UK2070 COMMISSION

Civil Society Perspectives on Inequality: Focus Group Research Findings Report

Dr. Lucy Natarajan, Elisabeta Ilie & Dr. Hyunji Cho

The Bartlett School of Planning, University College London

February 2020

Table of Contents

1/ Summary

This research responds to the first report from the UK2070 Commission, which is currently investigating spatial inequality and proposes an agenda for strategy long-term action. The study examines regional inequality as it is experienced in 'left behind' places. It does this by looking at perspectives on inequality of those civil society organisations who are already working in 'left-behind' contexts. This brings a new approach to understanding inequality, looking at the 'symptoms' rather than the 'prevalence' of the phenomenon. This new approach also acknowledges the agency of those who are facing disadvantage directly, and brings insights about how civil society offers assistance. Overall, (as summarised here and further discussed in chapter 9) the findings lend support to the UK2070's objectives and highlight the value of public engagement in strategy-making.

As UK2070 has argued, a fundamental shift is needed to address the deep-rooted or structural problem of regional inequality. Yet, inequality is also a problem that is directly experienced; communities live with it, and have agency in making changes. This implies that policy-makers and communities must work together in order to define the problem and work out solutions to it. Regional inequality is generally expressed in policy circles through the language and narratives of econometrics. Rigorous quantitative reports for the UK2070 Commission have evidenced the existence of inequality. That work necessarily takes a quantitative approach, where disadvantage is framed as a matter of low economic dynamism and standards of living[1]. Those analyses identify the existence of inequality but don't explain its impacts. This study adds depth on places shown to be 'left-behind' using a qualitative research approach.

The report offers a new way of seeing and talking about regional inequality, and presents findings from early 'community focused' research for the Commission. It seeks to connect the knowledge of policy-makers to communities in 'left-behind' places in England[2]. At this stage in the Commission's work, is not feasible to conduct in-depth studies with the general population. Therefore, this study employed focus group methods to hear from civil society organisations, in view of their close knowledge of local communities and their concerns. This involved gathering data on the experiences and views of representatives of local voluntary interest groups that support 'left behind places' directly.

In 2019, a small team of researchers from UCL conducted a series of five focus groups with civil society organisations in England. The goal was to elicit an initial understanding of the types of 'symptoms' of inequality and associated narratives. Focus groups are discursive research events, and the ideal method for collecting qualitative social data. They bring to light local knowledge, and

---

[1] The UK2070 Commission has considered econometric perspectives on regional inequality measures in a think piece from McCann (2019). That work offers important evidence on the differentials between nations, using OECD statistical measures. It shows beyond doubt that we are amongst the most unequal high-income industrialized country. McCann offers a discussion of OECD data and the different uses of GDP/GVA (measures of economic performance) and RDI (regional disposable income measures).

[2] England is the focus of this work, in view of the distinction between England and the devolved policy contexts (please see the first report of the UK2070 Commission from May 2019, 'Fairer and Stronger: Rebalancing the UK Economy' [available online at UK2070.org.uk], for a fuller discussion of this point).

the language and narratives used by social groups to express it. Participants in UCL's series of focus groups were working closely with communities, and helping those impacted by disadvantage. They were members of civil society organisations that sought to help in various ways (socially, economically, and environmentally).

The data collected provides initial information on the *common types of experiences and discourses in left-behind places across England*. The focus group methods centred on scoping out the range of experiences. The events were held in diverse parts of the country, to hear from different types of places. Each event focused on a different part of England, and the series covered the North, Midlands, South, and Rural places. Participants were selected to be able to discuss a range of issues. At each event there were representatives of local groups that had interests in economic, environmental and social issues. The analysis sought to identify prominent themes, which could be seen across the focus groups.

For this report, findings are organized under six overarching themes: A) priority concerns; B) work in local places to support people; C) the types of barriers to action; D) how places should change; E) how to get past them; and F) how strategy might help overall. The findings make no claim to prevalence or comprehensiveness, but rather provide a robust starting point for engaging with the realities of places. The issues uncovered help to explain the ways that inequality is experienced and the associated narratives and language (or discourses).

Across the themes, the findings have significance for UK2070, and support its mission as stated in 'Towards a Framework for Action'[3] in three ways:

- **Firstly**, findings reaffirm the early outreach purposes of this research and signal the importance of continuing to develop the *UK2070 participatory strategy*. Concerns about the possibility of exclusion were palpable throughout the fieldwork, and public participation was identified as a very high priority across all of the discussions. The narrative was that the 'lay' public should not be 'done to'[4], and that strategy should take on board 'lived experience'[5]. [All themes]
- **Secondly**, they add weight to UK2070's argument for *effective devolution*. People spoke in terms of decisions needing to be more 'sensitive to localities', and having 'leadership from beyond Westminster'. The narrative was that devolution would enable the types of change they wanted to see, because information about localities would be more robust, and decisions could be taken at appropriate geographic scales. [Theme E]
- **Thirdly**, the findings suggest greater policy coordination is needed, which adds weight to UK2070's argument for greater *aligning of ambitions* in spatial frameworks. There were two parts to this. People identified how a joined-up policy context would help them in their own work, and called for a more 'needs-oriented' spatial policy context.
    - Discussions of immediate action via self-help and achieving fundamental change from the 'bottom-up' clearly demonstrated that there were serious barriers. People discussed 'responsive initiatives' of communities to deal with immediate needs, and more

---

[3] Please see the UK2070 Commission's first report of May 2019, p.59
[4] 'Done to' is where people have no say in decisions that affects them, and runs counter to the Aarhus Convention (UNECE, 1998)
[5] 'Lived experience' is gained by directly living with a phenomenon, and associated with specific (often social) forms of knowledge that are only possible when constructed through direct human experiences.

'strategic efforts' for long-term shift in places. [Theme B] Aspirations for change included transitioning to 'sustainable production' and 'stronger social fabric'. [Theme D] However, the experiences reported suggested that it was extremely hard both to maintain the levels of capacity for immediate action (in terms of human energy and financial resources), and to establish the types of partnership that would be needed for the longer-term. [Theme C]

- o In the discussions of priorities of 'left-behind' places and how strategy might help address them, there was a strong narrative of needing better targeted social policy and more robust planning capacities. Disadvantage was framed in terms of the 'economic insecurity' and 'piecemeal urbanism'. [Theme A] The narrative was about injustice arising from a lack of targeted policy. Coordinating strategy and stronger urban planning processes, could help to achieve this through 'needs-oriented' development processes and maximize the 'social value of land use'. [Theme F]

The following chapters provide details of these findings. The main points are highlighted at the start of each section, and then explained with illustrative quotes. Details of method and other reference materials are appended. The final chapter briefly synthesizes the findings and their implications.

