Developing a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach to reinvigorate public involvement of marginalized groups in the public policy domain

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Abstract

Disenfranchised populations on the margins of society typically struggle to have social and policy issues that concern them recognised and remedied by governments. Building on a Scandinavian participatory design approach, which traditionally aims to empower marginalized groups through participation in design, this thesis critiques and expands on a strand in participatory design that mobilises the notion of publics, developed by political theorist John Dewey, to propose that participatory design approaches and methods may contribute to the formation of publics by helping groups articulate complex societal issues. However existing research operates mostly at the community scale, is not oriented to the policy domain, and does not shed light on the process of public formation. This undermines the political force of Dewey's concept of publics and limits the potential impact of design interventions in the policy domain. To situate participatory design with emerging publics more firmly in relation to public policy discourse and agenda-setting, this thesis develops and trials an alternative application of publics - called *publics-oriented participatory design*.

Adopting a constructivist worldview and interpretive epistemological orientation, this design-inspired qualitative research synthesises insights from agenda-setting and feminist political theory and uses an interpretivist policy analysis to situate an emerging public in the policy context. Trialled with a self-organised social housing Tenant Group in rural England, this thesis contributes a more situated and holistic understanding of the application of the publics-frame in design and offers insights into the benefits of applying methods adapted from interpretivist policy analysis to inform design interventions with emerging publics. Meanwhile, the interaction between the proposed publics-oriented design approach and public formation groups raises challenges to certain assumptions in participatory design. Insights into publics formation with marginalised groups and contextualising practice are proposed.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1   Introduction

Disenfranchised populations on the so-called 'margins' of society often struggle to have social and policy issues that concern them recognised and remedied by governments. This further reinforces the marginalisation of these groups and seeds distrust in the political system (Mills, 2000; Barnes and Prior, 2009). Recent attempts in studies of participatory design to address this situation draw on a theory of publics developed by pragmatist political theorist John Dewey. According to this theory, developed in his seminal book *The Public and its Problems* (1991 [1927]), 'publics' are individuals who come together around shared issues that the state and its formal channels have failed to address. However, since public issues in modern societies are increasingly complex, indefinite and intertwined (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Buchanan, 1992), people often struggle to articulate their shared issues and therefore cannot form a coherent public. To support the process of issue articulation essential for public formation, in recent years some design researchers influenced by research in Science and Technology (Latour, 2004, 2005) proposed to use the critical and material approaches and methods from participatory design (DiSalvo, 2009; Le Dantec and DiSalvo, 2013; Ehn, Nilsson and Topgaard, 2014; Le Dantec, 2016). As a nascent approach in participatory design, the contributions of the publics-frame to the design of public services and policies remain unclear and require further exploration (Asad and Le Dantec, 2015). This thesis critiques and expands on the publics-frame in participatory design by developing and trialling an alternative approach that aims to situate the practice more firmly in relation to the public policy domain by synthesising insights from agenda-setting and feminist political literature to inform a design-inspired practice with emerging publics to enable them to cohere into a public and take political action in the policy domain. I refer to this approach as *publics-oriented participatory design*.

Based on a critique of participatory design research and practice that uses the publics-frame, I have identified a tendency in the literature to focus on designing with publics at the local community scale, as advocated by Le Dantec and DiSalvo (2013a). Problematically, I argue that this undermines the political force of Dewey's conception of publics as a tool and process whereby people attempt to make sense of substantive societal issues that negatively impact their everyday lives and organise to collectively demand that these issues be addressed. Critically, though Dewey sees the complex process of issue and public formation as taking place outside formal channels

of governance, he also posits that publics are an integral part of the democratic process (Dewey, 1991, p.27). Indeed, according to Dewey, publics are necessary when the more immediate scale in which people lead their lives is no longer sufficient for identifying or settling social issues.

Following this, I argue that participatory design practice using the publics-frame isn't sufficiently oriented to the public policy process. Though operating at a local scale may suffice for some issues, it does not suffice for the issues that Dewey delineates as policy issues and therefore require systematic (macro-level) solutions. This weakening of the concept of publics in the political sense, is part of a wider pattern in the literature, which as I detail later suffers from a lack of consistency and accuracy in the application of the concept of Deweyan publics. Similarly, there is also a surprising lack of attention and insights into the process of public formation, which design interventions purport to support. Aiming to address these gaps in the participatory design literature using the publics-frame, in this study I develop and expand on the literature to develop a more *publics-oriented participatory design* approach which seeks to situate this relatively new strand in participatory design more firmly in relation to democratic processes of agenda-setting.

To clarify the approach, I have outlined three central features. First, following from the critique of the existing literature, a publics-oriented participatory design approach seeks to delineate and operationalise more clearly what is a public and what is an appropriate site for engaging with a public. Given their heterogeneous, emergent and dynamic nature, this is not straightforward. However, to maintain Dewey's stance about their democratic role, in undertaking a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach, I conceptualise publics as a tool for political action which enables groups to influence public policy discourse to demand from the state that their issues be recognised and addressed. Further, since I aim to expand on a Scandinavian participatory design approach, which traditionally aims to empower marginalised groups through design, I focus here on marginalized groups, to whom I argue later, the concept of publics is especially pertinent. While I recognise that marginality of a particular group is always defined in relation to a particular position, issue, or time - to name a few factors (Mowat, 2015), some groups experience multiple and ongoing forms of marginalization and it is this kind of group that is the focus of this study (Mowat, 2015).

Secondly, echoing the arguments of design historians Richard Buchanan (2001) and Victor Margolin (Margolin and Margolin, 2002; Margolin, 2010) who called for design researchers and practitioners to learn about the social science domain in which they operate, the *publics-oriented participatory design* approach integrates findings and insights from public policy. Specifically, I

have chosen to integrate key models and findings from agenda-setting theory and research, which focuses on how issues are prioritized and become policy agendas, and feminist political theory, which emphasizes the perspective of marginalized groups. Broadly, these theories and perspectives help shed light on how marginalized groups may influence public policy discourse and agendas (Schattschneider, 1960; Fraser, 1990; Baumgartner and Jones, 2009; Kingdon, 2011). In addition, I integrate research from the specific policy domain – in this study, social housing policy.

Thirdly, the more *publics-oriented participatory design* approach investigated is situated in that it draws on insights from policy research, including barriers to public formation in the policy domain, especially for marginalized groups. By foregrounding the need to address barriers to public involvement a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach seeks to focus engagements with marginalised groups on rethinking what conditions and methods may enable marginalised groups to take part in publics. As part of this exploration, a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach seeks to investigate with emerging publics the scope of their issue to determine whether there is a need to engage at the level of government or whether the issue may be resolved, possibly initially, at the local level.

To deepen understanding of the implications of these barriers to marginalized groups in a specific policy domain, from the perspective of those impacted, as part of a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach, I adapt a method from interpretivist policy analysis. This approach is valuable here as it proposes methods for enrolling people's experiences and interpretations of social issues in assessing and making recommendations to policymakers (Yanow, 2007; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2013a; Wagenaar, 2015). However, in applying an interpretivist-inspired approach as part of a *publics-oriented participatory design,* I recruit this method to inform members of the emerging publics. This participatory approach encourages participants to reflect on their roles and relationships to specific aspects of public policy through its consequences on their lives. As a researcher this method also enabled me to triangulate data from housing studies and housing policy reports to contextualize and validate research participants' reported experiences and understandings, thus bridging between highly situated knowledge and knowledge of the policy domain. Reflexive analysis of the process and outcomes of these design-inspired interventions, which integrates insights from agenda-setting and the feminist strand in political theory, was used to theorize about gaps between participatory design theory and its practice with emerging publics and reflect on the process of public formation.

Methodologically, to offer a critical and situated understanding of the interaction between *publics-oriented participatory design*, emerging publics and public formation, this thesis takes an

interventionist and empirical approach that focuses on participatory design in the context of an emerging public in rural England. Since the group came together around shared concerns about their housing, I refer to the emerging public at the centre of this study as the Tenant Group.[1] As a newly formed group, the Tenant Group struggled to articulate whether and how public services and policies impact them and initially did not consider taking collective political action to attempt to influence housing policy agendas. Using interpretivist-inspired policy analysis and research through design-inspired methods, I reflect participatory design and publics theory by drawing on new data collected through interventions with the Tenant Group (Cross, 1999; Frankel and Racine, 2010; Zimmerman et al, 2010). Thus, this thesis seeks to develop new understandings about the application of the notion of publics in contemporary participatory design research and about the process of their formation.

Importantly, while the category of housing policy seems to imply a unified domain, a review of UK housing studies and policy research suggests that housing policy, and in particular social housing policy, is highly contentious and contradictory (Cowan, 2011; Madden and Marcuse, 2016) – and therefore a useful yet challenging site to investigate the complex process of public formation. Social housing in the UK is defined as rented accommodation that is provided at below-market rent levels by the government through registered housing providers to people who meet government-set criteria of priority housing need (Cowan, 2011). Thus, social housing is a need-based welfare benefit which is provided to groups that experience multiple and ongoing forms of marginalisation in society (Bevan and Cowan, 2016; Robertson, 2017). This marginalisation is reinforced by successive governments' efforts to reduce spending on social housing since the 1970s, with the relative proportion of households that are social lets reduced from 30% at its peak in the 1980s to 17% in recent years (Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010; DHCLG, 2019). This reflects a shift in government priorities, away from the support of social housing. Moreover, since housing issues greatly impact people's daily lives, such issues fit Dewey's (1991) understanding of issues that are likely to incite people to organize into publics (Hills, 2007; Stephens et al, 2005).

These circumstances partly explain the formation of the Tenant Group. However, though the Tenant Group assembled around shared housing issues in a rural area of the English Midlands, these issues and their consequences were not fully articulated by the group making it difficult to agree on a collective action strategy. Thus, based on Dewey's theory, and a research site criterion that I developed here, the Tenant Group is understood as an emerging public and not as a fully formed one. This makes it an ideal site to explore the possible contributions of a *publics-oriented*

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[1] The name of the group, research participants and their location are made up in order to protect the anonymity of research participants and in accordance with their preferences.

participatory design approach. Specifically, I investigate (as articulated in research question 1) whether a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach - which integrates understandings from agenda-setting theory and feminist political theory and uses an interpretivist-inspired policy analysis method to contextualize people's experiences of a specific policy domain – can enable an emerging public to cohere and become a tool for political action in the public policy domain. At the same time, working in dialogue with a group comprised of people who are marginalized in terms of their socio-economic background and their rural location enabled me to explore through practice and theorizing, the claim that Scandinavian participatory design approaches and capabilities are especially suited for marginalised groups. Specifically, I investigate to what extent a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach enables public involvement for marginalized groups in policy discourse and agenda-setting? (As articulated in research question 2).

To answer my research questions, I adopted a constructivist worldview that is underpinned by both an abductive research approach (Blaikie, 2010), which is suitable for open-ended research (such as research with emerging publics) and an interpretive epistemological orientation (Yanow, 2007; Weimer and Vining, 2011; Wagenaar, 2016), consistent with a research strategy that aims to foregrounds people's own accounts of their lived reality as a basis for understanding a given social problem (Blaikie, 2010). This design-inspired qualitative research study uses an informed grounded theory approach to theory building to analyse data generated from design-inspired interventions and interpretivist policy analysis. This enables me to empirically investigate and theorise about the relationship between participatory design and public formation of marginalized groups. In my analysis, I draw on literature in feminist strands in political theory and social movements to critique and evaluate how social tenant construct their role in relation to the policy domain. In addition, the relevance of the principles of *participation* and *knowledge*, which aim to empower marginalized groups through *participation* in design and the use of their situated *knowledge* and have been argued as fundamental to the Scandinavian approach and methods are re-evaluated from the perspective of participants (Ehn, 1988; Schuler and Namioka, 1993; Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012).

Using an interpretivist-inspired policy analysis to inform design-inspired interventions effectively, 1) contextualized local experiences and issues within a wider framework of housing policy and 2) revealed gaps between formal and informal narratives about social housing policies, thereby revealing possible opportunities for a publics-oriented design-inspired interventions. Findings effectively contributed to a more situated understanding of participation and non-participation and generated insights into the complex process of public formation among

marginalized groups. Analysis of these findings yielded approaches and methods for developing new roles of participatory design in bridging between day-to-day concepts and experience of housing (local knowledge) and the policy.

In addition, contrary to current understandings of design theory and practice, my findings revealed that the core principles of participation and knowledge, which inform the publics-oriented participatory design approach and are central to participatory design research and practice in general, may not be aligned with the principles that are central to motivating marginalised groups to get involved in an issue-based action group, such as the Tenant Group. Critically, I found that these discrepancies may undermine, rather than enable, the process of public formation which the publics-frame in participatory design, and the publics-oriented participatory design approach purport to support. Synthesizing insights about marginalised groups from feminist political theory and social movements literature. I make recommendations for methods and approaches informed by a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach.

1.2   Research approach

Though the fundamental principles of *participation* and *knowledge* are commonly presented in the participatory design literature as central to contemporary participatory design practice and research (Simonsen and Robertson, 2012; Halskov and Hansen, 2015), as I elaborate in the literature review, they are not adopted here without reservation. Of concern is evidence that the meaning and operationalisation of these principles vary considerably across sectors (Iversen et al, 2010, 2012; Halskov and Hansen, 2015; Smith et al, 2017). In the social policy domain, which is the focus of this thesis, Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren (2010) argue that these principles are often diluted, a situation that undermines the political and democratic significance of the participatory design approach. Indeed, as participatory approaches to designing public services and policies are increasingly explored within governments (e.g. Bason, 2010, 2014), their emphasis tends to be on improving the mechanism of governance and instrumentalising participatory approaches to fulfil policy agendas of those that govern, rather than those of marginalised groups (Moor, 2009, DiSalvo, 2010, Le Dantec and DiSalvo, 2013a). According to Smith, Bossen and Kanstrup (2017), this highlights the importance of planning for critical and situated approaches to participatory design research. Hence, my decision to focus on a case study, the Tenant Group, in a specific policy domain, social housing policy.

The proposed *publics-oriented participatory design* approach has the potential to introduce such criticality since it integrates perspectives and insights from agenda-setting and feminist political theory to reconsider the relationship between participatory design and public involvement in social policy issues. Such an approach is consistent with the original, possibly naïve (as I explain later) aim of Scandinavian design to empower those impacted by the issue and in particular marginalised groups. By emphasizing the moral and practical premise of participation and aiming to empower people by affording them greater influence, the Scandinavian participatory design approach reflects an explicit political stance (Ehn, 1988; Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren) that is consistent with the Deweyan conceptualisation of publics as a tool for political action. Therefore, to investigate the approach and capacities of a *publics-oriented participatory design*, I attempt to use the principles of participation and knowledge as a guide, to anchor decisions, big and small, throughout the design process in an ethical and politically minded framework. In doing so, I intend to learn from the dilemmas and challenges that may arise. Moreover, by scrutinising my attempts to negotiate these principles in practice with an emerging public, I seek to gain insights into the suitability of participatory design approaches and methods for marginalised groups.

In sum, in this thesis, I aim to develop, investigate, and clarify an application of the concept of publics that more closely approximates Dewey's vision of invigorating democracy through participation but also integrates other perspectives from participatory design, public policy, and political theory. This *publics-oriented participatory design* approach entails delineating at the outset what researchers mean by publics; drawing on insights from agenda-setting and feminist political theory to better understand how marginalized groups may influence public policy discourse and agendas; and using participatory design-inspired approaches and methods to aim to enable an emerging public to overcome barriers to participation and articulate its issues. Importantly, this final element entails discerning with emerging publics whether their issues are a matter of public concern that necessitates the attention of the state (macro-level) or may be resolved locally (micro-level). Through reflexive analysis and a constructivist grounded theory approach, I theorise about the relationship between public formation and a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach, reflecting on its merits and shortcomings and implications for research into designing with publics.

1.3   Relation to the literature

As noted earlier, in this thesis, to contextualise *publics-oriented participatory design* practice and operationalise publics as a tool for political action, I have sought to locate my practice in relation

to the public policy domain. To do so, I have drawn on a range of literature. For the design-inspired element of my research, I have drawn on public policy research - specifically agenda-setting theory, interpretivist policy analysis and on literature about the specific policy domain, housing studies. Briefly, agenda-setting research, which explores how governments prioritise certain issues over others, offers important concepts and insights about barriers and constraints to public involvement in the policy process and is used here to locate publics-oriented design in relation to the policy process (Schattschneider, 1960; Kingdon, 2011; Birkland and Schwaeble, 2019). Interpretivist policy analysis is utilised here since it offers an approach and methods that I argue are well-suited for the ethos and publics-frame in participatory design (Yanow, 2007; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2013a; Wagenaar, 2015). As I explain below, one of the contributions of this thesis is the development and modelling of an interpretivist-inspired methodology within a *publics-oriented participatory design* project.

For the theoretical and methodological analysis, I have drawn on feminist perspectives from political theory and the social movements literature. The feminist strand of political theory is pertinent to my inquiry since it recognises a lack of parity in public involvement and, based on empirical research and theorising, explores ways in which marginalised groups may seek to overcome barriers and have their issues addressed by the state (Fraser, 1990; Stall and Stoecker, 1998; Taylor, 2002; Jupp, 2010). Thus, expanding on Dewey (who does not detail how publics form and operate) the feminist strand in political theory elaborates on how the tool of publics may empower marginalised groups and serve as a route to political action and influence (Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2002; Butler, 2016; Craddock, 2020). I have also drawn on the social movements literature, which explores all forms of activism, including publics, but is, confusingly, most often referred to as social movements. This literature is used in my analysis to explain the influence of different identity constructions for publics involvement (e.g. activist, citizen) and how Tenant Group members' way of identifying their role impacts the appeal of design-inspired interventions (Bobel, 2007; Cortese, 2015; Craddock, 2019, 2020).

1.4 Thesis overview

In the following chapter (Chapter 2) I present the literature review, which consists of two central parts exploring varied theoretical and practical perspectives on public involvement in shaping public policy agendas, services and policies. I open with a preliminary introduction of central concepts, aims and principles in participatory design (Section 2.2). This is followed by a more robust section about the evolution of the construct of publics (Section 2.3), where I introduce

Dewey's theory of publics, the revival of his ideas in Science and Technology Studies (STS) and its influence on the use of the publics-frame in participatory design. Further, I discuss here central concepts and debates about the claim that design-inspired interventions can help make publics and critique the application of the construct of publics in participatory design projects (Section 2.3.3). Based on this, in the conclusion of this section (Section 2.3.4), I identify a need to contextualise the publics-frame approach in design research and practice more firmly in the policy process and propose to develop a new approach to the publics-frame in participatory design. Thus in section 2.4, I discuss and integrate insights from agenda-setting theory and research (Section 2.4.1); feminist political theory (Section 2.4.2) and interpretivist policy analysis (Section 2.4.3). In the conclusion of this chapter, I articulate central features of the proposed *publics-oriented participatory design* approach (Section 2.5.1) and set out my research questions (Section 2.5.2).

In the following chapter, Chapter 3, I detail the methodology and methods for data collection and analysis chosen to answer the research questions and discussion of research ethics and my positionality. To determine the criterion for my research site, which is identified as a Tenant Group in the Midlands concerned with social housing issues, in Chapter 4, I use reflexive analysis of fieldwork at a local community centre. With the public policy domain identified as social housing, I outline the policy context based on desk research in housing studies and policy research (Section 4.2). This research elaborates on the historical and political context for the emergence of state provision for housing in the UK (Section 4.2.3) and then goes on to describe the current situation in social housing which the Tenant Group must contend with (Section 4.2.4). Specifically, I draw on the participation literature at the intersection of housing studies to discuss the outcomes of formal tenant participation programmes.

To contextualise the design practice in the policy domain, in the next chapter (Chapter 5), I introduce the Tenant Group and its specific housing-related concerns and analyse the first exploratory session conducted with the group founder. In Chapter 6, following insights gained from the Exploratory session, I develop and model an application of an interpretivist tenant-oriented policy analysis in the framework of participatory design practice with publics. Using a grounded theory approach, I analysed semi-structured interviews with social tenants to assess how tenants are constructed in and out of the policy process and how this impacts their propensity to get involved in collective political action. Implications for designing conditions for public-making are drawn from these insights. Though the interpretivist policy analysis is based on an analysis of interviews that were conducted after the Exploratory session, to avoid an artificial break between the analysis of Case Study 1 and Case Study 2, I have decided to present

findings of the policy analysis non-chronologically. Analysis from this chapter deepens understanding of the non-participation of Tenant Group members which was an ongoing situation throughout my research.

In Chapter 7, I seek to answer through design-inspired research and interventions with Tenant Group members how *publics-oriented participatory design* may address barriers to the participation of marginalised publics in the domain of social housing policy. This is carried out in Case Studies 1 and 2 where I explore with participants how they might engage across housing tenure boundaries to design their own inquiry about an issue that matters to them. Outcomes are discussed in Chapter 8 through a synthesis of design theory and feminist strands of political theory and social movement literature. In closing, in Chapter 9, I summarise the contributions of this study to the literature, reviewing the theoretical and methodological implications to the research and practice of *publics-oriented participatory design* and outlining some recommendations for participatory design research with publics.

1.5   Researcher background and motivation

My interest in social fairness led me to become involved in social policy issues relating to marginalised groups through my volunteer work, since 2015, at the UK charity Citizens Advice (CA). CA offers free and independent advice for people facing difficulties and campaigns to improve the policies that unfairly impact typically disadvantaged groups. As a trained Generalist Advisor, I worked directly with 'clients' (as they are called at CA) and gained first-hand knowledge of complex and chronic issues encountered by marginalised groups (concerning welfare benefits, housing, social care, homelessness, debt and employment). This experience gave me an up-close perspective on the hardships and barriers experienced by people from marginalised groups while trying to navigate complex bureaucratic procedures and policies. In my work, I was struck at the extent to which CA and other non-profit sector organisations, which helped those in need, were essentially compensating for the shortcomings and unintended consequences of poorly rendered social policy agendas. Social welfare services and policies, of which social housing is a part, often seemed inordinately complicated and restrictive to the marginalised groups they were intended to help. These contradictions fuelled my interest in participatory approaches to social policy change. Hence, my interest in the revitalisation of Dewey's theory of publics in participatory design of public services and policies and my disappointment and frustration – once I delved into the literature - that the full potential of the publics-frame is not being realised. Thus, building on

my training and experiences, I was keen to experiment with different approaches to applying Dewey's theory of publics in participatory design research and practice with communities.

