

An exploration of agency and participation factors relevant to supporting Gaelic vernacular communities.

A Preliminary Report

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1. Introduction

This small research study builds on the legacy of the *Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community* research (GVCV)¹ through exploring community agency and participation factors relevant to how Gaelic development interventions engage with the Gaelic vernacular community. In particular, the study considers policy interventions which can be aligned more productively to supporting the critical role Gaelic-speaking communities have in determining and securing their own sociolinguistic and socioeconomic futures. This report is based on consultations and a survey in two rural Gaelic vernacular districts, one in west Lewis and one in the north area of Skye. This research was conducted during the period of COVID-19 restrictions, and thus sought to ascertain local perspectives on adapting to such challenges and to explore mechanisms by which the communities can emerge from these circumstances. This research context for conducting the study is both local and global from two perspectives: the global threat posed by the COVID pandemic, on the one hand, and the ubiquitous endangerment of the globe's minority languages and of cultural diversity, on the other. As the world begins to emerge from the multiple disruptions caused by the health pandemic, those concerned about the stark reality of the ongoing sociolinguistic pandemic will most likely struggle to vie for attention and resources in what might prove to be an even less interested or more antagonistic environment, as more powerful and populous constituencies clamour to have their needs met first. Expecting the post-COVID world to be more interested in ethnolinguistic vulnerability, from the current perspective, would appear to be optimistic. This pending situation puts added pressure on fragile ethnolinguistic minorities to explore alternative social initiatives to protect their societal situations.

2. Background

The Christie Commission Report (2011)² highlighted the need to address and reform the delivery of public services in Scotland. A primary mechanism which has emerged as a result of the Christie Report, seen as being key to public service reform, is the concept of participatory governance and participatory budgeting processes.³ The Christie Commission recognised the value of communities and their abilities to create social and economic change, although the relevance of the Report has been re-assessed in relation to rural areas and for service delivery in rural communities (see Currie, 2017).⁴ The focus and direction of enlightened policy development and community engagement are increasingly targeted on localised social innovation and creativity as the key drivers of a new paradigm of place-based and participatory development (OECD, 2006)⁵, and on the identification of new models of community engagement.

¹ Ó Giollagáin, C., Camshron, G., Moireach, P., Ó Curnáin, B., Caimbeul, I., MacDonald, B. and Péterváry, T. (2020) *Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community: A comprehensive sociolinguistic survey of Scottish Gaelic* (GVCV). Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

² Scottish Government, 2011. Available at <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2011/06/27154527/0>

³ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/participatory-budgeting/>

⁴ Currie, M. (2017). *Implications for rural areas of the Christie Commission's report on the future delivery of public services*. Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences, The James Hutton Institute.

⁵ OECD (2006) *New Rural Paradigm*. OECD Publications: Paris. Available online at <http://www.oecd.org/gov/regional-policy/thenewruralparadigmpoliciesandgovernance.htm>

Participatory (community) governance relates to the recognition that communities have ‘agency’, and that they should have the ability to act and be agents of their own development. However, participatory governance is a relatively new approach to public policy in Scotland, and as such, challenges will inevitably emerge in the power relations governing resource allocations between public policy bodies and target communities. Equally, finding an equilibrium between the aspirations of public bodies and the extent to which agency is actually ‘awarded’ to communities will determine local priorities, and enable communities to wield a degree of power and control over their own circumstances.

A policy area where community agency and participation should be strengthened is in the engagement mechanism and the public policy interface with the vernacular Gaelic communities. The recently published sociolinguistic research survey of Scottish Gaelic, (GCVC), detailed the relative weaknesses in the linkages between Gaelic-language policy operating at a national level and the current impediments in the Gaelic vernacular community to influence Gaelic policy. In short, current policy and practice do not attach sufficient importance to community agency and participation at the local level in the design and implementation of priorities to maintain and revitalise Gaelic within the vernacular group.

If the existing gap between the socially dissociated national Gaelic language policy and *in-situ* Gaelic sociolinguistic practice is not addressed at both strategic and operational levels (cf. Ó Giollagáin and Caimbeul 2021)⁶, current evidence points to the inevitable and ultimate demise of Gaelic as a vernacular language (GCVC).

A key recommendation of the GCVC was the establishment of a *Participatory Community Cooperative Trust*, linked to an *Urras na Gàidhlig* (Gaelic Trust). In order to inform and enable a more progressive approach in the design and implementation of Gaelic-language policy to address the language crisis of the vernacular Gaelic group, a deeper understanding is required of how the dynamics of community agency and participation function at the local level. The factors of agency and participation are fundamental to successful community development processes and should be appraised at a local level to identify the most effective and equitable institutional frameworks to support Gaelic development. Such knowledge and understanding would enable a more direct and productive engagement between national Gaelic policy and the current challenging realities of the vulnerable situation within the Gaelic vernacular community.

3. Focus of the research study

The focus of this small-scale study was on exploring how the community development factors of agency and participation, in the context of national Gaelic language policy, interrelate with the realities of two Gaelic vernacular communities participating in this research. The study is a first step in developing an understanding of the extent to which community agency and participation are observable at the community level in relation to policies aimed at local Gaelic development priorities. Evidence provided by the community through the research process will assess the potential for re-orienting current national and regional Gaelic policies in order to strengthen the future state and long-term viability of the Gaelic language in communities.

The fragile situation associated with the state of Gaelic in the vernacular community is reported in detail in the GCVC.

⁶ Ó Giollagáin, C. and Caimbeul, I. (2021). Moving Beyond Asocial Minority-Language Policy. *Scottish Affairs* 30.2: pages, 178–211.

A key area of exploration in this research centred on the implementation of official Gaelic language policies, and how such policies interact with local realities as viewed by participants from the two communities involved in the study.

4. Key elements of methodology

The key parameters of the methodology included:

1. 2 vernacular communities were participants in the pilot research study. One community is located on the west-side of Lewis and the other in the north-east area of Skye. Both communities were selected on the basis they participated in the follow-on *Community Conversations*⁷ organised by Alasdair Allan MSP and Kate Forbes MSP, which took place in response to the *Gaelic Crisis* research publication. As a result of participating in these conversations, both communities indicated their willingness to provide further insights in relation to how Gaelic development operates at a local level within their respective communities.
2. The research process involved two specific elements: a qualitative element generated through a total of 6 focus group discussions involving the two communities, and an online survey questionnaire.
 - a. For the focus group element, a number of topic discussion questions were developed to ascertain viewpoints on aspects of local Gaelic language-based community development processes and outcomes. (see **Appendix A** for the list of questions which guided the discussions online);
 - b. For the survey element of the research process, a series of questions were developed to complement the responses from the qualitative responses generated by focus groups.
3. A lead individual from each of the two communities acted as a local coordinator in support of the research process. COVID restrictions meant no face-to-face meetings/discussions could take place directly with community members with all elements of the research engagement process undertaken remotely and on-line.
4. The two community coordinators managed local activities in respect of identifying community members to participate in the focus group discussions and also in the distribution of information related to the survey questionnaire through locally based newsletters and on-line fora.
5. The two communities responded positively in providing their respective views in the online discussion and in the completion of the survey questionnaire.
6. A total of 34 individuals participated in the online meetings and the questionnaire generated 46 responses in total. All of the online discussions were conducted in Gaelic.
7. To observe and ensure the anonymity of community participants, survey responses to each question have been collated, and comments made by community participants, and included in the text, are not allocated to any particular area.

5. Gaelic Use in the Study Areas

The two areas participating in the research study were the West-side of Lewis (An Taobh Siar) and the North-east area of Skye (An Taobh Sear). The area coordinators supporting the research team were asked to supply local post-town/area names which could be used in the survey questionnaire to indicate the locality of respondents, including the target area for the research as a whole. The following post-town/local area names were identified by the local coordinators as being suitable for the research survey and to identify the locality of survey respondents:

- West-side of Lewis: Barvas, Bru, Arnol, Bragar, Shawbost and Dalbeg.

⁷ Allan, A. and Crouse, L.A. (2020). *Community Conversations on the Future of the Gaelic Language within the Vernacular Community*. <https://www.alasdairallan.scot/comhraidhean-gaidhlig>

- North-east of Skye: Staffin, Kilmuir and Sgìre Thròndarnis.

In order to provide context for the research study, trends in Gaelic-speaking populations from both localities alongside trends in primary school pupils attending Gaelic-medium education classes are presented as follows.

5.1 Population trends

The research study area identified for the West-side of Lewis included the following 2011 data zone areas.

- Carloway to Shawbost
- Bragar to Brue
- Barvas to Borve
- Galson to Swainbost

The North-east side area of Skye is identified by the 2011 data zone as ‘Skye North-east’ with the geography of the data zone recorded as ‘Flodigarry to Staffin’. For completeness the ‘Skye North-west’ data zone is also included in the overview of population trends. This area is recognised by the Census data as comprising Earlish, Uig and Kilmuir.

Tables 1 and 2 show the trends in Gaelic speakers in the geographic areas participating in the research study.

Table 1: Gaelic Speaker Trends 1991-2011 in Research Area

<u>Locality</u>	<u>1991</u>			<u>2011</u>			<u>Population Change as %</u>	<u>No. Gaelic Speakers Change as %</u>
	<u>All people aged 3 and over</u>	<u>Number of Gaelic Speakers</u>	<u>Gaelic Speakers as % of population</u>	<u>All people aged 3 and over</u>	<u>Number of Gaelic Speakers</u>	<u>Gaelic Speakers as % of population</u>		
West-side Lewis	2,973	2,521	85%	2,718	1,718	63%	-9%	-32%
North-east Skye	435	345	79%	615	285	46%	41%	-17%
North-west Skye	841	482	57%	943	352	37%	12%	-27%

Source: National Records of Scotland, Census data

Table 1 shows some significant shifts in the Gaelic demographic profiles of all areas. The west-side of Lewis has shifted from a healthy threshold of 85% Gaelic speakers in the overall population in 1991 to 63% in 2011, a decline of 32% in the overall number of Gaelic speakers in the area. The population as a whole has also declined by 9% as the economically active population move to find employment opportunities and adequate housing elsewhere. A sustainability threshold of c.65% of minority language community speaking Gaelic is recognised as being required to support communal use of language and resist pressures of rapid language shift (Ó Giollagáin et al 2007; Ó Giollagáin and Charlton 2015)⁸. According to the 2011 Scottish Census, the west-side of Lewis is now on the cusp of such a threshold.

⁸ Ó Giollagáin, C., Mac Donnacha, S., Ní Chualáin, F., Ní Sheaghda, A. and O’Brien, M. (2007) *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht: Principal findings and recommendations*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Ó Giollagáin, C. and Charlton, M. (2015) *Nuashonrú ar an Staidéar Cuimsitheach Teangeolaíoch ar Úsáid na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht* [UCLS: Update of the Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht: 2006–2011]. Na Forbacha: Údaras na Gaeltacha.

The change in the Gaelic-speaking population of north-east Skye is more pronounced, a shift from 79% of the resident population speaking Gaelic in 1991 to just 46% of the resident population reported as Gaelic speakers at the 2011 Census. The decline in the proportion of Gaelic speakers (46%) in the resident population can be attributed to an increase of 41% in the resident population between 1991 and 2011 with most of the new residents to the area not Gaelic speakers. Only 37% of the resident population of north-west Skye Census data zone claimed to be Gaelic speakers at the 2011 Census.

Appendix B provides more details on trends by each area.

Table 2 provides an overview of the number of resident Gaelic speakers who reported at the 2011 Census that they also spoke Gaelic at home.

Table 2: Number of Gaelic Speakers in Population who speak Gaelic at Home – 2011 Census Data

<u>Locality</u>	<u>All people aged 3 and over</u>	<u>Gaelic: Can speak Gaelic</u>	<u>Language other than English used at home: Gaelic</u>	<u>% Population as Gaelic Speakers</u>	<u>% Gaelic Speakers who use Gaelic at Home</u>
North-west Lewis	2,718	1,719	1,520	63%	88%
North-east Skye (Flodigarry – Staffin)	615	285	234	46%	82%
North-west Skye (Earlish - Uig – Kilmuir)	943	352	233	37%	66%

Source: National Records of Scotland, Census data

Table 2 indicates in terms of a general overview that for the most part those members of the resident population reported as Gaelic speakers in the 2011 Census speak Gaelic at home. However, there are percentage point gaps ranging from 12% in the west-side of Lewis to 34% in north-west Skye in relation to reported Gaelic speakers and people who speak Gaelic at home.

See Chapter 2 of the GCVC for a more detailed and technical analysis of Gaelic Census data.

5.2 Primary school GME pupils

Table 3 shows the trend of the percentage of the school roll in Gaelic-medium education in the four primary schools in the two research areas. **Appendix B** provides a breakdown by school and by year-class over the period 2011-12 to 2019-20.

Table 3: Percentage of Primary School Roll in Gaelic-medium Education 2011-12 to 2019-20

<u>School</u>	<u>2011-12</u>	<u>2012-13</u>	<u>2013-14</u>	<u>2014-15</u>	<u>2015-16</u>	<u>2016-17</u>	<u>2017-18</u>	<u>2018-19</u>	<u>2019-20</u>
An Taobh Siar	44%	50%	53%	48%	50%	49%	48%	49%	57%
Siabost	42%	21%	30%	35%	48%	53%	45%	49%	53%
Cille Mhoire	79%	76%	64%	63%	60%	58%	62%	57%	61%
Stafainn	81%	74%	89%	86%	86%	79%	87%	80%	90%

Source: Bòrd na Gàidhlig

The north Skye primary schools (Cille Mhoire and Stafainn) have maintained a strong Gaelic-medium presence in their respective schools over the last 10 years. Staffin (Stafainn) in particular is a strongly focused Gaelic-medium primary notwithstanding that only 46% of the resident population are reported as Gaelic speakers at the 2011 Census. The west-side of Lewis primary schools (An Taobh Siar and Siabost) have seen the percentage of the school roll in Gaelic-medium education increase slightly over the last 10 years although Gaelic enrolment remains at less than 60% in each school.