2/ Introduction

This report presents the findings from focus group research conducted with diverse organisations in different parts of England in 2019. They demonstrate the way local, civil society actors approach inequality, and their discourses about the need for change and the role envisaged for strategy. This gives a unique picture of some of the possible paths and pitfalls on the way towards a new economic balance for the future. It is intended to be a first step towards developing shared understandings, not the final word. This section recaps the rationale of the research, then the findings are given in chapters 3 and 4, and finally the implications for the UK2070 Commission's inquiry into regional inequality are discussed in chapter 5.

Researchers from UCL conducted a series of focus groups in mid-2019, in order to build on the UK2070 Commission's First Report *Fairer & Stronger* (UK2070 2019). The Commission had evidenced beyond doubt that substantial economic inequality exists within and between different regions of the UK, and argues that not only is this situation grossly unfair and detrimental for all regions, but that it can be changed. The Commission recommends a substantial program of work, including the introduction of a spatial strategy where there is none in England, and significant public investment to enable change.

The focus group research was designed to provide qualitative insights directly from civil society organisations about the issues considered in the Commission's First Report. At this stage in the inquiry, is not feasible to conduct in-depth studies with the general population. However, civil society organisations, such as local trusts and societies, interest groups and associations (referred to as CSOs in the rest of this chapter), have deep experiential knowledge of communities and localities.

The overall aim of the study was to inform the UK2070 Commission of the experiences of those living with the impacts of inter- and intra-regional inequalities. It would also provide early insights into CSOs' views on positive changes, how such changes can be enabled, and the role envisaged for strategy in this. These experiences and views on the future constitute a unique and current 'civil society perspective'.

Learning from a civil society perspective has great value, especially very early on before decisions are made. Firstly, it broadens the set of knowledge available for the deliberative stages before any pens are put to paper. As already noted, it does so in a way that is as close to communities and their localities as feasible at this stage. Secondly, it is a step towards making connections and having good communication with potential future partners. The CSOs who participated in this research come from across England, and are working in diverse ways to support communities. They have significant experience of helping in areas of disadvantage today. They are likely to be critical partners in the delivery of any program of action and they can bring knowledge 'from the coalface', to help understand the current context and what might matter in delivering strategy.

Focus groups are a well-established qualitative research method for investigating experiences and views. They bring together a small group of purposively selected people, for in-

depth discussions focused on a topic. The data produced helps to articulate social realities and explain situated phenomena. In other words, focus groups explain what is important to people about a context, and how things work in particular settings. Fuller methods are appended.

Five[6] events were held across England. One focus group was conducted in each of Newcastle, Wigan and Birmingham, to hear from CSOs working in the North East, North West and Midlands. A further two focus groups were held in London, to hear from the rest of England; one with CSOs working on rural issues, and another for London and the South East. Participants came from organisations concerned with housing, economy, environment and other issues (see appendix), in places that are faring less well[7]. CSOs engaged in free-flowing discussions on six themes. As shown in table 1, these were focused on experiences and views on the future.

EXPERIENCES

Overarching themes	Topics discussed
A: Priority concerns	The ways that communities experience disadvantages in the locality of the CSO, and the issues that are most important currently.
B: Working to help communities	The activities that the CSOs are currently undertaking to address disadvantage in their areas, and help people in diverse ways.
C: Barriers to taking action	Perceived challenges to tackling issues and supporting communities where the CSOs work.

VIEWS ON THE FUTURE

Overarching themes	Topics discussed
D: Desired changes for the future	The ways in which places might need to change, to support communities / address disadvantage.
E: How to enable change	The various actions / other factors that are expected to help make the changes that CSOs and communities want to see in their area.
F: How strategy can help	How strategies or policies might help to make positive changes for the future.

Table 1: Themes / topics discussed in the focus groups

---

[6] In total 8 events were held. Further reports will deal with the other 3 events, which provide insights about relevant socio-economic changes anticipated by those working in sustainability, technology, the built environment professions.
[7] Also referred to as 'left-behind' places, although that term is contested.

Focus groups data was analysed using standard methods (see appendix), to find commonalities across the focus groups. The findings are presented in the following chapters by theme as shown below in table 2. Prominent points of difference between regions are noted, however the findings are primarily about *commonalities of 'perspective'*.

Chapter 3: Experiences	**Chapter 4: Views on the future**
A: What are the priority concerns?	***D: What changes to places would help communities?***
> Economic insecurity	> Evolving more sustainable modes of production
> Piecemeal urbanism	> Strengthening the social fabric
B: What activities are underway to help communities?	***E: What would enable positive change?***
> Responsive initiatives	> Locally sensitive decision-making
> Strategic efforts	> Leadership from 'beyond Westminster'
C: What are the barriers to further action?	***F: How might strategy help?***
> Low local capacity	> Orienting towards need
> Difficulties with building partnerships	> Maximize social gains from land use
> Misperceptions of localities	

Table 2: Themes / findings about CSO perspectives

The rest of this report is as follows. Chapter 3 covers 'experiences', and chapter 4 covers 'views on the future'. Key points are summarized at the start of each section, and illustrative anonymised quotes from the discussions are given throughout chapters 3 and 4. Findings from across all of the themes are synthesised in chapter 5, with conclusions.

3/ Experiences

This chapter presents the findings from the focus group research on the experiences of the civil society organisations and the communities in England they currently work for. It sets out these findings under three 'themes': priority concerns of communities; voluntary local activities underway to address those concerns; and barriers to those activities. Together they describe the experiential side of civil society perspectives on inequality.

A: What are the priority concerns?

The UK2070 Commission has articulated regional inequality as a national concern, and proved beyond doubt its existence and prevalence in the UK (McCann, 2019). In the focus groups with civil society organisations, inequality is explained as a set of experiences in 'left-behind' places. Participants at each focus group event discussed the areas where they worked and the priorities of those that were experiencing disadvantage. They described the negative impacts of failed policies and a context of uncoordinated socio-economic strategies.

The discussions centred on *economic insecurity* and *piecemeal urbanism*. Economic insecurity was a matter of concern where there was increased awareness of falling standards of living. There was a strong sense of a 'slow apocalypse' as communities were gradually undermined and edging towards socio-economic crises. Piecemeal urbanism was where decisions were not helpful to localities, and participants gave examples of urban changes not working for communities and development approaches not taking account of existing capacities. Overall, participants spoke about policies that were not targeted well, and their experience of the results, which they framed as a matter of injustice.

Economic insecurity

The Commission's report stated that inequalities have been widening and that disadvantaged communities are being affected economically. The focus group discussions echoed this, and expanded on the severity of the impacts of low incomes. In the discussions, participants were very careful with language and pointed out the need to avoid terms that could be interpreted as labelling or blaming social groups. They spoke in terms of economic insecurity rather than 'poverty'. This framed disadvantage as emanating from the economic context, impacting individuals at specific moments, and having 'knock on' effects for the community.

