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## **ASSEMBLING PROSPERITY IN A POST-COVID UNITED KINGDOM: NEW APPROACHES TO LEVELLING UP**

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**ASSEMBLING PROSPERITY  
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# ABSTRACT

Livelihood analysis and citizen-led understandings of prosperity have useful analytical potential to investigate the impact of policies, infrastructure, institutions, social support and democratic engagement on quality of life, beyond traditional income and economic growth measures. The UK Government's new 'Plan for Growth' will fail to secure livelihoods post-Covid because they focus on GDP growth, productivity and trickle-down economics, driven centrally, rather than an examination of what makes life worth living and regenerates and sustains nature. Drawing on a range of disciplines, we explore a new approach to driving innovative change.

**Keywords:** *assemblages; Covid-19; livelihoods; prosperity; United Kingdom*

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# INTRODUCTION

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Regional inequalities in the UK are persistent and long running, and policy initiatives over many decades have sought to address them without noticeable success (McCann, 2016, 2019). Recent research has deepened our understanding of spatial inequality by focusing on the differences within as well as between regions (McCann, 2019; UK2070, 2019; Zymek and Jones, 2020). The UK Government's call to 'level up' predates the Covid crisis with its attendant amplification of systemic frailties and injustices, and while the phraseology is new the impetus is not. This paper explores three interrelated issues: the emergence of new discursive frameworks for describing the nature of the economic and political challenges; the question of whether we know how to 'level up' and/or 'build back better'; and the issue of whether existing policy frameworks can deliver results. We start from the assumption that repeated calls for localism, place-based approaches, community interventions and the like are clearly powerful and persuasive, but still under researched, under theorised and insufficiently specified. The result is very often a set of strong assertions in favour of devolved governance, community initiatives, and localised job creation schemes that build on geographical and historical assets and capabilities without any clear discussion of how this will be done (Bounds, 2020; Tomaney and Pike, 2020; Welby and Mullally, 2020). Part of the difficulty here is that many prescriptions begin with proposed solutions – train more apprentices or inclusive growth – without a firm understanding of the specificities of place or a theory of effective place-based innovation.

# THE LANGUAGE OF CHANGE AND THE PRODUCTIVE CONSEQUENCES OF PLACE

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One of the glimmers of hope in these grim Covid times comes from the call for fresh thinking on the economy, for a focus on community well-being and quality of life rather than on productivity, GDP growth and GVA. There are many who claim that the historical period of neo-liberalism that has held sway since the 1970s is now in decline and about to be replaced by a new phase of economic history yet to be named. In the meantime, a series of possible futures and policy directions prevail in popular discussion: green deal, post-capitalism, post-growth, inclusive growth, great reset (Antink et al., 2020; Barwick, 2020; CPP, 2020; LGA, 2020). This language of renewal is positive, but lacks specificity (Tiratelli and Morgan, 2020; Hughes, 2019). Terms like ‘build back better’ and ‘inclusive growth’ are worryingly under theorised, and have no procedural content (Lee, 2019): the implication is that we are building back better than before Covid, but if we could not do it before, how can we do it now? Everything that was difficult pre-crisis – raise productivity, turn economic growth into well-being, protect the planet’s resources, transition to renewables – has not suddenly become easier. In addition, phrases such as ‘the great reset,’ the ‘left-behind’ are purely descriptive terms, and they lack analytical and processual heft. Their solutions tend to be exceptionally broad: improve productivity, retrain for the fourth industrial revolution, build innovative potential, invest in infrastructure. Where these terms are useful is in critiquing how we think about economies, and the relationship of society and politics to the economy. What does seem to be shifting is the idea that our societies should be in service to our economies rather than the other way around; we have lived too long in the service of the market and it has not served us well.

New discursive frameworks should be productive, of course; there is little change without revision in the framing devices we use for making sense of the world. Many of the terms currently finding favour have been in use for several decades, but have simply not found support or purchase. The fact that the UK public want a fairer, greener, more connected Britain after Covid marks a considerable sea change in public opinion (APPG Green New Deal, 2020; Youel, 2020). The demands include more locally sourced food, green spaces, liveable streets, flexible working and vibrant communities. These claims clearly require swift action, but the question is how. The routine answer to this question is place, act locally, enhance local decision-making, and democratise intent and purpose. The UK has several historic precedents for local level action, from co-operatives to Transition Towns, aimed at building resilience at the community level, but these efforts remain largely at a distance from policy objectives and macroeconomic strategy. One way potentially to reduce that distance is to ask how we can bring alternative thinking more effectively into the mainstream of policy formulation and action.