Further research would be required to understand the community and educational policy dynamics in each locality to fully understand the mechanisms driving such statistics.

6. An Overview of Scottish Gaelic Language Planning

In 2005 the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act established the statutory language planning agency, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and the provisions of the Act set out the framework for the creation of Gaelic language plans in Scottish public bodies. The preamble to the Act provided an overview of the primary powers given to the Bòrd:

- ‘Functions exercisable with a view to securing the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language, including:
 - the functions of preparing a national Gaelic language plan; and
 - of requiring certain public authorities to prepare and publish Gaelic language plans ... in connection with the exercise of their functions and to maintain and implement such plans, and of issuing guidance in relation to Gaelic education’.

The first National Plan for Gaelic was for the period 2007–2012, and currently Bòrd na Gàidhlig are consulting on the fourth National Plan for Gaelic which will be for the period 2023-2028.

The primary instrument of the 2005 Act was the requirement for Scottish public bodies to prepare and implement Gaelic language plans. The purpose of such plans was (and is) to expand the profile, acquisition and use of Gaelic across the public sector in Scotland. By providing for the use of Gaelic in the delivery of public services, as well as in the internal operations of public bodies, Gaelic Language Plans are regarded as the formal policy instruments to increase the profile and visibility of the language, with the expectation that this would help raise the status of Gaelic in the public domain. The approach taken to frame Gaelic-language policy in Scotland is very much based on minority language planning structures in other jurisdictions, most notably Canada, Ireland and Wales. The narrow, but close to all-consuming, focus on the production of Gaelic language plans for public bodies in Scotland, none of which have been independently evaluated for effectiveness in relation to language outcomes in either the island or the urban communities, has arguably significantly impeded a community-focused and systems-based approach to revitalising the state of Gaelic across Scotland.

Despite a budget of circa £25 million allocated to each five-year National Gaelic Plan, only the 2007-12 Plan has been formally evaluated on its impact on the state of Gaelic at the community level. In summarising their evaluation of the impact of the 2007–12 National Plan for Gaelic, Jones *et al.* (2016)⁹ highlighted the following issues:

- The absence of clear benchmarks in the NGLP makes it more difficult to draw unambiguous conclusions with regard to the success (or lack) of implementation.
- A perceived lack of connection between the use of Gaelic in the home, early years and communities and in formal education was identified as a shortcoming in the current NGLP.
- Stakeholders’ general perceptions of the NGLP tended to reflect their widespread sense that it was useful as a tool to demonstrate language-policy priorities to civil servants and politicians, and to some extent public bodies preparing their own GLPs. However, there was also a perception that the Plan was often of little use or no relevance to the wider Gaelic community.

⁹ Jones, K., Williams, C., Dunmore, S., McLeod, W. and Dunbar, R. (2016) Assessment of the Impact of the National Gaelic Language Plan 2012–17: Final report for Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Inverness: Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

- Widely held concerns that GME is currently prioritised over language maintenance in the Gaelic community may, in part, be assuaged by adopting a more inclusive and wide-ranging conception of education as a strategy for language development which makes greater use of the traditional communities. These should articulate more clearly goals for the strengthening of such communities, including the development of greater opportunities within them for social use of Gaelic in an expanding number of settings.

In addition, Jones *et.al.* (2016: 9) highlighted the issue of *agency* as follows:

While the high-level commitments, (included in each of the Language Plans of Public Bodies), may be accepted for what they are – statements of political intent and direction of travel – the crunch issue is whether and how the body which creates the strategy gets, and is able to ensure, buy-in, even of public-sector bodies, which is easier to regulate than the non-state sector. In a Scottish Gaelic context, buy-in involves not only Scottish Government, but also local authorities, non-governmental public bodies and, crucially specialist Gaelic organisations, which are typically the Bòrd’s delivery partners in respect of at least some significant aspects of its national plans the Bòrd is to a considerable extent reliant on others – public authorities, Gaelic organisations, other groups – to implement policy and fulfil commitments.

This emphasis on *agency*, in the context of the Bòrd’s powers, highlights a critical strategic gap in the focus and delivery of national Gaelic-language planning priorities, in that the *agency* and *participation* of Gaelic-speaking and Gaelic-learning communities as key components of the process of language revitalisation appear not to be explicitly recognised as the fundamental pivots on which the future of Gaelic will thrive and survive. Future national Scottish Gaelic planning could be reasonably expected to be flexible in its recognition of different communities of interest and to be configured to fully engage on an equitable basis with distinct communities in the design and in the delivery of appropriate actions. These actions should bring a focused relevance to language planning in each of the localities working towards strengthening the use and learning Gaelic in the daily lives of speakers and learners across diverse communities in Scotland.

For a full analysis and critique of the present approach of Scottish Gaelic planning see GVCV: 374-386, and Ó Giollagáin and Caimbeul (2021).

7. Community Agency and Participation

The Brundtland Commission’s definition of sustainable development is equally applicable to the survival of vernacular language communities such as Scottish Gaelic. The Commission defined sustainable development as ‘meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (1987: 8).¹⁰ Whilst the Brundtland Commission was focused on the natural world, an extension of their definition of sustainability to include cultural and language heritage could also bring into focus for policy-makers and Scottish Government the importance of acting decisively to strengthen the present situation of the Gaelic vernacular group and project a vision for Gaelic into the future. A radical transformation is needed to create the condition of ‘resilience’ necessary to ensure a sustainable future for Gaelic in its last remaining vernacular communities. How such a change can take place is dependent on the voice of the community being heard and being taken account of in policy development.

¹⁰ Brundtland, G. (1987) *Our Common Future: World Commission on Environment and Development* (New York, Oxford University Press).

It is also dependent on how Scottish Government and public bodies engage positively in a process of participation for a systematic renewal and reorganisation of local interventions which will drive a revitalised future for Gaelic in vernacular communities and elsewhere in Scotland.

However, participation needs to go beyond projects and programmes directed by the ‘Gaelic professionals’ in the organisations funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig or by those who have been in a long-term client relationship with the Bòrd (cf. Ó Giollagáin and Caimbeul 2021). Irrespective of the merits of individual projects/programmes, there is a need for a significant shift to acknowledge the fundamental role of communities in being the initiators of change within their respective localities. There is a danger that the ‘rhetoric of participation’ will be used to maintain power structures and enable those in positions of influence and authority to pursue their own agendas and control the present status-quo position. Getting beyond the scope of current policy agendas requires community focused development initiatives and integrated decision-making at a grassroots level.

Recognition of the complexity involved in ‘reengineering’ the current policy structure in alignment with community capacity will require the forming of local and regional networks of knowledge and support to achieve positive change. The development of such networks would resonate with the frequently invoked concept of ‘social capital’. (For a comprehensive discussion on definitions and interpretations on social capital and networks, see Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Bourdieu, 1986; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000).¹¹

Bourdieu defined social capital as ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 241). Bourdieu saw social capital as a property of the individual, rather than the collective, derived primarily from one’s social position and status. The key difference between Bourdieu’s conception of social capital and other definitions is in how power relations are interpreted. For Bourdieu, social capital was considered to be linked to the reproduction of class, status, and power relations, with power seen as *power over* as opposed to *power to*.

In addition, Bourdieu centres the network approach to social capital with the individual but within the context of a framework system which links social, economic and cultural structures. These linkages are the fundamental building blocks for understanding the complexities of accruing and reproducing social capital. However, beyond such complexities, we also need to comprehend how well a community can engage and overcome problems and challenges and this requires an understanding of agency. Agency is the key indicator of a collective’s ability to identify unified solutions to respond to sustainable development challenges. The assumption which underpins such a view is that a group of people and/or a collective possesses the ability – *agency* – to act and to be the architects of social and economic change in their respective localities.

In the literature there are many ways in which agency has been defined. Harvey (2002: 173)¹² defines agency as the ‘capacity of persons to transform existing states of affairs’.

¹¹ Borgatti, S. & Foster, P. (2003) The network paradigm in organisational research: a review and typology, *Journal of Management*, 29(6), pp. 991–1013.

Bourdieu, P. 1986. The Forms of Capital. pp. 241–58 in *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*, edited by J. G. Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press.

Portes, A. (1998) Social capital: its origins and applications in modern sociology, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, pp. 1–24.

Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community* (New York, Simon & Schuster).

¹² Harvey, D. (2002) Agency and community: a critical realist paradigm, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 32(2), pp. 163–194.

Eversole (2011, 2012)¹³ states that the principal argument underlying the discourse on community agency is ‘that place-based communities, with a bit of help and encouragement from enabling public policy, can create their own development trajectories’. Eversole (2012: 30)¹⁴ illustrates how public policy practitioners can ‘remake the idea of participation to meet the real needs of communities’. Of particular importance in the context of this small research study is the following:

Increasing consensus is emerging in the literature that communities have knowledge and institutions that are qualitatively different from the knowledge and institutions that guide the work of formal development organizations. Such ‘community knowledge’ and institutions are organically bottom-up ways that communities pursue their change agendas. Yet the knowledge and institutions of communities tend to be invisible to professionals trained to see knowledge as expert knowledge and institutions as formal development institutions. Old ways of thinking about development as something that professionals initiate, persist alongside more recent assertions that communities themselves make change: creating deep and often unacknowledged tensions for community development practitioners. Participation as typically understood and practiced retains a legacy of a top-down view of social change: it invites ‘communities’ into development processes and development decision making, it respects their voices and their presence, but asks them, in effect, to leave their knowledge and institutions at the door (Eversole (2012: 37–38).

Another important dimension that determines the extent of community agency is the political system at local and national levels. How the political system engages with the community, especially regarding the management of resources and the community role in decision-making, will determine the degree of agency and participation which local groups and individuals feel are under the control of the community. A well-functioning political system, in all its dimensions, should support a sense of group or individual empowerment to make changes and to realise their own aspirations within their respective sociolinguistic and socioeconomic situations.

The analysis of the survey responses and the online discussions with the two communities participating in this research study aims to make a start in answering important questions on community agency and participation in the context of improving the state of Gaelic in the vernacular communities of Scotland.

8. Analysis of Responses to the Community Survey and Focus Groups

The analysis of this research is based on six online discussions held with 34 community members and the 46 responses generated from the online survey. The discussion topics to elicit views from the two participating communities are set out in **Appendix A**. The views of the community are presented in the following analysis. Specific comments from community participants in the study are presented in *italics*.

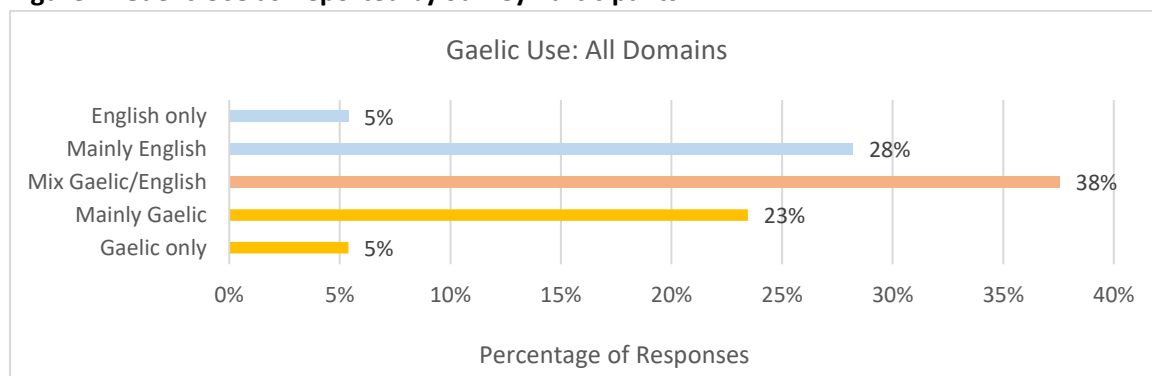
8.1 Extent of Gaelic Use in the Community

The vitality of Gaelic and by extension its future sustainability in the community are directly linked to the extent to which the language is used across all societal domains. **Figure 1** shows the aggregated responses of respondents across all domains of use. Collectively 38% of responses show a mix of Gaelic and English used across every-day domains of community activity. A breakdown by language use is shown in the Figure 1.

¹³ Eversole, R. (2011). Community Agency and Community Engagement: Re-theorising Participation in Governance, *Journal of Public Policy*, 31(1). pp. 51-71.

¹⁴ Eversole, R. (2012). Remaking participation: challenges for community development practice. *Community Development Journal*, 47(1), pp. 29-41.

Figure 1: Gaelic Use as Reported by Survey Participants



N=46

The predominance of English across all community domains of language-use activity is evident in these responses. At a more detailed level the survey responses indicated that those individuals who responded to the survey in the 65+ age group predominately speak Gaelic across most domains of use whereas the younger generations reported that a mix of English and Gaelic dominated conversations. Only 2% of respondents reported speaking Gaelic-only to teenagers and to children at primary school. Respondents reported that when they were young, they spoke mainly Gaelic/mix of Gaelic and/or English but now English predominates in any conversations with people younger than 18 years of age. However, within the areas participating in this study, the use of Gaelic-only and a mix of Gaelic/English predominates in conversations in friend's houses, the church and at work within the local area.

(See Chapter 2 of the GVCV: 64-77 for a more detailed assessment of Gaelic ability and household practice.)