The prevalence of low-income households was perceived to have been growing. Participants noted the downward trend where children would be worse off than their parents, and the expansion of homelessness even amongst those in work. Descriptions of circumstances of the least well off were stark. The effects of growing reliance on foodbanks for instance would have long-term repercussions for some young people, since it would affect their health and education. As one participant explained, "the local children rely on school meals, and are not getting nutrition for growth and learning".

Discussions centred on economic insecurity, which was perceived to result from wider economic changes. Participants explained how the lack of security from 'gig economy' jobs (short-term engagements without regular wages) and changing benefit levels (various social provisions including changes to pensions) drove people into low incomes. They also noted concerns about long-term trends, including the increasing cost of living, automation of tasks that were currently a source of employment, and a lack of secure funding for social projects that currently acted as an economic 'safety net' (see section 7).

Low incomes and economic insecurity were seen to have 'knock-on' impacts on communities both practically and psycho-socially. Across all of the focus groups, participants discussed social divisions. The very prospect of not being able to get a job that would provide quality of life was said to be alienating. Young people were particularly at risk in this regard, having fewer opportunities for family formation and therefore their ability to establish economic independence was being slowed down. There were also strong concerns about the very high levels of social anxiety amongst younger people, which could compound problems for their future. More broadly, participants were concerned about societal trends that could undermine social cohesion. There were extremely troubling accounts of hate crimes against minority groups, and participants were fearful about the "growing prevalence of far right views".

More practically, in discussions of rural areas and London, it was noted that those taking action to protect themselves against low income were compounding difficulties for the wider community. In London, communities were being affected by rising house prices, which was partly (see also the points on housing below) attributed to people buying up properties as source of pension income because future incomes and pension provisions were insecure. In the smaller settlements of rural areas, it was perceived that entire communities were at risk from young people and those with specific skills leaving to find employment. The intergenerational dynamics are important especially for small rural communities, since "when schools have to close it creates a tipping point".

Piecemeal urbanism

The Commission's first report argues for a more strategic approach to economic development with spatial planning to ensure investments are well targeted. This agenda was highly relevant to many of the priorities identified in the focus groups, which spoke of 'piecemeal urbanism'. Across this set of concerns, participants highlighted the uncoordinated urban policies and social programmes, and illustrated how such approaches to development were not serving communities. Much of the narrative was about distributional fairness.

Across the focus group discussions, there was a recurrent narrative that urban policies, including housing, infrastructure and employment development approaches, were neither joined up as strategy nor connected to local contexts. Participants talked about 'piecemeal urbanism', meaning development that was not directed in the interests of their communities. It did not relate to the long-term wellbeing of communities or sustainability of places as created 'housing' rather than homes, and it resulted in transport that was mainly beneficial for wealthier people. This left people

very despondent about who was ultimately benefiting from development, and where investment funds were ending up.

People expressed very strong concern over housing stock, which was not affordable nor of sufficient quality. People discussed the lack of 'space standards', both internally to properties and in terms of green space provision. Focus groups participants were frustrated by the lack of housing strategy. They explained how the new supply was not right for current residents, for instance providing levels of density that was too high for residential areas or allowing green spaces that communities needed to go up for grabs. It was not taking into account environmental quality standards and associated infrastructure needed for carbon neutrality. Consequently there would be insufficient 'homes for life', such as would be needed by growing numbers of older people in their communities.

It was recognized that investment in infrastructure had been made in some places, but this was seen to exacerbate disparities in amenities and privileged the better off. "Shiny new development doesn't benefit us." It was raising the value of properties and wealth of property owners and (especially noted in relation to new transport infrastructure) making life easier for the most affluent. The situation was stark in London, with a burden of overload of larger services, which were world class but not really adding to the quality of daily life for people; "too many hospitals, too many big hospitals, too many universities, too many railway stations and railway lines, too many airports, crossrail, the Shard". For instance, the Midlands focus group noted that new transport links mainly benefitted better off places.

> "...the theory was that this would benefit the poorer places and it would actually allow the boats to rise up, so to speak, on the tide. In actual fact, all the evidence of actually doing those big infrastructure schemes showed the exact opposite and that it actually benefitted the already affluent places".

The final priority concern was that policy did not consider existing local capacities, Participants discussed how their communities did not have the facilities to reach employment opportunities, e.g. since child care or public transport was missing. There was a disconnection between urban and rural parts of regions, for instance around Manchester, such that the chance for people in urban areas to use excellent schools in rural areas was being lost. People described how the local skills base was not really taken into account, and therefore "investment doesn't stick to places". There was for instance a strong critique of missed opportunities in the construction industry. Expertise in these trades is built through ongoing apprenticeship, and cannot be patched in short term to communities. As such, the experience was that policy did not enable specific communities to harness opportunities, and there was no strategy that could coordinate and link in latent potential or resources.

B: What activities are underway to help communities?

The UK2070 Commission has focused attention on the phenomenon of 'left-behind' places and proposed fundamental shift is needed with significant new resources and strategy that can enable

significant programmes of work across the country. The research was premised on the fact that people are responding to disadvantage voluntary efforts. Focus group participants were asked to discuss the current efforts to help communities of their civil society organisations. The analysis indicates this local support comprised both *responsive initiatives* and *strategic efforts*. Responsive initiatives are direct means of helping communities to cope in the context of disadvantage. Strategic efforts were directed at changing the local context. Both types of activity were extremely challenging and participants also discussed how they would have liked to pursue them even further. The different types of work are described here, and barriers to further action are discussed in the next section.

Responsive initiatives

Some participants were working to deal with the fall out of disadvantage. Some sought to limit poor practices and low skill levels. Some others were seeking to create 'self-help' capacity to continue these responsive initiatives over the longer term.

Regarding designing good, this involved both housing and public amenities. Those working on housing were using Building for Life[8] to tackle poor practice. Other projects mentioned in the focus groups were responding to the lack of public amenities. In particular, the Grange in Blackpool[9] was praised for targeting investment where communities already were living.

> *"it has services being delivered from the core of that community and it's building that community, people want to move there now, it's changing, but that has been significant investment in that specific area, rather than it making things further afield accessible"*

There were various initiatives to support skills development and learning. One organisation for instance was helping 'provide learning opportunities to people who mostly didn't do very well in the education system'. The skills would help directly in economic development. A community co-operative for instance offered local support both as a place for people to develop social enterprises skills and grow local businesses in Wigan. Similarly, A social enterprise organisation was seeking new forms of business focused on social and environmental capital, as well as harnessing financial markets for local enterprises, through "an employment bond to try and create local jobs through a variety of things, business start-ups, people who can't actually borrow from anywhere else because they have no security and jobs in the third sector".