While my training, experiences and values shaped my motivations, approach, and priorities, and brought me to eventually engage with a social housing tenant group, these same elements highlight and shape my positionality in relation to the individuals involved. Though my volunteer work at CA gave me some 'street cred' or respect from some participants, I was an 'outsider' to them on many levels, a fact that inevitably impacted the nature of our interactions. Most obviously, I have a foreign-sounding name, an American-like accent and what some would consider an 'ethnic' appearance. In addition, I am not a social tenant, a fact that I would indirectly make clear in our early meetings, and never have been, so do not share their lived experience or claims to situated knowledge. I am a homeowner in a town that locals consider to be 'posh' and typically say so. To be transparent about my identity and motives, I made a point of being open about my motives and the scope of my involvement with the Tenant Group at the heart of this study. Formal artefacts, such as the Research Information Sheets (Appendix B and C) and Consent Form (Appendix D and E) were used to open discussions about my research aims, approach and methods. Though admittedly, very few participants asked many questions, these artefacts were effective at setting expectations and clearly communicating in detail the aim, scope, approach and activities involved in my research. Though housing studies document widespread suspicions of 'others' among social tenants (Watt, 2008; McKee, 2011; Craddock, 2020), this did not inhibit research participants from sharing their views and impressions, even about my design-inspired interventions. Indeed, I found that some of the more interesting practical and theoretical insights about *participatory design* using a publics-frame resulted from my use of reflexive analysis to explore how my background and relationship with participants impacted the design research process.

1.6 Terminology

Naming public political actions

Since participatory approaches and concepts are continuously being developed across a broad range of domains (Sanders and Stappers, 2008; Halskov and Hansen, 2015) and different literatures that I draw on, such as public policy research, housing policy, public participation and others, employ a variety of labels to describe public political action, I would like to outline my

approach and decisions made. While the term participation is the most popular today (Smith et al, 2017), the terms public participation, public engagement and public involvement are also used interchangeably. Based on my reading, I propose that generally, contemporary uses of the terms in the different literatures follow this pattern:

Participation is associated with literature concerned with formal settings and methods of interaction, such as public participation, tenant participation, and participation research.

Engagement is associated with literature concerned with less institutionalised settings and methods of interaction. The construct suggests more open-ended approaches to interaction, as used in community engagement literature and socially engaged art.

Involvement is the most general label and is not associated with a specific literature, setting, methodology or format. Grammatically, its use requires that an object is specified (involvement in…) which makes for more stilted writing.

Given the more general quality of the label involvement, I have chosen to use the label 'public involvement' but at times, for the sake of clarity,[3] I use the term that is most common in the particular literature that I am discussing.

Labelling the Tenant Group – is it a public?

Another central concept in this thesis requiring theoretical clarification is the concept of publics. As I argue in this thesis, participatory design research using the publics-frame is not always explicit and systematic in its conceptualisation and operationalisation of the construct of publics. To clarify the application of the term 'publics' in relation to the Tenant Group, it is important to distinguish it from related forms, namely community groups and social movements. While all these forms are nongovernmental and tend to be identifiable by a shared 'issue', the most notable differences between them are the scale and scope in which they operate. Community groups usually form because of a shared location (Richardson and Sefton, 2005), whereas publics can also be geographically dispersed and operate at all scales. As a result of their differences in scale and scope, community groups are typically associated with a high degree of activity and control by its members (Skinner, 1997), whereas, publics may not benefit from such close associations

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[3] For instance, if there is a quote using the term participation or engagement, to avoid confusion, I may use that term when discussing the meaning of the passage.

and long-term community-based relationships, infrastructures and resources (Dewey, 1991; Marres, 2005, 2007). Thus, publics may be comprised of people from different marginalized groups that have not had any previous interactions with each other. As a result, according to Marres (2007), publics' members can be highly heterogeneous and possess very different stakes and attachments to the same issue. This quality of publics is shared by social movements, however, in contrast to publics, social movements always operate on a much broader scope and scale and hence may consist of multiple publics.

In this thesis, though the Tenant Group operates in a specific district in the Midlands at the community level, it cannot be defined as a community group as its members are geographically dispersed and do not encounter each other in their day-to-day lives. In addition, it is far from being a social movement as it operates on a much smaller scale and at this stage in its development does not aim for transformative change or collective political action at the scale of the state. Finally, although the Tenant Group at the centre of this study is not yet a public, based on Dewey's criteria of publics, it is certainly a potential public and hence I refer to it as an 'emerging public' or 'potential public'.

In sum, in this thesis through analysing an empirical design experiment with an emerging public in the domain of social housing, I venture to critically evaluate to what extent participatory design-inspired interventions support collective political action among a group of people who do not normally engage in social policy issues. This was always an interesting but also challenging process, which forced me to constantly reassess my assumptions and approaches and ultimately illuminated the contradictions in participatory design practice and theories of publics and possibilities for overcoming these.

1.7 Contributions

This thesis contributes to the literature on participatory design in the public policy domain and specifically to research and practice in participatory design inspired by Dewey's theory of publics and its development in the Science and Technology studies and participatory design literature. By theorising and empirically exploring how to develop a more *publics-oriented participatory design* approach, which draws on public policy research and political theory to understand barriers and opportunities experienced by marginalised groups in a particular policy context and leverages these to inform design-inspired interventions with emerging publics.

Thus this thesis, first, contributes clarifications about the application of the Deweyan concept of publics in participatory design. Building on my critique of existing applications of publics in the design literature, this study adopts a closer reading of Dewey's notion of publics and models a process of identifying a set of criteria for delineating a suitable site for research with a potential public. The criterion developed mitigates, in part, the risk of researcher bias and over-determination of whether a public was formed and recognizes that publics do not always form, with or without design interventions. Further, while this thesis acknowledges the value of existing community-based participatory design research using the publics frame, my application of the concept of publics posits that researchers and emerging publics evaluate whether an issue experienced locally may be a public issue that needs addressing at the state level.

Second, by drawing on literature in agenda-setting and feminist political theory, this thesis contributes to a broader understanding of how to locate publics in the policy process, even if on the margins, and models methods for contextualising local issues in the policy domain. One of the central features of this approach entails, synthesising insights from the literature on barriers and opportunities for publics involvement to inform design-inspired interventions aimed at promoting public formation among marginalised groups.

Third, through concerns and resistance from participants to my interventions, this thesis presents lessons and insights into the interaction between a more *publics-oriented participatory design* approach and the process of public formation among marginalized groups – an area that is generally neglected in existing participatory design research using the publics-frame. One conclusion drawn is that agitational public-facing tactics may not be suitable for newly formed marginalised groups and that design researchers may need to be attentive to aligning principles of design (such as participation and local knowledge) to those of participants and investing in internal-facing tactics to reinforce public formation.

Finally, a fourth contribution involves insights into the potential benefits of using an interpretivist-inspired policy analysis method in participatory design with marginalised groups. To understand the experiences of marginalised groups in the wider policy context and inform design-inspired interventions that aim to overcome barriers to participation in the policy domain, I adapted a method used in interpretivist policy analysis. Understanding social housing policy and its impact on tenants from an interpretivist orientation was shown to be highly constructive. Inconsistencies and contradictions between formal and informal understandings and experiences of policy categories, narratives, and policies, were used as opportunities to explore and learn with participants. By acknowledging, integrating, and analysing the perspectives and

local knowledge of marginalised groups in this manner, participatory design can reveal these interpretations as valid ways of seeing and leverage this for issue articulation.

Chapter 2 – Literature review and research questions

2.1 Introduction

Building on a Scandinavian participatory design approach, which traditionally aims to empower marginalized groups through participation in design, this thesis critiques and expands on a strand in participatory design that mobilises political theorist John Dewey's notion of publics. Identifying gaps in the existing research into participatory design using the publics-frame, I propose adaptations which together may offer a more *publics-oriented participatory design* approach. To develop and justify this approach, this study draws on theoretical work across a range of disciplines that explore public involvement in social policy issues. These include, most prominently participatory design, political theory, science and technology studies, agenda-setting, which I review here - as well as housing studies for the case study, which I introduce later.

To present my argument, I begin by briefly introducing the democratic ambitions and principles that guided early Scandinavian participatory design (Section 2.2) and consider concerns expressed by design researchers about the salience of these fundamental principles across industry and academia, and most recently the domain of public policy (Buchanan, 2001; Simonsen and Robertson, 2012; Simonsen, 2014). In this context, I introduce the application of Dewey's notion of publics in participatory design as a relatively new approach to frame and make sense of the potential of participatory design practices with communities to strengthen public involvement.

To give a deeper understanding of the publics-frame and assess its application in participatory design literature, I begin by exploring the evolution of the concept (Section 2.3). First, I return to its source in political theory and review the central concepts and arguments in Dewey's theory of publics (Section 2.3.1). This is followed by an exploration of the revival of his ideas in a strand of Science and Technology Studies (STS) which has greatly influenced participatory design which uses the publics-frame (Section 2.3.2). With the central concepts and actors elucidated, I critique the application of the concept of publics in participatory design research (Section 2.3.3). Here I argue that this strand of participatory design is not sufficiently oriented to influencing change in public services and policies; is inconsistent and vague in its use of Dewey's concept of publics; and does not engage with or contribute to understanding the complex process of public formation

in the policy context. Thus, I conclude that there is a need for a practical, yet theoretically informed approach in keeping with Dewey's theory which conceives of publics in relation to the state and as a tool for collective political action.

This leads to the final section of the literature review where I contextualize and elaborate on a proposed *publics-oriented participatory design approach* by drawing on insights from literature in the public policy domain that explores different perspectives on the roles, relationships and routes to publics involvement. Central concepts, theories and findings from agenda-setting research are used to shed light on the multiple socio-political and structural barriers that marginalised groups face in the policy domain (Section 2.4.1). Meanwhile, contributions from feminist political theory (Section 2.4.2) shed light on possible routes for marginalized groups to get involved in policy discourse and influence policy agendas. I propose that by recruiting these perspectives, design researchers and policy researchers working with marginalized groups at the intersection of policy and design can more firmly locate their practice in the policy domain.

To help formulate and trial these ideas and set the groundwork for empirical investigation of this approach, in the conclusion (Section 2.5.1) I delineate central features and concepts that I recruit from the literature to develop a more *publics-oriented participatory design* approach. To assess this approach, I engage in empirical investigations with an emerging public concerned with social housing.

2.2 The democratising ambition and principles of early participatory design

To understand the approach and capabilities that participatory design brings to public involvement in social and policy issues and elaborate on the challenge of locating design practice in the political and policy domain, it is valuable to pause and reflect on how Scandinavian participatory design approach, methods and methods came about. Design researchers often describe early experiments in Scandinavian participatory design (Ehn and Kyng, 1987), conducted before the term participatory design was coined[5] (Ehn, 1988) to illustrate and justify the political and transformative potential of participatory design. These brief accounts usually describe how participatory design practice evolved in the 1970s from long-term collaborations with trade union representatives aimed at developing worker-centred technologies. However,

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[5] Participatory design was originally called the 'collective resource approach' in Scandinavia and is also sometimes described as 'cooperative design' (Ehn and Kyng, 1987; Ehn, 1993).

these accounts often do not elaborate on the favourable socio-political and institutional conditions that existed in the Scandinavian countries in the 1960s and 70s and made it possible to develop and test a design approach that provocatively advocated for the empowerment, even Marxian emancipation (Ehn, 1988), of marginalised groups through participation in design. Notably, this overlooked set of conditions[6] – which included political legitimacy and support from business and policymakers, vital resources for design research, research independence and a separate physical space for critical inquiry – may explain the challenge of replicating such an approach in the 1970s in other countries (Asaro, 2000), or today in Scandinavian industries (Beck, 2002; Balka, 2006).

In addition, it is rare for design researchers to mention that the worker-centred designs of these highly lauded experiments were never adopted by the manufacturing sectors for which they were designed (see: Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012; 2014). This was a disappointing outcome, which Pell Ehn (1988, Addendum), who led these experiments and later coined the term participatory design, attributed to a failure to engage business representatives in the design process. My brief critique here of the often-idealised representation of Scandinavian participatory design's so-called 'origin' story is intended to highlight the complex trade-offs that exist in designing with marginalized groups and highlight the ongoing challenge for participatory design researchers and practitioners as they find themselves needing to gain the support of powerful stakeholders while also creating conditions for marginalized groups to influence the design. This, I argue, also shows the importance of contextualising design practice and considering the specific socio-political and policy context – something that all too often participatory design researchers using the publics frame, neglect to do. Notably, these themes also run throughout this thesis and as I illustrate later represent an ongoing tension in the practice and research of participatory design. To begin to address this, in this thesis, I synthesize literature from political theory, agenda-setting theory, public policy analysis and social policy research to better understand the potential of participatory design with emerging publics.

As participatory design practices evolve and expand to different domains (Luck, 2018) the challenge of negotiating the political ambitions of the early participatory design experiments fuels an ongoing debate about what are the fundamental distinguishing principles of participatory design (Sanders and Stappers, 2008; Halskov and Hansen, 2015). The most commonly articulated

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[6] Early participatory design experiments had the support of government and industry leaders on account of the strength of trade unions that were concerned with the impact of new technologies on workers (Beck, 2002). As a result, a multi-disciplinary group of researchers at an independent research Centre with a political affinity to trade unions and their goals (Asaro, 2000) was given considerable freedom to develop with union representatives worker-centred design solutions (Beck, 2002).

principles in participatory design are the principles of democracy and knowledge (Ehn, 1988; Schuler and Namioka, 1993; Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012) – two concepts that signal the breadth of ambition and the idealism of early participatory design (Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012, 2014). These are still generally accepted as underpinning a participatory design approach. The principle of democracy, which I refer to as *the principle of participation* (as in Halskov and Hansen, 2015) - a term I prefer since it is more specific - rests on the moral proposition that people who are affected by design have a legitimate reason, even right, to be involved in it (Ehn, 1988; Schuler and Namioka, 1993). Meanwhile, *the principle of knowledge* rests on the pragmatic proposition that everyone can potentially play a role in the process of design by being experts in their own experience. This proposition holds that people, through their lived experience, possess practical and situated knowledge about specific conditions and contexts that is highly beneficial to design (Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012; Binder et al, 2015).

In a review of contemporary participatory design practice, Halskov and Hansen (2015)[7] compiled a list of five fundamental aspects of participatory design and found that aspects that closely mirror the principles of participation and knowledge, which they termed politics and people (Ehn, 1988; Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012), remain central preoccupations in contemporary participatory design research (the other aspects were design context, methods and products). Similarly, Iverson et al (2010) argue that these two principles still inform all aspects of participatory design, as evident in community-based participatory projects (Manzini, 2015; Sangiorgi and Scott, 2018) and democratic experiments in design labs (Björgvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren, 2010; Ehn, Nilsson and Topgaard, 2014).

Notably, these principles and their moral premise reflect an explicit political stance since they aim to empower typically marginalized groups by affording them influence that they did not previously have on the design process (Ehn, 1988; Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012). Thus, it has been suggested that these design principles politicize participatory design practice by making issues of inclusivity integral to the practice and by encouraging a pluralist orientation (Sanders and Stappers, 2008; Binder et al, 2015). As pointed out by Björgvinsson et al (2012, p.103), the principle that those impacted by design have a "say in the design process…reflects the then-controversial political conviction that controversy rather than consensus should be expected around an emerging object of design". As I discuss later, contemporary design research builds on this notion, drawing on related concepts of agonism derived from the work of political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2009) (Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2010; DiSalvo, 2010) and

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[7] Based on a literature review of full articles from Participatory Design Conferences (2002-2012) and central participatory design texts.

dissensus (Keshavarz and Mazé, 2013). Thus, participatory design principles are understood here as both practical and widely accepted among practitioners and researchers, but also agitational in their approach to the status quo. The articulation of these principles and the worldview they advocate – that everyone has a right and ability to engage in design and contribute their local knowledge to inform design – have had a far-reaching impact on the development of participatory design practices.

In practice, design principles of participation and knowledge are often used to justify and shape the development of specific design methods used in knowledge generation. For instance, simple, visual and interactive design methods that are easily adapted and developed to meet specific contexts and participants (Mattelmäki, 2006; Sanders and Stappers, 2008, 2014; Simonsen, 2014) and are often explained as a way of making the process of design more accessible, and thus assumed to be more empowering (Ehn, 1988). Design researchers and practitioners argue that visual and tactile methods put participants at ease and enable them to articulate their experience, knowledge, and ideas in the new context of design (Mattelmäki, 2006; Sanders and Stappers, 2008, 2014). In addition, researchers allege that the materiality of design makes complex ideas tangible and accessible, allowing participants to explore abstract ideas and futures, reflect on practices, test their viability, and communicate across social and professional boundaries (Simonsen and Robertson, 2012; Sanders & Stappers, 2014). Overall, such research sees knowledge generation in participatory design as a dialogic process that is highly situated and mediated by the design principles of participation and knowledge. Yet according to Iversen et al (2012), the preoccupation with design methods and participatory approaches too often shifts the focus away from the principles that should inform them.

Indeed, the wide variety of approaches and scope applied to participation in different stages of the design process often raise epistemological and ethical concerns. For example, Vines et al (2013, 2015) interrogate how designers configure participation and call for designers to reflect on procedures of who is invited to participate and consequent power dynamics between participants. Other researchers, pointedly critique what is exactly the purpose of participation (Iversen et al, 2012). As the application of participatory design approaches and methods for involving people in design and contributing their experiential and local knowledge expand to different sectors and industries – design researchers note that some of these sectors are decidedly less concerned with the empowerment of participants (Buchanan, 2001; Simonsen and Robertson, 2012; Blomberg and Karasti, 2013; Simonsen, 2014). As a consequence, some critics assess that too often participation is used to benefit designers and their clients rather than participants (Balka, 2006; Julier and Moor, 2009; Le Dantec and Fox, 2015). Similarly, Iverson et

al (2010) warn that the principle of participation is increasingly diluted and framed as a concern for inclusiveness, as evident in narratives about 'democratising' design. Other design researchers go further and suggest that such interpretations of participation undermine the political and democratic significance of participation in design (Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2010), others suggest that in some instances participation is reduced to an exercise in consensus formation (Björgvinsson et al, 2010; McCarthy and Wright, 2015) or is too focused on isolated design events (Andersen et al, 2015).

Indeed, as critiqued by Halskov and Hansen (2015), participation is often only loosely defined, if at all, and when defined in the design literature, the motive behind it is not clear. Thus, it is often unclear whether participation is leveraged for the sake of participants' empowerment, collective learning, or design. More pointedly, it is unclear whether being involved in the design process makes one less marginalized. Evidence about whether participation in design confers influence by challenging existing power relations and transforming patterns of exclusion and social inequality remains mixed (Simonsen and Robertson, 2012; Bratteteig and Wagner, 2012; Büscher et al, 2002). Some design researchers argue that the opportunities that participatory design offers to participants are highly contingent and depend on how participation is planned, the extent to which methods chosen are carefully scripted and implemented (Halkov and Hansen, 2015; Le Dantec, 2016), and the extent to which values underpin design process (Iversen, et al, 2012). In addition, in their book on participatory approaches McCarthy and Wright (2015) point out that inviting people to take part and define for themselves their relationships and aims as a group may also lead to a particular project either "not happening at all or not happening in anything like the way originally planned"(2015, p.4). Thus, participation may ironically lead to a decision to leave things as they are. Thus, it appears that, as Halskov and Hansen (2015) write, there is a need to pay attention to what constitutes participation in design, what purpose it serves and to whose benefit, but most importantly to continuously explore this as contingencies and dynamics change.

Similarly, in the domain of public services and policies, where design-based approaches have over the past two decades been used in an attempt to improve the mechanism of governance (Bason, 2010, 2014) there is a debate about how participation and knowledge are being recruited in this context. Some researchers argue that design and participatory approaches are being instrumentalized at the expense of users, and some design researchers have called for greater criticality about the role and outcome of design practice in this domain (Moor, 2009; DiSalvo, 2010; Le Dantec and DiSalvo, 2013). Concerns include privileging designers' knowledge and expertise of the design process over that of the community, and not allowing for the iterative process of design to enable participants' needs, insights and preferences to steer the project (Knutz & Markussen, 2020); or the inadvertently reinforcing social and cultural norms (Bennet

and Rosner, 2019; Knutz & Markussen, 2020). Thus it has been proposed, and I concur, that to address this participatory design needs to recognize its political role (Tonkinwise, 2011; Manzini, Staszowski and DESIS Network, 2013). Alternately, researcher Ellen Balka (2006) proposes what she refers to as a reformist agenda in participatory design that makes the questions of ethics, values and democracy, integral to design practice, as in the early experiments in Scandinavian participatory design, may help resolve these underlying tensions.

In sum, the debate about the relevance of design principles articulated in the 1970s to contemporary design practice, and in particular, the principle of participation, suggests that if approached with criticality, these principles may still enable researchers and designers to anchor decisions, big and small, throughout the design process in an ethical and politically minded framework, and one which I seek to test in my practice. However, since the translation of the principles of participation and knowledge have been shown to differ across sectors and domains (Asaro, 2000; Beck, 2002; Balka, 2006), the relevance of these principles to the participatory design of public services and policies is unclear (Asdal, Brenna and Moser, 2007). Thus, echoing the arguments of design historians Richard Buchanan (2001) and Victor and Sylvia Margolin (Margolin and Margolin, 2002; Margolin, 2010) who call for design researchers and practitioners to learn about the social science domain in which they seek to act, I propose that participatory design of public services and policies would benefit from exploring linkages to the public policy literature about democratic processes and public involvement.

One such conceptualization used in participatory design, which I introduce in the next section, draws on the work of political theorist John Dewey (1991) and the development of his ideas in Science and Technology Studies. Dewey's notion of publics, which is often read as a call to reinvigorate democracy through public participation, is proposed by some design researchers as a theoretical entry point to understanding the potential of participatory design in public services and policies (DiSalvo, 2009; Le Dantec and DiSalvo, 2013; Ehn, Nilsson and Topgaard, 2014; Le Dantec, 2016). This thesis critiques and expands on this subfield which I refer to as the public-frame in participatory design.

To understand the conceptualization of the publics-frame in participatory design, I begin by introducing Dewey's central arguments about publics, their problems and their relationship to the state (Section 2.3.1), while also noting the theory's shortcomings. Following this, I highlight and critique some relevant developments of Dewey's work in STS and participatory design research and practice (Section 2.3.2). This discussion forms the basis for proposing a more *publics-oriented participatory design* approach which explores how to enable marginalized groups to assert their agency in the complex domain of public policy by integrating insights from

agenda-setting, feminist political theory, and interpretivist policy analysis to inform practice with emerging publics (Section 2.4).