From one perspective, the answer to that question is already here because of the repurposing of economic failure as the new terrain of the political. The economy is a vital space of contestation where democracy or its lack, and most certainly its failures, are no longer just a political space but a newly formed economic one (Cook, Long and Moore, 2016). The origins and ramifications of problematisation, of how problems come to be defined as problems, are always deeply historical and situated (Moore, 2011: Ch1). Two broad points follow from this. The first relates to scale since

'levelling up' and the 'left-behind' are scalar concepts, where the defining problem is spatial inequality. Much of the discussion regarding inequalities and what to do about them focuses on their location and on comparative entities that are spatially naturalised: cities, rural areas, communities. This brings scale to the forefront of politics, but also has the effect of treating it as unproblematic, as if scale were something that just exists, rather than something that has to be produced through processes that proceed most often through contestation. Consider how the politicisation of scale has forced certain concerns into political and policy fields through an insistent demand from the 'left-behind' areas of the UK that they are the scale that matters. However, there are many actors and agencies involved in bringing things newly into view and creating them as objects of intervention. Deciding what the problems are and how they should be tackled is the domain of experts and their role in governance broadly understood (Foucault, 1979; Rose, 1999), and one of the effects of expertise is to draw boundaries, exclude things from view, so that frameworks stand out in relief and appear to relate to boundaries observable in the world. Such processes have been discussed much more vividly in development studies and research from a variety of disciplines in the Global South where critical thought has been tenaciously attentive to the way societies and their problems are made to appear so that technical solutions can be applied (Li, 2007; Moore, 2018). In the process, certain categories, problems and goals emerge to carry the freight of interventions and solutions, and key to their constitution is the creation of specific sets or systems of relations between elements. Consequently, we might wish to keep in mind how such innocent and apparently self-evident terms like the 'local' or 'well-being' come into being and are operationalised.

This relates to the second point which is that the spaces and places labelled 'left behind' or in need of 'levelling up' appear through this process to be comparable, susceptible to similar solutions, but

are, in reality, entangled landscapes comprising multiple spatialities and temporalities; they are the product of history and of many actors, agencies and institutions some recent, and some very long running. Those spaces that require levelling up may share certain features in common – processes such as deindustrialisation or assets such as poor skills – but there are significant differences between these places: Blaenau Gwent is not Kingston-upon-Hull (McCann, 2019; Moore et al., 2020). These empirical differences matter, most particularly because their combination and recombination in specific embedded locales creates complex ecologies of livelihoods, institutions and belonging. In the UK, policies that begin with GDP growth, enhanced GVA and improved productivity have had limited impact historically on left-behind places and have failed to translate into rising living standards for individuals, households and communities largely because they have not succeeded in targeting the specific developmental potential of each place (Iammarino, Rodríguez-Pose and Storper, 2017). Yet, the diversity of spaces, places, agents, communities and institutions provides a potentially powerful lever for future change, albeit one that is currently under specified, researched and deployed (Iammarino, Rodríguez-Pose and Storper, 2019).

Difference between places means that one size does not fit all, and calls for GDP growth, productivity improvement and inclusive growth continue to ring hollow. So where might we start to formulate new frameworks of understanding that could drive more effective policies? In the following sections we provide a response to this question by bringing together an array of concepts and tools in a novel interdisciplinary framework drawn from anthropology, geography, development studies, sociology, political theory and organisation science, and inspired by work in the Global South, to explore how we can repurpose the ideas and methods we have to hand to drive further innovation.



# THE PURPOSE OF PROSPERITY: LIVELIHOODS, ASSETS AND PUBLIC SERVICES

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Recent work in East London with local communities has focused on citizen understandings of prosperity in terms of the quality and challenges of lives lived. What emerged from the research was a clear picture of how individual lives and household necessities intersect with larger institutional, structural and historical challenges. Analysis of the data demonstrated that individuals, as well as individuals within households and social networks, draw on a range of diverse, multidimensional, multiscalar elements to discern, manage and try to bring into being their vision of a good life (Moore and Woodcraft, 2019: 294). Good quality work, functioning public services, choice, opportunity, political freedoms, and intergenerational justice all came to the fore. Respondents described how they employed a combination of institutions, social networks, community and care facilities, transport and education providers to build a secure livelihood. People often described failures in such systems as holding them back and impeding their ability to make a living (Moore & Woodcraft, 2019; Woodcraft & Anderson, 2019).

Livelihoods perspectives have been central to development practice and theory in the Global South in the last decades (e.g. Chambers and Conway, 1991; Scoones, 1998, 2009; Ellis, 2000; Hussein, 2002; Solesbury, 2003; Serrat, 2017) and are increasingly being deployed to understand transformations in labour regimes, disaster risk management and natural resource stewardship (Downie, Dearden and King, 2018; Scoones et al., 2018; Mabon et al., 2020). Contemporary livelihood studies focus on the active involvement of people in responding to and enforcing change (De Haan, 2012; Levine, 2014). The sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) builds a

holistic picture of people's lives that includes their capacities, skills, health, social networks and access to public services, as well as their financial situation. It makes connections between the micro (peoples' daily lives) and macro levels (regional and national policies, institutions) to understand the power-dynamics shaping people's lives (May et al., 2009). It recognises that people require a range of assets (physical; financial; human; social; and natural) to achieve positive outcomes, with no single category of assets on its own sufficient to yield all the many livelihood outcomes people seek (Moser and Norton, 2001). Rather than confronting problems and focusing on what is absent, a livelihoods approach begins by comprehensively mapping the assets communities already have and works to build upon areas of strength and vitality to strengthen capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011).