In the online discussions with community members the level of Gaelic use across domains of activity indicated by the survey responses was confirmed, with the use of Gaelic reported as being considerably stronger within the older age groups than amongst the younger generations. A range of particular views were reported:

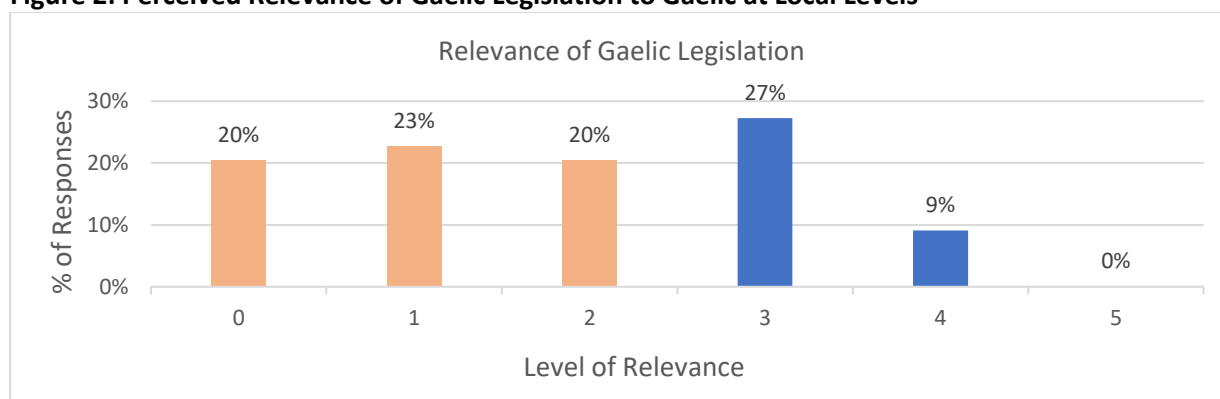
- *Tha a' Ghàidhlig làidir an lùib na seann daoine ach chan eil an lùib na h-òigridh.*
- *Chan eil daoine gu leòr san sgìre le Gàidhlig – tha barrachd dhen +50's le Gàidhlig an coimeas leis an òigridh. Tha mòran dhe na daoine bhon sgìre le Gàidhlig a' fuireach air falbh bhon taigh ann an Glaschu/Dùn Èideann.*
- *Chan eil cothroman ann mar a bha on nach eil luchd na Gàidhlig anns a' choimhearsnachd. Chan eil mòran theaghlaichean a-nist às an sgìre agus chan eil na cothroman ann a' Ghàidhlig a bhruidhinn. Nuair a bha sinne a' fàs suas cha robh ann ach Gàidhlig san sgìre.*
- *Chan eil e nàdarra leinn a bhith a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig le chèile a dh'aindeoin is gu bheil Gàidhlig againn.*
- *Tha feadhainn le Gàidhlig aca ach chan eil iad a' faireachdainn neo cho cofhurtail sin Gàidhlig a chleachdadh. Chan eil thu airson a bhith nad "Gàidhlig fanatic"!*
- *Tha mi nas buailtich Beurla a bhruidhinn ann an suidheachadh sòisealta.*
- *Tha mise an còmhnaidh a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig aig an taigh. Le mo phàrantan fad na h-ùine ach buailteach Beurla le mo phiuthar. Chan eil ach an teaghlach againn fhìn le Gàidhlig anns an àite far am bheil sinne a' fuireach.*
- *Tha Gàidhlig ga bruidhinn anns a' choimhearsnachd ach chan eil mi a' cluinntinn a cheart uiread is a bhithinn a' cluinntinn mu chuairt 10 bliadhna air n-ais. Tha deifir mòr air tighinn thairis air na beagan bhliadhnaichean a chaidh seachad.*
- *Tha daoine san sgìre le Gàidhlig ach chan eil iad ga bruidhinn neo ga cleachdadh.*

- *Cunnart ann gu bheil tuilleadh is còrr de chuideam air a chur air gràmar na tha air bruidhinn na Gàidhlig agus tha sin buailteach bacadh a chur air fileantaich nach deach tro foghlam Gàidhlig agus aig a bheil sgilean foirmeil caran lag.*

8.2 Perceived Barriers in the Use of Gaelic

The community conversations elicited a number of responses on how those present viewed particular barriers in relation to the use of Gaelic in their respective communities. A general but key point raised by respondents was that the current national approach to Gaelic development and indeed learning has become detached from wider policy initiatives such as Community Planning Partnerships, the Islands Bill and the Single Outcome Agreements agreed between Scottish Government and Local Authorities. As **Figure 2** below illustrates, 63% of responses indicate that the various elements which comprise current Gaelic legislation do not address the obvious language crisis that exists in relation to Gaelic vitality in our indigenous communities.

Figure 2: Perceived Relevance of Gaelic Legislation to Gaelic at Local Levels



N=46. Level 0 = low relevance and Level 5 = high relevance

Community members are of the view that current policy interventions across a number of developmental parameters do not recognise the importance of Gaelic as the foundational basis of the social milieu of existing traditional/indigenous Gaelic communities. The social continuity of Gaelic as a community language is predicated on the ongoing existence of rooted social networks of speakers, but the current approach within present policy interventions is skewed towards increasing higher order status and institutional promotion, alongside an emphasis on Gaelic within the education system, without robust linkages to the importance of community as the critical element in the intergenerational transmission of the language to future speakers.

Respondents participating in the community discussions were also critical of the present Gaelic Medium Education curriculum and how such education provision is configured. The GME curriculum is viewed as being highly problematic – the curriculum is based on an English world-view with little regard to Gaelic culture (*chan eil e stèidhichte air a' chultar*). In addition, community participants suggested that GME fails to give full cognisance to fluent speakers in the present system.

Community comments included:

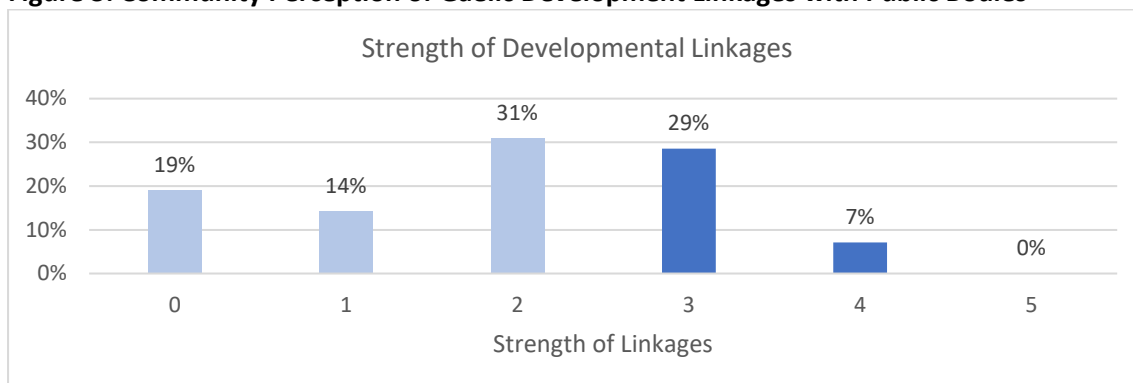
- *Mur an deach thu tro FMG (Foghlam tro Mheadhan na Gàidhlig) 's e luchd ionnsachaidh a tha annad.*
- *Chaidh tòrr a thoirt air falbh gun fhiosta bho fileantaich le FMG.*
- *Bha cròileagan ann agus Playgroup. Dhùin am Playgroup. Thàinig clann a' Phlaygroup dhan chròileagan ach cha robh iad airson Gàidhlig ionnsachadh. Cha robh nighean bheag le Gàidhlig airson a bruidhinn oir bha h-uile duine eile a' bruidhinn Beurla.*

- *FMG. Cnapan-starra chan eil e air a stèidheachadh ann an dòigh freagarrach airson na coimhearsnachd.*
- *Anns an Sgoil Àraich “No Gaelic assumed”. Suidheachadh doirbh airson clann a tha fileanta.*

8.3 Community perceptions on the development interface with Public Bodies

A common refrain from communities is that public bodies which deal with Gaelic development matters are somewhat remote from the communities they aspire to serve, they lack real understanding of the reality on the ground, and there is little ongoing active communication on issues of local importance. The survey responses from this small research project shown at **Figure 3** confirm previous viewpoints (GVCV and Allan and Crouse 2020). 64% of responses indicate that positive and active linkages are low.

Figure 3: Community Perception of Gaelic Development Linkages with Public Bodies



N=46. Level 0 = low and Level 5 = high

The general fragmented approach to integrating Gaelic development within a socio-community framework adds to the feeling of ‘remoteness’ that local groups report on the public engagement of Gaelic development bodies with localised situations. Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Local Authorities, in particular, are considered as being mostly ‘hands-off’ in relation to developmental linkages. Only Fèisean nan Gàidheal were reported in a positive light, partly because the organisation is situated within a Gaelic speaking community, and because the localised structure of the fèisean provides an important community linkage. A number of the individuals who contributed to the forum discussions are somewhat ambivalent about the actual impacts of the Gaelic community development activities of Comunn na Gàidhlig (CnaG). However, in some locations there is much positive feedback on the engagement of individual CnaG officers with community activities.

Community members report a lack of transparency and accountability in the work of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The Bòrd is seen as ‘detached’ from the real community challenges of Gaelic development. Even when there is support forthcoming for Gaelic projects within the community, not everybody is aware of the purpose of the projects and the general objectives which are being pursued. *Chan eil an taic a tha a’ tighinn gu na coimhearsnachd seo follaiseach dhan a h-uile neach a tha a’ fuireach sa choimhearsnachd.*

A particular issue is that decisions on financial support and Gaelic priorities are being taken outside the area without much local consultation on issues that the community view as being a local priority. Access to funding streams beyond short-term project cycles is also a major challenge for local communities with a number of individuals reporting that Bòrd processes in relation to funding applications are bureaucratic and time-consuming with application forms seeking similar background information year-on-year. *Tha e doirbh a thuigsinn ciamar a tha Bòrd na Gàidhlig a’ sùileachadh gun tig aig daoine àbhaisteach sa choimhearsnachd na foirmichean iarrtais a lìonadh – tha iad doirbh dèiligeadh leotha.*

From the conversations generated by this small research project it would appear that many participants are of the view that there are two Gaelic worlds: vernacular communities in the islands and learner/speaker networks elsewhere.

Whilst generally recognising the positive, important role of learners for the future of Gaelic, members of the Gaelic-speaking communities in the islands felt that they themselves only exist on the periphery of the “Gaelic world” which takes precedence in the official focus: the promotion and support for Gaelic-learner initiatives. The ‘Gaelic professional’ world operates at a distance removed from the traditional Gaelic community according to participants in this research.

- *Tha saoghal na Gàidhlig ann agus tha e dùinte gu ìre do fileantaich a chaidh a thogail sa chànan. Tha daoine le Gàidhlig a’ faireachdainn nach eil iad mar phàirt dhen choimhearsnachd seo a tha air a riaghladh le na buidhnean poblach.*
- *Saoghal proifeasanta na Gàidhlig agus a’ choimhearsnachd Ghàidhlig tha air taobh a-muigh an t-saoghail sin. “An exclusive group”.*
- *If there are links, they aren’t evidenced in local actions, policies aren’t much good without actions.*
- *...the impression I get is that people who work outwith “the Gaelic world” have no idea what Bòrd na Gàidhlig do.*
- *Chan eil na “professional Gaels” gar riochdachadh.*

According to a number of the study participants the most successful initiatives have been directly initiated by the community, rather than from Gaelic planning documentation or from advice from Gaelic development officers. People feel that there is generally a disconnect between operational reality and a set of aspirational policy measures that might or might not work in the real-world of Gaelic development at the level of community.

In addition, in relation to the community perception of a disconnect between public policy and community aspirations, respondents taking part in this research indicated the lack of a community voice in decisions relating to how Gaelic funding is awarded and spent locally.

One particular survey comment also resonated with the participants in the online discussions, in relation to funding generally and funding decisions locally and regionally:

At the moment, with GLAIF management devolved to local authorities nobody has any control over what is sought or how it is spent. We have literally no idea who completes the applications or what funding they seek. We are not consulted.

However, some participants did highlight one particular initiative which had worked well in terms of engagement and the involvement of the community, as illustrated by this comment:

Bha lomairt Shiaboist fìor mhath le oifigear taiceil is comasach: bha a’ chlann a’ bruidhinn ri daoine nas sine anns a’ choimhearsnachd. Cèilidhean beaga le Clann an là an-dè. Math dhan chloinn. Bha clann comhfhurtail a’ bruidhinn ris na seann daoine. Cuimhne mhath aca air a’ phròiseact. A nis, tha dìreach Gàidhlig ann an sgoil.

Project funding for this successful local initiative ended and momentum was lost within the community in creating successful links between the different age cohorts. This is another example of mostly successful community-based projects being ended due to the limitations of short-term objectives and a lack of forward planning by funding bodies, as the following comment demonstrates.

Chan eil sìon lèirsinneach mun dòigh a tha taic air a thoirt seachad. Chan eil buidhnean air an toirt còmhla airson a bhith a’ bruidhinn air cuspairean lèirsinneachd agus air ciamar a thigeadh adhartas a dhèanamh taobh a-staigh choimhearsnachdan fa leth.

A constant negative refrain from the online meetings was the lack of a proactive engagement shown by Bòrd na Gàidhlig in discussing issues with community groups outwith their third-party funded organisations. According to some study participants policy-makers (including BnaG) do not effectively answer this need.

Chan eil am Bòrd a’ tighinn a bhruidhinn le buidhnean ionadail feuch am bidh fios aca air dè a tha a’ dol agus cuideachd airson taic a thoirt dhan bhuidheann cumail a’ dol.

Na daoine a tha dèanamh na poileasaidhean Gàidhlig, tha iad uile aig ìre eadar-dhealaichte agus fad air falbh bho shuidheachadh na coimhearsnachd.

Community members were of the opinion that the lead Gaelic development body should have a more focused and productive link to the general community.