2.3 The evolving construct of publics in political theory, STS and participatory design

John Dewey was a pragmatist political theorist. Thus, as in Pragmatism, his thinking represents a move away from seeing political theory as the pursuit of truth, a notion that Pragmatists repeatedly questioned (Dunne, 2018). Instead, as historian and theorist Louis Menand explains, pragmatists "believed that ideas are not 'out there' waiting to be discovered but are tools . . . that people devise to cope with the world in which they find themselves" (Menand, 2001, p.xi). Commonly agreed central aspects of pragmatist research include: (1) concern with substantive societal problems, (2) aim to advance social change and (3) recognition of the social origins and character of knowledge generation (Dunne, 2018). Dewey's book *The Public and Its Problems* (1991 [1927]), which I discuss in detail here, exemplifies this approach and can be seen as part of an attempt to develop a practical and grounded method or tool for engaging with the concrete social problems of people's everyday lives. Given this context, it is not surprising that Dewey's pragmatist approach has in recent years gained traction in participatory design research which is concerned with the transformation of an existing state through the participation of those impacted.

2.3.1 Revisiting Dewey's theory of publics

Delineating publics and their formation

Written nearly a hundred years ago it is striking how relevant Dewey's book *The Public and Its Problems* (1991) remains to this day. Dewey is concerned with what he perceives as the apathy of the electorate and with the weakening of democracy as it comes to be equated with the institutions of representative government and the 'machinery' of policymaking, as he dismissively refers to it.[9] Dewey's ideas move away from a focus on formal institutions and centre on the democratic processes: he sees liberal democracy as dynamic and ever-changing, as ideally

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[9] Dewey's The Public and its Problems was written as a response to the books Public Opinion (1922) and The Phantom Public (1925) written by political journalist Walter Lippman who shared Dewey's concerns for democracy but reached different conclusions about public agency and the value of participation. For a comparative analysis of their approaches see Marres (2005).

it should reflect and address the ever-changing problems of society. Thus publics, which consist of groups of individuals that come together around a common social problem which is not (yet) addressed by the state, is key to the democratic process (Dewey, 1991). As he explains (1991, p.15-16),

> The public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions, to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for.

As implied in the excerpt above, central to Dewey's notion of multiple publics (described in the singular form above) is the notion of the "indirect consequences of transactions". Dewey argues that indirect consequences both constrain and trigger the formation of publics. On the one hand, they are a constraint to public formation because they are indirect, which makes identifying the public's problems more difficult. On the other hand, indirect consequences are also a trigger for public formation in the sense that they make it "necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for" (1991, p.16). In other words, given the scope and scale of indirect consequences and the many diverse actors involved, such problems cannot be cared for by those impacted alone. Notably, Dewey's use of indirect consequences to define publics suggests that publics do not exist *a priori*. Instead, publics are conceived as multiple and dynamic. Thus, in a vibrant healthy democracy, publics constantly rise and dissolve as societal issues change. Reversely, in more stagnant democracies, publics struggle to take shape because the societal problems that concern them resist identification and articulation, and therefore remain unresolved.

Through his discussion of the distinction between direct and indirect consequences, Dewey conceptualises what kind of issues bring publics into being, and essentially defines what he considers to be public issues. He maintains that private issues can be easily identified through their direct consequences on individuals (who are negatively impacted) and can therefore in most cases be remedied by those directly involved. In contrast, public issues are identified through their indirect consequences, which are more difficult to identify, especially in complex societies where the scope and nature of the issues are more complex and intertwined. Consequently, publics often remain unformed and tentative because individuals struggle to identify and articulate their shared public issues. In Dewey's words, it is because these issues have "indirect, extensive, enduring and serious consequences of conjoint and interacting behaviours" (p.126). Notably, though Dewey's conceptualisation of what kind of issues are public and therefore give rise to publics is central to his theory of publics, yet as I elaborate below, the subfield of

participatory design that uses the publics-frame often neglects this aspect of publics and their formation.

The significance of publics to marginalized groups

Another important aspect of Dewey's theory is that it aims to influence governments. As noted earlier, Dewey assumes that publics are formed to address public issues, which, by definition, are issues that people cannot resolve amongst themselves or in the local community and must therefore be "systematically cared for" by an institution (1991, p.16). Dewey conceives the democratic state, or its ideal, in a process of constant change and experimentation. As he summarises, "By its very nature, a state is ever something to be scrutinised, investigated, searched for" and it needs to be "guided by knowledge of the conditions that need to be fulfilled" (1991, p.31). Thus, Dewey's state is "an experimental process" (1991, p.34) that must continuously be "retried" and "rediscovered" (p.34). This is an exciting proposition and one that resonates with a 'designerly' approach that emphasises the qualities of exploration, experimentation, and imagination to test and improve policy design.

Dewey's notion of democracy provides the conditions for experimental inquiry because, as political theorist Matthew Festenstein (2019) writes, it allows for ongoing questioning, inquiry and contestation of the status quo. This knowledge-based conception of publics and the state suggests that both the formation of publics and the state are reliant to a certain degree on knowledge generation (Festenstein, 2019). However, though Dewey calls for intelligent governance (1991, p.31), he admits that public officials, who are appointed to act as representatives of the public, often fail to do so. Moreover, few states and their officials possess the tools and knowledge to stay dynamic and experimental and therefore responsive to new issues that arise (1991, p.31). Instead, Dewey writes how once established, political forms become institutionalised, inflexible and outdated and state officials and powerful interest groups tend to consolidate power and may even obstruct the organizing of newly formed publics that contest their authority. Thus, Dewey proposes that (1991, p.31)

> ...to form itself, the public has to break existing political forms. This is hard to do because these forms are themselves the regular means of instituting change......the creation of adequately flexible and responsive political and legal machinery has so far been beyond the wit of man.

This passage conveys that though the processes of public formation and disbanding around changing issues are integral and instrumental to democratic processes, it may also involve a political struggle and even a radical break from the status quo if the state resists change.

Given this tendency of state officials to resist change, Deweyan publics are conceptualised as a non-institutional form of inquiry that is essential to recognising changing societal problems (the publics' needs) and pushing for their resolution. Importantly, this suggests that design practice with publics is likely to operate on the margins of formal channels of government and engage in and support a naturally occurring process where people gather to try and make sense of what it is that ails them. Since publics arise in response to a failure of the state and its formal channels, I propose that this suggests that the very process of issue and public formation, even before an emerging public coheres around a particular issue and course of action, can be seen as politicising. Thus, I propose here that Dewey's theory can be interpreted as offering an alternative route that is especially relevant, but not exclusive to marginalised or underrepresented groups that may attempt to remedy their problem by forming a public. Moreover, as both the theory of publics and participatory design share this orientation to marginalised groups, I conclude, like other design researchers using the publics-frame, that the publics-frame is well suited for a Scandinavian approach to participatory design in the public domain.

Unclear how to overcome barriers to public formation

Notably, though Dewey's ideas on publics have shown to be very resilient, his critics in feminist political theory, STS and design research (Fraser, 1990; Marres, 2007; Dixon, 2020) argue that Dewey neglects to elaborate on the process of public formation or on the process by which publics may influence government. Instead, Dewey tends to depict the problem of public formation as an intellectual or epistemological problem which may be resolved systematically by state officials if they were equipped with 'knowledge' of what it is that concerns publics. Thus, he proposes that individuals need to develop methods and conditions for critical social inquiry in order to identify their common issues and through this process form into a coherent public (p. 208-209). As he writes,

> The essential need, in other words, is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion, and persuasion. That is the problem of the public. We have asserted that this improvement depends essentially upon freeing and perfecting the processes of inquiry and the dissemination of their conclusions. Inquiry, indeed, is a work which devolves upon experts. But their expertness is not shown in framing and executing policies, but in discovering and making known the facts upon which the former depend... It is not necessary that the many should have the knowledge and skill to carry on the needed investigation; what is required is that they have the ability to judge of the bearing of the knowledge supplied by others upon common concerns. (Dewey, 1991, p. 208-209)

Thus, in this passage, Dewey proposes that "methods and conditions of debate, discussion, and persuasion" about an issue are necessary for issue-public formation, and critically, that expertise in inquiry is necessary. Surprisingly, this segment at the very end of his book is the first mention Dewey makes of the need to "devolve upon experts" the process of inquiry into the issue that ails a public. Moreover, this passage distinguishes between three different forms of expertise and expert roles: the researcher must carry out "processes of inquiry and the dissemination of their conclusions", the policymaker is charged with "framing and executing policies", and those impacted by the problem must "have the ability to judge the bearing of the knowledge supplied by others upon common concerns" (1991, p.209). Critically, in this division of labour, members of publics do not generate knowledge but must simply confirm or reject "knowledge supplied by others". This underestimation of local knowledge and possible contributions of publics to policy discourse is not consistent with Dewey's earlier argument about the essential role of publics in democracies.

As observed elsewhere (Mills, 2000; Marres, 2007; Dixon, 2020), though Dewey goes to great lengths to outline the challenges of issue and public formation, his proposed resolution of these challenges remains underdeveloped and seems tacked on at the end of the book. According to one of his near contemporaries, sociologist C. Wright Mills (2000, [1959]), the reliance on methods of inquiry for the formation of publics creates a dependency on experts, which entrenches social inequalities. Moreover, since marginalised groups are less likely to possess the experience, resources and capabilities to conduct a social inquiry, Mills argues that they are less likely to take part and therefore define the issues of the day. This proposition is also raised by agenda-setting scholars, discussed later (Section 2.4.1). Though I agree that Dewey's knowledge-based solution is problematic, it nonetheless rests on a belief that publics hold knowledge that neither the social researcher nor the policymaker possesses. Thus, ignoring the narrow role that Dewey scripts for publics in the passage above, and embracing his earlier arguments*, I propose that approaches and methods in participatory design, which are intended to empower marginalised groups, may help strike a balance between the lack of expertise in social inquiry and the expertise that publics do possess*. Moreover, given the barriers to public involvement and public formation, if publics are to be a vital source of social critique, it is worthwhile exploring a participatory approach to knowledge generation.

To conclude, Dewey's book *The Public and Its Problems* powerfully portrays the challenge that groups face to articulate their issues and form publics, but also significantly, describes what is at stake for democracies if publics are not formed. In addition, his notion of publics proposes a dynamic and emerging relationship with the state, which ideally is intended to address multiple

issues of multiple publics but struggles to do so for a variety of reasons. Unfortunately, though Dewey is passionate about the unique contribution of publics, he does not detail how to tackle social inequalities and institutional entrenchment that impede the formation of publics and does not elaborate on new approaches and methods that would enable greater public involvement for marginalised groups. Indeed, as discussed above, his recommendation of a knowledge-based expert-led solution to overcome the challenge of issue and public formation undermines the traits of autonomy and criticality that he argues are essential to publics. Nonetheless, in recent years The revitalisation of Dewey's ideas in STS has had a significant influence on the development of the publics-frame in participatory design. In the following section, I briefly review intersecting concepts and approaches in STS and participatory design (Section 2.3.2). With the central concepts and theoretical frameworks fully articulated, I then turn to a critique of the application of these concepts by participatory design researchers using the publics-frame (2.3.3).

2.3.2   STS research on engaging people in issue articulation

Dewey-inspired research in Science and Technology Studies (STS), which elaborates on, how people may be engaged in social inquiry and discourse about complex policy issues, is often cited in participatory design research using the publics-frame. Specifically, this strand of STS explores attempts by citizens, with the support of experts, to shape government agendas and policies. Though STS focuses on techno-scientific controversies, in Deweyan terms public issues (e.g. pollution, genetic modification), it is also relevant to non-technological issues which similarly have far-ranging and often unpredictable impacts on people's lives and may lead to public formation (Callon, Lascoumes, & Barthe, 2009; Marres & Lezaun, 2011). To begin, I highlight here central concepts developed by leading STS scholars, Bruno Latour (2004, 2005, 2007, 2008) and of Noortje Marres (2005, 2007, 2011, 2014).

Drawing on Dewey's theory of publics, Latour and colleagues, including Callon et al (2011), explore how social inquiry can open new modes of generating knowledge and new forms of agency for 'ordinary' people (Latour, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008). This strand of STS does not necessarily focus on public formation but proposes that researchers and other stakeholders seek to develop new forums and methods to bring together those impacted with professionals and officials in order to clearly articulate what concerns them. To explain the process of social inquiry, Latour introduces two contrasting concepts which some design scholars, and this study, have found useful. These are *matters of fact* and *matters of concern*. Matters of fact refer to taken-for-granted and therefore uncontested aspects of society, whereas matters of concern refer to contested issues and their consequences to humans and non-humans (Latour, 2005; DiSalvo,

2009; Le Dantec and DiSalvo, 2013), which are often only partially known (Marres, 2007). Drawing on Dewey, according to STS scholars, new publics arise when diverse and interrelated consequences and issues are made explicit, thus making previously unknown or taken-for-granted matters of fact into newly articulated matters of concern (Callon et al, 2011; Marres, 2005, 2007). Critically, this inquiry process pushes a group of previously disconnected individuals to reassess the boundaries of the issue and relations between them (Callon et al, 2011; Marres, 2005, 2007) and possibly organize into a public that may seek to have the issue remedied.

Notably, research in STS contextualizes Dewey's theory of publics to the twenty-first century by considering the impact of globalization and digital internet-based technologies, which are at least in the Western world, make knowledge, of varied in quality, more accessible to those with the resources and capacity. In this landscape, digital platforms that connect globally dispersed groups are shown to be a site for issue formation, allowing for groups to identify multiple interconnected subjects, educate themselves and also target a wide variety of powerful international institutions, not only the state (Marres, 2005). Given the breadth and scale of these technologies, discerning between matters of fact and matters of concern is still a challenge (Marres, 2005). Thus, though this literature expands the scale, scope and target of public formation, STS researchers still maintain in accordance with Dewey that 1) publics arise when the issues of concern necessitate a more systemic intervention at the macro-level and 2) these issues are articulated and addressed through knowledge-based methods of social inquiry. Thus, again, methods, tools and approaches that support the process of social inquiry, deemed essential for issue and public formation, are developed by expert researchers and designers.

In this context, Latour (2005, 2008) turns to design practice and proposes that the critical and material practice of design can facilitate participation in an inquiry into matters of concern and support the development of alternatives. Specifically, through interaction with designed artefacts and through making things, he argues that everyone is capable of critiquing a given designed object (whether it is a mobile phone, a waiting room, or an election ballot) and of proposing how it may be improved. According to Latour, "When things are taken as having been well or badly designed then they no longer appear as matters of fact" (2008, p. 4), instead, they become expressions of matters of concern, with multiple interpretations and truths. Thus, in this critical turn, Latour holds that designers can help make matters of concern manifest by making them

visible and concrete through the practices of making things. Retooling the word 'things', Latour conceptualizes it as specific objects that act as matters of concern.[10]

Latour and Weibel's (2005) Dewey-influenced call to articulate new issues by making 'things' public, has been adopted in participatory design using the publics-frame as a theoretical framing for explaining how making Dewey's consequences material might help groups articulate complex societal issues (e.g. Le Dantec and DiSalvo,2013; Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012; Binder et al, 2015; Le Dantec and Fox, 2015; Le Dantec, 2016). As DiSalvo (2009, p.48) writes, Dewey's consequences are assumed to be evident in the "concrete situations, experiences, and materiality of everyday life", and suggest to designers how they may, with emerging publics, investigate and understand public issues. In design practice 'design things', which may comprise of designed objects, design workshops, exhibitions, public debates, blogs and videos, are used to encourage critical thinking and discourse and reveal matters of concern (Emilson and Hillgren, 2014). Moreover, design researchers Björgvinsson et al (2010) propose that exposing matters of concern through design things can also be used to enable participants to critically consider potential future issues and propose alternative plans of action or objects of design.

To explain the political implications of making issues into matters of concern, researchers in STS (Marres, 2007) and design theory (DiSalvo, 2010; Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2010; 2012; Ehn, Nilsson and Topgaard, 2014; Koskinen, 2016) have in the past decade turned to the concept of agonism[11] derived from the work of political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2009). Mouffe's theory of pluralistic agonism posits that struggle and conflict are integral, productive, and meaningful aspects of a democratic society. However, since political coalitions in democracies typically build on consensus, she contends that they often marginalize those who do not hold hegemonic views. To involve marginalized groups in public discourse, Mouffe proposes that in healthy democracies, "The aim should not be consensus or to support rational decision making, but rather to make alternative views clearer and more visible" (Mouffe and Martin, 2013, p. 69). Drawing on this, Marres (2007) argues that given the heterogeneity of publics, it is not possible that they assemble solely because of consensus or a shared issue, as posited by Dewey (1991). Thus, based on the theory of agonism, it is understood that issue articulation is just as likely to raise agonistic

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[10] Latour (2005) also developed the concept of *Dingpolitik*. The notion *Ding* (or 'thing') refers to the etymology of the word 'thing', which describes the governing archaic assembly of ancient Nordic and Saxon societies, where people together with non-humans (e.g. material artefacts, buildings, animals, etc.) gathered to discuss their concerns. From the perspective of *Dingpolitik,* human agency is not the only active driving force for creating our social and built environments.

[11] The concept of agonism is derived from 'agon', the Greek for 'struggle'.

concerns and lack of congruence between those assembled. Further, Marres (2007) posits that a diverse group of people may also come to realize that settling their issue requires taking into account how others may be affected *differently* by the same issue. Thus, in embracing agonistic as well as shared concerns, a potential public may begin to develop some alignment and possible alternative ways of defining the scope and nature of an issue which they want to be addressed (Marres, 2007).

As shown in the discussion above, Dewey's theory of publics and its elaboration through the work of Latour (2005, 2008) and Marres (2005, 2007) transforms his focus on issues and public formation into a critique of how issues become contentious matters that require public attention (made into matters of concern) and draw together a diverse set of individuals in their differences (through embracing agonism). Similarly, participatory design researchers and practitioners, have also experimented with the practical and theoretical use of agitational approaches and methods that challenge existing meanings and assumptions -- as described in DiSalvo's (2008) category of political design. Practices associated with an agonistic approach include Scandinavian participatory design (Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2010; 2012; Ehn, Nilsson and Topgaard, 2014; Koskinen, 2016), and adversarial design (DiSalvo, 2010). Critically, the approaches advocated by Latour, Marres and colleagues, bring in the world of things and actions as tools for design or design things that may enrol people in the process of social inquiry about complex societal issues. The experimentation in STS about possibilities for creating conditions, mechanisms and methods that enable material and critical inquiry between 'ordinary' people and experts through processes of collective making and discourse has shaped, to a large extent, the theoretical framing used participatory design research, which I review below. In this thesis, I also adopt this theoretical framing and attempt in my practice to make matters of fact into matters of concern through the collaborative making of design things with research participants.

2.3.3   Assessing the use of the publics-frame in participatory design

Playing on Latour's (2005) call to make things public through design, civic media designer and theorist Carl DiSalvo (2009) proposes that design 'makes publics' through its focus on the process of issue-articulation. To test this claim, in his 2009 paper, DiSalvo challenges designers to ask, how might design's products and processes construct publics? However, over the past decade, attempts to empirically test design's capacity and contributions to issue and public formation have forced design researchers, including DiSalvo (DiSalvo, Maki and Martin, 2007; Lodato and DiSalvo, 2016), to be more critical of the making publics claim (e.g. Asad, Fox and Le Dantec, 2014; Le Dantec and Fox, 2015; Birkbak, Petersen and Jørgensen, 2018). In this section, I assess the

participatory design literature which has flourished in the intersecting fields of civic media design and human-computer interaction research (e.g. DiSalvo, 2009; Le Dantec and DiSalvo, 2013; Le Dantec, 2016, DiSalvo, Maki and Martin, 2007; Asad and Le Dantec, 2017) and Scandinavian participatory design with communities (Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2010; Ehn, Nilsson and Topgaard, 2014, Emilson and Hillgren, 2014; Linde, 2014; Lindstom and Stahl, 2014; Frandsen and Peterson, 2014). Broadly speaking, I have identified two central and somewhat overlapping approaches to participatory design using the publics-frame:

(a) making conditions for issue and public formation

(b) making forms and means for issue and public formation.

Below I critique these approaches and problematize the application of publics, eventually proposing an alternative reading of the construct of publics, one that emphasizes their political role in democracies, as conceived by Dewey.

a) Making conditions for issue and public formation

To support marginalized groups in addressing complex and interconnected social issues, some design researchers have sought to create a space or forum where design interventions are used to enable, support and create conditions for meaningful participation in design for 'ordinary' people. One such approach involves establishing 'innovation labs', also called 'living labs' which are typically community-based, often have a physical site and are supported both professionally and financially by resources and expertise from local universities, institutions and authorities (Björgvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren 2010, p. 102). A few labs explicitly adopt a Deweyan publics-frame to inform their practice and theorising, as evident in published papers and reports on their work. Most prominently these include Media Living Labs at Malmö University, Sweden (Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren 2010; Ehn, Nilsson and Topgaard, 2014), and Civic Media Lab at the Georgia Institute of Technology, United States (DiSalvo et al, 2008; Asad and Le Dantec, 2015, 2017; Lodato, 2015). These labs aim to make design processes more accessible to typically marginalized groups (e.g immigrant women, disenfranchised youth) by enabling them, with the financial and technical support and participation of local stakeholders (NGOs, civil servants, businesses), to take part in the development and quick trialling of public service prototypes in real-life contexts (Simonsen and Robertson, 2012).

To enable design in labs, designers engage in an ongoing process of infrastructuring. Infrastructuring is another concept drawn from STS research, in particular from the work of Susan Leigh Star and Karen Ruhleder (1996). In the design literature, infrastructuring is

understood as laying foundations and understandings between participants, designers and stakeholders to enable the development of collaborative design work (Björgvinsson et al, 2012; Le Dantec and DiSalvo, 2013; Le Dantec, 2016; Le Dantec, 2016; Jenkins et al, 2016). This includes, for example, making connections between stakeholders, negotiating possible collaborations and financial support, clarifying common and agonistic concerns, and developing activities to support participation in design. Thus, infrastructuring entails a new role for design researchers, one that Björgvinsson et al (2011; 2012) describes as a 'matchmaker' as it involves aligning different humans, settings, things and devices, to facilitate the design process. Hirscher and Mazé (2019) propose that infrastructuring entails the blurring and continual renegotiation of users' and designers' roles. Thus, importantly, infrastructuring does not take place in any one stage of participatory design. Instead, it is an ongoing process that demands constant alignment of diverse and sometimes agonistic motives and concerns (Bannon and Ehn, 2012). Following this, some scholars using the publics-frame suggest that the process of infrastructuring helps create democratic conditions for participatory design (Björgvinsson et al, 2012; Le Dantec, 2012; Le Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013).