Some of the projects were helping people develop coping mechanisms, again the emphasis was on empowerment. One example was outreach on ways to counter fuel poverty, through solar panel schemes. The environmental network was helping to "put a spotlight on where people feel things are working well and help others to learn from that". Another environmental initiative was about "waking people up to their rights" in order to support communities in protecting their local

---

[8] https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/guide/building-life-12-third-edition
[9] https://www.groundwork.org.uk/Sites/clm/pages/thegrange-launched-in-blackpool

environments. In Birmingham, one participant noted how their planning group enabled wider community groups to come together and learn from each other.

> *"...brings representatives from all those groups together, once every six weeks, so that we inform each other of what we do and we try to make sure that we're not duplicating efforts…"*

Others were working to share universities' resources with local communities, by building skills and developing new capacities that would be a source of 'community research enterprise'.

> *"...passing on skills, handling research projects within their own communities that have meaning and that have value, add a lot of value…"*

There was even a food bank initiative that was seeking to make empowerment a part of the solution. They operated through self-help network where those using the project also pitched in to help run it. They also sought to engage people in a longer-term project of sustainable food supply.

> *"We collect it [7 tons of food per week locally], we sort it, we distribute it, so we distribute it through cafés, through events, through stalls and then we also send some of it to animals, we compost some of it and then we encourage people to grow stuff – I call it virtual circle."*

Strategic efforts

Some focus group participants were seeking to make more fundamental changes to the context where they were operating. This typically involved partnerships, working with larger institutions or networks and targeting 'publicly engaged' practice.

Good institutional relationships were key to many of the strategic initiatives. In Newcastle, a participant described efforts to promote new construction approaches, via centres of excellence and a university. Another was partnering with the local parks trust and city council, and local volunteers to deliver natural environment conservation work. A homelessness partnership saw communities and service providers co-writing a charter, through a partnership board that included people with lived experience of homelessness. This 'end-user' involvement created more meaningful and immediate benefits. This was confirmed in another focus group, where the approach was seen to challenge the Maslowian 'hierarchy of needs' approach to wellbeing[11].

> *"You're investing in things that homeless people themselves say, 'I don't want friendship after I've been re-housed, I want it today and I want to feel good about myself today.'"*

Others sought to change the nature of funding streams and associated thinking. One project allowed university funding to be connected to communities, and create a new type of 'visible pathway' for people who want to engage with the university sector but not in the traditional educational ways.

---

[11] Where basic needs (i.e. food, safety and shelter) are first fulfilled *before* further needs (e.g. social, personal ones) are addressed. See Tomaney for a discussion of regional and place wellbeing understandings (Tomaney, 2017)

Similarly, a social enterprise organisation had a wider mission to encourage a socially oriented business and investor mindset.

> *"We're trying to get financial mechanisms that enable people with wealth and assets to redistribute them by investing in causes that are better for more disadvantaged people."*

C: What are the barriers to further action?

In trying to improve the circumstances of communities in 'left behind places' all organisations face serious challenges. As noted by the UK2070 Commission, there is a low level of public sector funds and a lack of strategy for change. Focus group discussions echoed those concerns, and shed light on how they manifest locally as barriers to action. There were three types of barrier to civil society organisations' work (i.e. the types discussed in the previous section). These were difficulties in the low levels of local capacity, difficulties in building robust institutional partnerships, and poor understandings of local places. They stopped organisations going further in tackling disadvantage.

Low local capacity

Focus group participants argued strongly that they aimed to work with empowered local communities, i.e. those with certain 'capacities'. Therefore, they needed to have a holistic set of skills, in order to build social capital and to engage with processes of changes. However, it was clear from the discussions that local capacity was lowest in areas of disadvantage, and this presented a barrier to taking action. Some communities lacked morale, and for the worst off it was a chronic difficulty.

> *"What I see is a community walking through the centre that are completely disillusioned, completely disillusioned with everything, so how do you get them interested again?"*

> *"There is an issue about building up community resilience because communities have lost heart in themselves because they don't think they're worth anything and it's about building up their own self-confidence."*

In areas of low local capacity, which were also the areas of greatest disadvantage, the opportunities were more easily taken up by better off communities. This was discussed in relation to neighbourhood planning, creating enterprise and further education.

> *"...lots of opportunity, but it seems like neighbourhood plans kind of depend on communities already having good, constructive dialogue within them – and in many cases, that's just not there…"*

For some people, the barriers to building local capacity were 'built in' to systems of support. Participants stated that the education system was fostering unhelpful mentalities. These were

described as encouraging students to see themselves as 'employees rather than potential employers' and shutting down their creative potential or ability to build local networks.

> *"Schools don't teach about co-operatives or about alternative ways of doing things, I don't think, they may teach children to try to work together on things or teamwork, but it's to compete against the other team."*

Similarly, participants discussed how challenges were 'built in' to the paths to accessing support. Some support was harder for people to reach because of the need to use online systems. Individuals could find it tricky "to write CVs, applying for jobs, applying for Universal Credit or benefits etc.". It was noted in discussions of online systems, that there are some rural areas with low provision, and across all regions some people are simply not used to ICT processes. For local groups, the tendering processes could work against local capacity.

> *"Goodness knows how much time is wasted, competing for sources of money which only a minority get, but the huge amount of time that goes into it is so annoying"*

Difficulties with building partnerships

Strong partnerships with institutions were key to success, according to focus group participants. However discussions revealed several ways in which their ability to build partnerships was being undermined.

Local organisations found it hard to connect with institutions that lacked leadership. Even where local politics had become stronger, local government were seen as lacking in leadership capacity. Participants discussed how local representatives were 'on the back foot', especially those within the planning processes. This made it hard to connect with them or find voice at critical moments. In particular, the powers of large scale land ownership and the methods of 'viability' calculations were known to disempower planning officers. Participants discussed for instance, how community concerns such as quality of build, sustaining upland farming, or social housing were too easily overlooked.

> *"The developer will cry, saying 'we can't afford to put in social housing, it's not going to stack up' and what do the planners do? They just roll over, they don't say 'right, no, we've given you planning approval based on this'."*

The low level of LA funding was part of the problem in that: there was not the capacity to spend time on reflections or debate; there was no specifically agreed spatial approach; and staff frequently changed. As a result it was hard to build strong working relationships with institutions.

> *"The barriers are that those who might help you move on at a frightening pace... you're constantly having to rebuild relationships, particularly in local government."*

A corollary was that institutions were not 'adapted' to making connections with communities. For one thing, the 'human efforts and time' needed for activities are onerous, but this was not recognized and it was a real problem for relationship building. Some participants were simply concerned that LAs were leaning on the third sector and not recognizing the scale of efforts.