8.4 Community Agency and Influence in Gaelic Development Decision-making

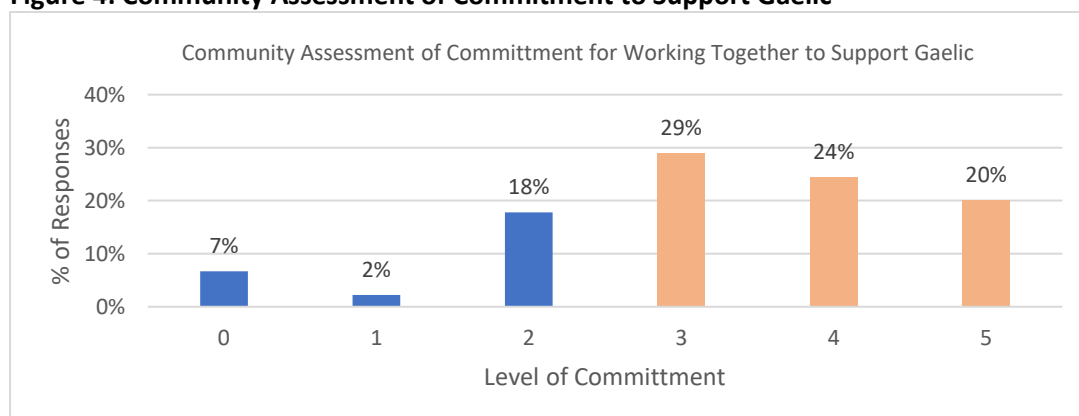
In Scotland, and elsewhere, public policy recognises that communities should have the wherewithal and the ability to create social and economic change (see *Community Empowerment Bill*, for example), and that they should have the ability to act and be agents of their own development. However, there is a fundamental question in relation to how effective Gaelic policy structures are in reality, and in how individuals and groups of people are enabled to be agents of change in current circumstances.

A sustainable framework for Gaelic development within a given locale should operate within an approach which integrates social, economic and linguistic ecology factors¹⁵ as these relate to the vernacular group.

These factors in turn contribute as a functioning system to enable and drive community sustainability and provide the basis for the intergenerational transmission of the language for future generations of speakers.

The ability of indigenous Gaelic communities (or any other community of minority-language speakers) to adapt to challenges and be proactive in creating change to support language sustainability is a signal of the level of ‘linguistic resilience’ inherent within that particular community. In turn, the sense of community commitment for working together in supporting and implementing measures to re-establish Gaelic as the primary language across community domains of activity can be considered as an important indicator of the level of ‘social resilience’ within a community. **Figure 4** provides an indication of how survey respondents assess the level of community commitment for working together to support Gaelic development in their local areas.

Figure 4: Community Assessment of Commitment to Support Gaelic



N=46. Level 0 = low and Level 5 = high

¹⁵ For discussions on language ecology see:

Haugen, E. (1972). *The Ecology of Language*, Stanford University Press.

Skutnabb-Kangas, T. and Harmon, D. (2017). Biological Diversity and Language Diversity. In Fill and Penz (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Ecolinguistics*. London Routledge.

Calvet, L. J. (2006). *Towards an Ecology of World Languages*, translated by Andrew Brown. Polity Press.

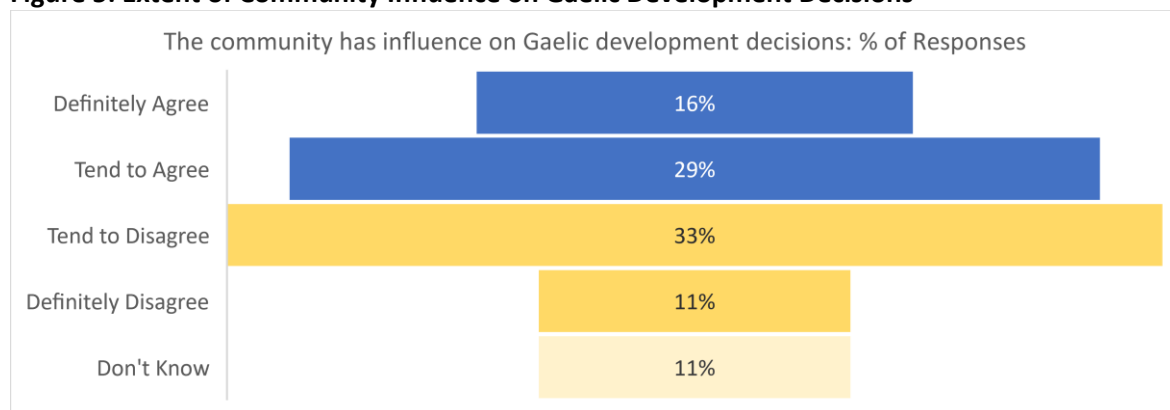
Abley, A. (2003). *Spoken Here: Travels Among Threatened Languages*. Houghton Mifflin.

73% of responses are positive in relation to working as a collective to support Gaelic language activities and initiatives/measures to improve the state of the language in the local area. However, a detailed understanding of the mechanics of adaptive capacity and, hence, the extent of ‘social resilience’ in the context of the state of Gaelic within the communities participating in this study is still lacking. Therefore, we can only report preliminary findings which signal areas of further work.

The ability of Gaelic-speaking communities to adapt and be able to re-set the situation of the language at a local level would require a redirection of focus and a reclaiming of policy decision-making, resources and responsibilities by the individual community. In order to monitor adaptability to change over time, Urras na Gàidhlig-led ‘vernacular community monitoring’ initiatives could be established and supported by relevant policy interventions and a research capability resource to record adaptation and any change in the Gaelic sociolinguistic and social capital of each community. A key underlying principle for such a change from the current ‘top-down’ policy approach applied to Gaelic matters is that communities, and individuals within these communities, should be empowered and able to influence decision-making at a political, policy and community level.

A question asked in this survey aimed to ascertain the linkage between community commitment and the extent of community influence in relation to Gaelic development matters, as these related to and/or impacted on the two participating communities’ respective geographies. **Figure 5** shows the overall response to the question.

Figure 5: Extent of Community Influence on Gaelic Development Decisions



N=46.

As **Figure 5** illustrates, overall responses are evenly split between agreement and disagreement over the extent of community influence in relation to Gaelic development activity in their respective localities.

The below comments from the individuals participating in the community discussions and the survey illustrate the range of challenges (and opportunities) which are inherent in community development processes in general, and particularly in relation to initiating a revitalised public policy approach to Gaelic maintenance and revival within island communities.

- *The more the community is engaged in initiatives related to language the more likely the initiatives will be successful and sustainable.*
- *I can, but purely because I work in community development. For others, I imagine they feel unable to influence local development in the traditional ways. The 4 local councillors show no interest in supporting Gaelic development. There is no active community council for the area. There is an absence of development, in general, other than the community groups. The community groups are open for anyone in the area to join, and hold regular consultations. Community groups seem to be an effective way for people who want to influence local development to do so.*
- *It is very difficult for local areas such as this to influence any decisions, let alone on Gaelic. Decision makers seem happy for our communities, language and culture to disappear.*

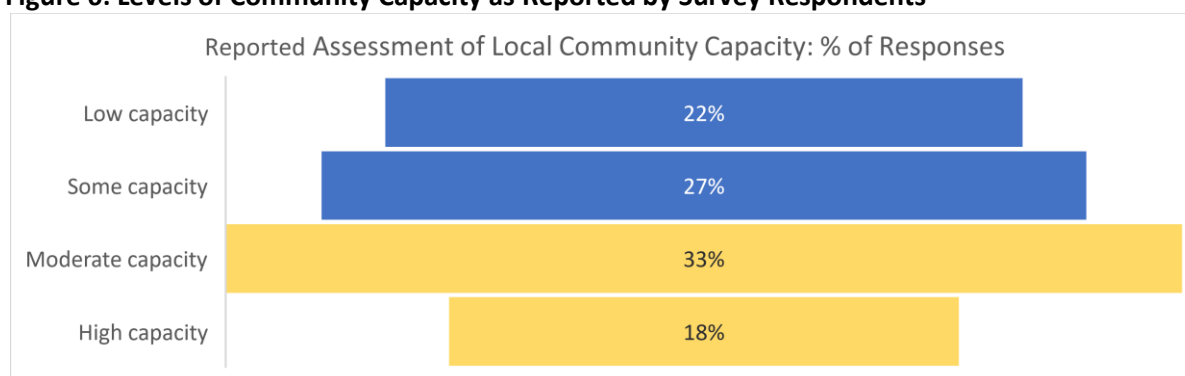
- *I have tried to influence provision from a position of experience in education, but the entrenched position remains that the focus is on learners.*
- *Feel there needs to be more coordination between schools, the Fèis, various organisations, employers, etc all doing their bit to support Gaelic but without an overall development plan.*
- *Things tend to happen locally by a few key local people, in isolation, and in many senses, we're left to our own devices.*
- *An uabhas obrach an lùib iomairt. Tòrr obair saor thoileach. Sùileachadh tòrr bho dhaoine.*
- *Duillich nuair tha daoine a' tighinn dhan sgìre agus chan eil ùidh aca sa Ghàidhlig*
- *Tha Plana Gàidhlig aca ach chan eil ùidh aig na comhairlichean. Cha sheas a' Ghàidhlig teirm eile den chomhairle seo.*
- *Feumaidh daoine òga seasamh airson na Comhairle. Tha ùidh aig feadhainn òga.*
- *Tha fios aig na buidhnean coimhearsnachd air an t-suidheachadh. Feumaidh sinn buidheann ionadail neo-eisimeileach a gheibh taic bho Bòrd na Gàidhlig.*

Whilst this research is limited to only some key aspects of Gaelic development within the context of overall development activity within the two localities participating in the study, emerging evidence does point to a disconnect between the reported community commitment to engage in local actions, and the perception of limited community influence in relation to local area Gaelic-language policy decision-making. Furthermore, from the community comments offered in response to this question there are more general developmental initiatives and reforms which are required to counter the displacement of local people from their traditional communities. These include a lack of adequate employment opportunities, a lack of access to affordable housing, an inability to purchase and/or acquire land at affordable prices, and the imbalance in the provision of basic services, such as fast broadband, in comparison to Scottish mainland communities. The effective export of young people and their families from island communities/localities as a result of weaknesses in public policies on employment, housing and basic services needs to be addressed if a functioning Gaelic community is to exist for future generations. Thriving communities need a demographic balance of economically active young people and families to be on a sustainable footing irrespective of the state of the Gaelic language within island/rural areas.

8.5 Community capacity to lead on Gaelic development

Figure 6 shows the overall survey responses in relation to the question as to whether the community as a whole had sufficient levels of capacity to lead on aspects of Gaelic development within their respective geographic areas.

Figure 6: Levels of Community Capacity as Reported by Survey Respondents



N=46.

Responses are evenly divided between low/some capacity to moderate/high capacity. However, survey respondents felt that in overall terms sufficient levels of capacity are embedded within the two communities in relation to being proactively engaged with localised development activities. This is evident from a number of successful community endeavours within both the research areas which have resulted in the awards of public funding and support to build new local premises and/or acquire local community assets.

However, from the forum/survey responses reported below there seems to be a need to strengthen support systems which engage the community and situate the Gaelic development dimension within the overall framework of community development.

- *Strong skill sets exist in the community but even those who manage to gain work relating to Gaelic have their focus directed towards the needs of national Gaelic rather than local.*
- *There are lots of skills and support in the community. I have put moderate because of the low percentage of working-age people in the population. The low number of 25 to 55 age group is an indictment of local and national policies with regard to rural Lewis.*
- *The capacity, with some initial scaffolding is there, but the opportunity is not, despite demand.*
- *There are lots of enthusiastic young people who are wanting to encourage and make Gaelic grow. With everyone involved there would be a much stronger sense of not just community spirit but a Gaelic community.*
- *Definitely skills and capacity in a few key people, the same ones all the time, but to initiate a response to improve the situation I think we need some external impetus and support and framework which we can apply to our own situation.*
- *Feumaidh sinn a bhith misneachail ach tha feum air cuideigin cuideachd as a' choimhearsnachd a ghabhas cùisean as làimh airson gnìomhan a chuir air adhart.*
- *Tha structar eadar-dhealaichte ùilleag gu lèir a dhith airson cùisean leasachaidh atharrachadh.*
- *Chan eil goireasan neo maoinachadh ann airson am barrachd luchd-obrach a chuir an sàs ann an cuspairean leasachaidh cànan 'sa choimhearsnachdan. Tha e uabhasach dùbhlànach adhartas a dhèanamh leis na tha againn do airgead.*
- *Chan eil ann ach ceithir oifigearan coimhearsnachd airson sgìre na Gàidhealtachd. Chan eil dòigh ann faighinn gu ìre sgìre aig an àm seo. Chan eil plana na Gàidhlig aig a' Chomhairle a' dol a dhèanamh mòran feum air na feumalachdan a tha sinne bruidhinn air a seo.*

8.6 Community Engagement and Gaelic Language Planning

Community engagement, community resilience and equality have been central concepts, at least in policy terms, in the various developmental frameworks which have been guiding the reform of the workings of the public sector in Scotland (see, Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services; Community Empowerment Act 2015; Fairer Scotland; Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy).¹⁶

Key factors in understanding community dynamics are shared identity and affinity, whereby a group of people are united by at least one common characteristic, including geography, identity or shared interest, and in the case of this research, as residents of a traditionally Gaelic-speaking community. (National Standards for Community Engagement, 2016).¹⁷

How these factors align and are reproduced within a community system seeking a sustainable future is dependent not only on internal mechanics but also on external influences, and in particular the extent to which Governments, Local Authorities and the power-brokers within public bodies help or hinder such processes and relations. In this regard the policy context and its implementation at the local level, alongside how policy measures are interpreted by public authorities, play a key and fundamental role in how community engagement and associated empowerment and governance factors support or hinder the community development process. The policy measures enacted as a result of the Christie Commission created the opportunity for community groups to have a greater say and influence in the delivery of public services, in particular through Community Planning

¹⁶ <http://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/352649/0118638.pdf>
<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/engage/CommEmpowerBill>
<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/10/9964>
<http://www.localdemocracy.info>

¹⁷ http://www.voicescotland.org.uk/media/resources/NSfCE%20online_October.pdf

Partnerships.¹⁸ According to community members participating in the discussion forums of this research, the level of integration of Gaelic language development and associated opportunities in, for example, the strategic and operational priorities of the Western Isles Community Planning Partnership¹⁹ is questionable.