Thus, it appears that one of the advantages of the lab approach for participatory design with publics is that it promotes long-term relationships between design researchers, local communities and local stakeholders. While this enables local knowledge to accumulate across projects and inform and facilitate future design opportunities (Hillgren et al, 2011), the benefits of infrastructuring to public formation appear mixed (Le Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013; Manzini & Staszowski, 2013; Björgvinsson, 2014). Positive findings from living labs reveal that bringing different groups together through infrastructuring and making design things can give participants new insights, access to new social networks, a sense of agency and long-term competencies (Björgvinsson et al, 2010; Le Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013; Ehn, et al 2014). This is consistent with Binder's (2007) argument that living labs can function as collaborative learning environments. However, researchers also report that infrastructuring processes can be very work-intensive for designers and that the nature of participation is problematic (Le Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013; Manzini & Staszowski, 2013; Björgvinsson, 2014). For example, Björgvinsson (2014) describes the infrastructuring process in a youth journalism project as volatile and unpredictable, explaining that participation was very inconsistent and that the process was distinctly undemocratic as some people had disproportional influence. Similar observations are made by colleagues at the Media Living Labs (see: Dragoman, 2013, Frandsen and Peterson, 2014; Ehn et al 2014) who found that the complexity of social issues and heterogeneous composition of emerging publics made agreeing on common goals and actions very difficult (Dragoman, 2013; Ehn et al 2014).

These findings suggest that even participatory design in living labs does not necessarily change the balance of power between actors. Moreover, agonistic infrastructuring, a construct used to describe the process of bringing together diverse sets of people and interests, seems to force together actors that may not be deeply committed to working together. For instance, Emilson and Hillgren (2014) describe the lack of long-term commitment among politicians, who if not re-elected would disengage and not secure institutional commitment before they left. In addition, it was found that powerful actors tended to avoid interactions that they perceived as potentially confrontational (Dragoman, 2013; Björgvinsson, 2014) and that in projects that engaged in agonistic infrastructuring, the so-called publics often disbanded after the completion of the formal design project (Björgvinsson et al, 2012; Varga, 2018). Finally, it has also been suggested that participatory designers may not always possess the necessary skills to negotiate between disparate groups to support public formation (Asad, Fox and Le Dantec, 2014; Ehn et al, 2014; Le Dantec and Fox, 2015; Le Dantec *et al*, 2015). This suggests that institutionally led initiatives, such as labs, may not be ideal for enabling marginalised groups to form publics.

(b) Making forms and means for issue and public formation – and issue-solving

The other central and often overlapping approach in participatory design using the publics-frame consists of designing new technologies and digital gadgets with emerging publics to either help them articulate their issues or design a solution. This approach is especially popular in civic media and human-computer interaction research (e.g. DiSalvo, Maki and Martin, 2007; DiSalvo et al, 2014b; Asad and Le Dantec, 2017; Steup et al, 2018) and resonates with the practical and solution-oriented design scholarship in the United States. For instance, it is striking how the processes and methods used in the so-called 'making of publics' are very similar, if not identical, to the process of product or system design. Specifically, designers engage with those negatively impacted or implicated by an issue to identify and frame a design problem, which designers and other experts then seek to resolve with participants. Though researchers using the publics-frame assume that through the iterative process of issue articulation and problem-solving, a coherent public emerges, this strand of research often neglects the process of public formation. Instead, researchers tend to draw on select elements from Dewey's theory of publics, most notably the generative quality of issue articulation. For instance, in research with a group involved in small-scale agriculture, DiSalvo et al (2011) argue for a practice of "collective issue articulation" that is focused on problem generation rather than problem-solving. However, as the researchers admit, the facilitated process ultimately focused on collective issue articulation and future innovations and neglected the process of public formation (DiSalvo et al, 2011, p.195).

Problematically, this solution or product orientation, whether it involves the design of web-based tools or digital strategies for tackling a social issue, often conflates publics with potential users of the new technology (Lodato, 2015). A tell-tale sign of this is when publics are discussed as pre-existing rather than emerging through the process of design interventions. For instance, in Le Dantec's book *Making Publics* (2016), which recounts the co-design of an IT platform at a women's homeless shelter, Le Dantec begins by delineating two publics in terms of their pre-existing institutional roles (staff and female residents). Inevitably, this conceptualisation of publics leads to a focus on service provision issues rather than an exploration of wider societal issues in which the groups are embroiled (e.g. causes of homelessness or domestic abuse) and can be overly solution oriented. Thus, I propose that the scalar shift in the operationalisation of publics, from Dewey's policy scale to a community scale, limits the scope of the issues addressed and the potential impact of publics-oriented design interventions in the policy domain. An observation also made by Karasti (2014) concerning the design of information systems. Moreover, this community-based approach to the publics-frame in participatory design often rests on the assumption that design practitioners can resolve the issues at hand and that these solutions can endure after the design intervention and digital gadget is complete (without the intervention of the state).

Table 2.1: Benefits and limits of central concepts used in participatory design research using the publics-frame and mobilized in this thesis

Key combination of concepts & central reference	Benefits	Limits
Theory of publics **and public formation** (Dewey, [1927], 1991)	Articulates the role of publics in democracies and the stakes if publics are not formed. Gives a framework for understanding public involvement of marginalized groups in public policy domain Highlights the challenge of articulating complex public issues.	Publics are difficult to identify as they are highly emergent, contingent, and dynamic. Does not elaborate on 'how' to enable public formation of marginalized groups. Does not detail how to tackle socially constructed barriers to public involvement of marginalised groups. Expert-led solution critiqued as elitist.

Public issues (Dewey, [1927], 1991) **Issue articulation** (Marres, 2005, 2007)	Identified as a catalyst to public formation. Delineates scale of issue and necessary domain of action – local or state. Articulating public issues essential to public formation	Local and policy issues overlap. Does not consider that issues may be addressed locally and then scaled
Participatory design research using the publics-frame (DiSalvo, 2009)	Develop design-based methods for engaging people in deliberation and co-design relating to complex societal issues. Develop sites and forums for issue and public formation and promote long-term relationships between researchers and communities. Make forms and means for issue formation	The concept of publics not clearly or consistently articulated or applied. Focus on the community scale, neglecting policy domain. Can be overly solution-oriented. Neglects processes of public formation Balance of power between researcher and communities problematic
Matters of concern (Latour, 2004, 2005) **making things** (Latour & Weibel, 2005) **Design things** (Björgvinsson et al, 2010; Le Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013)	Conceptualizes an approach to social inquiry which challenges taken-for-granted aspects of society. Propose methods for making 'matters of concern' through making design things'. Propose making Dewey's consequences material to help publics articulate complex issues	Making an issue a matter of concern does not necessarily make it a public policy issue. Dependency on expert designer or researcher in expert-led solutions Design-inspired methods can also be misconceived and reinforce power imbalances.
Participatory design principles (Ehn, 1988; Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012) **Democracy/ participation, knowledge,**	Politicize participatory design practice by embedding an ideal of democratic processes. Anchor and guide practice across different sectors and disciplines	Multiple interpretations Principles less useful or meaningful if not situated. Unclear to what extent principles underpin the design process. Don't necessarily challenge existing power relations or benefit marginalized groups

In sum, though proponents of the publics-frame in design Le Dantec and DiSalvo (2013) have argued, convincingly I think, that the publics-frame provides a pragmatic theoretical framework

for developing design approaches and methods concerning societal issues, both approaches outlined above tend to neglect theorising about the complex process of public formation and usually do not engage with issues at the level of the state and the wider policy domain.

The call in STS and participatory design to support public formation by making unarticulated issues into matters of concern through making design things appears well-suited for Dewey's framework and can easily be seen as relevant to explorations of the material consequences of issues. However as shown above, making an issue into a matter of concern does not necessarily make it a public policy issue. Thus, it appears that there is a step missing which would link the local domain to the public policy domain to enable public formation. In addition, the dependency on expert designer or researcher in expert-led solutions remains, as do concerns about reinforcing power imbalances through these dependencies and a focus on local solutions. Thus, having found the two central approaches to applying the publics-frame in participatory design wanting, I propose that design researchers may benefit from re-evaluating how the construct of Deweyan publics is applied and integrated into the wider domain of public policy. This may entail recruiting the concept of public issues to distinguish between local and policy-level issues and considering more closely barriers to participation.

2.3.4 Conclusion

The review above of the application of the publics-frame in participatory design research and practice reveals that one of the challenges is the lack of a systematic and considered approach to applying Dewey's notion of publics in participatory design.

One of the challenges of applying the concept of publics is their emergent nature. Since Deweyan publics are understood in the participatory design literature as dynamic, emergent, situated, multiple, and heterogeneous (DiSalvo, Maki and Martin, 2007; Le Dantec and DiSalvo, 2013; Le Dantec, 2016) it is not always clear what constitutes a public. As a result, design researchers often refer to existing groups as publics whilst also claiming to be making publics. Also, as noted earlier, in design practices that focus on designing solutions, the so-called public is often conflated with pre-existing categories of users (e.g. DiSalvo, 2009; Le Dantec, 2016). Thus, considering the complexity of public formation, I suggest that it is important that the new *publics-oriented participatory design approach* exercise caution in claiming the existence of a public. It is important to recognise that publics require a great deal of time and effort to form (Marres, 2015) and often may fail to take shape (DiSalvo, Maki and Martin, 2007; Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe, 2011; Marres, 2011; Emilson and Hillgren, 2014). Following this, in this thesis, I prefer to use the term

potential or *emerging* public, rather than simply public, and not assume that a public is formed because a common issue has been articulated. In addition, it is proposed here that designers and researchers using the publics-frame need to delineate and justify their application of the construct of publics and make explicit the implications of their choices more clearly. Thus, as stated earlier, this includes acknowledging when the translation of the construct of Deweyan publics no longer expresses Dewey's central arguments about the nature and potential of public involvement in democratic processes and policymaking.

A second challenge evident in the operationalisation of publics in participatory design relates to the scale of the issues. Though Deweyan publics are largely conceived in relation to the state, most of the design projects above are conducted at a local scale, in local communities, institutions or councils (Le Dantec and DiSalvo, 2013; Asad and Le Dantec, 2015). This is evident in both the central approaches that I delineated. To justify this scalar shift, Le Dantec and DiSalvo (2013) argue that any community and institution may be relevant for a publics-frame since the 'consequences' that Dewey refers to take place in people's private lives and the inquiry at the micro-level implicates all scales. While this is a valid point, the difficulty in this interpretation is that according to Dewey (1992), individuals cannot fully understand what troubles them because they are impacted by the indirect consequences of an issue resulting from interactions across different scales (individuals, community, city, state). As Dewey (1991, p. 27). writes, "the essence of the consequences which call a public into being is that they expand beyond those directly engaged in producing them". Thus, according to Dewey and similarly STS researchers, publics are deemed necessary when the more immediate scale in which people lead their lives is no longer sufficient for identifying, much less settling, an issue. In other words, as noted earlier, publics arise in response to what Dewey qualifies as public issues – issues that are expansive and ill-defined, intersect at different scales and therefore require systematic attention because even once identified. Critically, defined as such public issues cannot be remedied at the community scale because their consequences are indirect. Thus, an integral aspect of the process of issue articulation is to identify the scale of the issue.

Therefore, in keeping with Dewey, I propose in this thesis an alternative approach to participatory design with emerging publics that would: A) delineate what is a public, B) discern the scope of the issue, and C) consider barriers to publics involvement in the policy domain. Specifically, I propose that through the critical and material approaches and methods of participatory design, design researchers and research participants may discern whether the issues that concern them are local issues or public issues. By discerning between local and public issues publics-oriented design researchers and research participants can understand whether

the issues under investigation necessitate operating beyond the local community, at the level of the state. As an extension of this, I propose that the existing publics-frame in participatory design practice and research needs to be more oriented to the policy domain and, in keeping with Dewey's theory, I propose to conceive of publics and the process of their formation as a tool for political action in the domain of social public policy. Therefore, to enable public involvement, this approach to publics assumes that there is a need to consider barriers by drawing on literature in agenda-setting and the specific policy domain.

2.4 Integrating lessons from related literature on public policy

Based on my critique of existing practice and research in participatory design using the publics-frame, I propose to overcome the shortcomings identified by developing a more *publics-oriented participatory design* approach which seeks to situate this relatively new strand in participatory design more firmly in relation to the democratic and public policy processes. Following arguments made by leading design historians and scholars (Buchanan, 2001; Margolin, Doordan and Buchanan, 2010), I consider what design practice with a marginalised group might learn from research about public policy process models and political theories of public involvement. To operationalise publics as tools for political action in the public policy domain, I argue that it is important to consider the domain in which *publics-oriented participatory design* seeks to operate and subsequently influence – namely, the public policy domain.

Broadly speaking, public policy, which is at the centre of policy research, is typically defined as the decisions and actions (or inactions) taken by local or national governments (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). These may entail forming new laws, and governing bodies and creating social programs, as a means of implementing policies and achieving their goals (such as preventing homelessness, improving educational attainment or maintaining the status quo). The actions referred to above are essentially the tools of government. While tools of government inevitably include the more prevalent top-down tools associated with conventional policymaking (like laws, legislation, budgets, and taxation), they may also consist of bottom-up tools, not associated with formal government (like social movements, social networks, and more) (John, 2011). Though the commonly used concepts of top-down and bottom-up over-simplify the dynamics of these tools and the policy process, they are still used in the literature (Sabatier, 1986; Baumgartner et al, 2009; Sabatier and Weible, 2014). In the context of this literature, *I propose to explore publics-oriented participatory design as a bottom-up non-governmental approach for citizens to influence public policy.*

After conducting desk research into models of policy process and consulting with a couple of public policy scholars[12] versed in policy analysis and policy process models, I chose to investigate two diverse subfields of policy research and political theory to gain a more complex and nuanced perspective on how public involvement may be understood in democratic systems. These subfields include agenda-setting theory research and feminist political theory. I elaborate on their suitability for my inquiry below. Below I highlight relevant concepts and approaches from the two literature and discuss their implications for design practice with emerging publics. This sets the groundwork for the design-inspired interventions where I develop and explore design-inspired activities and discourse informed by these insights from agenda-setting feminist political theory to enhance issue and public formation.

2.4.1 Agenda-setting: barriers and opportunities for public involvement

In the literature on policy process models, public involvement is typically framed as taking place at the front end of policymaking during the agenda-setting process (Hendriks, 2012; Howlett and Giest, 2012). Agenda-setting is theorised as the process by which issues, among many societal issues, become policy agendas to be explored and possibly addressed by policymakers. Consequently, many routes to influence public policy focus on inclusion in the process of decision-making about government agendas (Meyer, 2005). Though methodologies of co-design (Bason, 2014, 2016; Hermus, van Buuren and Bekkers, 2020) and co-production (Durose and Richardson, 2016) in local and national government increasingly explore methods of involving citizens in other aspects of the policy process, such as policymaking, policy implementation or policy assessment, these are usually government initiatives and therefore less relevant to designing with publics, which are non-governmental. Thus, having located my practice outside formal channels of policymaking, yet oriented to influencing public policy agendas and discourse, to further understand the context in which *publics-oriented participatory design* seeks to operate, I explore below how public involvement of marginalised groups is constructed in agenda-setting theory and research. As this thesis does not explore the agenda-setting process per se, a review of the literature and policy process models is not warranted here. Instead, I briefly present central concepts and insights from agenda-setting research and consider how these may be leveraged by designers and researchers to inform design interventions with the publics.

Agenda-setting is the process by which certain societal problems gain the attention of the public and policymakers and become policy agendas, whereas other, no less important problems, do not

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[12] Prof. Jennifer Rubin and Prof. Peter John.

(Cobb and Elder, 1972). Though agenda-setting scholars have identified many kinds of agendas (see Baumgartner and Jones, 2009), the most central are *policy agendas*, also called institutional agendas. These consist of the "subjects and problems to which governmental officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention to, at any given time" (Cobb and Elder, 1972; Kingdon, 2011, p. 3). As this definition implies, policy agendas are constantly changing as they are intended to reflect the recognised problems of society at a 'given time', much like Deweyan publics that are multiple and dynamic and supposed to reflect the pertinent issues of the day. However, critically, given the multitude of publics and issues, agenda-setting ultimately reflects the priorities of those closely associated with governments (Kingdon, 2011). As Eric Elmer Schattschneider, considered a founder of agenda-setting theory, describes it, agenda-setting is a process in which "some issues are organised into politics while others are organised out" (Schattschneider, 1960, p.69). Thus, inevitably, agenda-setting is a highly contentious process where groups, on very unequal footing, compete to have their issues recognised and addressed by the government.

In a slim but influential theoretical book titled *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist View of Democracy in America* (1960),[13] Schattschneider, portrays agenda-setting as a complex interplay between politics, power, and policy. He argues that 'ordinary' people are only 'semi-sovereign' because they do not have the autonomy to define the issues that matter to them as these are manipulated by the political system, which he portrays as a conflict system. This conflict system is theorised as the process and structure whereby powerholders define central societal conflicts, which then determine the relative position and dominance of different groups in the socio-political system. Schattschneider refers to this process as the 'conflict of conflicts' (1960, p.73) and posits that powerholders are more likely to shape the definition of central societal conflicts and therefore keep marginalised groups, such as Dewey's publics, constrained by preconceived categories which keep people "divided into factions, parties, groups classes, etc." (1960, p.66).

Dominant groups in this context are government decision-makers and policy professionals affiliated with institutions such as businesses, labour unions, universities, and think tanks. These actors possess the requisite knowledge about the policy process and certain issues and regularly interact with each other and with decision-makers to enable them to influence policy agendas (Kingdon, 2011). Together, these actors compose what agenda researchers variably call 'issue networks' (Lukes, 2003), 'policy community' (Howlett, 1998), 'policy elites' (John, 2015) and

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[13] Though his theories are based on an analysis of the United States political system in the 1950s, his theories are still applicable and generalisable to other democratic systems (Mair, 1997).

'policy monopoly' (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009). Notably, all these labels imply the exclusion of those who do not belong to these groups. According to Schattschneider (1960), dominant groups seek to manipulate conflicts by either expanding the conflict, for instance, by mobilizing supporters (a process he termed *socialisation*) or containing the conflict, for instance, by excluding the involvement of opponents (a process he termed *privatisation*). Thus, the struggle over the policy agenda is conceived as one between the *socialization* of conflict and the *privatization* of conflict. According to agenda theory, groups on the margins face multiple social and structural barriers which constrain their ability to influence the definition and scope of central conflicts in societies.

Interestingly, though Schattschneider is often associated with an elitist approach to agenda-setting as his theory highlights how governance systems control public involvement through the manipulation of conflicts, Schattschneider insists that public involvement in contentious policy issues is inevitable. As he writes (1960, p.138),

> The people are involved in public affairs by the conflict system. Conflicts open-up questions for publics interventions. Out of conflict, the alternatives of public policy arise… it is difficult to avoid public involvement in the conflict; the regular operations of government give rise to controversy, and controversy is catching.

This passage shows that Schattschneider's *theory of the conflict system* is based on what appears to be a strong belief in the public's political agency as he argues for the inevitability of public involvement due to the so-called contagiousness of controversy and conflict, which "the regular operations of government give rise to" (1960, p. 138). This suggests that Schattschneider does not see a lack of public involvement as a problem for democracy. Instead, he argues that low public involvement is the result of the systemic mobilisation of bias.[14] *Mobilisation bias*, as Schattschneider referred to it, is conceptualised as comprising of administrative processes, rules, and institutions, that validate and reify certain issues and people and exclude other issues and people from participation. The fact that Schattschneider reframes nonparticipation as a function of power, or lack of power, rather than public apathy as posited by other theorists (e.g. Lippmann, 2007 [1922]) is significant as it suggests that even those who are relatively powerless in the political system, have agency.

Indeed, Schattschneider's analysis of the conflict system recalls social constructionism, a theory based on sociologist Anthony Giddens' structuration theory (Brown, 2002). The basic premise of structuration theory is that individual actions are constrained by social structures but, at the

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[14] See Schattschneider's examination of low voter turnout in US elections (1960, p.97-113).

same time, individuals' actions may affect or constitute social structures. Thus, in terms of agenda-setting, if powerful actors in the policy community (Howlett, 1998) pursue strategies to define the conflict, as Schattschneider and other agenda-setting scholars propose, the outcomes of policy content and processes then structure the issues and conditions around which publics can form. Therefore, though Schattschneider is sceptical of public sovereignty, I propose that his model of the conflict system and the contagion of conflict can also be understood as potentially generative in that these conflicts function as triggers that force people to get involved – much like Dewey's issues. By engaging in collective political actions, Deweyan publics may potentially have an impact on the system that constrains and shapes the nature of their public involvement and force the emergence of new public agendas.

This perspective on public involvement is developed in more recent research in agenda-setting associated with the populist approach, which seeks to give greater attention to informal routes and forms of influence. Researchers adopting a populist approach reject the elitist approach which usually sees policymaking as the responsibility of a small elite group, and typically ignores the interests and issues of the less powerful (Lukes, 2003; Lippmann, 2007). For instance, Cobb, Ross and Ross (1976) observe that an elitist approach often frames public initiatives as 'outside' initiatives thus reinforcing polarized notions of insiders and outsiders in the policy process and ignoring the ideal of popular sovereignty.[15] In addition, assuming a government perspective, some researchers adopting the elitist approach (e.g. Kingdon, 2011; Zahariadis, 2014) use their research findings to advise powerholders how they may manipulate the policy process, its resources, other actors, and digital media. This strategic strand in agenda-setting research is sometimes criticized for assuming that policymakers are rational decision-makers even though empirical research of the policy process, especially implementation research, clearly shows this is not the case (see: Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984; Kingdon, 2011; Rein and Schön, 2019).

In contrast, agenda scholars who adopt a more populist approach, recognise the potential influence of marginalised groups on the policy process and propose that decision-making about policy agendas is messy and irrational and therefore may be influenced by elements of fortuity and randomness (Birkland, 1997; Kingdon, 2011). This viewpoint is also exemplified in the literature on social movements (e.g., Barnes et al, 2003; Barnes and Prior, 2009) where randomness is argued to open opportunities for previously marginalized groups and their issues to impact policy agendas. For instance, natural or man-made disasters, accidents, scandals,

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[15] For contrast, in Dewey's (1991, p.57-8) theory of the state, he proposes that it may be conceived as a public because it addresses the issues of publics.

financial crises, and pandemics may for a short time spark media and public attention and bring a 'focus' on previously neglected issues (Kingdon, 2011; Birkland, 1997).[16] Tellingly, these 'focusing events' (Kingdon, 2011) have been shown in some instances to force governments to listen to marginalised groups, or at least appear to be listening (Kingdon, 2011; Greer, 2016), yet populist approaches to agenda-setting also make clear that these opportunities are the exceptions to the rule. As Kingdon (2011) admits, the moments in which policy agendas are more pliant are often short-lived, unpredictable, and less accessible to marginalised groups (Kingdon, 2011; Howlett and Giest, 2012).[17]

In sum, research in political science and policy studies portrays the process of agenda-setting as highly institutionalized, professionalized, opaque, unpredictable, chaotic and systematically biased in its administrative procedures and institutions (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998; Kingdon, 2011; Cairney and Jones, 2016; Bevan and Jennings, 2019). Though the populist approach to agenda-setting highlights possible routes in which marginalized groups may influence public discourse and agendas, in particular through idiosyncratic and random processes, these occasions are short-lived and difficult for marginalized groups to capitalize on. While it is important not to conflate the agenda-setting process with government, as it takes place in and outside of government, this depiction of the messy process of agenda-setting by both elitist and populist scholars details the many socio-economic barriers to public involvement – with clear implications for participatory design interventions with publics.

