inform the decisions of practitioners, activists and, most importantly, communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. If communities are to lead their own development, it is crucial that they have critical information about the comparative effects that applying different approaches may have on their well-being. My thesis has demonstrated that different approaches might involve significant trade-offs between material and social dimensions of well-being, or between the well-being of project participants and the well-being of the wider community. Understanding how different approaches compare is critical to help communities identify trade-offs and make more informed decisions about which approach/es to follow.

This thesis also aims to contribute to well-being research. The study of well-being is often too focused on outcomes: how different approaches have an impact on people's well-being. My thesis however indicates that these outcomes (impact on well-being)

can vary significantly when taking into account the processes that people are involved in (the type of approach). A significant finding in my thesis is that people's assessments of well-being can be strongly mediated by the approach they are involved in. Asset-based and rights-based approaches, according to my findings, influence how people perceive their well-being and what they can achieve. Understanding how these approaches influence people's assessments is critical to determine the impact that these two approaches have on well-being. Failing to understand this influence can lead to misleading results. In the context of my research, I could have reached the conclusion that asset-based approaches have a higher impact on well-being, but only because those involved had a more positive view about what the project was able to achieve. I could have also reached the conclusion that rights-based approaches have a lower impact on well-being, but only because those involved are more likely to emphasize the challenges and problems they experience.

I hope my findings can be a call for action to researchers. When assessing well-being, it is important that researchers do not only focus on the outcome (how people assess their well-being across different indicators) but also understand how people make sense of their own well-being depending on the type of processes (approaches) they are involved in.

10.4. Final remarks and future directions for research

Back when I started my PhD, I set a clear goal: to find out the answer to a question that I have constantly faced as a practitioner. My involvement in community development was full of tensions, contradictions, ambiguities and unknowns. I was not sure how to best help the people I worked with, and I felt trapped between 'navigating the system' and 'changing the system'. I undertook this PhD to help provide valuable information about how different approaches work, so that those involved in community development can make more informed decisions. To do so, I followed a systematic research process. I was aware of my biases and I wanted to be 'fair'. I methodically designed my research, selected case studies, developed a well-being framework and conducted my data analysis. Through this process, I found that there were no easy answers to the question I initially pursued: which approach is better?

This thesis has shown that both asset-based and rights-based approaches can help communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage enhance their well-being, but in regard to different indicators. Asset-based approaches have a higher effect on project participants across social and personal indicators of well-being, but a limited effect on material well-being. Rights-based approaches, by contrast, have a higher impact on material well-being and at the community level.

At the organisational and practice level, asset-based approaches are easier to apply and to demonstrate positive outcomes because they prioritise individual behavioural changes over structural changes. Rights-based approaches, on the other hand, achieve more transformational outcomes at a community, and societal level. However, organisations following rights-based approaches face more challenges. Some of these challenges are due to external regulations and incentives (funding) that may limit their ability to engage in political actions. Other challenges are the result of duty-bearers' inadequate responses when socio-economic disadvantaged communities make right claims and pressure duty bearers to fulfil their responsibilities.

My findings have significant implications for community development practice. Applying asset-based and rights-based approaches independently involves making significant trade-offs. Given this, community development organisations must weigh considerations regarding the political context, funding available, organisational capacity, and urgency of needs when deciding which approach to follow.

This thesis has addressed a significant gap in the literature. It provides the first in-depth comparative study of the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on the well-being of socio-economic disadvantaged communities. However, to fully understand how these two approaches work and the effects they have, further research is required. My thesis has compared the impact of these two approaches on a relatively short-period of time. It would be valuable to consider what effects they have in the longer term. More longitudinal studies are thus required. It would also be valuable to have comparative empirical research that includes other approaches to community development beyond the two I have focussed on.

While further research is required, this thesis makes a significant contribution to community development practice and research. By providing empirical evidence on

the comparative effects of following asset-based and rights-based approaches in community development settings, this thesis helps practitioners, activists, and most importantly, communities facing socio-economic disadvantage make more informed decisions about how they wish to set about improving well-being and advancing social change.