> *"There's a woman who runs an art group at [name of place] and she ran it for years and got paid, she runs it without being paid now, but everything is falling on the shoulders of people who are already a bit knackered."*

Overall the message was that collaborations were not sufficiently valued. Those working with larger institutions discussed a very particular set of challenges in making connections with communities. They discussed a generalized mistrust of expertise, and how large organisations were "very focused on making money or profit and very focused on global issues, rather than focusing on its locality". Others talked about the 'infrastructure in the community space', that was needed . This was "an infrastructure of training and resources and networks and support in order to do that job well and to get the most out of that job", and it was sometimes invisible or not catered for.

> *"We used to have partnerships with local providers where we would be able to send children to do all sorts of fantastic vocational and technical skills – we can't do that anymore because we weren't allowed to count them in our headline measures..."*

Misperceptions of localities

While the lack of investment in local places was an important concern for the focus groups participants, their discussions of the challenges centred more on how available money was spent. As one participant put it, "I don't think it's an issue about us not having the money in the country, I think there's plenty of money in the country, it's the efficiency of how that is used." Participants argued that 'myths' about places, or misperceptions of how localities really worked, were one of the main causes of poor allocation of public funds.

Participants discussed how programs of interventions were 'too distant' from context. This allowed misunderstandings to creep in, such as what might help a local economy, or how specific industries might be expected to create employment.

> *"What they failed to see was the value that market was adding to [name of] Town Centre and actually, maybe having a walk between the train station and the bus stop was better than having a walk from the market to the bus stop. Maybe that never got brought into it because it's not valued in the same way that travel times and commuting times are."*

> *"The construction industry was always fodder for those who were less academically inclined, but it doesn't work that way, you need trained operatives on building sites. The only jobs that you can get which are untrained are, literally somebody sweeping up a yard, everything else needs training and needs nurturing"*

Participants also discussed how misperceptions were driven by poor analyses of what currently is occurring. This was a theme in discussions in different regions, and it was particularly strongly stated by rural stakeholders.

> *"There is a tendency to try to use a kind of an equivalent way of thinking as they use in an urban area to think about disadvantage in rural areas, so you know that in London, if you want to target the disadvantaged, you put the IMD data up on a map, you see where the hotspots are, which wards, in which boroughs, that's where you target the money and then you try to do the same thing in the rural area, you say 'well, there are fewer people, but there must be pockets of disadvantage,' so you go looking for pockets of disadvantage and of course, then you can't really find any because it's just dispersed, it's pink washed across everywhere and your methodology doesn't work and your data doesn't work"*

4/ Views on the future

This chapter presents the findings from the focus group research on the views of civil society organisations about the future, and changes that would help in the places where they work. It sets out these findings under three 'themes': changes to places that would help communities; what would enable those changes; and how strategy might help in that. Together they explain the attitudinal side of civil society perspectives on inequality.

D: What changes to places would help communities?

The UK2070 Commission's first report set out a strong case for transformative change[12]. The focus group participants were asked what changes they would like to see, and the discussions centred on how places should be different in the future to better support communities and address disadvantage. Much of the narrative was about how places might *evolve sustainable modes of production*. This meant that places might keep evolving to be sustainable, which would involve transitioning to environmentally sound means of production whilst adapting operations to sustain local incomes. Participants reflected that this question was really about 'what type of society we want', and that *stronger social fabric* was necessary both in itself and for its economic potential.

Evolving more sustainable modes of production

Participants talked about the value of exploring new modes of production, and the importance of foundation economies. There were specific ideas for some industries, and an overarching narrative of how to continually evolve to be more 'sustainable' in economic and environmental terms.

In the discussions of how places should change, participants talked about specific new modes of production that had more sustainable practices and used land most sustainably. This related to emerging developments in the food and construction industries. Some participants discussed new construction modes, associated with building information management (BIM) and modular work. They argued that these would make skill management simpler and enable more flexible design, to prevent retrofitting issues in the future.

> *"The whole idea of having a muddy building site and building homes on mud with lorries coming in and making more mud and builders sawing bits of wood... it just doesn't make sense, so the idea of offsite construction and modular building and just craning things into place is not only sensible, but it actually gives people the ability to work indoors, to be fully skilled, to be trained in not necessarily repetitive jobs, there's no reason why you shouldn't be a builder with timber skills or a builder with electrical skills or a builder with masonry skills."*

Other people saw great potential in new modes of food production, and argued this field was complex and needed greater exploration and development. Some participants noted how heritage

---

[12] The changes aspired to would be fundamental and enable a real shift in direction, through "major programmes of action not driven by trends", as well as being long-term, cross-cutting of policy domains, and having inclusive and accountable processes. p.58.

models (such as pasture-fed beef) could be useful for sustainability, while others questioned the proportion of land given over to cattle and sheep, and 'ecological wastelands'.

> *"...rather than thinking that somehow we can feed eight million people from farmers' markets once a week on the corner, it's not going to happen... but, we don't want the implications of highly industrialized agricultural either..."*

Across the focus groups, participants emphasized the foundation economy, which was seen as best practice but challenging in a variety of ways. As participants saw it, this spanned the economic functions of local services and essential goods, which places could not do without. It also used reduced supply chains, and associated carbon footprints. One concern was that many foundation economy jobs (the main examples were in teaching assistance, caring, and food) did not come with a decent standard of income, and inevitably people looked to other professions longer term. Some participants saw this as a 'gender equality' issue because much of the caring services was traditionally taken on by women. Others noted the pressure on small foundation economy type businesses that the relatively high costs and smaller turnover could bring. A wholesaler of fruit and vegetables in a remote area had to adapt and find support to develop a café 'add-on', which then made the business viable.

> *"...a kind of economic model which is much more about short supply chains, about direct contact with the customers, about being flexible enough to change in response to changes in demand and fashion and we're talking about food as a leisure opportunity for some of these people or as a means for a social interaction..."*

Strengthening the social fabric

The last theme in the discussions of 'how places should change' was strengthening 'social fabric'. This echoed the points made about insecurity and division in the section above on 'priority concerns', and the points about capacity in the section below on 'barriers to action'. The argument was that community cohesion and energies were under threat in disadvantaged areas. Throughout all of the focus groups, participants argued strongly that more community interactions and social platforms were needed. These were inherently desirable goals, and participants also expected economic benefits.

Creating opportunities for more social interactions and greater social capital were seen as critical for the future. This involved two types of social bonds (as expected by social theory): the close bonding relationships that sustain communities and particularly so in times of crisis; and looser bonds that bridge people into institutions and economic activity. Participants echoed the sentiment that both types had recently been ground down, and needed reviving.

> *"It's that sense of belonging and that's what community means to me, a sense of belonging ... if there's a crisis, just look at how the community pulls together, so they're there for each other. If there's a flood or if there's a crisis, they're there for each other, they'd do anything to help, but that community spirit has gone,"*

"Youth workers, who once upon a time would have done open access engagement work in community centres, are now being put into a position where they say 'okay, we can provide support to you, you and you, but we can't provide to you because you don't fit the profile'."