First, agenda theorists' insights about the manipulation of conflicts (Schattschneider, 1960) depict how specific issues or solutions, or even groups, that are not aligned with the hegemonic view of central societal conflicts, may not be considered legitimate concerns for governments (Bachrach and Baratz, 1977; Cairney, 2012). This suggests that the struggle of marginalized groups to have their issues recognized is centred more fundamentally on a struggle to be seen as a legitimate party, and therefore suggests a possible focus for participatory design interventions. Moreover, since powerholders are depicted as inevitably favouring one ideology over another,

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[16] The Grenfell Tower fire (June 14, 2017), which took the lives of 72 people in a London social housing tower due to multiple safety flaws which residents flagged but authorities ignored, is an example of the opportunities and limitations of focusing event (Booth, 2020). Though the event drew broad public and cross-party support for change and greater investment in social housing, over five years have passed and though the public hearings are still taking place, the policy outcomes so far are few and the influence of social tenants on the policy agenda, much less housing policy, is unclear (See: grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk).

[17] As noted by Kingdon (2011, p. 98) and confirmed in recent research (Birkland and Schwaeble, 2019), random events are not a prime driver in agenda-setting, and to generate change they need to be accompanied and reinforced by pre-existing conceptions of a societal conflict.

the marginalized position and status of certain issues and groups are shown to be reinforced and institutionalized through *mobilization bias* (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009; Birkland and Schwaeble, 2019).[18] Second, Schattschneider's depiction of the manipulation of conflict by powerholders through socialization suggests possible tactics that participatory design with emerging publics may recruit to get the attention of other groups and even policymakers. Lastly, I propose that the complex account of the many barriers to public involvement and influence in public policy proposed by agenda-setting scholars also needs to be contextualized, to understand how it may manifest differently in a specific policy domain. In this thesis I explored barriers specific to the social housing domain through the literature on tenant participation and through the housing studies literature. Collectively, these insights from agenda-setting literature suggest that a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach needs to recognize these systemic barriers in a specific policy domain and explore ways of engaging emerging publics in challenging existing roles and categories which entrench certain groups marginal status.

2.4.2 Feminist political theory: alternative routes to public involvement

Another strand of research relevant to considering the relationship between public formation, marginalized groups and participatory design is feminist political theory, which overlaps with social movement literature. In this literature, publics are often referred to as counterpublics and over time, as noted by social theorist Michael Warner (2002) the concepts of publics and counterpublics are increasingly used interchangeably. However, as leading feminist theorist Nancy Fraser (1990) explains, the use of the term 'counterpublics' is intended to emphasize the role of publics as a 'counter' to dominant publics and discourses. This oppositional framing is conceptualised as inherent to this form of activism as counterpublics are seen to emerge in response to exclusions (Fraser, 1990) of specific identities, spaces or topics from the public sphere (Asen, 2000). Though this emphasis suits my orientation to groups that experience ongoing and multiple forms of marginalisation, to maintain consistency with the Dewey-influenced literature that anchors this thesis and minimises confusion, I continue using the term publics.

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[18] For instance, capitalist ideologies may conceive of issues relating to poverty as the responsibility or fault of the individual and are therefore not a public concern. Similarly, certain policy solutions (e.g. basic income) may not be considered legitimate if they do not align with the dominant ideology (Bachrach and Baratz, 1977; Cairney, 2012).

I propose that the feminist strand of political theory is pertinent to understanding the potential for participatory design with publics because it explores alternative routes in which marginalised groups and publics, which are excluded from participating in the official public sphere, may overcome barriers to participation and seek to have their issues addressed (Jupp, 2010). This strand not only acknowledges social inequalities but argues that publics specifically emerge in response to what political theorist Nancy Fraser (1990) terms a lack of parity in participation in the public sphere. This further reinforces the relevance of publics to marginalised groups.

Importantly, the feminist strand in political theory and social movements also seeks to identify alternative routes to public political life based on empirical research. For instance, one well-established form for making publics is called the private sphere approach (Fraser, 1990; Stall and Stoecker, 1998; Mahony, Newman and Barnett, 2010b). This approach though typically rooted in concerns for quintessentially 'private' issues and relationships sees collective actions in the private sphere as a springboard for participants to gain capacities and influence in shaping discourse and activities in the public sphere. Thus, this approach entails extending the scope of seemingly private issues into the realm of the public. In doing so, this approach unsettles officially sanctioned boundaries between private and public issues and demands the address of previously ignored issues that had been relegated to the private sphere (Fraser, 1990; Jupp, 2010). In documenting the shift from private to public, or more accurately the movement back and forth between private and public spheres, the feminist literature shows how the designation of an issue as public is socially and historically constructed and, therefore, is deeply ingrained and difficult to change (Fraser, 1990).

The exploration of practical questions about how pluralistic governance might work and how barriers to participation may be overcome is also associated with a very broad field often referred to as citizen participation literature or public participation literature (for a review see LeGate & Stout, 2020). This area of study intersects a range of disciplines, most prominently urban development and social movements, which explore practical questions about how pluralistic governance might work. It has also informed, with mixed results, public participation initiatives in central and local governments that aim to involve citizens, a topic I return to when I introduce the public policy setting of social housing. However, as part of a wider discussion of participation, it is necessary to note one of the most influential models in this space, the famous 'ladder for citizen participation'. Published decades ago (1969) by Sherry R. Arnstein, an American social worker turned federal policy advisor who worked for years in helping communities develop programs to improve local job opportunities, housing, schools and health services. Arnstein's (1969) penetrating analysis of citizen participation in democratic processes advanced the

position, similar to Schattschneider, that genuine participation requires a redistribution of power. Without a reallocation of power, she conceptualizes how varied forms of participation are often manipulative and ultimately maintain the status quo (Arnstein, 1969).

She conceptualizes eight rungs of participation, presented as a metaphorical ladder with each ascending rung representing an increased level of citizen participation. In rising order, these are 'manipulation', 'therapy', 'informing', 'consultation', 'placation', 'partnership', 'delegated power' and 'citizen control'. The first two rungs qualify as forms of 'non-participation' because they aim to either educate or cure 'ordinary' people rather than give them more influence. These are followed by three forms of low participation ('informing', 'consultation', 'placation'). 'Informing' citizens about government programs, their rights, responsibilities, and options is deemed to be the basis for any participation and is argued as useful if information sharing is mutual. 'Consultations' go further as they provide real input from citizens to decision-makers yet fall short according to Arnstein as do not give them influence on decision-making. 'Placation' gives a few citizens some influence but in a limited scope and is therefore argued to be 'tokenistic' (1969, p.216). In contrast, the highest rungs on Arnstein's ladder, 'partnership', 'delegated power' and 'citizen control', do represent different forms of 'citizen empowerment'. 'Partnerships' entail a redistribution of power between stakeholders arrived at through negotiation, whereas the last two, highest rungs, entail different levels of autonomy in decision-making.

To Arnstein, 'citizen control' of local programs that affect them is ideal, though critics challenge her assumption that devolving control to citizens necessarily leads to the best outcomes (see: LeGates and Stout, 2015). Nonetheless, Arnstein's model, though developed in the 1960s, offers a useful framework for both practitioners and participants to assess alternatives not only for citizens but also for governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and has wide applicability across domains and political systems (LeGates and Stout, 2015) - including participatory design. Participation research finds that different levels of citizen participation are usually associated with different methods and tools (Creighton, 2005) and a mismatch between the declared purpose of the participatory initiative and the method used is likely to undermine the perceived authenticity and legitimacy of the initiative (Feldman and Quick, 2009).

This resonates with Fraser's (1990) notion of the dual function of publics. According to Fraser, the process of public formation possesses two reinforcing functions: 1) withdrawal and regroupment[19] and 2) agitation. The first function is theorised to give marginalised groups a

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[19] Though separating the first function into its composite parts (withdrawal and regroupment) would have been clearer, I believe Fraser chose to cluster these functions because they are both inward-facing,

space where they may withdraw into themselves and through deliberation with those similarly situated, 'regroup' (to use Fraser's terminology) around new understandings of the issue. Meanwhile, the second function, agitation, recalls Dewey's theory and entails marginalised groups agitating for their new understandings of their issues to become a part of the dominant discourse. Critically, according to Fraser to become a public, a group must serve both functions. The function of detachment and regroupment enables marginalized publics (counterpublics) to overcome structural inequalities to articulate their issues, whereas the function of agitation enables newly assembled groups to cohere and counter dominant publics – hence the significance of what methods are used at what time.

In sum, feminist political theory reinforces Dewey's argument that publics are essential to democratic processes and are triggered by a failure to deal with their issues due to a lack of parity in participation and structural barriers that marginalized groups and their issues face. What is the implication for the design interventions using a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach? Based on the feminist perspective to the involvement of marginalized groups in policy discourse (articulated in the private sphere approach and dual function of publics) newly formed marginalised groups must be both inward-facing, in order to articulate their issues and group identity and "public-facing" (Mansbridge, 2017, p.107) to demand that their issues be considered as legitimate and hopefully addressed by policymakers. These aspects of participation also loosely mirror Arnstein's ladder of participation, where initial engagements seek input about the nature of the issue whereas the higher levels of participation give control about determining what will be done. Both Fraser and Arnstein, however, give little further details about the relationship between the dual functions of publics. In the conclusion of this thesis (Chapter 8) I discuss my findings and their implications for design practice with publics.

2.4.3 Interpretivist policy analysis: enrolling perspectives of marginalized groups in the policy domain

To investigate *publics-oriented participatory design* as a practice that seeks to enable publics to influence policy agendas, design practitioners and researchers may benefit from conducting a policy analysis of a particular issue and identifying barriers to participation in a particular policy domain as part of the design research. By considering how existing policies, processes and structures of agenda-setting constrain and generate forms of public involvement, *publics-oriented participatory design* research and practice may be better equipped to support the complex

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that is, they both focus on internal processes of group formation, whereas the function of agitation is explicitly public-facing and focuses on group actions in the public sphere.

processes of issue and public formation. To do this I propose that design researchers may learn from the interpretivist approach to policy analysis used by policy researchers.

Researchers adopting interpretivist methodologies in policy analysis draw attention to the distinction between what they term a positivist orientation and an interpretivist orientation to social phenomena and argue that the relationship between the two is not binary (Schaffer, 2015). To better understand this relationship, in his book *Elucidating Social Science Concepts*, policy researcher Fredric Charles Schaffer (2015) introduces the concepts of experience-near and experience-distant, developed by anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Concepts that are experience-near are commonplace words used in everyday interactions (e.g. stigma, experience), whereas concepts that are experience-distant, consist of remote language used by specialists (e.g. attitudinal barriers, social phenomena) (Geertz, 1983, p.57). A positivist orientation usually assumes that experience-distant concepts describe a reality that is out there and is therefore objective, whereas experience-near concepts are purely subjective. In contrast, an interpretivist orientation gives more credit to experience-near concepts and seeks to understand how people understand a particular concept to inquire about a shared understanding of their reality. Thus, Schaffer (2015, p.7-8) writes,

> A central conceptual task of many interpretivist scholars, in other words, is to negotiate the divide between the social world and the everyday language used to mark it, on the one hand, and the concerns of the scholarly community and the specialised language used to investigate them, on the other.

An interpretivist orientation seeks to mediate between the experience-near and experience-distant. Navigating between these two orientations to social phenomena, experiential and analytical, is difficult for social researchers (Geertz, 1983; Schaffer, 2015), and policy analysts among them. As I argue here, it is even harder for laypersons, such as activists, whose activities and campaigning need to bridge between experience-near concepts of people's lives and their own lives and experience-distant concepts of the policy landscape.

Thus, I propose that methods from interpretivist policy analysis (Section 3.3.2) may be used in the framework of a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach to help contextualize and understand how participants see themselves in relation to the policy domain and how it impacts their capacity to act. Critically, while interpretivist policy analysis aims to inform policy makers and other powerful stakeholders, in this thesis the interpretivist-inspired policy analysis aims at articulating the experiences and worlds of emerging publics and generate knowledge and insights for participants.

2.5 Conclusion

2.5.1 Proposing a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach

Overall, this chapter shows that while the revival of the construct of publics and its translation in STS gives the practice of participatory design a framework for understanding how diverse actors and institutions assemble around shared and agonistic concerns to form publics (Marres, 2005, 2007; Latour, 2005, 2007; DiSalvo, 2009, 2010; Le Dantec, 2016), the application of the publics-frame in design is far from straightforward. To review, my critique has found that existing practices in participatory design using the publics-frame (Section 2.3.3) often fail to clearly delineate what is a public; tend to focus on the local scale of communities rather than societal and political systems; and very rarely reflect on lessons learned about the relationship between participatory design and public formation, even when claiming to make publics. These are significant shortcomings since such an approach to the making of publics fails to challenge the lack of parity in participation, highlighted in both agenda-setting and feminist literature. Thus, the existing publics-frame in participatory design avoids directly challenging failures of the state or other powerful institutions (Marres, 2005). In doing so, this strand of participatory design betrays the importance of Dewey's notion of publics to marginalised groups and similarly undermines the principles of participatory design that purport to empower marginalized groups. This lack of attention and understanding of the potential and significant role of publics, which Dewey argued are integral to the democratic process, reveals a need for improving existing research and practice. Thus, I call for a more *publics-oriented participatory design* approach and practice which understands publics as a tool for political action in the public policy domain, as envisioned by Dewey.

Guidelines for a publics-oriented participatory design approach and key concepts used:

Though I have highlighted above specific empirical and theoretical research in agenda-setting theory and feminist political theory which I suggest present opportunities for developing a more publics-oriented approach and methods, these remain unformulated and untested. Therefore, to set the groundwork for an empirical investigation of the proposed analytical framework, below I delineate the central features of a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach and central concepts that I recruited from the various strands of research on public involvement highlighted earlier.

A) Clearly delineate the criterion for a research site of an emerging public at the outset

. As critiqued earlier (Section 2.3.3), existing participatory design research and practice using the publics-frame often neglects to clearly delineate what constitutes a public (DiSalvo, Maki and Martin, 2007; Le Dantec and DiSalvo, 2013; Le Dantec, 2016). As a result, too often design researchers refer to existing groups as publics whilst also claiming to be making publics. Thus, considering the complexity of public formation, I proposed that a *publics-oriented participatory design approach* exercise caution in claiming the existence of a public. Secondly, and more significantly, I proposed that designers and researchers delineate and justify their application of the construct of publics and make explicit the implications of their choices. Thus, as part of a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach I developed at the outset a criterion for identifying a suitable site for an emerging public. To delineate such a criterion, I conducted exploratory fieldwork to identify a research site and through reflexive analysis refined the criteria before choosing a research site. This process is detailed and analysed in section 4.1. To delineate this criterion I drew on Dewey's definition of publics and in particular on his concept of publics issues, which he argues are essential for public formation, and insights Marres (2005,2007) on the process of issue and public formation. To investigate its application, I conducted exploratory fieldwork to identify a research site and through reflexive analysis refined the criteria before choosing a research site. This process is detailed and analysed in section 4.1.

B) Contextualise people's experiences in relation to the relevant policy domain and assess the scope of the issue

To situate a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach more firmly in the public policy domain, I have argued here that while some social issues may be resolved at the local scale in communities and institutions, it is important to develop ways of assessing with members of an emerging public whether the scope of the issue at hand requires engaging in policy discourse and influencing policy agendas. However, since marginalised groups and their issues are often not seen as legitimate actors in the policy domain, investigating the scale of the issues is entwined with understanding mobilisation bias and barriers to participation experienced by an emerging public. In practice, this entails developing methods that enable an emerging public to understand how existing publics policies construct them in and out of policy discourse, so they may articulate their experiences of policies that impact them and gain insights about the issues that concern them to discern whether they are publics issues that necessitate the attention of government (macro-level) or issues that may be resolved locally (micro-level).

C) Create conditions that enable the involvement of marginalized groups and therefore encourage public formation

As documented and theorised by agenda-setting theorists and feminist political theorists, the position of emerging publics on the margins, also means that forming a public is very difficult and likely to entail a struggle. Research in agenda-setting depicts how the policy process is highly institutionalized and systematically biased against marginalised groups who lack the expert knowledge of actors who are part of the policy community. Nonetheless, this literature also contributes insights into the causes of non-participation and therefore suggests opportunities for design researchers and policy researchers working with communities to rethink public involvement in terms of acknowledging and tackling systemic structural and cultural constraints.

As I argued earlier, Schattschneider's (1960) ideas about mobilisation bias, and the development of his work in more recent agenda setting research, shed light on how marginalized groups may overcome barriers that are constructed by more dominant groups. In this study, I attempt to mobilize with social tenants the tactic of *socialization*, which entails expanding the boundaries of a conflict to get more people with a stake in the matter involved is a means of persuading policymakers to address the issue. Critically, agenda-setting research suggests that through recognition of an issue by a wider group, a marginalized public may also gain legitimacy in the public sphere, thus making it more likely that their concern would be heard.

The proposed *publics-oriented participatory design* approach and practice, which I seek to develop a conceptualisation and operationalisation that is closer to Dewey's vision of invigorating democracy through participation, has the potential to introduce criticality to research at the intersection of design and policy since it integrates perspectives and insights from agenda-setting, feminist political theory and interpretivist policy analysis. In this thesis, I develop and investigate through analysis of design-inspired interventions, discourse, and an interpretivist-inspired policy analysis, possible implications and contributions of this approach for participatory design with emerging publics. Though the research in this thesis takes place at the community scale, close to where Dewey's indirect consequences take place, as part of a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach, my design-inspired interventions aim to explore whether local issues raised by research participants are ultimately a symptom of wider public issues that necessitate collective political action at the macro-level. In doing so within a real-life setting with a group of social housing tenants, I evaluate and refine understandings about the relationship between participatory design, public formation and the public policy domain and make

recommendations for the conceptualisation and application of a publics-frame in participatory design with emerging publics.

2.5.2 Research questions

Since the existing application of the publics-frame in participatory design research and practice tends to underplay the significance of publics as a tool for political action and potential route for marginalised groups to get involved in public policy discourse and agenda setting, I seek to investigate an alternative approach which is attentive to the constraints, opportunities, and processes of public involvement in the public policy domain. Drawing on insights from specific models and concepts in public policy literature and political theory, this study explored developing a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach with a potential public to investigate:

1. To what extent can a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach enable public involvement for marginalized groups in policy discourse and agenda setting?

This also enables me to investigate in greater depth:

2. To what extent is a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach suited for work with marginalised groups?

Taking a constructivist approach to answer these questions about the relevance of the publics-frame in participatory design, in my empirical practice-based work with an emerging public I considered how participatory design may negotiate the specific constraints that agenda and feminist theorists argue impede the capacity of marginalised groups to act collectively and politically. Thus, as I attempt to design for participation in collective political action, throughout the thesis, I explore an underlying question specific to the domain of social housing policy, which is central to the case study: How does the way social tenants are constructed in and out of social housing policy constrain and generate specific forms of public involvement?

Chapter 3- Methodology

3.1   Research approach and research design

An essential part of understanding methodology involves the researcher being explicit about her understanding of the world (ontology) and of how knowledge is generated in research (epistemology) (Blaikie, 2010). Some researchers propose that this is more important in cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, where disciplines may differ in their understandings and conventions about the nature of social reality and its knowability (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2013a). To answer my research questions, I adopted a constructivist worldview that is underpinned by both an abductive research approach (Blaikie, 2010), which is suitable for open-ended research (such as research with emerging publics) and an interpretive epistemological orientation (Yanow, 2007; Schaffer, 2015; Wagenaar, 2016), consistent with a research strategy that aims to foreground people's accounts of their lived reality as a basis for understanding a given social problem (Blaikie, 2010).

Adopting an abductive approach, the focus is on the meaning given by research participants to phenomena, or in other words, on their constructions of reality, based on their language, interpretations, and accounts of their everyday lives (Blaikie, 2018: 118). This approach does not take social phenomena as objective. Instead, it sees phenomena as influenced and shaped by participants' experiences and subjectivities. The researcher in this approach seeks to uncover and describe an 'insider' view of the phenomena. Digging deeper, the next stage in an abductive approach involves 'deriving categories and concepts that can form the basis for an understanding of the problem at hand' (Blaikie, 2018: 120). In this stage, social researchers Charmaz and Belgrave (2018) propose that an abductive strategy advocates the recognition of diverse and divergent perspectives, thus encouraging researchers to reason about irregularities in existing phenomena to develop hypotheses. This involves reasoning about the data and making theoretical conjectures, which in this study I checked and theorised through further generation of empirical data. Such an approach is combined here with inductive approaches, popular in policy analysis, which supplement understandings derived from participants by

contrasting them to empirical data the researcher collects from which generalisations can be made and theory developed.

A constructionist adaptation of grounded theory, developed by Charmaz (2010) is adopted here. This entails acknowledging that meaning is created through the interaction between the researcher and the phenomena (interpreter and interpreted) as situated in society. Thus, knowledge is understood as constructed rather than discovered informing the use of certain methods. In addition, the constructivist and interpretivist positions

3.2   Qualitative methodology and research design

Qualitative social research does not represent a monolithic, agreed-upon approach to research but is a diverse field with many perspectives and contradictions, practised across many disciplines. Generally, qualitative approaches are popular in social research due to their ability to explain relationships, individual experiences, and social realities (Blaikie, 2010). Grounding my research in a constructivist approach, which posits that our understandings and knowledge are socially constructed and therefore created through social interactions, relationships and experiences, helps focus my attention on people's experiences and perspectives of a societal issue and recognises that understanding of the world is constantly in flux as it is negotiated and renegotiated through our experience of social worlds. Thus a constructivist-informed methodology using an interpretive epistemological orientation is used here as a framework, which helps researchers understand what it is they are looking for and examining (Atkinson, 2017).

Focusing on marginalised groups and emerging publics and their formation through design-inspired interventions and an interpretivist policy analysis, I have chosen qualitative methods that allow themes to emerge from the data, thereby allowing individual experiences and interpretations shared to come through in the analysis and findings. Exploring the interaction between design-inspired practices and publics necessitates an in-depth understanding of contextual factors that contribute. Methods such as interviews, observations, and fieldwork, offer a rich and detailed exploration of

subjective experiences, social interactions and contextual societal factors shaping public formation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Empirical and interventionist methods

This qualitative research study mobilises empirical and interpretivist methods inspired by Scandinavian participatory design and uses an interpretivist-inspired policy analysis to understand and contextualise participants' relationships to the policy domain to investigate and theorise about the relationship between participatory design and public formation of marginalized groups. To answer my research questions, I have structured the research design into four central phases. The rationale for using qualitative research and the methods chosen will be detailed in the following section (Section 3.3 Methods).