The SLA has had rather minimal impact on research and policy in the UK (Hinshelwood, 2003; May et al., 2009; Athwal, Brill and Chesters, 2011; Crawley, Hemmings and Price, 2011; IPPR North, 2011) where historically approaches have focused on specific forms of community development in the context of inequality and poverty reduction (Gilchrist, 2003, 2005, 2006; Popple, 2006). Key features have involved consultation and public participation in decision-making, neighbourhood renewal, capacity-building projects, and encouraging citizens to invest in the community and voluntary sector, within an overall framework of helping people to help themselves. The SLA resonates with certain aspects of community development but is distinctive in terms of its focus on data collection to enable a detailed understanding of the lived experience

of the affordances and constraints of livelihoods, and its systemic approach to the intersections between individual, community, local, national and international policy levels. It is in essence a whole landscape approach to the question of what determines quality of life and what needs to be done to make change possible; it is at once a method/process and an analytic/policy framework. The result is that while SLA and community development share a drive towards localism, SLA focuses on the security and sustainability of livelihoods in the context of long-term socio-economic change as well as immediate shocks, within a relational appreciation of the intersections between assets and strategies.

Oxfam and Church Action on Poverty (May et al., 2009; Oxfam GB, 2016) piloted a number of SLA projects in the UK working with local partners and low income communities<sup>1</sup>. They began by mapping five sets of assets as well as the key policies, intuitions, and practices that affect people's livelihoods. Indispensable to the approach is a focus on intersections and relations, for instance how public services such as youth services and libraries shape social assets or how prevailing social, cultural, and religious practices within a community impact livelihoods through care responsibilities and the control of particular assets. In Splott, Cardiff, family networks constituted an important social asset, enabling people living in poverty to call on family members for child support and loans. However, non-Black, Asian and minority ethnic women were less able to call on their family for help than members of Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities; showing how the intersections of identities, based in place, effect people's ability to build a livelihood (Oxfam GB, 2013; 2016). The SLA framework pays particular attention to how financial assets are influenced by non-financial assets, and how

particular individuals, households and communities do not necessarily privilege financial assets over non-financial ones. The development of the former is often dependent on the strength of the latter. SLA also explores the reasoning behind the decisions people make, as they seek the best use of the assets and opportunities available to them.

Within the SLA framework, potential vulnerabilities that could weaken assets and undermine livelihood strategies require examination. These include national and international trends like deindustrialisation, ageing populations, migration, environmental degradation, climate change and forms of political representation and voice: national policies, global trends, regulation and macroeconomic policy, including the provision of public services, are all major determinants of quality of life and livelihood security (IPPR, 2011). Government in the form of the provision of public assets – from education to clean air – is an important component in livelihood strategies. Rather than being passive recipients of public services, people treat public services and welfare provision as part of their portfolio of assets which they combine and use to survive and progress. As the Covid pandemic has powerfully reinforced, public services are part of collective survival structures, but more than this, they are a fundamental component in the development of future capacities and capabilities that allow individuals, households and communities to respond to change. Consider, for example, how the provision of services will be required to evolve to provide the asset base for future livelihoods through such developments as localised energy generation, electric car charging forecourts, and digital provision, not only for the management of environmental assets, but for the development of new forms of employment.

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<sup>1</sup>References for the results of projects carried by Oxfam and CAP: (Bull, Brooks and Smith, no date; Orr et al., 2006; Wainwright, Davies and Kenningham, 2008; Ponder and Hindley, 2009; see also IPPR, 2011: 14).

**Figure 1.** Author review of livelihood literature showing examples of what could contribute to the five assets in the UK context, and the trends and policies that may influence them.