Participants noted the need for more functioning social platforms, or places where people could interact and build community. People argued that community buildings were especially lacking in dense urban areas and more remote rural settlements. Participants discussed how schools should be spaces for communities, 'not the exam factories that they currently are'. Some participants argued it was particularly important to support cultural activities, and reach out to younger cohorts and those who were marginalized economically.

"...a meeting place for young people who haven't got any money to spend to meet anyway and we desperately need something like that in the village centre to give that generation some territory, some legitimate territory that they can get involved in…"

"I walk with [a teacher] into [town centre] for a coffee … and there will be loads of people talking to him and it's a brilliant way, in that old vernacular, of being a respected member of your community."

Participants also described how places needed different types of physical infrastructure with socio-economic purpose (i.e. community buildings, socially functional working spaces). They discussed how these amenities provided spaces for people to build confidence and discover economic opportunities, by making it possible for people from different backgrounds to make connections. For example, people would be encouraged (back) into the workplace, especially younger people and women after raising children, through social connections.

"How do young people make their work related social connections if all the people with any experience and management responsibilities are sitting in their living room in Cumbria, doing it down the wire?"

"I see a danger of [social isolation] spreading with mental health on the rise and lack of community infrastructure and a lack of safe community spaces, pride and we know that positive activities really do help that, so in a way, when austerity is at its worst, I think that's even more of a case to invest in the things that make us feel better."

E: What would enable positive change?

Focus group participants were asked what would enable the positive changes they wanted to see. The answer was clear - participants in the focus group recommended more devolved forms of decision-making and leadership. The detail of what devolution involved was critical. Participants argued that decisions needed to be taken 'at an appropriate scale' and draw on locally sensitive

evidence. Associated with this was a strong narrative on the need for 'more leadership' and this involved political choices being informed by voices from 'beyond Westminster'.

Locally sensitive decision-making

Focus group discussions evidenced a strong desire for more locally sensitive decision-making, on the basis that it would ensure the 'right' kind of changes. The scale of 'local' was not clear but there was strong agreement that changes would be better decided 'locally' and that calculations behind decisions needed to be more sensitive to detail at a 'local granularity'. This would help ensure existing communities benefitted from developments and that local successes were not undermined.

What was meant by 'local' varied, but people argued that decision-making needed to be closer to localities for good decision-making. The discussions emphasized the need for greater trust in decisions taken 'more locally'. As one participant put it, "If the people with the money can put their faith and their trust in local decision making, then you get change that is relevant to their local community." Others argued that decisions should be taken at a level at which people could 'see' issues properly. They pointed to how 'higher up' tiers could lose sight of what really constituted a win or what was simply 'common sense'. This was clear from the discussions of instances where investment in 'successful' amenities had transformed them into something, which was no longer of use to the original user-base. Other participants talked about the importance of regional planning types of decisions, which were lower than national, typically related to an 'intermediate' scale, and regarded investment in housing and infrastructure.

> *"[planners in the Midlands] were trying to solve some of the spatial issues of the West Midlands conurbation which sees an ever over-heating Solihull and an ever under-heating Black Country where you have got a load of physical and social infrastructure which has been massively under-used, so the vision in that spatial strategy was one of enabling the Black Country, Telford and Stoke and putting a break on the ever growing south east of the region, so I certainly saw that as being quite progressive."*

Participants discussed how the numbers behind decisions needed to be more locally sensitive. This meant looking at problems with a finer level of detail, and avoiding 'Green Book' methods that are investing in upward trends. Some explained that investing in transport connections had benefitted more affluent places on new routes. As one participant explained, *"you would see further decline in terms of businesses moving out, relocating to the more affluent place."* Others talked about the adverse effects in both growing and declining places.

> *"...you've got the standardized methodology for objectively assessed need – which basically 'bakes in' all of the historic trends in terms of population growth which, when we're looking from a northern perspective, that is basically a decline in population growth…"*

> *"[London Boroughs] are being asked to adopt figures that are probably not deliverable and then a planning application comes in that's not fitting with the plan, and if it goes to appeal and the inspector says 'you're not meeting your*

housing targets, you have to allow this development,' then the local community's
lost control over the plan."

Leadership from 'beyond Westminster'

When participants were asked what was needed for places to change, a very prominent immediate response across all of the focus groups was 'more leadership'. Some participants discussed how the ideas, practices and physical fabric in their areas 'had not changed forever'; others felt an impeding sense of crisis that might 'force a reset'. Nonetheless, across the focus groups there was a strong consensus that change could be pursued if there was the 'leadership' to drive it through, but that this would need to involve voices outside of the centralized political machinery.

Discussions centred on building up input from 'beyond Westminster'. Some people argued for stronger regional political voices within parliamentary debate, and others again for more community involvement in policy-making. Either way, participants wanted government to be more externally referenced and expected this to help achieve the changes they wanted to see.

A prominent concern was that politicians ought to make policy, but that there were fewer routes for those outside of central government to steer policy towards helping their own regions. Some participants observed that parliamentary representatives 'toed the party line' when they were in Westminster. This meant that they were only interested in the 'national picture', and did not bring any local issues into the national debate. Other participants discussed the need to create their own lobbying groups to bring their issue to the attention of government. The political power of local Mayors was recognized, but it was part of a problematic layering of leadership and could feel disconnected.

> *"we have a mayor who we can vote for, but it's one of 11 and I don't get to vote*
> *for the other nine council leaders and my ward, previously, didn't even vote for*
> *the previous council leader where I live, so I had no accountability, apart from*
> *voting for the mayor once every four years"*

Other participants argued for more citizen engagement in political issues, or 'inclusive leadership'. Some people noted that enfranchisement had been falling generally, i.e. with declining unionization and voting, and discussed how to get people more engaged. Some argued that it should be more easy for people to be involved in different layers of decision-making, rather than being 'stuck between wards' or not being able to engender change beyond their ward boundary. Others described how citizens connected directly into strategic debates, through the development of a community-led alternative plan for London, homelessness partnerships, and direct activism on climate change awareness. They saw citizen engagement as a means to political leadership. It could bring a sense of urgency in dealing with intergenerational inequalities, climate change and concerns of vulnerable communities. It could also be a means to check the local sensitivity of decisions (described above).

"...there is a lot of angst out there in the society that I think can put bottom up pressure, but you're talking about how the political system works there and at the moment, it's not switched on."

"...having a sounding board made up of a representative party of people, before government policy is implemented, might be a better idea, instead of Iain Duncan Smith just going 'I've got this great idea, let's do it,' without thinking about the barbaric effect that that is going to have on people and their well-being and the most vulnerable in society..."