Phase 1: **identifying research site and policy domain**

Building on my critique of the application of the publics-frame in the participatory design literature (Section 2.3.3), in phase 1, I aimed to articulate the application of publics more clearly by delineating a suitable research site for engagements with an emerging public, as detailed in Chapter 4. As in many community-based participatory design research using the publics-frame, this involved localising my engagements to a geographic area and identifying a shared issue of concern. Given this situated and embodied approach, which I justify later, I chose fieldwork methods and infrastructuring activities (Section 3.3.1), with two possible sites: first, a local community centre and later, an issue-based tenant group. These were documented in fieldnotes and memos, with memos being my reflections and thoughts. Based on a reflexive analysis of engagements at the local community centre I articulated my evolving understanding of the application of publics and how I sought to mitigate for weaknesses in existing approaches. The final criterion developed, which the Tenant Group met, consists of identifying a self-organised, newly formed group, identified with a shared potential public issue in a shared geographic area (see Table 4.1). Based on this criterion, which is consistent with a Dewey-informed understanding of publics as a tool for political action for marginalized groups, I chose to conduct all further research with the Tenant Group and withdrew from engagements with the community centre.

In the second part of Phase 1, to ensure the suitability of the social housing policy domain as a policy area for exploring a publics-oriented approach with a marginalised group I conducted desk research (Blaikie, 2018, p.32). Specifically, I reviewed literature in housing studies to understand patterns in public formation in the domain of social housing (Section 4.2.2); the specific historical and political context of social housing in the UK (Section 4.2.3); and formal tenant participation programmes (Section 4.2.4). This desk research also served to frame and situate my *publics-oriented participatory design* approach to the current state of knowledge on housing policy and public involvement in social housing issues. Further, drawing on taxonomies of tools for public policy interventions (e.g. Hood & Margetts, 2007; John, 2011), broadly outlined as top-down and bottom-up, I positioned publics as a bottom-up tool for influencing policy agendas.

Phase 2: Exploratory research

In Phase 2, presented in Chapter 5, I began my exploratory work with the Tenant Group to understand the local housing policy context in a rural region of the West Midlands and its possible impact on the Tenant Group at the centre of this study. I conducted desk research and meetings with the group's founder. Desk research served to locate and integrate data about the Tenant Group using housing reports from local district council (District Council, 2018); public sources (local newspaper articles); housing charity reports (Shelter, 2017, 2019); national statistics (English Housing Surveys, 2018, 2019); government departmental reports (MHCLG, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2020b); and government-commissioned reports on the state of rural housing (e.g. Best and Shucksmith, 2006; Taylor, 2008; Snelling, 2017; Baxter and Murphy, 2018). Lengthy two-hour meetings with the group's founder, documented in fieldnotes, helped identify central areas of concern, as well as concerns about lack of involvement from group members, including repeated cancellations of committee meetings due to illness. This informed a design-inspired activity with the group's founder to explore barriers to public involvement through making things. The session was documented in fieldnotes, photos of artefacts and a shared digital file. Reflexive analysis was used to draw out key findings and insights about barriers to publics involvement among Tenant Groups' members.

Table 3.1: Qualitative design-inspired research design across four phases, detailing focus of analysis, research questions, and methods applied

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
	(Chapter 4)	(Chapter 5)	(Chapter 6)	(Chapter 7 & 8)
	Identifying the research site and policy area	**Exploratory research – Entering the research site**	**Tenant's experience of housing policy**	**Design-inspired interventions - Cases 1 and 2**
Focus of analysis	Refining a set of criteria and application of concept of publics Assessing suitability of policy domain	Understanding policy context and its possible impact on Tenant Group	Understanding social tenants' experience of housing policy and identifying opportunities for design-inspired interventions.	Developing opportunities for public involvement in housing policy discourse through design-inspired interventions
Research Questions		To what extent is a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach suitable for marginalised groups?	To what extent is a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach suitable for marginalised groups?	To what extent can a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach enable public involvement for marginalised groups in policy discourse and agenda-setting?
Sub-questions	How to identify a suitable site for research into emerging publics and a publics-oriented approach?	What are barriers to social tenants' involvement in Tenant Group?	How are social tenants constructed in and out of public policy? How does this impact social tenants' public involvement?	
Methods	Fieldwork Reflexive analysis Desk research of policy domain	Desk research of local and rural housing landscape Design-inspired interventions Reflexive analysis	Interpretivist tenant-focused policy analysis Semi-structured interviews Constructivist grounded approach Desk research	Design-inspired interventions Constructivist grounded approach

Phase 3: Interpretivist-inspired policy analysis

In phase 3, presented in Chapter 6, I adapt a method from interpretivist policy analysis to analyse their perspectives and understanding of social housing categories and narratives. While a focus on marginalised groups' point of view, language, and understandings (experience near) is not new to participatory design, the interpretivist epistemological orientation in policy analysis also makes use of experience-distant concepts from the policy domain (Schaffer, 2015). In recruiting this method in a publics-oriented framework I aimed to identify assumptions and gaps between informal and formal perspectives and constructions of the social housing policy; contextualise participants' experience in relation to policy categories and discourse; and identify opportunities for challenging existing barriers to promote public involvement.

Following a method used in the interpretivist policy analysis literature, I identified a central policy category (tenure) and housing narrative (idealisation of homeownership) to interrogate. As in the literature, I employed semi-structured interviews to gather data about social tenants' experience of social housing and query, 1) how are social tenants constructed in and out of public housing policy? and 2) how does this impact the propensity of social tenants to get involved with an emerging housing public? Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. To answer these questions, I used a constructivist grounded theory approach and conducted a collective analysis of all transcripts to identify central themes and subthemes from the data. In analysing the data and articulating implications for potential design-inspired interventions, I referred to the policy research focusing on the construct of tenure and narrative idealising ownership to identify assumptions and gaps.

Phase 4: Design-inspired Case Studies 1 and 2

In Phase 4, presented in Chapter 7, I built on findings from phases 2 and 3 and developed with the Tenant Group conditions for public involvement by planning design-inspired interventions focusing on an issue raised by group members – social housing selloffs. In Case Study 1, design-inspired activities (including a card sorting activity and collective inquiry activity) were developed in collaboration with the group founder as part of a kick-off event. However, due to limited interest, the event was cancelled. Thus, reflexive analysis of this aborted event, based on feedback from two committee members who

chose not to attend the kick-off event, sheds light on the complex process of public formation for marginalised groups.

These insights informed Case Study 2 which involved a more collaborative process of articulating, planning and developing with all three committee members methods of engaging group members in the collective investigation of the same issue which they could not remedy locally through interactions with the local housing association. In engagements with committee members, I employed design-inspired methods of card sorting, planning a mapping activity and tales of consequence (Table 3.3) which were documented by me in photos and field notes. These design-inspired interventions, informal conversations with committee members, and the actions or inactions that followed form the data for Case 2. Using constructivist grounded theory method, I analysed the Case Studies 1 and 2, integrating discussion of previous research phases, and arriving at new understandings about tensions in the *publics-oriented participatory design* approach and in the process of public formation. In the following chapter (Chapter 8) discuss the extent to which the *publics-oriented participatory design* approach trialled here enabled or undermined public involvement and consider implications for interventions with marginalised groups.

Selection and recruiting – Tenant Group (all research phases)

As reported in housing studies (e.g. Thurber and Fraser, 2016; McKee, 2018; Jones, Lowe and West, 2019), recruiting participants from marginalised groups is challenging due to distrust of authority figures. To counter this, I used snowball recruitment using personal introductions to obtain an initial meeting with potential participants. Through contacts at Citizens Advise, who worked in community outreach, I was introduced to the Tenant Group founder, and she, subsequently, introduced me to four other group members who also agreed to take part in my study (n=4). All were social housing tenants living in a rural area in the Midlands, and were committee members, though with varied levels of engagement with the group. To counteract selection bias, where only the most active members of the group participated, and to access the perspective of individuals who were not interested in joining the Tenant Group, I managed to recruit two social tenants who were not group members but had the same landlord. Again, I was introduced to the two participants through a colleague at Citizens Advice. These two non-members in a sense

represent in this thesis the 'silent majority' of social tenants who do not participate in issue-based action groups. Though one of the non-members, Kate, had been homeless for over 12 months at the time of our first meeting, she had previously been a social tenant at HA-x. Both women had not heard of the Tenant Group before meeting me, nor did they subsequently choose to join the Tenant Group. In addition, through these interviews, research participants also gave third-person accounts relating to their children (n=6), partners (n=3), siblings (n=6), and parents (n=6), thus bringing in research participants' interpretations of the experiences of different generations and more hard-to-reach individuals (e.g. individuals with substance dependencies, physical disabilities and more). While I refer to these in my analysis, these are not considered a part of the sample.

Though not claiming or aiming for a representative sample, based on county-wide data on the demographic of social tenants in the West Midlands (MHCLG, 2019), as illustrated in Table 3.2, the demographic traits of this small sample (n=6) are consistent with trends among social housing tenant in England. This includes, a high proportion of women, older age groups (50+), employment status and type of social housing accommodation.

Table 3.2 – Contrasting demographic traits of housing research participants to social housing tenants in England

	Research participants Tenant Group members (n=4) Not in Tenant Group (n=2)	**Social housing tenants** **in England**
Gender	1 Male 5 Female	28% Male-led household 72% Female-led
Employment status	Employed – Part (2) Full (1) Retired (1) Unemployed (1) Unable to work (2)	38% Employed 30% Retired 20% Unemployed 20% Unable to work
*Type of accommodation	General (4) Supported (1) Secure (1) Homeless (1)	General 75% Supported 15 % Secure 10%

Statistics from English Housing Survey 2018-2019 (MHCLG, 2019)

* Types of accommodation definitions: General Needs - Housing stock serving general needs, includes both self-contained and shared housing. Supported Housing - Housing with special design facilities or features targeted at tenants that require support, for example housing designed for older people. Secure Housing - Housing designed to accommodate daily and ongoing needs of the elderly or those with special needs so they may live independently.

Nonetheless, given the limitations of such a small sample size, I attempted to recruit more research participants from the Tenant Group through social media posts. However, though these were posted by trusted group committee members, recruiting was unsuccessful but also mirrored the experience of the group's committee. Though qualitative research typically seeks to increase its generalisability by drawing on many data sources (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2006), in the context of design-related research a less lengthy process of data generation is sufficient. As argued by design researchers using methodologies from the social sciences (e.g., design ethnography), an orientation to fragments of data often 'suffices' if the crucial work of analysis (that yields insights about the design context, the user needs and implications for design) is carried out with rigour (Buur and Sitorus, 2007; Halse, 2008). In addition, allowing for feedback and refinements about the methods developed and analysis of data through an iterative design process can compensate for a small sample by incorporating ongoing iterations (Sanders and Stappers, 2008).

3.3 Methods

In this section I describe in greater detail the rationale for my methods, the process of data collection and the approach taken to analyse the data. Methods are informed by a constructivist approach using an interpretivist epistemological method for data analysis.

3.3.1 Fieldwork

To determine an appropriate research site and propose a new application of the publics construct in participatory design, I conducted fieldwork over several months. As in most community-based participatory design research using the publics-frame I chose to conduct my research in a specific locality. This is informed by the logic of place-based research (Cottam and Leadbeater, 2004; Neese, 2015) which posits that in a common geographic setting where people lead their daily lives, they are likely to interact with similar actors and institutions and encounter similar unresolved issues – especially if they share other characteristics associated with geographic location, such as living in social housing or living in a particular kind of community. Though, I recognise that technology-mediated groups can form virtual communities around a shared public issue

(Boler, 2008; Deville, 2016), and STS research into publics has explored these on an international scale (Marres, 2005), in this study I chose an embodied and situated approach (Simonsen, 2014), which enables me to leverage my knowledge of local issues and actors arising from of my years of volunteer work as a generalist advisor at the local Citizens Advice.

Given this situated and embodied approach, I chose fieldwork methods and infrastructuring activities (Section 3.3.1), with two possible sites: first, a local community centre and later, an issue-based tenant group, before choosing to focus on the latter. I became aware of both of these sites through my volunteer work at Citizens Advice and my knowledge of the area. The local community centre was well-reputed, and Citizens Advice offered a weekly drop-in service there, though not one I was a part of. Meanwhile, I was made aware of the Tenant Group as their founder had invited Citizens Advice to attend their first meeting, though no one did.

Data collection

Fieldwork at the community centre and with the Tenant Group involved ongoing infrastructuring (Star and Ruhleder, 1996) which consisted of initiating contact with group members and other relevant actors through emails and face-to-face meetings, and meeting and interviewing group members and negotiating the framing and purpose of participatory design-inspired interventions for the group. Infrastructuring is understood from the perspective of design literature where it is described as laying foundations and understandings between participants, designer researchers, and stakeholders to enable the development of collaborative design work (Björgvinsson et al, 2012; Le Dantec and DiSalvo, 2013; Le Dantec, 2016; Le Dantec, 2016; Jenkins et al, 2016). In this study, this consisted of negotiating possible collaborations, informal conversations to understand people's concerns, co-developing proposals for activities to explore common concerns, building relationships with stakeholders and agreeing on ways of working together. This work was conducted at the local community centre and subsequently with the Tenant Group.

At the community centre, contact was initially made with the Centre's director to introduce myself and my research and agree on whether and how I may proceed to

investigate a possible collaboration without unsettling the members of the centre. The centre's director welcomed my proposal to explore possibilities for engaging the centre's users (as they are referred to in the Centre) in exploring a particular policy issue through activities of collaborative making. To properly set expectations, I clarified to the director and to those I engaged with that I was examining one other possible research site and would decide if to proceed after a month of preliminary work. To ensure ethical practice, it was agreed with the Director that I would coordinate and conduct my activities with Jack, the Community Centre's full-time community development worker (Fieldnote, 14.8.18).

To sense check interest and build a rapport with the club members I attended four weekly Circle of Tea club led by Jack (Fieldnote, 24.8.18) and stayed to chat with club users at the Community Centre café. My fieldwork consisted of participant observation at the Circle of Team meetings, group conversations co-facilitated with Jack (Circle of Tea, 2 meetings), and meetings at the community centre café with four users who expressed interest in the project. Interested users were given the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) which was explained and asked to a sign a Consent Form (Appendix D). Visits to the Community Centre and meetings were documented in **fieldnotes** immediately after my visits to elicit more detail. Upon consultation with Jack, when at the centre I was careful not to take any notes, which he believed would draw suspicion and make people uncomfortable. This decision is reinforced by the literature which suggests that notetaking may create distance between research and those studied.

Data analysis

Reflexive analysis of the exploratory session and the case studies was used to analyse and unravel the possible impact of my presence, and the design-inspired interventions. As part of reflexive practice, Holliday stresses the importance of writing which he describes in qualitative research as an unfolding story because it is "an interactive process in which [the writer] tries to untangle and make reflexive sense of her own presence and role in the research" (Holliday 2007, p.12). Holiday recommends writing research in first person as this enables the voice and person of the researcher as a writer to become an ingredient of the written study but also forces greater clarity.

3.3.2 Interpretivist-inspired policy analysis

The interpretivist approach to policy analysis developed as a critique of more positivist approaches to policy analysis, is useful in the framework of a more *publics-oriented participatory design* approach because of its focus on citizens' experiences, perspectives, and their understanding of social policy issues (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2013a; 2013b). More broadly and ambitiously, some interpretivist scholars argue that this method may enhance democratic processes and make policy analysis more inclusive (Wagenaar, 2015, 2016; Rhodes, 2018), an outcome that is consistent with the publics-frame investigated in this thesis.

Proponents of interpretivist policy analysis argue that it may stimulate meaningful communication about social issues (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2006; Bevir, Rhodes and Newman, 2015; Rhodes, 2018) and create the conditions for mutual understanding (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2013a; 2013b) as it challenges the underlying assumptions of policymakers and policies with the experiences and practices of their marginalised groups (Lin 2000; Wagenaar 2011: 298). In choosing to conduct an interpretivist-inspired tenant-oriented policy analysis as a method in a *publics-oriented participatory design* project, I am attentive to how inquiry can instigate a process of discovery for participants and may be experienced as an exploratory stage for an emerging public. In addition, I am also guided by the design principles of participation and knowledge (Yanow, 2007; Weimer and Vining, 2011; Wagenaar, 2016). These emphasise the right of those impacted by design to take part in its design and acknowledge and harness the benefit of their local knowledge to this endeavour.

In sum, interpretivist policy analysis typically aims to challenge conventional framing and underlying assumptions of problems, constructs, and narratives in public policy. In doing so, this method also exposes the construction of meaning by individuals studied, while also recognising the researcher's part in the construction of meaning (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2006; Bevir, Rhodes and Newman, 2015; Rhodes, 2018). Thus, I argue that methods developed in interpretivist policy analysis are suitable in the framework of a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach which takes a constructivist approach and aims to contextualize and understand how participants are constructed and constrained

in the policy domain in which they seek to operate in order to enable them to engage in policy discourse and agenda setting

Given the aim of publics-oriented design to contextualize local issues in the policy domain, I chose to adopt an approach used in interpretivist policy analysis where researchers critique and contest formal policy categories or narratives to reveal their multiple and divergent meanings and implications to those impacted (Jacobs and Manzi, 2000; Ingram and Schneider, 2015; Yanow, 2015). In this literature, p*olicy categories* are understood as a device that helps policymakers shape a policy domain by breaking it down into categories that give a socio-technical account of relationships between people and societal issues (Cowan et al, 2010; Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010). Meanwhile, *policy narratives* are understood as stories that governments and the policy community develop to explain and justify these policy categories, policy agendas and related policy programmes and policies (Stone, 1989; Atkinson, 2000). Importantly, in the interpretivist approach to policy analysis, these categories and narratives are not seen as objective and objectifiable phenomena as in the positivist tradition, but as contested and unstable. Thus, it is recognised that though constructing policy categories to define policy issues and possible target groups is integral to policymaking (Ingram and Schneider, 2015), these categories and narratives are not neutral and therefore exposing their biases and contradictions is informative (Jacobs and Manzi, 2000; Ingram and Schneider, 2015; Yanow, 2015). Moreover, since governments use policy categories and narratives to legitimise political and social action or inaction (Atkinson, 2000; Meyer, 2005) and the inclusion or exclusion of certain actors (Jacobs et al, 1999), this approach to interpretivist policy analysis is relevant for a study that explores barriers and routes to public involvement in the public policy domain.

Data collection - Semi-structured interviews

To explore the social construction of policy categories and narratives and their impact, interpretivist policy researchers either conduct a detailed discourse analysis of texts (e.g., policy briefs, party platforms) or analyse semi-structured interviews with citizens (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2006; Yanow, 2007). Though studies using discourse analysis offer insights into the evolving conceptions of policy categories and rhetorical

strategies employed by policymakers, they focus solely on secondary sources and formal sources which exclude the perspective of those impacted (Wagenaar, 2015). Thus, in this study, I chose to conduct an interpretivist policy analysis using semi-structured interviews, as in interview-based interpretivist policy analysis investigating austerity (Bevir and Rhodes, 2015; Killick, 2018) and debt (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012). Since members of marginalised groups may not be confident and equipped to talk about specific housing services, policies or processes (McKee, 2011), semi-structured are useful as they involve a loosely structured approach that allows for the participants to elaborate more openly on what is important to them, within the given interest of the project (Alversson, 2003). This flexibility also permits the researcher to follow up on responses, probe deeper, and adapt questions as necessary (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). In addition, since establishing a rapport and creating a comfortable atmosphere during the interview can encourage honest and open responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) I did not conduct the interviews in the first meeting and also always allowed the participants to decide where to hold the interview.

To choose the central categories and narratives for investigation I reviewed the housing studies literature and housing policy reports. In this literature, scholars identify the theoretical construct of tenure as one of the primary organising categories of the UK housing system (Cowan et al, 2010; Cowan, 2011). Tenure categories formally define people's relationship to different kinds of accommodation and differentiate between the legal rights and responsibilities of these tenure groups (Cowan, 2011). Tenure categories have been used by the UK government for decades to design and implement housing policies (Cowan, 2011; MCLGH, 2019). Social housing policy issues and the people whom they affect are routinely seen through the tenure category (Cowan et al, 2010; Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010; DCLG, 2017; Ministry of Housing, 2018) and data on tenure has systematically been collected by the government through the English Housing Survey since 1967 (DCLG, 2017). Coupled with the tenure category, I chose to focus on the homeownership narrative (Gurney, 1999; Flint, 2003). As I elaborate later in my discussion of the historical and political context of social housing policy (Section 5.2.1), the narrative of homeownership, which was spearheaded in the late 1970s by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, articulates and justifies the policy agendas, preferences and programmes that encourage and support home ownership.

While presented as rational, objective and backed by data in policy discourse, the ownership narrative is also prevalent in popular discourse (McKee, 2010; Robertson, 2017; Savills, 2018), and therefore an issue that most people would have an opinion about. Though tenure technically describes a legal consumer category (Cowan, 2011), tenure has come to be associated with other meanings in the wider socio-political, economic and cultural discourse in which they are embedded (Flint, 2004; McKee, 2011). Thus, I concluded that given the centrality and longevity of the tenure category and ownership narrative in UK housing policy; their popular purchase in public policy and popular discourse; and their broader socio-political meaning, investigating social tenants' perspective on these constructs can be insightful for examining how they see their roles and relationship to housing policy and understand their agency in this complex policy domain.

In sum, the tenant-oriented policy analysis aimed to:

> (1) Understand how social tenants see themselves in relation to housing policy
>
> (2) Assess how the construction of social let tenure (through tenure categories and narratives) impacts the propensity of social tenants to take part in collective political action.
>
> (3) Inform and spark ideas for possible design-inspired interventions in this domain.

Analysis along these lines comprised assessing to what extent tenants accept, reject or adapt specific tenure categories and narratives based on analysis of interview transcripts and notes (Section 6.2). Secondly, I developed a schematic layout of central factors which research participants reported as impacting social tenants' sense of security to analyse gaps between formal policies and tenants' perceptions which may be investigated through design (Section 6.3: Implications for participatory design interventions).