Appendix 1. Participant information sheets and consent forms

1.1. Participant information sheet for project participants and community residents

Invitation to participate

You are invited to take part in a PhD research study to explore the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on well-being.

This participant information sheet is aimed at helping you decide whether you would like to participate. It explains the aims of the study, what your participation involves and what happens when the study ends. It also includes confidentiality procedures.

This document is three pages long. Consent Form is attached in a separate document. Please make sure you have read and understood all the pages.

General information about the research

This PhD research is aimed at studying how participating in an asset based or a rights based approach project may have an influence on people's material, social and personal well-being.

This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and supervised by Dr. Elke Heins and Dr. Jan Eichhorn from the department of social policy at the University of Edinburgh. This research has passed the ethical review procedure of the School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh.

The research findings will be included in the final PhD thesis and used in articles for academic journals, reports and presentations at national and international conferences.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Before doing so, you can ask as many questions as you need, and you do not have to decide immediately whether you will participate in this study. If you finally agree to participate, you will be given a copy of both this participant information sheet and the consent form.

Access

If you have any difficulty participating in the research, please let the researcher know to make any required adjustments.

What your participation involves?

In the interviews, you will be asked a number of questions face to face. For instance, questions about the community you are part of, your involvement in this project and how it has influenced your sense of well-being and the wider community.

Interviews can take up to 2 hours and they will be audio- recorded to facilitate the analysis data analysis.

Participation is voluntary. You can choose not to answer any specific question without leaving the interview. You are also free to decline to participate or to withdraw at any time during or after the interview. Note that once the analysis of the data has been conducted, withdrawing your consent might not be possible. Yet, you can ask the researcher to destroy part or all the audio recorded and the transcripts before the analysis of the data is conducted (this is up to two calendar months from the time you had the interview).

Confidentiality

All information you provide will be confidential. This means that only the researcher and her supervisors will have access to interview's audio and non-anonymised transcripts. Only if you disclose information that is believed to put your safety or of others at an unacceptable risk, the researcher will inform the appropriate services to ensure your continued safety. Should this situation arise, the researcher will discuss it previously with you.

Personal information will not be gathered, apart from the name of the project you are involved in. This information is only collected for data analysis and it won't be revealed or published as such. It will also be stored separately from the information you provide in the interview, to ensure answers are not traceable.

Benefits and potential risks

As a participant in this research, you will contribute to the study of community-led approaches and well-being. You will be able to share your knowledge and experience with other communities, practitioners, organisations and policy makers interested in community development and social policy.

There are no known direct risks for you in this research. During the interview, you might want to talk about sensitive topics around your own involvement in the project. In these cases, you might experience a degree of distress or discomfort. Should any issue arise, the researcher will make sure that you are supported and that, if you wish, you are signposted to a specialized service.

Reimbursement

You can claim travel expenses incurred from participating in this research, on submission of receipts. You will also receive a 10£ voucher to thank you for your participation.

Further information

Contact Cristina Asenjo Palma, [REDACTED] if you have any questions or concerns about this research at any stage. You can also contact the main supervisor of this research project, Dr. Elke Heins [REDACTED].

1.2. Participant information sheet for practitioners and external agents

Invitation to participate

You are invited to take part in a PhD research study to explore the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on well-being.

This participant information sheet is aimed at helping you decide whether you would like to participate. It sets out the aims of the study, what your participation involves and what happens when the study ends. It also includes confidentiality procedures.

This document is two pages long. Consent Form is attached in a separate document. Please make sure you have read and understood all the pages.

General information about the research

This PhD research is aimed at exploring how asset and rights based approaches may influence the well-being of geographical communities and/or communities of interest in Scotland across three dimensions: material, social and personal.

This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and supervised by Dr. Elke Heins and Dr. Jan Eichhorn from the department of social policy at the University of Edinburgh. This research has passed the ethical review procedure of the School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh.