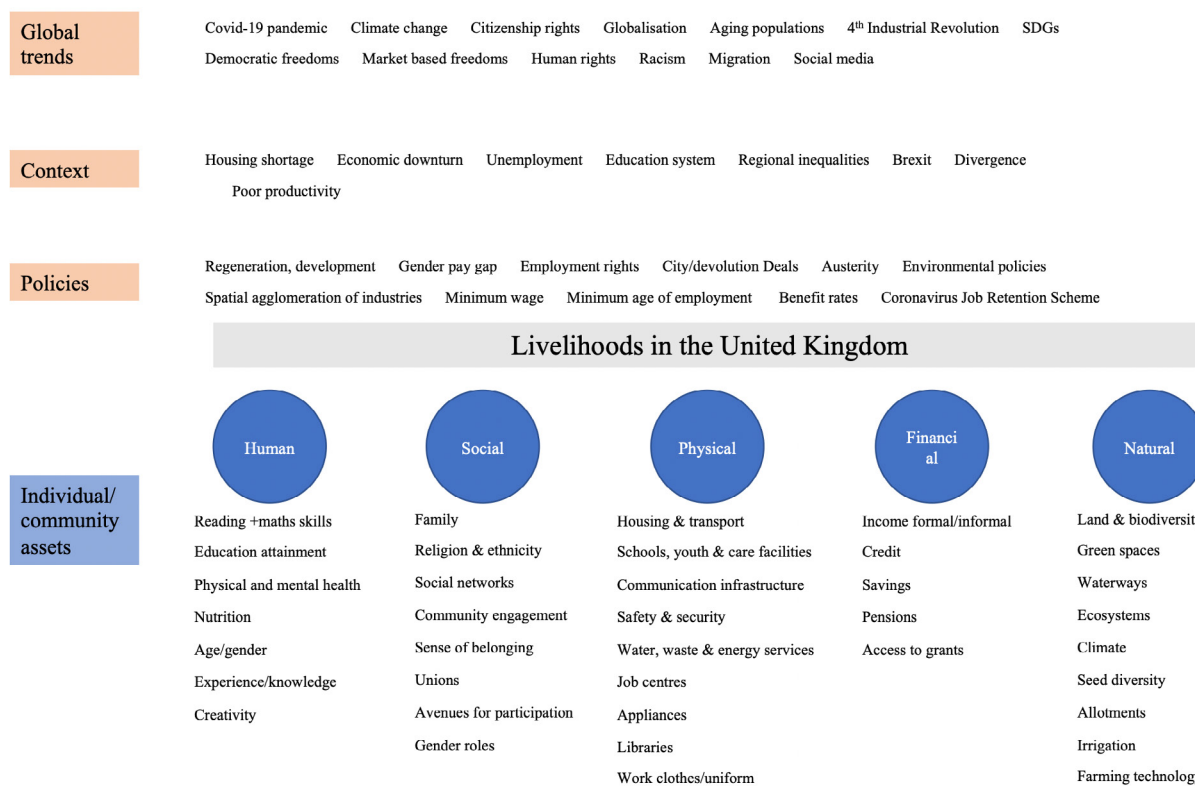
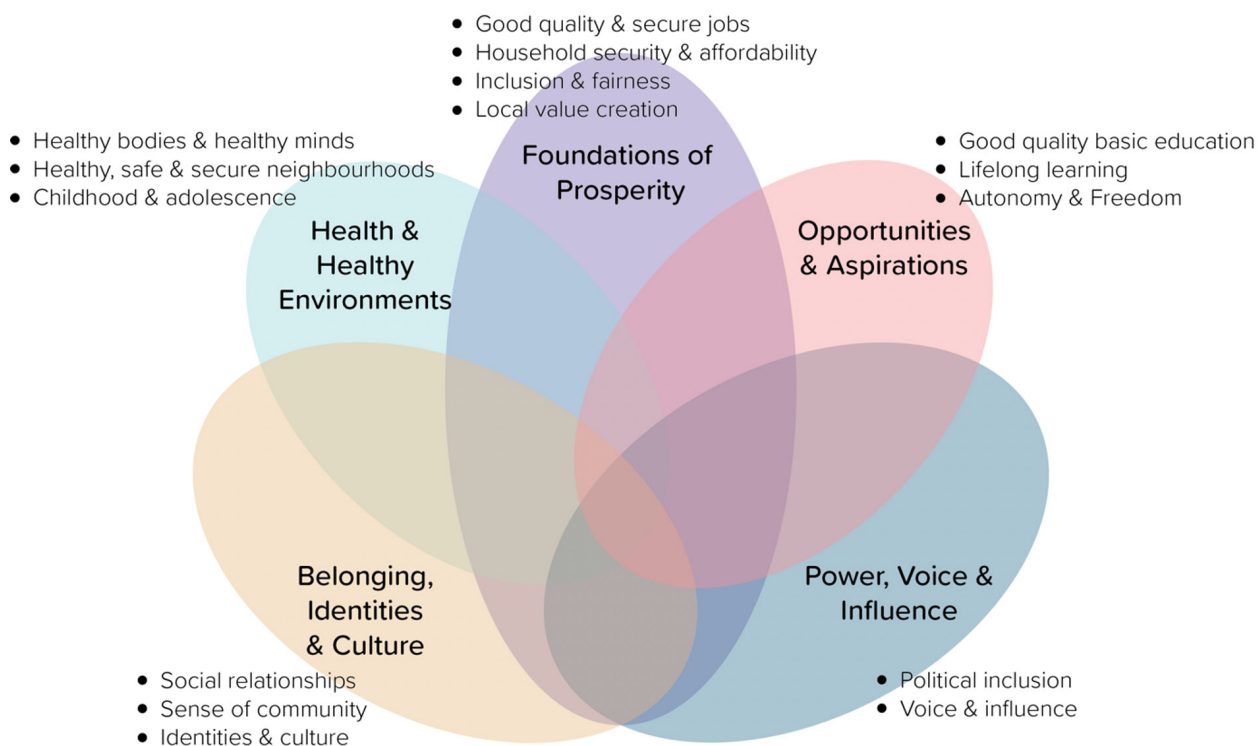


Figure 1 contains a summary of what an SLA can contribute to understanding and analysing the range of assets supporting livelihoods in the UK, accounting for larger determinants, trends and policies based on a review of the extant UK studies and a reading of the wider literature from the Global South (De Haan, 2012). The key issue here is that livelihoods are dynamic, change happens, and individuals, households and communities are making decisions and working to get by in contexts of social and economic change. The susceptibility and vulnerability of livelihoods to external shocks and policy formation at all levels is a vital part of decision-making. Understanding the larger ecosystems with which livelihood strategies sit is key to understanding the constraints and opportunities for place-based improvements in quality of life and sustainable prosperity.

This larger ecosystem of assets, actors, agencies, institutions and infrastructures came to the fore in research conducted in East London (Moore & Woodcraft, 2019). Initially, this was not a study based on a SLA, but one focusing on citizen understandings of prosperity, emerging pathways to prosperity and how the quest for quality of life, aspiration, security and connection constituted the terrain of localised forms of prosperity. The aim of the research was to redefine prosperity for the 21st century and to move away from narrower versions based on economic growth, skills-based employment, and productivity (Figure 2).