F: How might strategy help?

Focus groups discussed how strategies could help in making changes in disadvantaged places, and discussions were not limited to a particular model of spatial or regional strategy. Participants had diverse suggestions, around two concerns. The first was how to orient policies and strategies to help promote development that is socially and environmental sustainable. The second was how to ensure that land uses are directed towards social gains.

Orienting towards need

Across the discussions, the consensus was that strategy would help if it was 'oriented towards need'. This would involve policies that had a strong focus on raising environmental and social standards. Some participants talked particularly about targeting the least well off. Others described how strategy should support infrastructure for communities. The underlying argument was for a shift in thinking about the problem and the solution, which moved away from purely econometric approaches and 'put society first'.

"Communities ought to be valued above and beyond the equation for housing."

Participants gave examples of focusing on the least well off, for a needs-oriented strategy. There were several suggestions of legal protections. Some people talked of a 'universal basic standard' for services[13]. Others wondered whether low income might be added as a 'protected characteristic' in the Equality Act[14], in recognition of the overlap between low income and other forms of inequality (such as disability and age). There were examples of investments that 'put public money furthest from the market provision', in order to provide a lead on issues that private sector money could follow. These included 5G broadband provision in England, public transport in Scotland, and housing provision in Finland. There were also suggestions of spatial strategies for 'more mundane' types of infrastructure, such as community facilities, space, rural services, or social enterprise, which were about tackling concrete and self-evident need.

"Politicians want to be seen to be doing sort of whizzy, strategic things, new rail lines etc., etc., when actually, the bus service is collapsing and that's what people rely on."

---

[13] Rural White Paper 2000 available at the National Archieves
[14] Current legislation 2010 Equality Act available at http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

Housing was considered in the most depth, with discussions of how housing numbers were 'blunt tools' that diverted focus from housing standards. People emphasized that targets for new housing were diverting from critical issues with existing stock and new build. Some argued that new build needed to be of much higher quality for the future - "…more space, wider doors, level access, low cost, free energy, a range of digital monitors for movement, for air quality, temperature, security, green infrastructure…" - and that England needed to have a stronger national voice on this matter. Others noted that the problem was fundamentally about affordability, indicating that strategy should consider how housing standards and financial insecurity were linked.

> *"What's happened is that we have a catastrophic failure of distribution of the actual space, so the more wealthy units have been getting bigger and bigger and bigger and under occupied and the units for people lower down the economic scale have been getting smaller and smaller and smaller or non-existent"*

Maximize social gains from land use

Across the focus groups, participants argued strongly that strategy was needed to ensure that land use was directed towards social gains. They described how they envisaged land might be managed for wider societal benefits. They emphasized that this would require stronger planning functions, and communication with stakeholders in the development and implementation of strategy.

Participants argued that strategy should seek to avoid agglomeration, but might 'connect' different parts of the country in a way that would ensure economic and ecological benefits. They noted that the ecological impacts of urban development (e.g. seen in food supply, water management, carbon footprint) needed to be considered extremely carefully. However, they argued there were several ways that new infrastructure especially transport could be beneficial, where it supported existing communities. For example it could make connections between rural areas and urban centres, to provide the opportunity for places to share social infrastructure.

> *"[we need] a real geographical kind of planning with communities which understands how those areas work, how Nelson and Colnes might link into Manchester"*

Discussions centred on how to protect local social and environmental assets, through more fine-grained considerations in decision-making. Some participants argued for devolved policy and others for more sequential decisions. Both types of argument were concerned with the details of location and form of developments, and the lack of attention given to their social consequences and environmental impacts. The over use of green space for development, and the low environmental performance of buildings were of particular concern in denser urban areas.

> *"a lot of the whole national infrastructure process, the strategic environmental assessment happens at very high level, so people don't understand, where there's choices between different roads because there's some, very generic national policy statement…"*

A major concern for participants was that the current weakness of the planning system primarily enables private interests to benefit from new development. They discussed matters such as the financialization of land through global investment in housing development, the need for Local Authorities to pay for land *with planning* permission in compulsory purchases, and the dominance of viability in development applications. Participants pointed to the low levels of funding in Local Authorities, typically described as 'decimated', and the consequent effects in terms of not having time to consider things carefully and fully. There were suggestions about how to strengthen planning through regulations that could encourage better use of land. Some people said that planning gain (e.g. from Community Infrastructure Levy) should be better ear-marked, i.e. for specific local projects. Others suggested using taxes e.g. for unused land and empty properties.

> *"it's about liquidity in the global economy and how that wealth gets transferred to exploit places like [place name] through the financialization of housing"*

As a final consideration, certain processes would be important for any strategy to be able to maximize social gains. Participants said strategy would need to be managed in an open way, to ensure support over the long term. Sounding boards and other stakeholder involvement would be helpful and, language would be important, since for instance even terms like 'poverty' and 'social mobility' could be contested. Milestones would be necessary to account for progress over the long term and prevent goals being constantly changed or manipulated.

> *"...looking at net zero by 2050 - we were arguing that the danger of having that as a target is that you then have a government who would do everything in 2049..."*

5/ Conclusion

Overall, the civil society perspectives on inequality endorse the work of the UK2070 Commission. They help to explain the perceived value of making fundamental changes and instituting new governance processes, as well as the challenging nature of doing so. As set out in chapters 3 and 4, this research provides initial findings on current experiences of being 'left-behind' and views on how to make changes for the future. Together these two set of insights reinforce the argument for greater devolution, coordination of strategy, and investment for long-term change.

Devolution is seen as particularly critical by civil society organisations, and is part of better engagement with the wider lay public. Participants were adamant that the public should not be 'done to' and that strategy should take on board lived experience[15]. They argued that engagement will bring community concerns to the foreground of decision-making and identify the most helpful programmes of work. They also insisted that authorities cannot roll out devolution on their own. Instead, they said that devolution requires civic involvement whereby local people are valuable partners providing knowledge and critical review of policy. This is in line with previous research (Natarajan, 2017), and calls for greater participatory democracy in spatial planning (Bouche-Florin, 2019).

Civil society groups are in a unique position, as direct responders in 'left-behind' localities but they face enormous challenges. Participants indicated that disadvantage is not only worsening but also fuelling social divisions. Therefore, they tackle immediate need and seek longer-term change in places where they work. However, they want to be able to go further in their work, and experience barriers to doing so. In particular, it is difficult to build the resources and partnerships that are required.

Strategy that can enable greater coordination, as well as targeted investments, would add value to civil society activities. The lack of coherence in policy is seen as very problematic. Civil society efforts are extremely hard to sustain without sufficient local coordination between initiatives (statutory and voluntary). In addition, a lot of energy and resources are being wasted through competition for resources. Thus strategy would be valuable if it can help in 'joining up' efforts and managing limited resources within places.