The research findings will be included in the final PhD thesis and used in articles for academic journals, reports and presentations at national and international conferences.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Before doing so, you can ask as many questions as you need, and you do not have to decide immediately whether you will participate in this study. If you finally agree to participate, you will be given a copy of both this participant information sheet and the consent form.

Access

If you have any difficulty participating in the research, please let the researcher know to make any required adjustments.

What your participation involves?

In the interviews, you will be asked a number of questions face to face. For instance, questions about the project and the community you work with, project's goals, achievements and how the project has influenced the people involved in it as well as the wider community.

Interviews can take up to 2 hours and they will be audio- recorded to facilitate the data analysis.

Participation is voluntary. You can choose not to answer any specific question without leaving the interview. You are also free to decline to participate or to withdraw at any time during or after the interview. Note that once the analysis of the data has been conducted, withdrawing your consent might not be possible. Yet, you can ask the researcher to destroy part or all the audio recorded and the transcripts before the analysis of the data is conducted (this is up to two calendar months from the time you had the interview).

Confidentiality

All information you provide will be confidential. This means that only the researcher and her supervisors will have access to interview's audio and transcripts.

Personal information will not be gathered, apart from your role and the name of the project you work with. This information is only collected for data analysis and it won't be revealed or published as such. It will also be stored separately from the information you provide in the interview, to ensure answers are not traceable.

Only if you disclose information that is believed to put your safety or of others at an unacceptable risk, the researcher will inform the appropriate services to ensure your continued safety. Should this situation arise, the researcher will discuss it previously with you.

Benefits and potential risks

As a participant in this research, you will contribute to the study of community-led approaches and well-being. You will be able to share your knowledge and experience of how asset or rights-based approaches work with other practitioners, organisations and policy makers interested in community development and social policy.

There are no known direct risks for you in this research. During the interview, sensitive topics around your own practice or the communities you work with might arise indirectly. In these cases, you might experience a degree of distress or discomfort. Should any issue arise, the researcher will make sure that you are supported and that, if you wish, you are signposted to a specialized service.

Reimbursement

You can claim travel expenses incurred from participating in this research, on submission of receipts.

Further information

Contact Cristina Asenjo Palma, [REDACTED] if you have any questions or concerns about this research at any stage. You can also contact the main supervisor of this research project, Dr. Elke Heins, [REDACTED]

1.3. Consent form for all interviewees

Researcher: Cristina Asenjo Palma

You are invited to take part in a research study to explore the impact of asset-based and rights-based approaches on well-being. Before agreeing to take part, please read the participant information sheet.

Tick if you agree that

- I have read and understood the participant information sheet.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary; I can withdraw from the interview and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.
- I understand that my personal details will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that the information I provide will be anonymized before being used in publications and other research outputs.
- I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and that the audio will be securely storage without any link to my personal details.
- I agree to maintain the confidentiality of other participants in this research.
- I voluntarily agree to take part in the project.

Name of participant	Signature	Date
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Researcher Signature	Date
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Appendix 2. Interview schedules

2.1. Interview schedule for practitioners – case study

THE PROJECT/WORK: How would you describe the work of (organisation’s name)?

- Core aims.
- Approach.
 - If concepts like *empowerment, responsibilities, self-help, campaigning and so on* are used, ask for clarification on what those terms mean.
 - If well-being comes up, follow up with questions like: How is well-being understood in the context of the project?
- Example of activities
 - How are decisions made?
 - How spaces of participation are created and what are the terms of engagement?
- People involved.
 - Strengths and potentials of people?
 - Particular needs, problems?
 - Social context?

THE INFLUENCE ON WELL-BEING:

- How is well-being understood in the context of this project?
- What is the influence of (organisation’s name)’s work on the well-being of the people involved?
 - Give interviewees the tokens with the indicators extracted from the well-being framework and ask them to locate them depending on the type of effect the project may have upon the well-being of the people involved.