To avoid a situation where research participants felt that they were being tested or judged, my semi-structured interview consisted of three kinds of interview techniques (see Appendix H: interview protocol). In the first section, I asked brief 'complete the sentence' format questions. These were used to elicit quick responses of their

impressions of specific housing-policy constructs and actors (e.g., housing associations, housing policy, stigma). Participants were encouraged to say 'whatever pops into your mind' with the intent of making participants feel more at ease as responses can be based on gut feeling and indeed, were often playful or provocative. In the second section of the interview, I asked an open narrative question to encourage storytelling ('Starting with your childhood, describe to me where you have lived and the kind of housing'). Narrative questions are considered ideal for eliciting assumptions, feelings and knowledge embedded in a person's life but that are difficult for interviewees to access directly, especially if bother interviewee and researcher are not aware of them (Wengraf, 2001). Throughout their housing narrative, I prompted interviewees to give specific examples and stories to explain some statements and assumptions thus eliciting nuanced personal stories about their experiences, and often those of family and friends, living in different types of housing. Finally, in the closing section of the interview, when interviewees were more at ease, I focused on their relationship to the Tenant Group and their perspective on activism, asking more specific questions about their interests, engagement and experience, if any with issue-based groups.

To improve the rigour of data collection and subsequent analysis, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and always took place after I had already met the participant at least once, introduced myself and my research and established some basic rapport with the participant.

Data analysis - Constructivist Grounded theory

Grounded theory is an inductive, emergent method which researchers can use to conceptualize their data and through an ongoing process of checking and refining major categories to develop and ground insights in the data collected. Since its introduction by Glaser and Strauss (1967) who adopted a realist stance which assumed reality is fixed and is out there to be discovered, many variants and associated epistemologies have been developed. In this study, I adopt a constructivist grounded theory approach, advanced by Kathy Charmaz (2010) which assumes that data is co-constructed by researchers and research participants. This approach is suitable for the study of marginalized groups as it enables bringing in the perspectives and understandings of marginalised groups on the margins of the policy-making process. More broadly, the approach recognises the

complex interactions at different stages of the research process between the researcher, participant, method and data which can shape the content and interpretation of the data. Critically, according to Levers (2013), though Charmaz articulates a position of multiple social realities she also refers to an empirical world, thus allowing for some inductive grounded theory strategies to be integrated in the analysis of data. In my analysis I was interested in exploring participants' experiences and perspectives of constructs of tenure categories and narratives, which were then refined to smaller categories to give more context (e.g. 'barriers to participation', 'distrust of authorities' 'internalising stigma', 'coping with stigma').

The analysis adopted an intertextual approach to analysing the data (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2013a). This involved an attentiveness to aspects of different participants' interpretations which, in a sense, speak to each other as they expose different perspectives, assumptions, relationships and actions concerning how participants experience and interact with policy categories and narratives. In addition, I continuously engaged in reflexive analysis of my own role as a researcher in relation to the data, interrogating how the data may have been shaped by my assumptions (Nader, 2011; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.15). Drawing on research from housing studies and housing policy research, I contrasted formal tenure categories and narratives with their meaning and significance to research participants. This approach aims to unsettle taken-for-granted categories and narratives and better understand how social tenants see themselves in relation to housing policy (aim 1).

Though interpretivist analysis can never be definitive (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2015) and is inevitably shaped by the researcher's own position and subjectivity (a point I return to in section 4.3), triangulating data from housing studies and housing policy allows for greater reflexivity and criticality (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2013a; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). To mitigate my influence and give interviewees a voice in the interpretation of the data collected (Mishler, 1991), committee group members, whose emails I had, received a transcription of the interview to allow them to correct and elaborate on their perspective and experiences. The two social tenants who were not in the group chose not to continue with the research project and out of respect for their wishes I did not seek to obtain their email addresses so I could send them a transcription.

Since the themes of the interviews resurfaced in later interactions with interviewees, participants were able to steer the meaning given to previous design-inspired interventions (Mishler, 1991). Further, desk research and secondary sources of data were used in the content analysis of these transcribed interviews to triangulate the data and to contrast, verify and locate participants' accounts (Warren, 2002; Wengraf, 2001).

3.3.3 Design-inspired interventions

In assessing the relevance and application of the concept of Deweyan publics in the domain of participatory design, and exploring a more *publics-oriented participatory design* approach, this thesis undertakes qualitative research and design-inspired methods to theorise about the complex process of public making. I draw inspiration from research through design, which is an umbrella term to describe diverse forms and methodologies of design research where the inquiry takes place through a process of designing (Frayling,1993; Cross, 1999; Buchanan, 2001; Frankel and Racine, 2010). Since my engagements with the Tenant Group did not involve designing a service or product, I cautiously refer to my approach as design-inspired. In adopting this approach, I follow Horváth (2007) and Stappers et al (2018)[20] who propose that research through design, which they contrast with practice-based research, is more inclined to theory as it aims to gain theoretical knowledge in addition to exploring the phenomenon. This is consistent with an approach proposed by design researcher Bruce Archer, and adopted here, who argues that research through design is suitable in 'circumstances where the best or only way to shed light on a proposition, a principle, a material, a process or a function is to attempt to construct something or to enact something, calculated to explore, embody or test it' (1995: 11).

Data collection

Activities for the interventions were informed by existing empirical and theoretical design research about making publics that use material and critical methods of making and discourse (Ehn, 2008; Telier, 2011; Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012; DiSalvo et al., 2014; Atzmon and Boradkar, 2017). Design-inspired interventions entailed a variety

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[20] Horváth refers to research through design as design-inclusive research. To minimise confusion, I do not adopt his terminology.

of activities from making design things to eliciting discourse and critique of the current state of social housing and public involvement, to activities that visualise and contextualise social issues (See Table 3.3). Design things are understood broadly, as proposed by Emilson and Hillgren (2014), as not only comprising designed objects but also design workshops, public debates, photos and digital sharing platforms

Table 3.3: Design-inspired methods applied in the thesis

Activity	Description	Aim	Research phase
Making things	Making representations of object cues listed in 'Home visits guideline to case workers'	To explore barriers to public involvement among social tenants. To generate ideas about how to engage group members in collective action.	Phase 2- Exploratory research
Shared co-designed document (using google-docs)	Using a shared digital document of artefacts made (previous activity) where participants can continue discussion	To elicit reflection about previous activity on barrier to public involvement	Phase 2- Exploratory research
"Who knows what?" activity	Card sorting activity to explore with participants their understanding of central sources of knowledge about social housing	To elicit discussion about how social tenants 'research' an issue and generate ideas about new sources and approaches	Phase 4 – Cases 1 and 2
Mapping	Mapping of things and processes	To contextualise the issue of social housing selloffs	Phase 4 – Cases 1 and 2
"Tales of consequence"	Telling stories of direct and indirect consequences of things on imagined map of social housing in the area	To contextualise the issue of social housing selloffs and make it into a matter of concern	Phase 4 – Cases 1 and 2
FOI challenge workshop	Co-design a collective inquiry method using Freedom of Information (FOI) requests through public digital platform WhatDoTheyKnow.com	To develop collective methods of inquiry and challenge existing relationships in housing domain	NOT implemented

In Phase 2, as part of the exploratory research, I developed a making design things activity to elicit conversations and insights about barriers to social tenants. In Phase 4, other design-inspired interventions, used in Cases 1 and 2, consisted of adaptations of popular design research methods, such as a card sorting activity and a mapping activity (Kumar, 2013). Such design-inspired activities are suitable for an investigation of public making in that they encourage participants to articulate and apply their local knowledge to understand highly situated aspects of the issue under investigation (Simonsen, 2014). Thus, collaborative making activities were used as scaffolding for discourse which was extended over time through the sharing of images of artefacts made and informal conversations. This reflects findings that such activities create context awareness from participants by eliciting varied and rich views, emotions, anecdotes, and explanations about the explored context (Visser et al., 2005).

A *making things* activity that used situated artefacts (e.g. a formal guide) to deconstruct the participant formal concepts and relationships and reinterpret them from multiple perspectives was planned and facilitated by me in Phase 2, the exploratory session. Photographed images of the design objects were posted for the participant on Google Docs. This co-created shared document elicited further conversations and insights thus enabling further discursive content analysis to draw insights for future actions.

A *card sorting activity* popular in interactive design research (Kumar, 2013) and called here 'Who know what?' was adapted and trialled in Case 1 and implemented again in Case 2 to explore participants' understandings of central sources of knowledge about social housing and generate discussions about how they operate in this space.

The planning of a *mapping activity* used in Case 2, was adapted from similar approaches in the literature (Kumar, 2013; Keane et al., 2014; Hanington and Martin, 2019). The aim was to develop. tactile and accessible means of contextualising the issue of social housing selloffs and modelling to participants the possible consequences and dependencies involved in a specific housing issue.

A *storytelling activity* (called here 'tales of consequence'), which was not pre-planned, but developed in situ, I utilised Dewey's concept of direct and indirect consequences and asked what the direct and indirect consequences of a particular housing issue through stories about housing. This activity recalls generative methods popular in industry which are used to tap tacit knowledge and latent needs (Sanders, 2001). Here it was used to encourage participants to rethink the scope of the issue they were looking at. This process of contextualising the issue recalls an approach in science and technology studies which researchers Callon et al (2011, p.82) describe as making 'an inventory of what is at stake'.

Though the design-inspired interventions with the Tenant Group took place at a community scale, close to where Dewey's indirect consequences take place, in keeping with the public policy orientation, the design-inspired interventions in this thesis were developed not only to articulate the issues but also to determine with participants the scope of the issue and whether their local issues necessitated engaging in public policy discourse.

Data analysis

Theorizing about design practice and research as case studies, according to Friedman (2003), enables the design practitioner and researcher to move beyond a succession of unique design interventions to a broader understanding of underlying principles and relationships. This helps theorise about a particular problem and possibly solve similar problems (Friedman, 2003). Brandt and Binder (2007) refer to this as 'meta-design knowledge', a body of knowledge about design inquiry and practice, which they propose is especially suited for theorising about design processes and therefore is suitable for a critique of *publics-oriented participatory design.* Building on themes from the interpretive policy analysis, I used a constructivist grounded approach (Charmaz, 2000; Charmaz and Belgrave, 2018). Transcripts and notes were annotated and analysed allowing broad themes to emerge. *Reflexive analysis* of the case studies was used to analyse the design-inspired interventions and unravel the possible impact of my presence.

Lastly, to contextualize data collected from design-inspired interventions with Tenant Group members and increase the rigour of the research design, I conducted *desk research*

to find secondary data sources on public policy processes and content. By drawing on empirical research in agenda-setting, housing studies and government reports on housing policy I was able to use secondary research to triangulate findings from my primary research and identify and analyse where these align and diverge (Koskinen et al., 2011; Simonsen, 2014b).

Table 3.4: Data types across research phases

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
	Identifying the research site and policy area	**Exploratory research – Entering research site**	**Tenant's experience of housing policy**	**Design interventions - Cases 1 and 2**
Methods	Fieldwork Reflexive analysis Desk research of policy domain	Desk research of policy domain Design-inspired activity Reflexive analysis	Interpretivist tenant-focused policy analysis Semi-structured interviews Constructivist grounded theory	Design-inspired activities Constructivist grounded theory
Primary types of data	Fieldnotes Memos	Photos of artefacts Shared doc comments Fieldnotes	Transcripts – semi-structured interviews	Photos of activity (card sorting) Fieldnotes
Secondary types of data	Academic research Policy research Community centre newsletter	Academic research Policy research News media	Academic research Policy research	

3.4 Ethical considerations, reflexivity and positionality

This study has been reviewed by Central Saint Martin's College Research Degrees Sub-

Committee and was found to meet the University's Code of Practice on Research Ethics. In addition, it is recognised here that in social research, ethical concerns which permeate all stages of the research process (including data accessed, generated and analysed), are not always predicted and may arise throughout the research process. Moreover, it is recognised that this research process is inevitably filtered through the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). These factors necessitate exercising reflexivity in the research process, as well as transparency on the part of the researcher concerning their positionality.

Reflexivity and positionality

Reflexivity is increasingly recognized as a crucial strategy in the process of generating knowledge utilising qualitative research (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Blaikie, 2010; Berger, 2015; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Reflexive research practice requires the researcher to examine their own beliefs, judgement and practice based on their background, namely their positionality, and assess how this might influence the research process (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). As a PhD student of middle-class upbringing who was not born or raised in the UK, I was foreign, or 'other', to research participants on many levels. This may have impacted the research process and outcomes in multiple ways, including impacting the relationship with participants; their willingness to share their experiences openly (De Tona, 2006); and the way that I frame their issues, the language used, and questions asked (Berger, 2015). To mitigate this, I have embraced reflexive analysis to monitor my assumptions, biases and relationship with participants as a means of enhancing the rigour of my research and its ethics.

Reflexivity is crucial throughout all phases of the research process, including the formulation of a research question, identifying, and accessing the research site, collecting data, analysing and writing. To maintain this critical self-awareness throughout the research process I detailed in my notes my reasoning, judgement and emotional reactions to different dilemmas and events and adapted my approach and methods accordingly. For instance, in searching for an appropriate research site to explore the formation of publics through engagements in participatory design, I came to the realisation that my search approach was too deterministic as I either assumed an issue would trigger a public or sought to create the setting for public formation through design-inspired interventions

which meant these may have never occurred without out intervention. To counter this, I concluded that to not have over influence on the research site, I would need to seek out a group of citizens who by their own accord came together to form a group which sought to address a particular area of concern to them all. In this way, I avoided determining the formation of a group and its areas of interest and hoped to collaborate with a group that was motivated and active in shaping its strategy. A reflexive approach to my design research was crucial to helping me avoid established approaches in design that use 'issues' or 'problems' as a starting point to solving participants' problems (Pihkala & Karasti, 2016).

As someone who did not share the background and experience of social tenants, to gain access and trust of Tenant Group members, I initially emphasised my three years' experience of volunteer work at the local office of Citizens Advice (CA) where I was exposed to the hardships that local social tenants faced. However, to set realistic expectations for my involvement, I emphasised my role with the group as one of a researcher, not an advisor or an activist. This included for the sake of transparency clarifying my research goals and the limited scope and time frame of my engagement with them as determined by my research goals. Further, while my exposure to how welfare policies sometimes demoralised rather than empowered vulnerable groups, motivated me to embark on this PhD research, I was highly aware that these issues did not in any way impact me directly. Thus, I took into consideration any possible risk to participants, asked for feedback throughout and adapted my research approach, activities and language in response to concerns they expressed about safeguarding, privacy and relations with powerful stakeholders.

In addition, using critical thinking about the design process and roles within it to assess my practice (Kettley, Kettley and Lucas, 2017) led me to reassess the impact of my affiliation with Citizens Advice, where I was still volunteering when I began my research with the group. While I was keen not to impose on the group a particular 'issue' to focus on or come up with a particular solution to their difficulties, through interaction with participants I became increasingly aware of the climate of distrust of institutions and authority figures among social housing tenants. This included, for some, CA, which was known to work closely with powerful stakeholders and was funded by the local council on specific projects related to social housing. Thus, I decided to leave CA in order to

uncomplicate my role and reaffirm my positioning as a researcher with transparent motives, allegiance and domain of expertise.

Lastly, I would add that while my 'outsider' position aroused some suspicion about my motives, my foreignness also conferred some advantages. First, it allowed me to ask seemingly obvious questions without appearing to be condescending, rude, or judgemental. This helped to undermine taken-for-granted categories, assumptions, and common knowledge, thereby slowing down the inquiry and giving space for alternative understandings (Stengers, 2005). Isabelle Stengers (2005, 994) attributes this strategy to the cultural role of the so-called 'idiot'. This method is beneficial to re-evaluating the meaning and use of words and idioms and exploring interpretations of norms, beliefs and categories that are somewhat taboo in British society (e.g. class, racism) yet are relevant to understanding social tenants in the UK. In addition, my being 'stupid' confers to participants the role of 'expert', which can be an empowering experience (Mishler, 1991) and makes participants appreciate the knowledge they hold.

Further measures taken to mitigate the impact of my positionality and relationship to participants in the research, included using multiple forms of triangulation that build on each other to improve the reflexivity, validity and credibility of the findings. Triangulation is effective in that it encourages the researcher to take multiple perspectives in answering the research questions and can include methodological, data, and theoretical triangulation (Flick, 2018). Data triangulation refers to the combination of data from different sources, times, places and people (Fick, 2018). The data used in my analysis came from different sources, from secondary academic or policy sources to data collected and generated through my fieldwork and based on observation, interviews and written materials collected throughout the study and at times involving follow-up conversations with the central participants. For example, interview-based data was triangulated with empirical data from reputable sources (e.g. peer-reviewed journals or government policy reports) (Mishler, 1991). Similarly, using multiple methods to understand different perspectives on the subject under investigation enabled me to compare and critique insights from observations, informal conversations, interviews, and written data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Theoretical triangulation was also employed to critically evaluate the data with multiple perspectives and hypotheses in mind. Since I drew on three central theories – participatory design, agenda-setting and feminist

theories – to understand public involvement this involved regularly conducting theoretical comparisons between what phenomena and findings the different theories explain or do not explain. In some cases, I have drawn on different aspects of the different theories to explain a finding more holistically.

In addition, by quickly processing the data generated through critical notetaking, transcribing and analysing, I was able to critique my own reactions, thoughts and emotions and attempt to correct my approach, methods, and biases where needed. Additional strategies to maintain reflexivity included engaging participants in conversations about the research process to check for any misunderstandings and biases on my part. Lastly, writing about my research I chose to use first-person language (Berger, 2015). This forced me to be very clear about my role and relationship with participants and be specific about the rationale behind my decisions and my actions and their consequences.

Anonymity

Taking into account the preferences of participants in this study, all identifying traits or markers of the research site, research participants and organisations involved have been omitted to protect participants' anonymity (Tsai et al, 2016). While this safeguards participants it also, regretfully, robs those who took part from gaining recognition and possibly exposure for their efforts. In conducting the research, I was acutely aware that participants risked possible detrimental consequences by participating and was respectful of the boundaries that participants set. In this case, participants expressed fear of retaliation from the housing association, a situation which impacted the work of the Tenant Group. In this respect, as noted by Sangiorgi (2011), marginalised groups involve a greater responsibility for design researchers.

Transparency

It should be noted that the Facebook forum used by the Tenant Group is not used as a source of data for this study. My engagement on the forum was solely to provide background information for my research project, which was introduced on the forum by the group founder through a push notification, sent to all members of the group unrelated

to the group feed. The notification introduced my project under the name Housing Justice and clarified who I was, my interest in the groups' activities, my motive for engaging with them, what I proposed to do, and in what time frame. Those who were interested in participating or wanted to hear more were invited to contact me or the group founder directly, and those who were not, did not have to do a thing. With one exception (analysed in 7.3.2), throughout the project, messages to the forum about the research project were posted by the group founder. These communications signalled the worthiness of the group and its activities as a subject of academic interest and highlighted the founder's support and involvement with the research project, which I assumed gave legitimacy and credibility to me and my project. None of the content on the Forum is used in my analysis. Rather, having access to the Forum gave me access to updates about group activities, allowed me to see Nicole's messages about my research project and gave me a sense of the ebbs and flows in member engagement on the site as discussed by the committee members.

In closing, this chapter has discussed the multi-disciplinary methodologies, methods and explorations to be used to answer my research question about the extent to which a new *publics-oriented participatory design* approach might create opportunities for marginalised groups to find their agency in a complex policy domain. In the following chapters, I explain the process by which I delineated the criterion for the research site and then introduce the Tenant Group and design the Exploratory session, conducted with the group founder (Chapter 6).

Chapter 4 – Identifying the research site and housing policy context

As noted earlier, before deciding to focus on social housing, over several months I explored different policy problems, potential collaborators and sites to construct a suitable research site. This preliminary research phase (phase 1), detailed in this chapter, was important as it enabled me through fieldwork and reflexive thinking to articulate how Dewey's construct of publics may be applied in real life through the lens of a publics-oriented design approach. This approach aims to contextualise practice with emerging publics in the policy domain and understands the construct of publics as a tool for political action for marginalized groups. In addition, this fieldwork allowed me to critically assess my position and role as a design researcher in relation to a marginalised group. Below, I give an account of my thinking about the application of the notion of publics in design research as it evolved through my engagements at a local community centre and the criterion I arrived at.

Based on this refined criterion, I chose to investigate a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach with a self-organised, newly formed social housing Tenant Group with a focus on social housing policy. Thus, in the second part of this chapter (Section 4.2), I analyse desk and field research in housing policy to better understand the local housing landscape in which the Tenant Group operates. In addition, I discuss implications for design-inspired interventions based on insights from a critical reading of the historical and political context of social housing in the UK (Section 4.2.2) and based on existing approaches in housing policy to involve social housing tenants in shaping social housing services (Section 4.2.3).

4.1 Identification of research site

4.1.1 Exploratory research - Community Centre

Initially, my criterion for a research site consisted of identifying through fieldwork an issue of concern in a geographic community setting, which may then be articulated into a particular policy issue through participatory design (Cottam and Leadbeater, 2004; Neese, 2015).

Based on this criterion and on my professional and personal knowledge of the area where I live in the Midlands of England, I decided to investigate the possibility of working with a local community centre, which I refer to as M-Community Centre. Established in 1997 and funded by

the local council, the M-Community Centre is well-regarded among local charities and well-attended by locals. It is situated in an ethnically diverse neighbourhood in an estate of approximately 5,000 primarily low-income households and a large stock of social housing. It supports locals by offering recreation, education, information and practical and emotional support. The M-Community Centre runs many weekly clubs and activities with the aid of volunteers, who usually also live in the neighbourhood. Finally, the M-Community Centre also has an affordable café that serves hot meals making it a natural meeting place, especially since there are no commercial food establishments in the neighbourhood (Fieldnote, 14.8.18).

In my first meeting with Jack, a Community Outreach Worker from the local council also joined. I introduced the project and its aims, and mostly Jack described his work, the clients he works with and the challenges they face (Fieldnote, 24.8.18). We agreed that to sense check interest and build a rapport with the club members I would first attend the weekly Circle of Tea club led by Jack. This enabled me to meet centre users informally (Memo, 24.8.18). At the first meeting, I introduced myself, my research interests, why I was there and explained what I planned to do for the next month or so. Interested users were given the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) and Consent Form (Appendix D). Club members appeared somewhat puzzled by my project but did not ask many questions and a group of four regulars, two men and two women, agreed to participate in the initial exploratory stage of the research and signed consent forms. Except for one individual, all participants lived in the neighbourhood, which is a short drive from where I live. At this exploratory stage of my research, I chose not to ask research participants about their backgrounds and demographics, as it was not essential for my research and felt too formal an approach. During September - October 2018, I visited the Centre four more times to meet one-on-one or in a small group with research participants at the cafe. My fieldwork consisted of participant observation, group conversations co-facilitated with Jack, and one-to-one meetings at the community centre café which I documented in fieldnotes immediately after my visits. Through my fieldwork, I learned about issues that concerned the M-Community Centre's users, their understanding of these issues, and what changes they wanted, if at all. The variety of data sources and formats used enabled me to assess the suitability of the research site (McNiff, 2016).