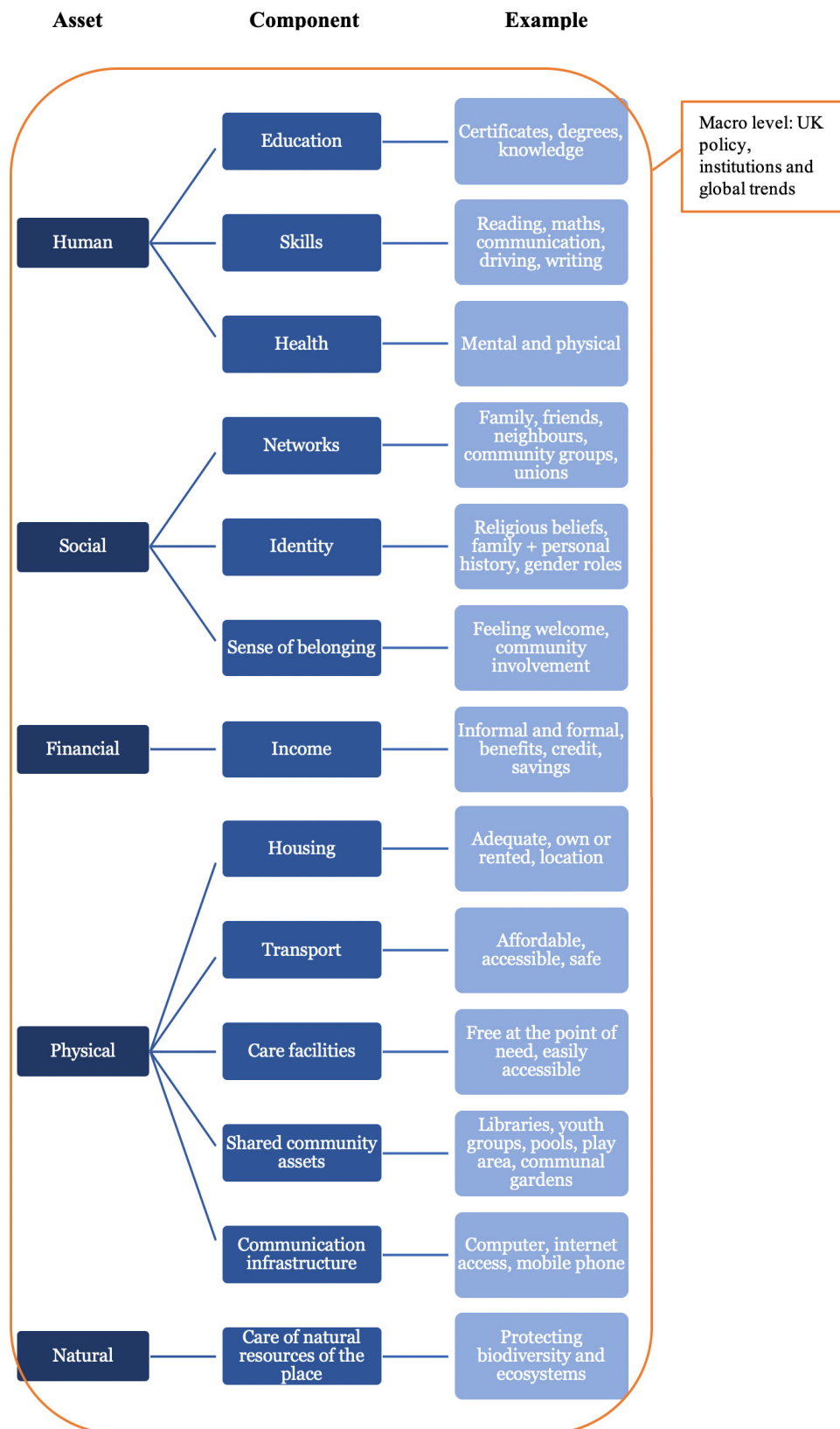
**Figure 2.** Prosperity Model developed from empirical research with citizen scientists and communities. Source: Moore & Woodcraft (2019).



During analysis of the data (both qualitative and quantitative) carried out in ongoing collaboration with resident citizen scientists, it became apparent that there was some significant overlap between the SLA framework developed in close conjunction with local communities in the Global South and the complex ecologies of intersecting elements described by communities in East London. This prompted a return to the SLA literature and a search for any examples of its deployment in the UK. Where SLA provided value for the research on prosperity was in supplying a meta framework that made intuitive sense to communities involved in the research, in furnishing a framework for data collection and in insisting on the relationality between different assets, agents, agencies and institutions in the system (Moore & Collins, 2020; Woodcraft & Anderson, 2019; Woodcraft et al., 2021). Figure 3 maps the SLA onto the Prosperity Model.

From our review of the literature from the Global South and North, across levels of granularity, and Prosperity Model data (Moore & Woodcraft, 2019) we have identified a list of 12 components that make up livelihoods in the UK (Figure 3). These 12 components are a complement to the Prosperity Model (Figure 2) with considerable intersection of the 12 components into the Prosperity Model's five domains. The Prosperity Model illustrates the multi-dimensional nature of prosperity and how the different conditions overlap and interact in everyday life (Moore & Woodcraft, 2019). This data can be used to contextualise the abstraction of the livelihood framework to frame challenges communities in the UK are facing.