However, a balanced assessment would recognise that Local Authorities, in particular (but other public bodies as well), have faced increased statutory obligations whilst dealing simultaneously with diminishing budgets. The result is a focus on achieving economies of scale, efficiency-saving and a reduction in services and/or support in areas particularly associated with community arts, cultural activities, and/or Gaelic. The drive for cost-efficiencies inevitably leads to a particular level of standardisation across national strategies and development programmes, and is unlikely in the main to recognise either the diversity or the different dynamics of individual communities.

This focus on the 'national' without fully recognising the 'local' has also entered the world of Gaelic development as directed by the National Gaelic Language Plan. The refrain "Gaelic belongs to Scotland"²⁰ is in itself a truism but at the same time tends to obscure the flexibility needed to direct strategic focus and priorities to the needs of different communities across Scotland.

The National Gaelic Language Plan states in relation to 'Communities', '... it is important that the needs of different communities are understood and that support is tailored to fit those needs' (NGLP 2018-2023: 35). From community evidence and the range of opinions generated by recent research (GCVC & Allan and Crouse 2020) and by media discussions,²¹ the degree of 'understanding' within Gaelic official/quasi-official bodies of the dynamics of individual Gaelic-speaking communities across Scotland is debatable. In the absence of detailed local knowledge, it is difficult to tailor support to meet the significant challenges that exist in supporting Gaelic as a language of the community, wherever that community might exist. Hence, the importance of direct communication and engagement with communities to agree on mutually productive pathways to progress and change should be recognised.

One particular mechanism to test community engagement is 'The National Standards for Community Engagement',²² which were launched in Scotland in 2005. The Standards are good-practice principles designed to support and inform the process of community engagement, and subsequently improve outcomes for communities.

Since 2005 they have been used to support community engagement, and user involvement in areas such as community planning and health and social care. Community engagement is a way to build and sustain relationships between public bodies/services and community groups, thereby providing the level of understanding required to take action on the needs or issues that communities experience.

This preliminary research sought the views of those participating in the study on the level of engagement between the community and public bodies directing Gaelic development matters. Given the limited geographic scope of this study, a widely generalised assertion on this topic from the analysis here would not be prudent. However, the responses to the seven principles do illustrate the prevailing views of the two communities participating in the research on the question of 'engagement' in relation to Gaelic policy and development matters.

The questions relating to the seven principles, shown in **Table 4**, were framed in relation to Gaelic language development as managed by Public Bodies with a Gaelic Language Plan and a direct remit for Gaelic policy and planning.

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/improving-public-services/community-planning/>

¹⁹ <http://www.ohcpp.org.uk/>

²⁰ National Gaelic Language Plan 2018-23. Key Messages, Page 6

²¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/naidheachdan/57327362>

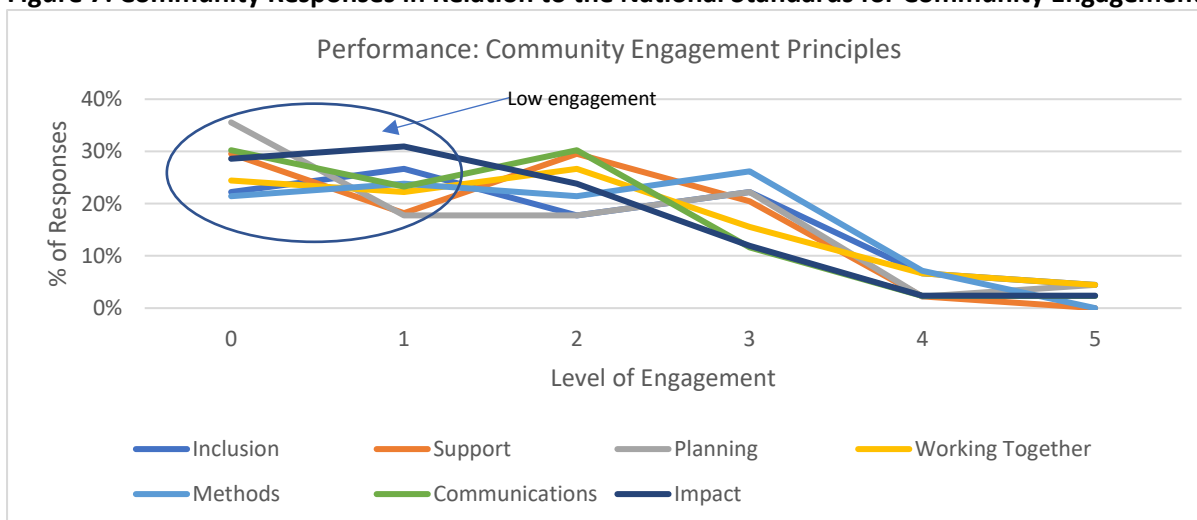
²² <http://www.voicescotland.org.uk/>

Table 4: National Standards for Community Engagement and Gaelic Public Bodies

Question: could you please provide an indication, in your opinion, of the current strength of community engagement processes which exist (if any) between Public Bodies (such as Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Local Authority) and the Gaelic language development requirements of your local area.	
1	Public Bodies have actively identified and involved local people and organisations in the development of plans and projects related to Gaelic language development in your area.
2	Public Bodies have actively identified and overcome any barriers to participation by the local community in Gaelic language planning and project activity.
3	Public Bodies have communicated a clear purpose for Gaelic language planning activities and this is based on a shared understanding of your community needs and ambitions.
4	Public Bodies have worked effectively in engaging with local people and community groups in your area to achieve the aims and objectives of Gaelic language planning priorities relevant to your locality.
5	Public Bodies have used community engagement methods that are fit for purpose for Gaelic language planning in your area.
6	Public Bodies have communicated clearly and regularly with local people and community groups on the priorities identified by the National Gaelic Language Plan and Gaelic Language Plan of the Local Authority.
7	Public Bodies have assessed the impact of Gaelic language planning locally and the knowledge learned has been used to improve future community engagement on Gaelic development matters.
Survey participants were asked to score each question on a range: 0 = little community engagement; to 5 = full community engagement.	

Figure 7 provides an overview of all the response scores to each of the questions relating to the seven principles.

Figure 7: Community Responses in Relation to the National Standards for Community Engagement



N=46

Response data from this survey clearly indicates that across all of the seven principles that comprise the 'Standards', community participants are of the view that low levels of engagement and communication exist between the main public bodies directing Gaelic language policy and the respective communities.

Analysis of the data indicates that 50% of all responses related to the low-level scores of 0 and 1; with 7% of all response scores suggesting higher levels of engagement at levels 4 and 5. By any measure, this is not a positive reflection of how public bodies with a Gaelic policy and development remit engage with the general community outwith the quasi-public bodies funded directly by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Scottish Government. It is recognised however, that this is a limited survey of community groups engaged in Gaelic development matters. The results generated by this question could not be considered a surprise in that they confirm community views expressed in the GCVC research and the Allan and Crouse (2020) *Community Conversations* report.

A number of the freely expressed views of forum/survey participants are included below to illustrate their reasons for scoring across the questions associated with the seven principles.

- *Chan eil mòran cheanglaichean eadar a’ choimhearsnachd àbhaisteach agus na buidhnean leasachaidh.*
- *Chan eil Bòrd na Gàidhlig a’ dèanamh oidhirp gu leòr airson a bhith ag obair sa choimhearsnachd.*
- *Tha e doirbh a thuigsinn ciamar a tha BnaG a’ sùileachadh gun tig aig daoine àbhaisteach sa choimhearsnachd na foirmichean iarrtais a lìonadh – tha iad doirbh dèiligeadh leotha.*
- *Tha beàrn mòr is astar ann eadar Inbhir Nis agus a’ choimhearsnachd seo. Chan eil duine bhon àite seo ag obair aca (BnaG) agus ‘s docha gu dèanadh sin feum. Tha mise a’ faireachdainn nach eil sinne mar choimhearsnachd uabhasach dlùth leis na buidhnean maoinachaidh.*
- *Chan eil fios a bheil na buidhnean Poblach ag èisteachd rinn.*
- *Barrachd tuigse air feumalachdan nuair tha obair oifigearan choimhearsnachd a’ dol gu cuideigin às an sgìre.*

There are clearly communication and engagement issues in relation to many aspects related to the strategies and plans associated with how Gaelic development is implemented at the local level. Additionally, poor and/or inadequate communication/engagement links and a lack of a properly configured stakeholder plan will result in the general community (outwith those groups in receipt of Gaelic project funding) feeling isolated from formalised development structures, inevitably leading to a lack of knowledge/understanding. Thus, a perception is created amongst some individuals that little is being done to support their respective communities. A recognition by policy makers of the complexities of community development and the need for open, transparent, accountable and positive engagement linkages with the general community would help ameliorate some of the concerns being clearly expressed through a range of different reporting systems and media.

Discussions with the community also highlighted a high degree of disquiet over the work of the Ministerial Group involved in the “Faster Rate of Progress” initiative. The effective dismissal by Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig of the GCVC research report and the Allan and Crouse (2020) *Community Conversations* report has been portrayed as a disregard for the legitimate views of ordinary members of the community and their concerns over the current state of Gaelic in the island communities. In the long-term, it is ordinary members of the community and the families bringing up their children speaking and using Gaelic as part of their daily lives which will ensure the future of the language. The depiction by official bodies of the circumstances of the Gaelic vernacular community of the Western Isles and other islands, and the assumed engagement with them, clearly do not concur with the communities’ view or documented evidence of societal reality in this regard (GCVC & Allan and Crouse 2020).

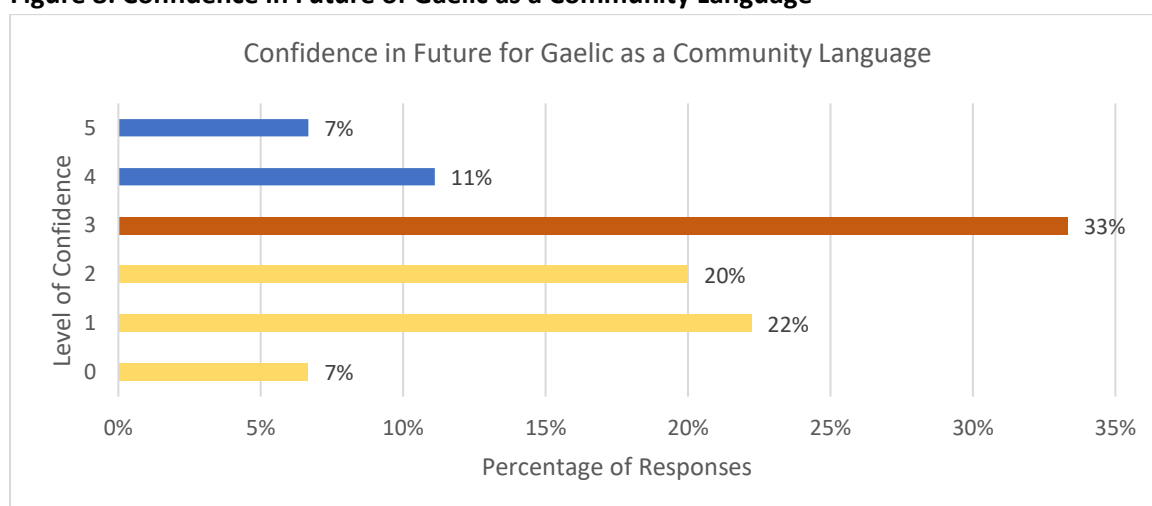
A Ministerial Group communicating primarily through public bodies/quasi-public bodies does not in the main represent the views of community members (active volunteers for the most part), in relation to the participative implementation of sustainable Gaelic language development projects and related activities. When local knowledge and ideas for change are being ignored and/or undervalued by those in power, such behaviour undermines local autonomy, empowerment, and community resilience, and impedes potentially more productive efforts to address the range of challenges which are undoubtedly present in the Gaelic vernacular communities.

Outwith the public sector funding sphere of influence, Gaelic language policy mechanisms should be reset in favour of engagement mechanisms with the general community. This requires the creation of an environment for positive dialogue and facilitative leadership between policy managers and community members.

Such an approach would be beneficial in three sociocultural dimensions by: a) enabling collaborative decision-making; b) strengthening community participation, and c) empowering the vernacular Gaelic community, as individuals and as groups, to make changes for themselves and reframe current approaches in Gaelic-language policy in ways which align with the realities and challenges of revitalising Gaelic in their own localities.

Given the low level of agency and empowerment, and the lack of recognition accorded to the views of the community, those individuals participating in this study do not indicate significant levels of confidence for the future of Gaelic from the perspective of current language use and transmission within their respective communities. **Figure 8** presents their collective assessment for the future of the language.

Figure 8: Confidence in Future of Gaelic as a Community Language



N=46. Level 0 = low and Level 5 = high

Nearly half of responses (49%) indicate lower levels of confidence for the future state of Gaelic. 18% report that they are fairly confident for the future, with 33% in the mid-range of confidence perceptions for the future use of Gaelic in the community. Whilst the future state and sustainability of Gaelic in the existing vernacular communities are yet to be determined, it should be clear to policy-makers that when a community loses confidence in their ability to maintain and protect the language into the future both language use in the community and the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic are clearly considered as highly vulnerable from the in-group minority perspective. The responses to this question reaffirm the findings of the GCVC: 284 where participants reported that, ‘... many contended that communities felt constrained by an inability to influence change... communities lack the confidence to address the decline of vernacular Gaelic without being given the support of formal structures’.