Positive direct effect	Positive indirect effect	No effect	Negative effect

-(After they place them) Could you tell me a bit more why did you put them here? Can you give me an example?

-Are there any other areas that the project might have an influence upon that are not reflected in these?

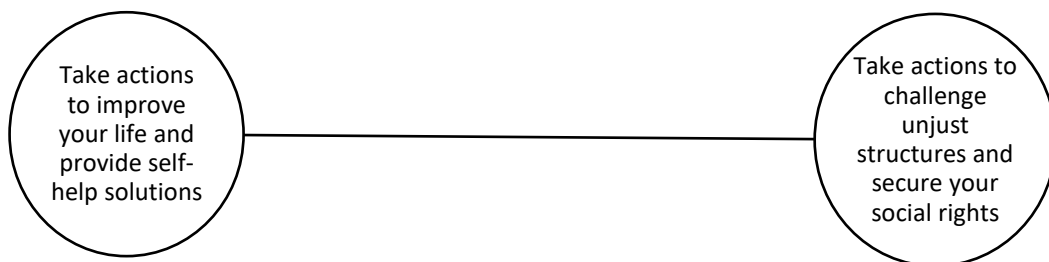
•What about the influence of (organisation's name)'s work on the well-being of the wider community (beyond the people involved)?

-Ask interviewees to move the location of indicators according to the type of effect the project may have upon the wider community beyond the people involved.

THE CHALLENGES: (What challenges this project face?)

- What has the project been unable to achieve?
- In what way this project could have a potential negative effect on people's well-being?
- Who are not participating? How do you explain their lack of participation?

THE APPROACH:



- Where along this continuum would you place the project you are involved in?
- In what way is it closer to (...)?
- What are the advantages of following this approach?
- What are the disadvantages of following this approach?
- To what extent could (organisation's name) follow a different approach?
 - If by then, the term 'asset-based' or 'rights-based' approach has not appeared, ask: Has the term 'asset-based'/'rights-based approach' been used within the context of your project? If yes, ask for clarification on what this term means.

2.2. Interview schedule for project participants – case study

INITIAL CHAT: How did you become involve?

THE COMMUNITY YOU LIVE IN/PART OF:

- Could you describe the community you live in/you are part of?
 - Strengths and potentials of people?
 - Particular needs, problems?
 - Social context?

THE PROJECT/WORK YOU ARE INVOLVED IN: How would you describe the work of (organisation's name)?

- Core aims.
- Approach.
 - If concepts like *empowerment, responsibilities, self-help, campaigning and so on* are used, ask for clarification on what those terms mean.
 - If well-being comes up, follow up with questions like: What well-being means to you?
- Example of activities.
 - How are decisions made?

THE INFLUENCE ON YOUR WELL-BEING:

- Give interviewees the tokens with the indicators extracted from the well-being framework and ask them to locate them depending on the type of effect the project may have upon them.

Positive direct effect	Positive indirect effect	No effect	Negative effect

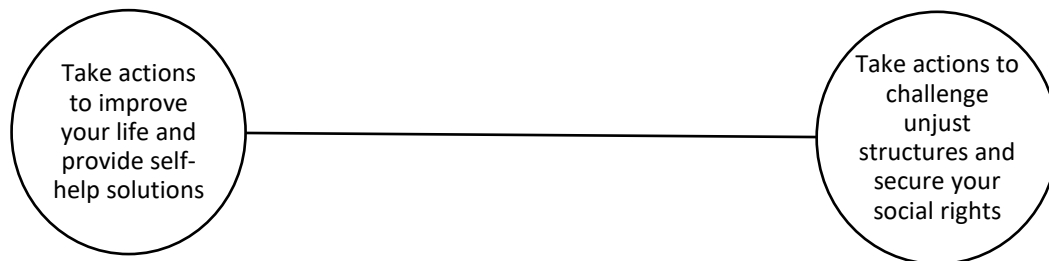
- (After all have been located) Can you tell me a bit more about why you put it there? Can you give me an example?