**Figure 3.** SLA mapped to Prosperity Model.



To redefine prosperity is to reset its purpose and how it might be achieved (Moore and Mintchev, 2021). This is an ambitious project, and it is also the objective of developing a citizen-led Prosperity Index (PI) tailored to local circumstance, and yet comparative in scope. Developing visions of prosperity with and for communities and mapping pathways for achieving these visions, bridges the gap between expert knowledge and lived experience promoting a downward and horizontal shift in power (Moore & Woodcraft, 2019). Understanding what is foundational to prosperity for specific local communities reveals the largely ineffective metrics currently in place where success or failure are evaluated in terms of GDP/GVA, productivity and increased competitiveness. The diversity of local places, especially at granular scales like the Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) where broad based aggregate metrics manifest little of the actual constraints underpinning and impeding success. In addition, such metrics provide little guide for action in contexts of very low growth or no growth, nor do they provide sufficient purchase to monitor and understand anticipated structural transformations in the economy (AI, robotics), alongside the high levels of environmental degradation and toxicity across the UK (Moore et al., 2020). A redesigned prosperity provides a new discursive framework and linking it to a SLA provides a detailed template for data collection, with the PI furnishing a set of indicators and metrics that can be used for evaluating prosperity at the local level. This provides a more grounded approach to earlier reconceptualisations of prosperity (e.g. Jackson, 2017) and supplies data analysis and metrics suitable for local level policy analysis in the context of a comparative framework for the UK.

Redesigning what constitutes prosperity for the UK in this manner is part of a broader emerging consensus that what is needed is a venturesome reworking of current macroeconomic policy not just to deal with present deficits, but to negotiate upcoming challenges. At the core of this refashioning is an emphasis on social innovation, improved social

solidarity and social infrastructure with an emphasis on quality of life. Recent research in the UK documents social fragility and political disquiet, a sense that the social fabric of society and the infrastructures on which it depends are in decline (Foundational Economy Collective, 2018). In the period 2007-2017 GDP rose in the UK, while social solidarity had fallen (Lima de Miranda and Snower, 2020). The values of social citizenship and solidarity have been undermined by the negative impact of untrammelled and unmanaged markets and the corrosive effect of a capitalism based on individualism and competition (Collier & Kay, 2020; Lynch & Kalaitzake, 2018). The Foundational Economy Collective have developed a zonal model of the economy which highlights the importance of the foundations on which we all depend: local services infrastructure (housing, health, education, care, utilities); mobility infrastructure (public and private transport systems); social infrastructure (libraries, community spaces, parks, high streets) (Foundational Economy Collective, 2018; Froud et al., 2018; Calafati et al., 2019). In short, the goods and services, including education, housing, health care and food, which are the basis of welfare and citizenship. Societies need many things to be provided collectively in order to ensure our collective well-being, the drive of policy should be to secure the supply of basic goods and services for all citizens in a way which is socially responsible and sustainable. The foundational liveability of many ordinary households in the UK has been severely undermined in recent years, and thus the foundational economy itself is in need of renewal if we are to level up or build back better. The result is a quickening debate suggesting that renewal should start by addressing our degraded social infrastructures (Kelsey and Kenny, 2021).



# BEYOND PLACE

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Throughout this discussion, we have supported the premise that place is key to comprehending the complexities of lived realities, but as a framing concept and locale for action it is not enough on its own. We also need to ask, 'how is change brought about'? It is relatively easy to identify failures, but much harder to build a convincing account of what succeeds and why. SLA is a powerful way of ordering and unearthing the specificities of place, but it is relatively weak on ascertaining drivers of change. To understand how change happens in specific locales and what prevents change from occurring, we need to turn to an additional set of theoretical ideas and considerations. Once again, these ideas and concepts have been developed in part in the Global South and cut across the disciplines of geography, development studies, philosophy, anthropology and organisation science.

What a SLA reveals are the complex ecologies surround people's lives, the wide variety of different assets that maintain them, as well as the material and environmental structures which support the whole. These complex ecologies are most often rendered as unidimensional networks with households or individuals at their centre, and this reflects the implicit theories of change and agency that underpin the SLA and its depictions. Work in systems thinking, complexity and organisation science however understands these multiple determinations as sets of intersecting systems with a large number of parts that have many unpredictable interactions. The defining characteristic of complex adaptive systems is emergence where order is an emergent property of interactions between elements: examples of forms of order might be health systems, knowledge systems, business strategies, social structures, and culture. In this formulation, systems are characterised by

nonlinear dynamics, sets of open-ended capacities that exceed the properties of the component parts: the component elements do things together that they could not do alone (Goldstein, 2018).

This implies a theory of change which is quite distinctive from many of the underlying assumptions implied in theories of community or place-based development, and indeed in economic policy formulations, where considerable emphasis is placed on unidirectional changes involving mechanistic levers and/or single metrics such as rising productivity or GVA growth. The result is a set of thin formulations that have no purchase when levers do not work and are unable to suggest how complex systems might be organised for innovation.