In addition, the commentary generated by the Allan and Crouse (2020) *Community Conversations* discussion generated similar views:

the perceived threat to Gaelic’s position as a language of the home and community has two main drivers – the overall reduction in opportunities to speak Gaelic and low levels of confidence. Both factors represent a vicious circle where Gaelic-language ability suffers through infrequent and irregular use, which in turn erodes confidence and the will to engage in the language (Allan and Crouse 2020: 9).

The situation in relation to a community’s level of confidence for the future for Gaelic is clearly complex.

Overly simplistic prescriptions for change without a full understanding of the community dynamics and how individuals and families make decisions on the acquisition and use of Gaelic appear to negatively impact the design and subsequent implementation of language policy in Scotland. The current project-led approach, whilst adequate at some levels of community engagement, does not address the underlying causes of the decline in Gaelic language use amongst the younger age cohorts resident in the vernacular community. This lack of focus on core issues for the sustainability of the vernacular communities explains much of the sub-optimal approach and the deflection of attention and resources to the more manageable, but less productive, lower-order promotions of community heritage and Gaelic practice in schools.

Whilst an uncertain future exists, there have been/are a number of excellent community-led projects across the areas involved in this research. However, as the following comments from participants in this research illustrate, the positive traction and engagement developed when the project is active tends to be lost when no further funding and/or support is available.

There have been some great projects. Participants thoroughly enjoy activities but no long-term planning and little attempt to connect projects as part of a bigger plan. The success of projects very much depends on the enthusiasm and skills of individuals delivering but no obvious overall plan focussing on stopping decline and strengthening ties between Gaelic speakers.

CnaG have previously done a lot of excellent work in our area, my children benefited hugely from it. This kind of work should be continued/encouraged.

However, in the face of Gaelic sociolinguistic decline disillusion and apathy may soon permeate the thinking and actions of local communities when their local knowledge of the state of Gaelic within their localities is considered to be of secondary importance to the policy makers situated somewhere outside the community. Such local knowledge is important in the revitalisation of Gaelic in the vernacular community. The Gaelic community's knowledge of their respective situation is central to their view of the current state of the language, the extent of use in the community on a daily basis, and whether it is likely to be passed to the next generation in sustainable numbers. This place-based Gaelic knowledge is not adequately exploited in how Gaelic policy and initiatives are devised or implemented, especially by external policy-makers. This results in the policy-system implementing project solutions which in the long-term, from the local perspective, do not instil confidence that the language has a sustainable future. A number of comments from the community members who participated in the online discussions show that the current Gaelic situation within the areas participating in this study is considered to be at a critical juncture.

The language is there in the young people but it needs to be encouraged more by people outside of the school to show the children that it can be used outside of school but also the older generations need to be willing to speak Gaelic to the younger generations.

The trajectory is going completely the wrong way without some vigorous interventions in terms of families, learning opportunities and regular usage amongst the younger (<30) generation.

Chan eil e nàdarra leinn a bhith a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig le chèile a dh'aindeoin is gu bheil Gàidhlig againn.

Tha feadhainn le Gàidhlig aca ach chan eil iad a' faireachdainn neo cho cofhurtail sin Gàidhlig a chleachdadh. Chan eil thu airson a bhith nad "Gàidhlig fanatic"!

Tha Gàidhlig ga bruidhinn anns a’ choimhearsnachd ach chan eil mi a’ cluinntinn a cheart uiread is a bhithinn a’ cluinntinn mu chuairt 10 bliadhna air n-ais. Tha deifir mòr air tighinn thairis air na beagan bhliadhnaichean a chaidh seachad.

Chan eil mòran daoine òga mu chuairt far am bruidhinn thu Gàidhlig leotha le cinnt.

Tha cunnart ann gu bi suidheachadh na Gàidhlig nas miosa. Nuair nach bi na seann daoine ann bidh an suidheachadh caran cugallach. Feumaidh an òigridh an suidheachadh a thogail. Daoine òga às an sgìre a’ falbh cuideachd agus chan eil sin a’ dèanamh mòran feum air neart is cleachdadh na Gàidhlig san sgìre. Beag air bheag tha comasan cànan gan call anns an sgìre.

To shift the balance from a pessimistic perspective to a more positive one, and amongst the younger age cohorts in particular, some radical and clear-thinking actions are required. Current systems of support and associated funding frameworks do not generate much confidence amongst this study’s participants. By sub-contracting most development initiatives to third-party organisations, Bòrd na Gàidhlig do not appear to have helped in creating a productive environment for engagement and communication with communities. Whilst recognising that improving the state of Gaelic in any community is a complex matter requiring a long-term perspective and a dedicated support system, a good start could be made by improving communications between Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the communities it serves with Bòrd development officers given responsibility for specific localities, in conjunction with the suggested Urras na Gàidhlig mechanisms. Engaging communities effectively requires an understanding and knowledge of community dynamics. Supporting long-term Gaelic vernacular community ethnographic work should be funded in these areas: a) to create a body of community-generated knowledge to help enhance the policy-makers’ understanding of the breadth of sociolinguistic challenges; and b) to boost the confidence and the collective capacity of the community to address the factors that are acting as barriers to the use of Gaelic beyond the classroom and institutional settings. However, the implementation of a new approach first requires a more open and candid dialogue about the societal challenges of the vernacular context between the community and official bodies.

9. Moving beyond the status quo

Responses from the majority of community members participating in this small study indicate that there is a disconnect between them as Gaelic-speaking communities and those who control decisions and resources in our public bodies relating to the maintenance and revitalisation of Gaelic. This view in particular centres on Bòrd na Gàidhlig who are not considered as being sufficiently proactive when it comes to the level of engagement and participation required to address the challenges identified by the vernacular community. Gaelic, as a social entity, does not exist at a remove from the community. Beyond the sociolinguistic context, the community responses have also identified related policy challenges/issues in relation to access by local people to affordable housing and local land resources, including connectivity in relation to broadband and transport services. Demographic trends continue to show that young people and their families are leaving island communities for opportunities elsewhere. There is an imminent danger that the economically active indigenous population is being displaced because they are unable to find adequate employment or gain access to affordable housing (cf. <https://sourcenews.scot/open-letter-save-the-highlands-and-islands-from-an-economic-clearance/>).

Respondents have clearly identified shortcomings in the way Gaelic development is devised and implemented in their local contexts and have pointed to deficiencies in how the current Gaelic public-policy framework relates to their concerns. Strengthening community agency and participation will create challenges for all groups involved in the provision of Gaelic-related supports. The issues centre around local democracy and how such processes are managed in the public sector

in order to create productive spaces for positive dialogue which will enable change and create confidence within the Gaelic-speaking collective. Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig should be open to enabling a more progressive approach to Gaelic development. This requires a willingness by official bodies to conduct a collegiate and productive engagement with the vernacular community. This would also entail a recognition of the need for a policy shift beyond the ‘one size fits all’ National Gaelic Language Plan to a system of language planning which is configured to take account of local community dynamics.

Gaelic-language planning, as led by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, is not viewed as giving a sufficiently strong voice to local collectives beyond the project-based ‘clientelist model’²³ which now pervades Gaelic policy implementation and is often dissociated from the societal reality of speakers in communities. The present approach to Gaelic-language policy and planning in relation to the vernacular community fails fundamentally to understand the dynamics of these communities. If Gaelic-language planning was developed and implemented as part of a wider community development agenda then recognition would need to be given to the communal complexities, recognising the differences between townships, parishes, youth organisations, sports groups, businesses, or other communities of interest and/or place. For example, cohesive community dynamics do not pertain in the Western Isles and the Isle of Skye, and some appreciation should be given to the diversity and complexities of communities when designing language policy which is dependent entirely on the participation and engagement of local people for its success or failure.

A more participatory form of governance through public bodies such as Bòrd na Gàidhlig needs to put communities at the centre of decision-making, with systems in place which strengthen the participation and involvement of the community to engage in a productive process of change and renewal. The conclusions and recommendations of the GCVC research and the Allan and Crouse (2020) *Community Conversations* have provided an opportunity to enable a process of dialogue and reflection on the state of Gaelic within the vernacular community. The recommendations from both reports should be used as part of the founding basis for developing facilitative leadership from Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Scottish Government. Unfortunately, this has not been the case up to this point, with an aura of denial and obfuscation surrounding the deliberations of the Bòrd and their refusal to engage positively with the vernacular social context and the views expressed by community members on the GCVC findings, in particular.

From this preliminary study, the comments articulated by community members point to a situation where more recognition and voice need to be given to the views, knowledge and the real-world experience of local groups. The opinions and ambitions of the vernacular groups participating in this study appear to be at variance with the corporate certainties displayed by Bòrd na Gàidhlig when challenged by communities to engage on this critical issue.

The important point to be noted in this situation is that “doing development” to the Gaelic-speaking collective is no longer a viable or sustainable option for official bodies. On the other hand, by engaging in a collegiate and facilitative manner neither point of view would be subservient to the other – participation is a process of being engaged in multi-directional thinking which should, if managed openly and honestly, empower both the community and the public bodies which exist to support Gaelic-development processes. Communities will still need and require the support and engagement of public bodies and Local Authorities to access resources and navigate the challenges of public policy and/or institutional barriers.

²³ McLeod, W. (2020: 53) *Gaelic in Scotland: Policies, movements, ideologies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Community members participating in this small study wish to see change occur in relation to the existing framework of policy support, with a significantly improved focus on funding being directed at the priorities identified at the community level.

A new framework for Gaelic democracy needs to be established in relation to strengthening the state of the language within the vernacular communities, and also across Scotland. Scotland is now at an opportune moment to engage with a more radical approach to establish a new policy culture and mindset which empowers communities, in partnership with the Scottish Government, to set a new policy agenda for Gaelic development.

A new Scottish Government and Parliament are in place, a range of challenging commitments were outlined in the Scottish National Party manifesto for Gaelic, and consultations are ongoing for the 2023-28 National Gaelic Language Plan. Coupled with the findings of the GCVC research and the community opinions expressed through the Allan and Crouse (2020) *Community Conversations*, this may be an opportune time for a radical departure from the status quo position and for setting out a new and community-empowered policy framework to support the use and learning of Gaelic in our vernacular communities and elsewhere in Scotland.

Chapter nine of the GCVC sets out a comprehensive new model of Gaelic development and engagement with the vernacular community. This model, termed the *Participatory Minority Language Cooperative*, is linked to the proposed new structure of *Urras na Gàidhlig*. *Urras na Gàidhlig* would be the community development trust for the Gaelic vernacular community, situated in the islands and under the direct control of a representative group of community members. The proposed new structure was broadly endorsed through the Allan and Crouse (2020) *Community Conversations* undertaken throughout the islands, with a recommendation that the proposed *Urras* framework would be considered further by official bodies in conjunction with the target communities.

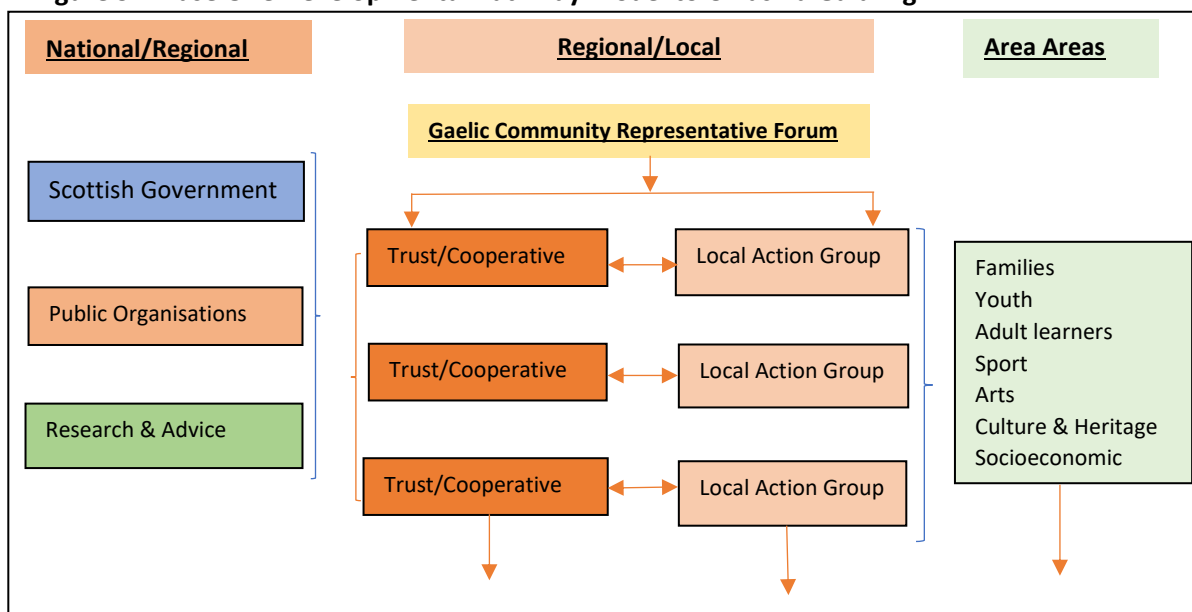
Whilst community members endorsed the Gaelic Crisis recommended model of intervention for Gaelic development, some members of the community suggested that ‘... consideration should be also be given to where features of the trust concept could in fact be absorbed within localised structures, such as community land trusts, while providing a strategic framework to progress language initiatives from a community development perspective’ (Allan and Crouse, 2020).