- Has your involvement in (organisation's name)'s work influenced any other area of your life beyond these?
- Do you think (organisation's name)'s work may also have an effect on the wider community (beyond yourself and other people involved)?
 - Ask interviewees to move the location of indicators according to the type of effect the project may have upon the wider community beyond the people involved.

THE CHALLENGES:

- What are the challenges you have faced while being involved in this project?
- What has this project been unable to help you with?
- In what way this project could have a potential negative effect on any areas of your life and well-being?

THE APPROACH



- Where along this continuum would you place the work you have done with (organisation's name)?
- In what way is it closer to (...)?
- What are the advantages of following this approach?
- What are the disadvantages of following this approach?
- To what extent would you like (organisation's name) to follow a different approach?
 - If by then, the term 'asset-based' or 'rights-based' approach has not appeared, ask: Has the term 'asset-based'/'rights-based approach' been used within the context of your project? If yes, ask for clarification on what this term means.

2.3. Interview schedule for community residents – case study

THE COMMUNITY YOU LIVE IN/PART OF: Could you describe the community you live in/you are part of?

- Strengths and potentials of people?
- Particular needs, problems?
- Social context?

THE PROJECT:

- Are you familiar with the work of (organisation’s name)?
- How would you describe the work of (organisation’s name)?
- Have you ever considered getting involved?
- What would it need to happen for you to get involved?

THE INFLUENCE ON WELL-BEING:

•In your view, has the work of (organisation’s name) influenced the community (beyond the people involved)?

-Give interviewees the tokens with the indicators extracted from the well-being framework (below) and ask them to locate them depending on the type of effect the project have had upon them or the wider community.

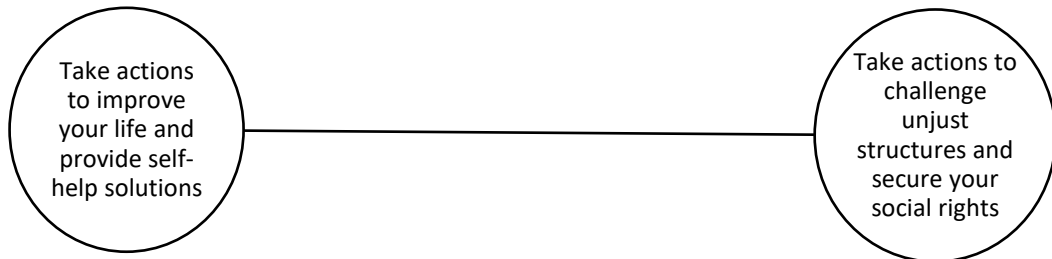
Positive direct effect	Positive indirect effect	No effect	Negative effect

- (Every time they locate an indicator) Can you tell me a bit more about why you put it there? Can you give me an example?
- (Once they have located all of them), Has the work of (organisation’s name) made an impact in any other area beyond these?

THE CHALLENGES:

- What has this project been unable to help the community with?
- In what way this project has had a negative effect on your life or on the wider community?

THE APPROACH



- Where along this continuum would you place the work of (organisation's name)?
- In what way do you think it is closer to (...)?
- If you were involved in (organisation's name), which approach would you like to follow? Can you tell me a bit more?

2.4. Interview schedule for external agents – case study

THE COMMUNITY: Could you describe community (x)?

- Strengths and potentials of people?
- Particular needs, problems?
- Social context?

THE PROJECT: Could you describe the work of (organisation's name)?

- Core aims
- Approach
- Example of activities

THE INFLUENCE ON WELL-BEING:

•In your view, would you say the work of (organisation's name) has had an effect on the people involved?