How should these complex systems and their component parts be characterised to improve our ability to navigate and shape them? Here social science approaches to complexity have made productive use of the concept of assemblages (Barry, 2013; Collier & Ong, 2007; DeLanda, 2006; Li, 2007; Marcus & Saka, 2006; Müller, 2015) to understand processes of organisation and change that involve multiple forms of agency, materiality, organisational forms and knowledges in specific places. The emphasis is on heterogeneous elements coming together to create new relationships through the reconfiguration of actors, technologies, organisations, rationalities, practices and knowledges. Within these complex ecologies, knowledge, assets and resources are distributed across many different entities, networks and practices, so change is generated not by single entities or actors, but by the entire ecology.

Currently, there are no good economic models for understanding prosperity redefined nor pathways towards such prosperity. In part because existing

models assume by default that community or place-based prosperity is an aggregate of individual prosperity. However, a redefined notion of prosperity focuses on collective prosperous lives and livelihoods, on those things we need to share in order to live a good quality of life. Understanding how complex innovations arise in such systems and how forms of emergent innovation can be shaped are crucial. The first insight is that prosperity is not an entity in itself or a property that adheres to individuals or firms, but rather an effect of the whole ecology or assemblage, something that is produced through the assemblage constituted by the interdependent ecologies that make up specific places. This raises the question of how the emergent properties of assemblages can be shaped and who does the shaping. Complex systems are characterised by extensive distributions of agency and purpose, so change is not brought about simply by top-down directives or mechanistic change processes, but by working to connect landscapes, assets, knowledge, livelihoods and identities into a purposeful problem definition (problematism) as well as a set of potential solutions. Purpose, here, is a set of collaborations across diverse agents and organisations over long periods of time to manage ambiguity and uncertainty in relation to certain goals or outcomes.

The value of an assemblage approach is sometimes easier to grasp in the context of the relationships between human and natural systems. For example, interventions designed to realign agricultural practices with environmental restoration involve complex intersections between soil, water and climate systems, as well as markets, regulations, farmers' livelihoods, consumer organisations, animal health, retailers and a wide variety of other actors, institutions and assets (Li, 2007; Forney, Rosin and Campbell, 2018). Interventions in such systems involve – amongst other things – engagement with the diverse and divergent interests of different groups with competing goals and values. Two points follow from this: the first is that assemblages are

heterogeneous, but they are also a matter of power, purpose and goals in specific contexts: 'the political significance of materials is not a given; rather, it is relational, a practical and contingent achievement,' (Barry, 2013: 183). The second is that assemblages are about emergent outcomes that form the basis for subsequent interventions and outcomes, and as evidenced and emphasised in many development interventions in the Global South, assemblages are not naturally occurring, they are most often the result of frameworks and ideas of governance, of how societies should be run, and what their purposes might be (Foucault, 1980: 194). Consequently, specific development initiatives, for example sustainable agricultural practices or community forest management, involve specific framings, knowledges, actors, institutions and resources that are pulled together to create new ecologies that shape and guide actions and interventions (Li, 2007; Forney, Rosin and Campbell, 2018). These ecologies change over time and can be very long running, informing and moulding governance and allocation of resources through policy initiatives and taken for granted assumptions.

Accordingly, assemblages can operate at different scales – community forest management is simultaneously a local level project activity, a set of national priorities and embedded in international governance frameworks – but they are also a matter of scope, of a specific configuration of agents, institutions, expertise, legal frameworks etc. As a result, they require work, they do not emerge *sui generis*, they inevitably create new objects (and indeed subjects) of governance, as well as a series of enabling fictions that take on a life of their own. Examples of such fictions abound: carbon off-setting, natural capital accounting, well-being, community development. It is a curious fact that the creation and development of these fictions have received much more critical attention in the literature on the Global South than they have in discussions of policy frameworks in the UK.



Assemblages are a way of making things public, bringing actors and objects and institutions together to create novel forms, with new potentialities and possibilities (Latour and Weibel, 2005). Perspectives developed in organisation science focus on the dispersal of knowledge across ecologies, where new agents (individuals, experts, associations, institutions) interact and react to the activities of others building new forms of knowledge, as well as capacities and capabilities. Together with new perspectives for organising relations within assemblages and new patterns of interaction, these capacities and capabilities create new dynamics for emergence of innovations. Key to this process is the shaping and enabling of emergence where the heterogeneity of possible outputs creates opportunities for creating, exploring and experimenting over time. New patterns of interaction increase the capacities and capabilities within the assemblage over time, but also draw on deep structures of value, meaning, culture, identity, principles, regulations and frameworks for action (Dougherty, 2016, 2017). This is why it is essential to expand our theories of change, redesign our understanding of prosperity and reorient goals towards quality of life and build new forms of collaboration and interaction that draw on the widest range of citizen and other expertise to drive social and economic innovation towards quality-of-life enhancement. Place-based capacities and capabilities will need to be developed to support a variety of innovations that can be reoriented towards quality-of-life goals over time (Moore et al., 2020). Organisation science targets the relationship between problem solving across complex ecologies through the development of common grounds for innovation and purpose. What this suggests is that social solidarity and forms of collaboration across diverse interests are key to innovation: the orchestration of emergence has to have a strategy that defines how the ecology or assemblage will use innovation to accomplish long-term goals (Dougherty, 2016, 2017).