Since the publication of the GCVC there has seemingly been a reluctance by Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig to engage with the suggested model of *Urras na Gàidhlig*. Community members participating in this research study reported an unconstructive engagement on the part of the officials employed to direct Gaelic development priorities on how to take forward the recommendations of both the GCVC and Allan and Crouse (2020) *Community Conversations* reports.

In order to break this impasse and to create a pathway for change in finding appropriate community-based solutions, a **Phase One model** based on the *Participatory Minority Language Cooperative* is suggested as a priority building block in fostering leadership and capacity within the vernacular community, prior to the introduction of *Urras na Gàidhlig* at a phase two stage.

Figure 9 shows the basic building blocks of the suggested phase one model.

Figure 9: Phase One Developmental Pathway Model to Urras na Gàidhlig



The core functioning element of this proposed Phase One model of intervention is at the regional and local levels and centred on existing local trusts/cooperatives.

The focus on the community at a local level recognises a key reality in that: ‘the key variable which separates the older, positivistic/technicist approaches from the newer critical/postmodern ones is agency, that is, the role(s) of individuals and collectives in the processes of language use, attitudes and ultimately policies’ (Ricento, 2000).²⁴ In addition, ‘a number of authors (cf. Ricento 2006; Hornberger 2006; Cooper 1989) consider that agency is now seen as a significant variable alongside, inter alia, ideology and ecology, in approaches appropriate for contemporary language planning, with the grassroots role of individuals vital in influencing localised language interventions’ (GCVC: 365).

Recognising the key concepts of community agency and participation alongside the requirement to enhance the salience of Gaelic as the ‘living language’ in the wider community, the primary purpose of the Phase One approach would be to build a strong foundation for the future consideration and implementation of public policy and community initiatives and support structures to engage with the Gaelic question and the vernacular group. The Phase One model aims to:

- Address the dynamics of community governance through strengthening social capital,
- Develop community leadership capacity and community empowerment,
- Recognise the centrality of community agency in securing a new future for Gaelic.

It is crucial that Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig take a proactive lead in creating a cultural change in how Gaelic policy is developed and put into practice at the local level. Such a shift in approach requires better levels of participation, engagement and a demonstrable facilitative leadership from institutions directing and implementing Gaelic policy matters. These are the fundamental steps to enacting change at the level of community.

²⁴ Ricento, T., 2000. Historical and theoretical perspectives in language policy and planning. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, Vol. 4(2), pp. 196-213.

In order for the Phase One of the community model to be effective the following principles need to be considered in both the development of the proposed model structure and its implementation:

- The model should be one in which the community can integrate their own reality of the Gaelic situation;
- The model should be based on knowledge and/or research relevant to each community and not chosen as a standard one-size-fits-all approach;
- The model should be developed through productive dialogue with the community;
- The model should take account of local dynamics to allow for adjustments during implementation;
- The model should reflect and include those elements essential for Gaelic sociolinguistic transformation, thereby creating an environment which instils confidence within the wider community in the process of change from the start.

The key elements of the Phase One pathway model to establishing Urras na Gàidhlig are:

- Existing **community trusts/community cooperatives** should be encouraged to take responsibility for Gaelic-language activities within their respective areas of influence and development. Each community trust/community cooperative should then be supported to establish a **Gaelic Local Action Group** to coordinate and take the lead role in the planning, development and implementation of Gaelic-language related activities within their respective localities;
- The Gaelic Local Action Groups should develop a local Gaelic action plan which would start to address the particular language support priorities identified by each respective community;
- Each of the community trusts/community cooperatives should have a directly employed Gaelic officer for the coordination and management of the Gaelic-language priorities of the Gaelic Local Action Group and working under the auspices of the community trust/cooperative. All Gaelic development activity should be undertaken by the local trust/cooperative and not through third-party organisations. Relevant expertise and services can be contracted-in by the trust/cooperative. The primary aim of changing the management and implementation structure is to develop and strengthen capacity, leadership and resilience at the local level within each community;
- Each of the community trusts/cooperatives and associated Action Groups could take on specific Gaelic development activities identified in the Language Plans of public bodies operating in their area. Such priorities would be agreed by the community trust/cooperative and adequately funded through the resources of the public body;
- In addition, the community trust/cooperative/Action Group would be adequately funded and resourced by Scottish Government/Bòrd na Gàidhlig/Local Authority to deliver on the priority language actions as identified by the community;
- Scottish Government/Bòrd na Gàidhlig policy support and resources should be directed towards ensuring the success of the Phase One model by providing support and training in appropriate facilitation methods and skills as well as a funding programme configured to ameliorate any barriers to local participation in Gaelic-related matters;

- A **Gaelic Community Representative Forum**²⁵ should be established to strengthen the network of local trusts/cooperatives engaged in addressing the Gaelic language use challenges which currently exist across the Gaelic vernacular community. The Representative Forum would be supported by Scottish Government/Bòrd na Gàidhlig/Local Authority/University of the Highlands and Islands. The detailed remit of the forum would be established by community members and all representation/activities of the forum would be conducted in Gaelic. The Representative Forum would be the democratic voice of the local community and should be consulted on all matters relating to Gaelic policy and planning pertinent to its geographic area of interest. As such it will also have a political function in addition to an advisory and developmental role.

The Phase One pathway model looks to foster a sense of community and an adaptive capacity within the vernacular group, in addition to embedding the Gaelic question with the context of community development. In that way the focus on Gaelic is not presented as “doing development” to the community but there is a clear emphasis on participation and a collective engagement across all dimensions which embed Gaelic within those development priorities and actions. It is envisaged that this will create opportunities for the local resident population to improve the societal and socioeconomic condition of Gaelic as a community language.

In developing the capability and capacity of communities, a process of Gaelic development set in the context of a community development framework should ensure that socioeconomic initiatives can be linked to sociolinguistic activities. The ultimate aim is to generate sustainable outcomes for the Gaelic group within their respective localities. It should be recognised, however, that the pathway to success is likely to be long and challenging, and that there will be some fundamental dilemmas to resolve, including local community dynamics, issues of power and the level of support and resources provided by Scottish Government to create the appropriate environment for change.

A starting point for change would be the suggested Phase One pathway model which should be adequately resourced and supported by the Scottish Government and other public sector funding structures. However, moving beyond the trajectory of development after implementation of the Phase One pathway model, there is an opportunity for radical change to be enacted by the Scottish Government, taking account of its manifesto commitments and the community consultation responses to the Bòrd na Gàidhlig preparation for the 2023-28 National Plan for Gaelic.

In line with the GCVC study and the *Community Conversations* report, the range of opinions and responses to this research project by the community members all point in the same direction. The severity of the Gaelic language crisis in the vernacular community is clearly undeniable, and a new community-based approach is required to address the current language-shift trajectory. The evidence is clear that communities are seeking a change of direction in Gaelic affairs. There is a desire to move away from the predominately symbolic and higher-order status-building framework to Gaelic-language planning and to progress to a new approach which is rooted at the heart of communities, with priorities identified by the community and with development actions managed and under the direct control of organisations based in these communities.

²⁵ The Gaelic Community Representative Forum is analogous to a Citizens Assembly.

A citizens’ assembly is a group of people who are brought together to learn about and discuss an issue or issues, and reach conclusions about what they think should happen. Governments and parliaments around the world are increasingly using citizens’ assemblies in their work. The assemblies enable decision-makers to understand people’s informed and considered preferences on issues that are complex, controversial, moral or constitutional. The UK Parliament commissioned its first citizens’ assembly, the Citizens’ Assembly on Social Care, in 2018.

This requires a fundamental change of approach, and a remodelling of the current policy framework. A renewed policy pathway would also include and be focused on the creation of a distinct funding programme to support the vernacular community in the process of change and renewal.

A dedicated funding programme should be based on a five-year period and be directly linked to the next National Gaelic Language Plan for the period 2023-2028. Specific community-based elements of the Language Plans of the key public bodies who are providing services in the Gaelic vernacular communities should also be linked to the proposed funding programme.

Such a new funding programme of support could be based and modelled on the successful European LEADER programme²⁶ which was established to support rural development.²⁷ An example of a successful local LEADER programme is Outer Hebrides LEADER²⁸ which was awarded c.£3Million for the period 2014-20.

The box below sets out the LEADER principles which are eminently applicable to the Gaelic situation across the vernacular communities.

Basic principles of the LEADER Programme	
The LEADER programme was a European Union initiative to support rural development projects initiated at the local level in order to revitalise rural areas and create jobs. LEADER projects were managed by local action groups (LAGs).	
The underpinning of the LEADER approach was based around seven principles to direct and support local development:	
1.	Area-based: taking place in a small, homogeneous socially cohesive territory
2.	Bottom-up: local actors design the strategy and choose the actions
3.	Public-private partnership: LAGs are balanced groups involving public and private-sector actors, which can mobilise all available skills and resources
4.	Innovation: giving LAGs the flexibility to introduce new ideas and methods
5.	Integration: between economic, social, cultural and environmental actions, as distinct from a sectoral approach
6.	Networking: allowing learning among people, organisations and institutions at local, regional, national and (<i>European</i>) levels
7.	Co-operation: among LEADER groups, for instance to share experiences, allow complementarity or to achieve critical mass.

In the Gaelic-language dimension a dedicated funding programme would provide a recognition of the varied challenges and supports required to support the Gaelic vernacular collective. A Gaelic-language LEADER structured programme would also recognise the dynamics and diversity of Gaelic-speaking communities, provide a fundamental basis for change, generate confidence in the future of Gaelic at the local level, recognise the agency of communities, strengthen social capital and local community governance, and empower local groups and individuals to be participants in this process of renewal.

A five-year LEADER-type programme focused on Gaelic-language priorities identified by the vernacular community would address the current ad-hoc, fragmented and project-based approach to Gaelic development. This approach would also transcend the difficulty of the vernacular community having to endure the take-it-or-leave-it option of the out-group conceived perspectives on Gaelic 'development'. Integrated within a new approach would be the fundamental building blocks of community development, those of community agency and participation, including engagement and decision-making at the local level.

²⁶ For perspectives on the LEADER programme, see: Shucksmith, M. (2010). Endogenous development, social capital, and social inclusion: Perspectives from LEADER in the UK. *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 40, pp. 208–218. Shucksmith, M., Brooks, E., and Madanipour, A. (2021). LEADER and Spatial Justice, *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 61, (2), pp. 322-343: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/soru.12334>

²⁷ LEADER was a bottom-up method of delivering support for rural development and was primarily aimed at developing and establishing small-scale, community-driven projects that are pilot and innovative in nature. Its main principle of community-led local development ensured that the benefits and participation of the local community in projects were central in securing LEADER funding.

²⁸ <http://www.outerhebridesleader.co.uk/leader-sub-home/>

In other words, Gaelic-based community governance is immeasurably improved through strengthening structures and processes for decision-making, and the direct control of policy and resources at the community level. By extension, Gaelic language policy and planning can address concerns about community resilience and Gaelic group vitality in general. Due to restrictions of space the issue of resilience,²⁹ in relation to communities and Gaelic policy, cannot be addressed adequately here, but is an area of research which needs to be explored further in the context of highly endangered ethnolinguistic minorities. On a general point, there are limited recognition and/or references in the literature which provide a framework in which to situate Gaelic language 'resilience' and language development within a context which recognises and interfaces with the community development principles of agency, governance, empowerment and the strengthening of social capital and community capacity.

The suggested LEADER-type funding programme to support the Gaelic vernacular group aligns well with the democratic process which underpins participatory budgeting.³⁰ Participatory budgeting is recognised internationally as a way for people to have a direct say in how local money is spent.

Participatory budgeting is defined as a democratic process in which community members decide how to spend part of a public budget. This means engaging residents and community groups in discussing spending priorities, making decisions and agreeing on specific proposals, as well as giving local people a role in the scrutiny and monitoring process. In Scotland, this approach is utilised as a mechanism for community engagement and as a resource to build on the wider development of participatory democracy.

The approach complements the ambitions of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015³¹ to give communities more powers to achieve their own ambitions. In relation to this research, most respondents to the survey question on participatory budgeting had no knowledge of the concept. However, participants were positive on the opportunities such an approach could deliver if implemented in a manner which gave voice to local decisions in relation to the Gaelic funding currently being awarded to public bodies, and in particular in relation to the Gaelic Language Act Implementation Fund (GLAIF).

Participation and engagement are key elements of a successful interface between public funding mechanisms and communities. Whilst there are Scottish Government initiatives and national priorities to help deliver on outcomes, as stated in Scotland's National Performance Framework³² that "*we live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe*", there is limited evidence generated by this research that Gaelic policy is framed and aligned sufficiently strongly within this framework with actions that support and strengthen community engagement, and which make a demonstrable difference to the state of Gaelic in these communities.

²⁹ For an overview of resilience in the context of community development, see: Danson, M. (2021). Current Scottish Land Reform and Reclaiming the Commons: Building Community Resilience, *Progress in Development Studies*, pp. 1–18. Sage Publications.

Danson, M. (2015). *Empowered Community-Led Inclusion – Community Resilience*, Report to Strengthening Communities Directorate, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Inverness.

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Marianna Markantoni, Artur Adam Steiner & John Elliot Meador (2019). Can community interventions change resilience? Fostering perceptions of individual and community resilience in rural places, *Community Development*, Vol.50 (2), pp. 238-255.

³⁰ <https://pbscotland.scot/>

³¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/6/contents/enacted>

³² <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/>

The current model for Gaelic language planning and policy in Scotland³³ is based on outmoded sociolinguistic paradigms that have emerged for other minority-language jurisdictions. Such approaches, self-evidently, have been developed for sociolinguistic networks and socioeconomic dynamics which are different from the situation of the Gaelic vernacular community. Therefore, they are unlikely to generate the degree of social capital/community governance required to improve the Gaelic situation in Scotland. A support and development framework grounded on the LEADER approach (and linked to participatory budgeting) is based on active participation and should encourage the building of social capital and community governance within the vernacular community.