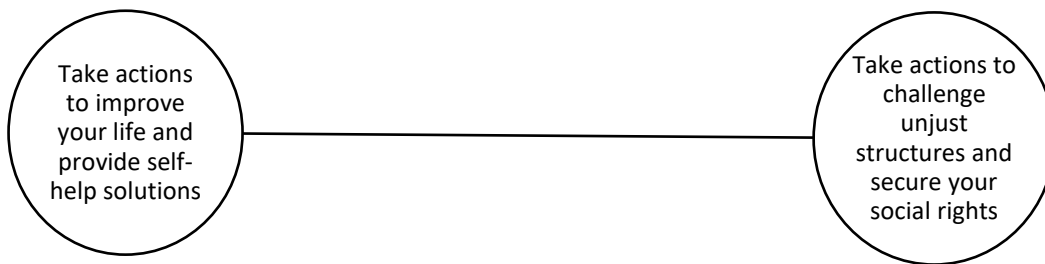
- Refer to the indicators extracted from the well-being framework.

•Do you think (organisation's name)'s work may also have had an effect on the wider community (beyond people involved)?

THE CHALLENGES:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of this project?
- What would you say are the challenges this project face?
- What has this project been unable to deliver?
- Would you say that this project has had a negative effect on the community or the
people involved?

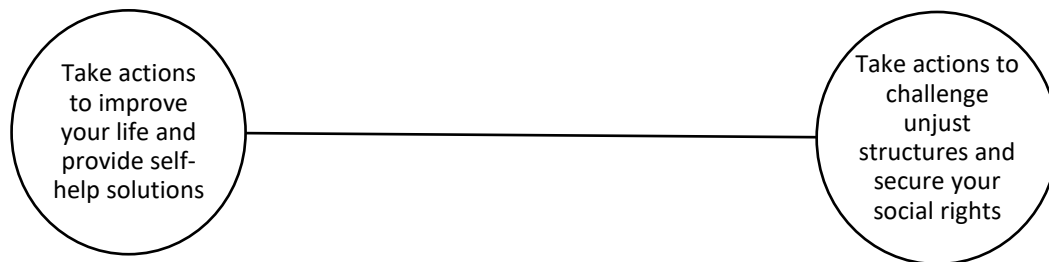
THE APPROACH



- Where along this continuum would you place the work of (organisation's name)?
- In what way do you think it is closer to (...)?
- To what extent can (organisation's name) follow a different approach?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach?

2.5. Interview schedule for practitioners – contextual interviews

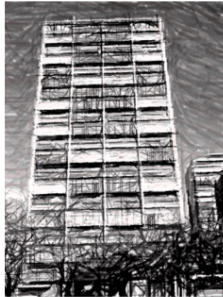
THE APPROACH



- Where along this continuum would you place the work of the project/organisation you are involved in?
- In what way is it closer to (...)?
- What are the advantages of following this approach?
 - How might this approach have an influence on well-being?
- What are the disadvantages of following this approach?
 - In what way this approach could have a negative influence on well-being?
- To what extent could (organisation's name) follow a different approach?
- What would be the advantages/disadvantages of following the other approach?
- To what extent could both be combined?
- As a practitioner, have you encounter a dilemma when deciding your working approach, in terms of whether to focus your work on 'what people can achieve by themselves' or to focus your work on 'actions to try to change the system'?

Appendix 3. Call for participation

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR STUDY ON HOUSING RIGHTS AND WELL-BEING.



Original photo by [REDACTED]

**ARE YOU A RESIDENT OF [REDACTED]
OR [REDACTED]?
CAN YOU SPARE 1 HOUR FOR AN INTERVIEW?
PARTICIPANTS WILL BE COMPENSATED (£10 VOUCHER).**

- This is part of a doctoral PhD research exploring the influence of rights-based approaches on well-being.
- Interviews are confidential. No personal data will be recorded.
- If you are interested in participating or want more information, please contact researcher Cristina Asenjo by 31st July 2019. Call 07443588417 or email cristina.asenjo@ed.ac.uk
- Interviews will take place in July, August and September. You can chose whether to do it over the phone or in a nearby café (expenses covered).

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