Dougherty and Dunne provide the apposite example of green housing systems where architects, builders, planners, suppliers, communities and information engineers come together using solar panels, eco-materials, digital distribution systems and a range of new innovations, technologies and regulations to collaboratively integrate alternative ideas into working systems (Dougherty and Dunne, 2011). Working systems not only build new forms of knowledge and associated capacities and capabilities, but have the potential to drive locally-based innovation that can create jobs, deliver on carbon net zero targets, reduce pollution, reduce heating bills. New forms of collaboration based on working systems that deliver common ground for innovation also build new value propositions, new business models and new public policies that set out new criteria for public welfare and collective action. The scope for such assemblages can be based on a whole system approach to addressing decent work, climate change, housing deficits, land reclamation, reduced toxicity, schools and skills programmes, but each aspect of the innovation has to focus on delivering quality-of-life, including environmental regeneration and protection.

# INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY OR A PLAN FOR GROWTH?

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A whole system approach to improving quality of life across the UK is clearly what is required, but are current plans for levelling up and reforming the UK's economy likely to deliver prosperity for its citizens as we have redefined it? The 2017 UK Industrial Strategy (IS) outlined four Grand Challenges to transform the future: AI and data; ageing society; clean growth; and future of mobility, to increase productivity and ensure good work for all. An analysis two years on from the publishing of the IS white paper found some progress towards the 142 policy commitments (Industrial Strategy Council, 2020). Most of the £45 billion assigned to IS initiatives was spent on a small number of projects such as R&D and transport, so many initiatives had little financing attached to them. A lack of consistency, coordination and scale across the country meant only modest progress was made towards the meeting Grand Challenges (Industrial Strategy Council, 2020). A flawed strategy, but a strategy nonetheless.

In the first quarter of 2021 the Government announced its 'transition' from the IS into a 'Plan for Growth' led by the Treasury (HM Government, 2021) to take into account Brexit, carbon net zero and Covid, to build back better and level up. It sets out how government aims to support economic growth through investment in infrastructure, skills and innovation – their core pillars of growth, but lays out a vision for the future rather than specific policy or regulation changes. Moving away from an IS is a departure from international practice, most countries are strengthening their industrial strategies due to Covid (Haldane, 2021). But the premise behind both the IS and Plan for Growth are the same – 'a programme of supply-side policies to drive prosperity in and across the economy,' (Industrial Strategy Council, 2021: 4).

The Plan for Growth is a centralist strategy (Fyans and Qureshi, 2021). While the Government maintains its desire to give more power to local communities, not much emphasis is given to devolution - not mentioned once in the Queen's Speech in May (Travers, 2021). Creating a Treasury campus in the North may bring government decision-making closer to people around the UK, but does little to 'give more power to local communities' which requires devolution of decision-making and fiscal power to the local level where there is deep understanding of local context. The focus on transport is welcome but it is only one foundation needed to improve 'left-behind' places. Plus, evidence from Japan suggests that a focus on high-speed rail is beneficial to larger urban regions but detrimental to smaller regions through jobs losses (Koster, Tabuchi and Thisse, 2021). There is no coordinated plan with clear milestones to reach the legally binding net zero by 2050 target. Finally, there are no measures for success or independent body to evaluate progress on the Plan for Growth.

There is no commitment to ongoing citizen involvement in place-based innovation priorities. Reviews in the Global South emphasise that innovations are more inclusive when solutions are designed not just for, but with, the people they aim to serve (Foster and Heeks, 2015) and that as innovation becomes more orientated towards societal goals and values, the focus needs to shift away from traditional top-down policy to enable innovations from citizens and civil society (Nicholls, Simon and Gabriel, 2015), and to reinforce the diversity of interactions between governments, researchers, business, NGOs, citizens and others in innovation and financial processes (Baker and Wigan, 2017; Burch and McInroy, 2018; LPB, 2020).

Covid has shown us the importance of inventing, producing, supplying and distributing locally – especially for food, medical supplies, energy and some manufacturing - highlighting the importance of a clear mission, a whole systems approach to co-ordinate entire supply chain and across sectors. With the IS replaced by the ‘Plan for Growth,’ ‘Skills for Jobs’ and the proposed Innovation and Levelling Up Strategies, there is a missed opportunity to see the interconnections and possibility for local collaborations between the levelling up agenda, the UK ‘productivity puzzle,’ ‘left-behind’ places, net zero economy, skills and education and innovation. Without a joined up and whole systems approach these government strategies will fail to meet the challenges the UK faces, beyond symbolic projects and tokens of levelling up success - high street revamp, gigafactories and high-speed rail (Jennings, McKay and Stoker, 2021).

# CONCLUSION

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In this paper, we have outlined the importance of detailed understandings of the circumstances, assets and constraints for each locale in any policy initiative directed towards reducing inter- and intra-regional inequality. We explored new frameworks for comprehending and visualising the goals and impact of any policy for levelling up and suggested that a revised notion of prosperity set within a SLA would offer the most potential. The diversity of agents, assets, resource and knowledge's in each locale is currently a under explored and underexploited means for driving change and innovation. Current approaches which focus on single drivers and levers will not provide suitable models for change or for driving improvements in quality of life. A broad reform of the economy and of macroeconomic policy towards a redefined notion of prosperity based on quality of life is required. Such an approach must be set within a whole system approach to change where innovation is understood as an effect across a complex ecology.

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