These conclusions form part of the inquiry of the UK2070 Commission, which is underway at the time of writing and will continue up to the end of 2019. Notwithstanding the necessarily arms-length nature of the qualitative work reported here, the study has sketched out a new perspective on inequality, which is more grounded than earlier work. It cannot replace a more detailed understanding of the perspectives of communities facing disadvantage across the UK, nor does it seek to. Instead, the research has identified common points of agreement across civil society organisations about how to help in 'left-behind places' across England, and unpacked the associated discourses. This offers a reference point for on-going work into public engagement with strategic approaches to the enormous challenge of regional inequality facing the UK today.

---

[15] See footnotes 4 & 5 on p.4

Appendices

Acknowledgements

References

Bouche-Florin, L. E. (2019) 'Charter of participatory democracy: A call for action towards a balanced democratic system', *Built Environment*, 45(1), pp. 112–129. DOI: 10.2148/benv.45.1.112.
McCann, P. (2019) 'Perceptions of Regional Inequality and the Geography of Discontent: Insights from the UK'. [available at http://uk2070.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/01-McCann-UK-Regional-Inequality-Debates.pdf]
Natarajan, L. (2017) 'Socio-spatial learning: A case study of community knowledge in participatory spatial planning', *Progress in Planning*, 111, pp. 1–23.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.progress.2015.06.002 .
Tomaney, J. (2017) 'Region and place III: Well-being', *Progress in Human Geography*, 41(1), pp. 99–107. DOI: 10.1177/0309132515601775.
UK2070 Commission (2019) *Fairer and Stronger: Rebalancing the UK Economy* (The First Report of the UK2070 Commission, May 2019) [available at
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DaPlONpLXwxS1lE2kLu3aQVkOQEmFLwB/view]
UNECE. (1998) *Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters*, UNECE, Aarhus, Denmark.

Participants
The participants came from a range of civil society organisations working on diverse activities.

The types included:

- Housing: providers of a range of homes (general needs or specialized housing) along with tenancy and accommodation services

- Environment: campaigners and others focused on protecting natural resources and wildlife in order to preserve and / or improve the environment for the benefit of present and future generations

- Local economy: promoters of local economic development and providers of support services for local business and entrepreneurs in the form of consultancy, training and collaboration opportunities

- Other types of activity:

  o *(Urban) design support* - advocating for guidelines and offering advice with the end purpose of improving the quality of the built environment and the user experience
  o *Campaigning* - organizing and leading movements which seek to influence decision-making
  o *Citizen support* - providing housing, training and support services primarily for vulnerable individuals
  o *Education* - providing courses and professional development opportunities, as well as undertaking research work
  o *Enable individuals* - enabling people to bring change in their own communities by creating job opportunities and by providing them with the training needed to take action
  o *Environmental action* - protecting wildlife and wildlife-rich landscapes, as well as promoting sustainable behaviour and lifestyles
  o *Heritage conservation* - preserving and protecting local and national heritage in the form of natural landscapes, gardens and buildings
  o *Local economic growth* - support the local economy by enabling local partnerships and by assisting new businesses / entrepreneurial initiatives with advice, tools and skills support
  o *Policy advice* - contributing to policy decision-making by providing research-based evidence and consultancy advice
  o *Resilient communities* - investing in and supporting sustainable communities in meeting the needs of their diverse neighbourhoods by facilitating collaboration between individuals and by assisting with advice, tools and skills support
  o *Youth support* - providing housing, training and support services primarily for vulnerable young people

Excluding those requesting their names do not appear, the organisations were:
(continues overleaf)

Abram Ward Community Co-operative
Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)
Archbishops' Council
Campaign to Protect Rural England
Design North East
Ecosystems Knowledge Network
Friends of Earth central office
Friends of Earth Manchester
Friends of Earth Midlands
Great Places Housing Group

Groundwork
Homes for the North
Housing Futures
Just Space
Lancashire Wildlife Trust
Localise West Midlands
Moseley Regeneration Group
My Fair London
National Trust North East
New Economics Foundation
New Policy Institute
Plunkett Foundation
Rural Services Network
Social Enterprise East of England
The Moseley Society
The Northumberland & Newcastle Society
The Real Junk Food Project
Town and Country Planning Association
TUC
National Education Union
Tyne & Wear Citizens
Tyne Housing
Unique Ladies Wigan
USE-IT!
Workers' Educational Association
With One Voice
Youth Focus North East

Methods

The methods used in this research are qualitative, and designed to elicit experiences and views and significance 'in context'. This means that validity is a matter of 'authenticity', where the research seeks to build as complete and close a picture of a phenomenon as possible. Focus groups are used as they get close to the subject matter and seek out diversity, description and depth in the data. The 'thematic' approach to analysis draws out understandings and reasoning. The techniques used for sampling, fieldwork, and analysis are summarized as follows:

Purposive sampling: The aim was to include Civil Society Organisations with as great a range of experiences of disadvantage as possible. As indicated in the UK2070 Commission's First Report, economic inequality is seen within and between the regions of England and there are many different types of socio-economic disadvantage. In order to capture the diversity of spatial inequality the sample included people working in diverse settings in England, doing different types of work in various parts of the country. Potential participants were identified using publicly available information. The sample was drawn from those working in the North East, North West, Midlands,

Rural England, London and the South East, and organisations with economic, environmental, housing and other social specialisms (see appendix). Participants were offered travel expenses to avoid excluding those with least capacity. Advice was given by several local partners on best locations for events and initial lists of potential recruits. Recruitment was conducted iteratively over a period of months to maximize the range of participant 'types' at each event. The total number of participants was 44 (between 7 and 10 at each event). A further three people who were unable to attend were interviewed by telephone.

Fieldwork protocol: A researcher moderated the discussions to encourage participants to freely discuss the six topics (table 1), using a topic guide with prompt questions. Each event lasted two hours, and followed research protocol for pre-event set-up, opening up and closing down discussions, and bringing proceedings to a close. The protocols were designed to engage participants, avoid limiting the discussions, and allow potentially unanticipated lessons to emerge. Informed consent was given in writing from each participant to record and use the data. All individual participants and some organisations (where anonymity was requested or where anonymity of individuals might have been compromised) are not identified in this report.

Thematic analysis: The discussions were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed. Analysis is not about prevalence, and the findings never claim to be representative in a statistical sense. Instead close iterative and interpretive assessment of data is used to provide robust qualitative analysis. Transcriptions were analysed in NVivo (qualitative data software) by three researchers. Standard coding techniques were used to identify and categorize data by the six topics of interest, and themes of importance within them. That broad code frame was then elaborated inductively from the data to produce further codes. The coding processes were tested within the research team. Those codes were then reduced to provide the findings that are reported in chapters 3 and 4 and synthesized in chapter 5.