At present, the Gaelic vernacular community (and other Gaelic communities and networks) are expected to engage with a language planning model which, for the most part, they had no part in designing, and which runs somewhat contrary to the level of community agency and empowerment which is required if the future of Gaelic is to be set on a more sustainable pathway.

10. Conclusions

This small research study set out to explore agency and participation factors relevant to supporting Gaelic vernacular communities. Research results from the study have reaffirmed the findings of the GCVC research and the Allan and Crouse (2020) *Community Conversations* series of meetings. It is clear that current approaches to Gaelic language policy and planning are not sufficiently embedded in the day-to-day working dynamics of the vernacular community.

The critical factors of community agency and participation are weak and fragmented as these relate to Gaelic policy and planning matters and are not adequately developed to drive the required change in governance and power dynamics. The weak relevance of existing language policy and the limitations in public engagement with the most critical societal aspects of the Gaelic vernacular condition are currently in a mutually detrimental dynamic of official inertia and communal disempowerment.

Setting the vitality of the vernacular Gaelic group on a sustainable footing requires cooperation across all relevant partners in addressing and diagnosing underlying socioeconomic and sociolinguistic problems which act as barriers to addressing current challenges.

A new and a radical approach based on a LEADER-type programme is suggested in order to enable a pathway to change, with resources and local planning under the direct control of local community trusts and/or cooperatives. The operational dimension of local Gaelic development should be centred on Gaelic Local Action Groups working under the auspices of the community trusts/cooperatives.

The establishment of a representative forum for the Gaelic vernacular community, analogous to a citizens' assembly, will be an important element in addressing the democratic imbalance which is evident in the current approach to Gaelic language policy and planning.

It is recognised that reversing the current situation of Gaelic in the vernacular community is a significant challenge for Scottish Government, public bodies and the communities which are involved in addressing change. A first step on the pathway to change needs to be taken to start building the foundations for a more successful and sustainable situation for Gaelic-speaking communities.

³³ See Chapter 8 of the GCVC for an assessment of current language planning and management models in Scotland.

This can begin through the implementation of the Phase One model of community engagement suggested by this study, which simultaneously offers a complementary mechanism for the Gaelic community in the islands to recover from the various social set-backs of the COVID pandemic.

Addressing the status of Gaelic in the vernacular community is now both a moral issue, in terms of addressing a democratic imbalance for those institutions with political and policy responsibility in Scotland, and a difficult sociolinguistic challenge for communities and official language bodies. Decisions taken during a period of crisis indicate the level of moral commitment and conviction of a society's leaders. These decisions also determine the public's confidence in collective capacities to address obvious social concerns. Radical and urgent change is necessitated by the severity of the Gaelic vernacular crisis and is required if Gaelic is to have any viable future prospects as a community language.

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Focus Group Interview Schedule

Community Governance & Agency and Gaelic Development

Objective:

To collect opinions from the community on the factors which act as enablers and/or barriers in the context of addressing Gaelic-language development matters in their local area.

Purpose of the research:

This research project aims to build on the legacy of the '*Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community*' research in order to identify potentially new approaches to Gaelic policy based on participatory governance and community agency. This pilot study will focus on exploring how community development factors related to governance and agency, in the context of national Gaelic language policy, interact with Gaelic-speaking communities in order to address current sociolinguistic challenges. The study is aimed at understanding the extent to which community governance and agency exists in relation to policies aimed at local Gaelic development priorities. Evidence provided by the community through the research process will assess the potential for re-orientating current national and regional Gaelic policies so as to strengthen the future state and viability of the Gaelic language in wider Highlands and Islands society.

Adhbhar an t-suirbhidhe:

Tha am pròiseact rannsachaidh seo ag amas air togail air dìleab an rannsachaidh '*Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community*' gus dòigh-obrach ùr a chomharrachadh a thaobh poileasaidh Gàidhlig stèidhichte air riaghladh com-pàirteachail agus fèin-stiùireadh coimhearsnachd. Bidh an sgrùdadh pileat seo a' cuimseachadh air sgrùdadh a dhèanamh air mar a bhios factaran leasachaidh coimhearsnachd co-cheangailte ri riaghladh agus fèin-stiùireadh coimhearsnachd, ann an co-theacsa poileasaidh cànan nàiseanta Gàidhlig, ag eadar-obrachadh le coimhearsnachdan Gàidhlig gus dèiligeadh ri dùbhlain shòiseo-cànanach ghnàthach. Tha an sgrùdadh ag amas air tuigse fhaighinn air an ìre gu bheil riaghladh agus fèin-stiùireadh coimhearsnachd ann a thaobh poileasaidhean a tha ag amas air prìomhachasan leasachaidh Gàidhlig aig ìre ionadail. Bidh fianais a bheir a' choimhearsnachd tron phròiseact rannsachaidh a' measadh nan cothroman airson poileasaidhean Gàidhlig aig ìre nàiseanta agus roinneil ath-stiùireadh gus staid agus ion-obrachaidh a' chànan Ghàidhlig ann an comann-sòisealta na Gàidhealtachd agus nan Eilean a neartachadh.

1. Introduction - Coordinator: to introduce research group and to the focus group:

Thank you for coming

- The session will last approximately one hour
- Brief talk about the research - who, why, what (see invitation)
- Emphasise the importance of hearing the views of community members
- Note keeping / recording (Is the recording of the session acceptable to you?)
- Focus Group Rules – confidentiality, anonymity, fair play for all
- Confirmation of confidentiality – no-one will be named in this work
- The information collected via the focus groups will be used for the purposes of this project only
- Are there any questions before we begin?

2. Focus Group participants to introduce themselves

3. Focus Group Discussion Guide

1. A brief discussion to elicit opinions on the strength of Gaelic in your community.
2. Identification of the main barriers to the use of Gaelic in the home and the wider community.
3. How well do the Public Bodies with a remit for Gaelic interface with your community?
4. Do current Gaelic policies and initiatives make much difference to the strength of Gaelic in your area and in supporting your community to use more Gaelic in everyday activities?
5. How well is the voice of the community represented in decisions on Gaelic policy which are relevant to your local area?
6. How can community groups and individuals be more involved in local discussions and decisions related to improving the Gaelic situation of the area?
7. Are there any particular actions which Public Bodies with a remit for Gaelic development should focus on in your area which would support Gaelic use in the home and community?
8. Are there community-based organisations in your area which could take on the role of coordinating and leading on Gaelic development projects in the home and the community?
9. Does the community have sufficient capacity (skills, resources and support structures) to lead on Gaelic development activities which they see as the priorities for their area?
10. Identification of Gaelic language priorities which could be acted upon now to show intent in supporting families, young people and members of the community

Thank Participants and Conclusion

APPENDIX B

North West Lewis

Trends in Population and Gaelic Speakers

<u>2011 Data Zone</u>	<u>Data Zone Name</u>	<u>1991</u>			<u>2011</u>			<u>Population Change as %</u>	<u>Gaelic Speakers Change as %</u>
		<u>All people aged 3 and over</u>	<u>Number of Gaelic Speakers</u>	<u>Gaelic Speakers as % of population</u>	<u>All people aged 3 and over</u>	<u>Number of Gaelic Speakers</u>	<u>Gaelic Speakers as % of population</u>		
S01009029	Carloway to Shawbost	578	456	79%	615	381	62%	6%	-16%
S01009030	Bragar to Brue	851	748	88%	720	429	60%	-15%	-43%
S01009031	Barvas to Borve	817	683	84%	737	484	66%	-10%	-29%
S01009032	Galson to Swainbost	727	634	87%	646	424	66%	-11%	-33%
Totals		2,973	2,521	85%	2,718	1,718	63%	-9%	-32%

Source: National Record of Scotland

<u>2011 Data Zone</u>	<u>Data Zone Name</u>	<u>All people aged 3 and over</u>	<u>Gaelic: Can speak Gaelic</u>	<u>Language other than English used at home: Gaelic</u>	<u>% Population as Gaelic Speakers</u>	<u>% Gaelic Speakers who use Gaelic at Home</u>
S01009029	Carloway to Shawbost	615	382	339	62%	89%
S01009030	Bragar to Brue	720	429	373	60%	87%
S01009031	Barvas to Borve	737	484	418	66%	86%
S01009032	Galson to Swainbost	646	424	390	66%	92%
Totals		2,718	1,719	1,520	63%	88%

Source: National Record of Scotland

Pupils in Gaelic Medium Primary Education

<u>Year</u>	<u>Primary School</u>	<u>P1</u>	<u>P2</u>	<u>P3</u>	<u>P4</u>	<u>P5</u>	<u>P6</u>	<u>P7</u>	<u>Totals</u>	<u>As % of School</u>
2011-12	An Taobh Siar	3	4	0	2	3	0	2	14	44%
2012-13	An Taobh Siar	5	4	5	5	0	7	0	26	50%
2013-14	An Taobh Siar	6	5	3	7	0	3	7	31	53%
2014-15	An Taobh Siar	5	4	5	3	5	2	2	26	48%
2015-16	An Taobh Siar	2	5	6	5	3	6	2	29	50%
2016-17	An Taobh Siar	8	2	5	6	4	3	6	34	49%
2017-18	An Taobh Siar	5	8	2	5	4	4	3	31	48%
2018-19	An Taobh Siar	10	6	8	2	5	2	3	36	49%
2019-20	An Taobh Siar	12	10	6	8	4	5	1	46	57%

Source: Bòrd na Gàidhlig

<u>Year</u>	<u>Primary School</u>	<u>P1</u>	<u>P2</u>	<u>P3</u>	<u>P4</u>	<u>P5</u>	<u>P6</u>	<u>P7</u>	<u>Totals</u>	<u>As % of School</u>
2011-12	Siabost	1	1	1	2	2	3	1	11	42%
2012-13	Siabost	3	1	0	1	2	2	3	12	21%
2013-14	Siabost	4	3	3	0	3	2	4	19	30%
2014-15	Siabost	4	4	4	3	0	3	2	20	35%
2015-16	Siabost	2	3	4	4	4	2	3	22	48%
2016-17	Siabost	7	2	3	4	4	4	2	26	53%
2017-18	Siabost	2	5	2	3	4	4	4	24	45%
2018-19	Siabost	4	2	4	2	3	4	4	23	49%
2019-20	Siabost	3	4	3	4	2	3	4	23	53%

Source: Bòrd na Gàidhlig

North Skye

Trends in Population and Gaelic Speakers

<u>2011 Data Zone</u>	<u>Data Zone Name</u>	<u>1991</u>			<u>2011</u>			<u>Population Change as %</u>	<u>Change in Gaelic Speaker Numbers as a %</u>
		<u>All people aged 3 and over</u>	<u>Number of Gaelic Speakers</u>	<u>Gaelic Speakers as % of Population</u>	<u>All people aged 3 and over</u>	<u>Number of Gaelic Speakers</u>	<u>Gaelic Speakers as % of Population</u>		
S01010678	North East Skye	435	345	79%	615	285	46%	41	-17
S01010683	North West Skye	841	482	57%	943	352	37%	12	-27
Totals		1,276	827	65%	1,558	637	41%	22	-23

Source: National Record of Scotland

<u>2011 Data Zone</u>	<u>Data Zone Name</u>	<u>Geography of Data Zone</u>	<u>All people aged 3 and over</u>	<u>Gaelic: Can speak Gaelic</u>	<u>Language other than English used at home: Gaelic</u>	<u>% Population as Gaelic Speakers</u>	<u>% Gaelic Speakers who use Gaelic at Home</u>
S01010678	Skye North East	Flodigarry - Staffin	615	285	234	46%	82%
S01010683	Skye North West	Earlish - Uig - Kilmuir	943	352	233	37%	66%
Totals			1,558	637	467	41%	73%

Source: National Record of Scotland

Pupils in Gaelic Medium Primary Education

<u>Year</u>	<u>Primary School</u>	<u>P1</u>	<u>P2</u>	<u>P3</u>	<u>P4</u>	<u>P5</u>	<u>P6</u>	<u>P7</u>	<u>Totals</u>	<u>As % of School</u>
2011-12	Cille Mhoire	3	3	5	3	2	2	1	19	79%
2012-13	Cille Mhoire	4	3	3	5	3	2	2	22	76%
2013-14	Cille Mhoire	7	4	2	3	4	3	2	25	64%
2014-15	Cille Mhoire	3	7	4	2	3	4	3	26	63%
2015-16	Cille Mhoire	3	3	7	3	2	3	4	25	60%
2016-17	Cille Mhoire	4	3	3	5	2	2	3	22	58%
2017-18	Cille Mhoire	5	4	3	3	5	2	2	24	62%
2018-19	Cille Mhoire (Tròndairnis)	4	3	4	2	1	5	2	21	57%
2019-20	Cille Mhoire (Tròndairnis)	0	4	3	4	3	1	5	20	61%

Source: Bòrd na Gàidhlig

<u>Year</u>	<u>Primary School</u>	<u>P1</u>	<u>P2</u>	<u>P3</u>	<u>P4</u>	<u>P5</u>	<u>P6</u>	<u>P7</u>	<u>Totals</u>	<u>As % of School</u>
2011-12	Stafainn	2	3	3	1	4	2	2	17	81%
2012-13	Stafainn	2	2	3	3	1	4	2	17	74%
2013-14	Stafainn	1	2	2	3	3	1	4	16	89%
2014-15	Stafainn	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	12	86%
2015-16	Stafainn	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	12	86%
2016-17	Stafainn	5	2	2	1	2	1	2	15	79%
2017-18	Stafainn	7	5	2	2	1	2	1	20	87%
2018-19	Stafainn	4	6	5	2	2	1	0	20	80%
2019-20	Stafainn	6	4	6	5	2	2	1	26	90%

Source: Bòrd na Gàidhlig