Using reflexive analysis, in the section below I discuss the evolution of my thinking about the M-Community Centre's users and their issues and my own role and research approach by drawing on my data, documented in my fieldnotes (in particular field notes 24.8.18, 18.09.18, 1.10.18, 8.10.18). The ideas below were also discussed with Jack who had a good understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the M-Community Centre's users, was knowledgeable about community development approaches and was fortunately keen to take part in my research.

a) Problems as a commodity

The existence of industries that cater to 'need', which may unwittingly see people as 'problem-holders' is well-documented in the participation and community development literature (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993; Barnes, Newman and Sullivan, 2007; Kelty, 2017). Nonetheless, it was unsettling for me to find myself, full of good intentions yet doing something similar – namely, mining for problems. Moreover, I was not the only outsider engaged in such inquiries. In three out of the five times that I visited the Centre, I encountered instances where either a local charity, the council, or local entrepreneurs were seeking to 'tap' into and understand the concerns of the M-Community Centre's users so they may then 'service' their needs. Notably, this tally does not include my inquiries. This deficit approach, as it is referred to in the literature on community development, focuses on what people lack and seeks to fix other people's problems for them (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). It is often contrasted with an asset-based approach to community development, developed in the late 1970s (see Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993; Cameron and Wasacase, 2017). This approach seeks to engage people's knowledge and capabilities (their assets) to understand the issue and then work with groups and communities to develop solutions. Participatory design researchers, especially those operating in the service design of health and social services, have embraced this approach and its rationale to inform design work (see review: Junginger and Sangiorgi, 2011). Thus, even though I was committed to such a more asset-based approach, pursuing a publics-oriented design project with its orientation to social issues that give rise to publics seemed more focused on deficits. Also based on my fieldwork, I had the impression that they were not too interested in change initiatives and therefore it seemed that I needed them more than they needed me and that my research project was a bit of an imposition on my part. This created an ethical dilemma about how I position my research and methodologically, whether my proposed interventions, which I was in the process of developing through conversations with research participants, would reveal a public issue that would lead to the formation of a public.

Based on institutional conventions, Jack the community worker suggested that my approach was perfectly acceptable. He admitted that individuals attending the clubs are routinely asked to fill out surveys or cards or answer open questions, such as those posed by Jack and myself about what problems they face (Fieldnote, 1.10.18). Thus, it appears that sharing problems, in private and group meetings, was routinised as part of the emotional and practical support offered by the M-Community Centre. Indeed, Jack also told me about a new Centre initiative (called M-Voice) which again aimed to identify local issues of concern. Advertised in the Centre's newsletter

(August 2018) which was distributed to the mailbox of all households in the neighbourhood (see Figure 5.1), the M-Voice initiative came about in response to the cancellation of the bi-annual neighbourhood consultations with Council officials. Interestingly, in the Newsletter, the Centre's team appealed to the neighbourhood residents in a surprisingly urgent tone, accentuated by the use of capital letters:

> 'M-Voice wants to work with local people to help change the things that matter to you. As a community resource, they can only work with the information they have; They NEED YOU to speak out.' (Newsletter, August 2018) (caps in original).

This passage suggests that the M-Voice initiative rests on identifying 'unknown' needs in the community which the Centre offers to help remedy. There is something sincere, even vulnerable, in the way the text makes explicit that the centre's initiative 'can only work' with the cooperation of those in the community. Also, the use of caps for the words 'NEED YOU' recalls iconic wartime recruitment posters from the First World War which tried to draw on the public's sense of responsibility and duty. This implies that the centre's users are not passive recipients of support afterall and that accepting support is also an expression of agency.

Figure 4.1: **Flyer M-Voice initiative**
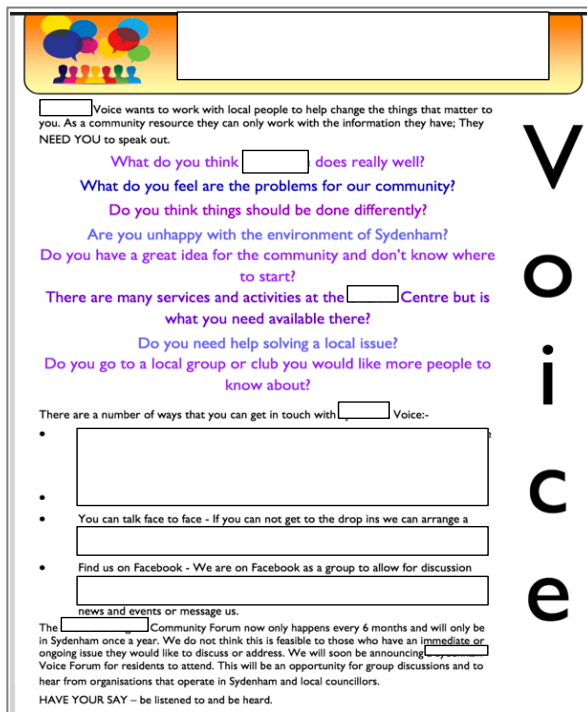
The flyer closes with an invitation for residents in the community to 'HAVE YOUR SAY – be listened to and be heard' (Figure 4.1, caps in original). Ironically, it appears that the silence of the local community, implied by the flyer, becomes a justification for this new initiative called, un-

ironically, M-Voice. Thus, the silence of residents is instrumentalised to justify the provision of more services, this time giving the residents a 'voice'. This would not be the first time that such logic was used, in this community or many other public service and research projects. The logic in this doctoral thesis, about the need for more public involvement in the face of a lack of involvement, is similar and equally problematic. Underlying both well-intentioned initiatives, by the M-Community Centre and by me, is the assumption that locals have problems that they want to be remedied yet need help in doing so. However, my fieldwork and the Centre's experience suggest that the expert 'provider' of services is also dependent on the 'recipients' of support to enrol in such a relationship.

Consequently, I wondered, what are the consequences of initiating and constructing public involvement through an appeal to people's problems? For Dewey (1991, p. 208-209) the existence of problems gives rise to publics, and the involvement of intermediaries and experts to discern these issues are necessary and desirable. However, I found that general inquiries about people's concerns resulted in a detached litany of problems, that did not seem to interest participants. Indeed, these conversations and guided activities often seemed to run 'dry' as participants preferred to chat about other things. Reflecting on my infrastructuring approach I found my motives were multi-layered: beyond the aim of discerning a pattern (e.g. a common concern), I was also interested in building relationships with participants and assessing possible activities which would both appeal to and be accessible to participants to engage in collaborative design. Thus, my approach was not singularly about problems but also included investigating people's attachments (Marres, 2007) to discern what things would move them to act on a concern. Attachments, a concept developed by sociologists Gomart and Hennion (1999), can manifest as personal interests (e.g. health, wealth, education) or public interests (e.g. environment, human rights). According to Marres (2007) who uses the concept of attachment in her study of publics, a diverse group of individuals is more likely to act collectively when their 'attachments' (Gomart and Hennion, 1999), the things that individuals perceive that they cannot live without, are implicated, or impacted by a more widely shared issue. *This made me wonder whether conversations about people's life stories and aspirations might provide a more natural setting to draw out insights about people's attachments and hardships and how people dealt with them*. This more balanced, asset-based approach (Junginger and Sangiorgi, 2011) is explored in my research with the Tenant Group that followed.

b) No agency

Another finding from my fieldwork was that there were numerous potential policy areas that the

centre's members could choose to explore constructively, however, no one was committed to any one issue. Reflecting on Schattschneider's (1960) analysis of non-participation it seemed that this apparent disinterest to act on social issues they experienced could also be understood as a choice. Indeed, echoing Schattschneider's observations about mobilisation bias, some participants presented non-participation as being shrewd, since they believed the welfare system generally worked against them. Indeed, as I show below, such a position makes sense considering the perspectives and experiences of those I spoke with. Some key impressions from my notes (notes, 18.9.18) give the context for the lack of agency in evidence:

- Stories of hardship appear to be normalized. For instance, stories of struggles with welfare benefit appeals, rent arrears, poor health, poor housing conditions, debt and more were seen as commonplace to the M-Community Centre users. Research participants were familiar with these issues and had a collection of similar stories experienced by family, friends and neighbours.
- The tone of conversations was generally defeatist. Refrains such as 'It's always the same' and 'No one listens' were used by different people on multiple occasions.
- Research participants used the vague term 'the system' to negatively refer to government institutions, processes and policies, at the local and national levels.
- The 'system' was described as unfair, contradictory and unpredictable. Participants described how social welfare processes and criteria were constantly changing.
- Participants believed 'the system' was designed to make claims, appeals and inquiries intentionally difficult and stressful. Damien (middle-aged) described how 'The system makes you sick'. And Lucia (middle-aged) said 'When your body is broken everything is hard'.
- Participants expressed distrust in authorities, politicians and the government.

The use of the concept 'the system', used by those without power to describe those with power, (Arnstein, 1969), shows how marginalized groups perceive those with more power abstractly as a monolithic entity. This distrust in the political system and politicians, and its documented rise in the UK since the 1990s (see: Jennings et al, 2017; Bowler and Karp, 2004) suggests that even with the proliferation of participatory approaches, there is still a need to develop forms of political involvement that are initiated and organised independently by marginalized groups (Arnstein, 1969; Gaventa, 1980; 2006).

However, to put this to practice at the community centre was a challenge since even those who volunteered were not especially interested or motivated to explore any of the concerns that they

raised. Since participatory design interventions have been documented to nurture a sense of capacity and agency among participants through clubs and hobbies, such as cycling, biking, gardening, and walking (Ehn, 2008; Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012; Ehn, Nilsson and Topgaard, 2014), I started to explore with participants the possibility of offering a photo club at the M-Community Centre. The idea was to use photo assignments documenting their lives, community and environment, as a scaffolding for deeper conversations which may lead to the emergence of a particular policy issue that they may want changed. However, the problem with this approach is that it did not seem to qualify as an independent initiative, and more critically, it seemed likely that without my initiative and the support from the M-Community Centre, such an initiative would not be sustained -- as evident in other publics-oriented design projects (e.g. Björgvinsson et al, 2012; Varga, 2018). Thus, I concluded that this approach was unsuitable for investigating the formation of publics through participatory design practice with marginalized groups.

In addition, framing the design activities as a 'club' felt disingenuous, even though I did explain to those interested that this was part of my doctoral research and that I saw this as a platform for possible collective political action on a particular issue that is developed through the photo club activities. Another concern was the inclusiveness of the photo club. Initially, I planned to use mobile phones and popular social media apps, such as Instagram, WhatsApp or Facebook, for creating and sharing photos, since I assumed this would make the activities widely accessible and sharable (Jewitt, 2012). Recognising that media literacy may vary, I 'pitched' the photo club as an opportunity to learn basic media skills (notes, 10.10.18). Nonetheless, those who did express interest were younger (aged 30s and 40s) and more media literate (notes, 10.10.18). Thus, undesirably, the digital medium proposed was limiting who would participate.

Finally, I also came to realise that what felt disingenuous was the normative assumptions behind participatory approaches in the public policy domain and my own. I had assumed that agency and political action were necessarily favourable and would be seen as such by participants. However, instead, I found that the centre's users had chosen inaction, rather than action, as proposed by Marres (2007) to protect their attachments. Insights about the context for this apparent indifference did not change my belief in the value of political action in democracies, but it did make me realise that *to be more consistent with participatory design's aim to empower marginalized groups, it would be preferable to locate my practice with a group that was actively engaged in a particular social issue which they wanted to be remedied*. This was an important outcome of my fieldwork at the community centre. However, what I did not realise at the time was that lack of agency and my own influence on research participants would be a constant theme

in this research project and would lead to my increasingly broadening my orientation from designing for political action to designing conditions and methods for participation. This entailed being attentive to the socio-political context of participation and non-participation and developing methods for doing so as part of my design research.

4.1.2   Refining site criteria

After almost six weeks at the Community Centre (which included a holiday break), I concluded that this was not a suitable setting for studying the proposed *publics-oriented participatory design* approach. This led me to refine my criteria for a research site. In Table   4.1, I present my final criteria and explain how each contributes to researching the relationship between participatory design, public involvement and emerging publics.

Table 4.1: Research site criteria

Research site criteria	Implications for the research process
Place-based - a geographic area	- Access to situated knowledge of an issue - Access to a mixed community and diverse perspectives - On-site design-inspired interventions
Focused on a public issue - cannot be settled locally	- Warrants systematic attention to the role of the state - Necessitates engagement with the policy process - Situated knowledge on the issue may benefit or challenge policy discourse
An autonomous **self-organised** group	- Group members have shown agency - Members committed to an issue and possibly to the group - Perceived as more authentic by the group members
A **newly formed** group	- Likely setting for studying emerging publics - Likely setting for studying the potential of *publics-oriented participatory design*

While keeping the first two criteria, a place-based research design with a focus on a particular potential policy issue, I now located my engagement more specifically with 'an autonomous self-organised group' in a rural county in the Midlands. I perceived two immediate advantages to this. First, an autonomous self-organised group, by definition, exists because its members are motivated to invest time and effort in its formation. In keeping with the criteria of a group focused on a particular issue, the self-organised group is also an issue-based group that arose around a shared concern. This meant that group members independently defined, be it broadly, a domain of concern. Another advantage, evidenced in policy research about autonomous self-organised

groups such as community groups or civic groups, is that while such groups do not automatically earn greater commitment and engagement in the larger community which they claim to represent, they are generally perceived as more authentic and trustworthy than groups that are not self-organised (Richardson et al, 2019; Richardson and Sefton, 2005) – or in other words, organised by outside initiatives. Thus, I hoped that by working in dialogue with such a group, to support its processes and issue-based goals, I may leverage the authenticity and trust afforded to self-organised groups. In sum, these expanded criteria helped resolve my concern about my having too much influence in determining the focal issue for the group at the centre of my research. It also resulted in a research design that I believed was more consistent with the principles of participatory design (participation and knowledge) introduced earlier. In keeping with this research design, my offer to the group would be that my research activities would be guided by the central concerns of the group and that the design activities I developed would contribute to their exploration of the issues and if they chose, to the co-design of what to do collectively to address the issue.

Lastly, since I was interested in the process by which people assemble and shape their political agency, I established that my research site needed to consist of a relatively newly formed group – a group that was in the process of articulating and refining its issues and its plan of action. Such a newly formed group needn't be large in scale and reach. As Marres (2007) explains, publics will inevitably start small and exclusive since articulating major social issues requires both time and effort. Thus, I propose to think of the newly formed group as a potential public or emerging public. This framing avoids deterministic thinking and emphasises that public formation is an indefinite and uncertain process – not all issue groups form publics. In addition, this enables me through my research to query whether the group is indeed emerging as a public, rather than taking the existence of a public as given -- a shortcoming I highlighted in some participatory design research using the publics-frame (e.g. Le Dantec et al, 2011; Le Dantec, 2012).

In sum, to lay the groundwork for a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach I refined my criterion for the research site through reflexive analysis of exploratory fieldwork and infrastructuring at a local community centre. Through this process, I delineated my criteria for a research site for an emerging public (Table   4.1). An important outcome of this fieldwork at the community centre was that I realised the importance of opening opportunities for political involvement that is initiated and organised by those typically marginalised in the policy domain. This conclusion is reinforced by policy research which finds that local self-organised community groups were more likely to be perceived as more authentic and trustworthy by locals, and were, therefore, more likely, over time, to earn the commitment and involvement from the communities

they aimed to represent (e.g. Richardson et al, 2019; Richardson and Sefton, 2005). Thus, by locating design-inspired interventions with a group that was already involved in exploring a particular social issue of their choosing, I hoped to minimise my influence and leverage the independence and commitments of its members in design-based interventions.

The process of refining and redefining my criteria for a research site led me to choose a newly established action group, the Tenant Group, which was self-organised by a group of frustrated tenants concerned with a variety of issues relating to social housing provision and poor service. To conclude the preliminary research into the research site (Phase 1), I conducted desk research to assess and confirm the suitability of housing policy for studying marginalised groups (Section 4.2.1). Following this, to lay the groundwork for a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach, I conducted further desk research about the policy domain of social.

4.2 Design context: Social housing policy and housing publics

The housing landscape in the UK is highly complex and includes many actors from the public sector, private sector, charities, and individuals with a range of needs and circumstances. Central actors include tenants; social housing providers, such as council housing and private registered providers; private landlords, and private developers; national government, and local authorities; financial institutions and third sector organisations, such as charities, think tanks and universities. For more about these actors and their relationships to each other see Annex II, 'Central actors in the social housing landscape'. Discourse amongst these actors often centres on the category of tenure which distinguishes between different kinds of housing and tenancies, each with different rights and responsibilities (Cowan, 2011; MCLGH, 2019). Housing tenure is usually broken down into three central types: social rent, private rent and owner-occupier (commonly referred to as homeownership).[21] The relative proportion of these tenures at the time of my fieldwork can be summarised as follows: [22]

- **Social let** comprises the smallest sector at 16.8% -- of which 6.6% are managed by local authorities (commonly called council housing) and 10.2% by independent housing

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[21] Data does not include other tenures, most significantly cooperatives and other forms of co-ownership (Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010).
[22] Tenure statistics are based on the English Housing Survey 2018-2019 published by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG, 2019). Note that household tenure distribution has not changed in 2019-2020 (MHCLG, 2020).

providers (commonly called housing associations). At its peak, in the 1980s, social let consisted of over 30% (Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010).

- **Private let** comprises 19.9% and since 1995 has been the fastest-growing sector.
- **Owner-occupation** is the most common tenure and comprises 63.3% of all dwellings. At its peak, in 2005, it comprised 71% of all dwellings (Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010).

The relative increase in the proportion of private let is due in part to its increase in absolute size against social let and owner occupation (Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010). However, there is also evidence that affordability (or lack of affordability) is a major driver for the changing mix in tenures (Caluori, 2019). While, ideally, each tenure should have a role in making a housing system that offers decent and affordable housing to all, at different income levels and throughout one's life, these tenures and relations between the tenures are not neutral, as I investigate later.

4.2.1 Why housing policy?

While the category of housing policy seems to imply a unified domain, it remains relatively new as a construct in policymaking (Malpass, 1999; Cowan, 2011; Jacobs and Manzi, 2017). Following socio-legal housing scholar David Cowan (2011, p.16), housing policy is understood here as providing "centrally planned government interventions in housing, designed to achieve certain social and economic goals". To achieve these goals, governments 'intervene' in the housing landscape using various tools of governance, which policy researchers have formulated into various taxonomies (e.g. Hood & Margetts, 2007; John, 2011). Though these taxonomies vary in their level of detail and scope, they inevitably include the more prevalent top-down tools associated with conventional policymaking (like laws, legislation, budgets, taxation)[23] and bottom-up tools, not associated with formal government (like social movements, social networks and more). As noted earlier in my introduction of public policy, this study focuses on bottom-up approaches to housing policy. Notably, this goal-oriented definition of housing policy presented above suggests a level of coherence that does not exist in housing policy (Cowan, 2011; Jacobs and Manzi, 2017). Instead, social housing policy is composed of a mishmash of ideas, theories and perspectives drawn from an array of fields (Clark, 2002; Bardach, 2011; Cowan, 2011). Moreover, in practice, the goals and interventions of housing policy are often inconsistent, contradictory, and ambiguous, for many different reasons (NAO, 2018; Law commission, 2016; Cowan & McDermont, 2016). As part of Phase 1, I elaborate on these reasons below to argue that social housing policy a likely site for the emergence of publics.

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[26]Quoted from https://www.taroetrust.org.uk on June 2019.

First, housing policy is highly inconsistent and contradictory because related policymaking and delivery are highly dispersed within government across multiple ministries that have conflicting objectives and across levels of central and local government (Bramley, 1997). For instance, though the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government leads on many housing issues, the Department of Work and Pensions' cuts to welfare entitlements and Treasury funding of a range of high-cost private market interventions directly impinge on housing policy (Perry and Stephens, 2018). Second, new policies do not always completely replace the old. Instead, old and new often co-exist and interact, forming a composite, or 'patchwork', of plural and at times contradictory policies (Perry and Stephens, 2018). Third, there often exists a gap between policy planning and practice, theory and implementation, as shown in a domain of public policy research called implementation research (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984; Schofield and Sausman, 2004; Hill and Hupe, 2014). Fourth, as noted in section 5.2.1 about the historical and political context of housing policy, as set out by politicians and policymakers, is often ambiguous in its concepts and guidelines (Zahariadis, 2014), which enables and fosters multiple interpretations and contradictions to co-exist in order to accommodate different motives and stakeholders (Schattschneider, 1960; Kingdon, 2011; Zahariadis, 2014).

In addition, the housing landscape in the UK is highly complex and includes many actors from the public sector, private sector, charities, and individuals with a range of needs and circumstances. Central actors include tenants; social housing providers, such as council housing and private registered providers; private landlords, and private developers; national government, and local authorities; financial institutions and third sector organisations, such as charities, think tanks and universities. For more about these actors and their relationships to each other see Annex II, Central actors in the social housing landscape. Discourse amongst these actors often centres on the category of tenure which distinguishes between different kinds of housing and tenancies, each with different rights and responsibilities (Cowan, 2011; MCLGH, 2019).

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[26]Quoted from https://www.taroetrust.org.uk on June 2019.

Social let comprises the smallest sector at 16.8% -- of which 6.6% are managed by local authorities (commonly called council housing) and 10.2% by independent housing providers (commonly called housing associations). At its peak, in the 1980s, social let consisted of over 30% (Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010).

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Owner-occupation is the most common tenure and comprises 63.3% of all dwellings. At its peak, in 2005, it comprised 71% of all dwellings (Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010).

The relative increase in the proportion of private let is due in part to its increase in absolute size against social let and owner occupation (Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010). However, there is also evidence that affordability (or lack of affordability) is a major driver for the changing mix in tenures (Caluori, 2019). While, ideally, each tenure should have a role in making a housing system that offers decent and affordable housing to all, at different income levels and throughout one's life, these tenures and relations between the tenures are not neutral, as I will show later.

Given the contentiousness of the idea of social housing and the many systemic problems that exist in this policy domain (Rees, 2018; Soodeen, 2018), including housing shortage, lack of affordability, and poor standards (Hills, 2007; Stephens et al, 2005), in terms of Dewey's theory of publics, it is reasonable to assume that social housing policy is a suitable area to assess applications and processes of *publics-oriented participatory design* (Keohane & Broughton, 2013; Malpass & Murie, 1982). Moreover, given the need-based allocation of social housing in the UK, this domain is especially suitable for the relevance of *publics-oriented participatory design* research and practice to typically marginalised groups.

4.2.2 About housing publics

The discipline of housing studies documents patterns of public formation in the domain of social housing. Typically, housing publics form in response to emergencies, such as regeneration or demolition, or the aftermath of catastrophes (Madden and Marcuse, 2016). In all these scenarios, people's ways of living are directly under threat, which gives them a strong incentive and common issue around which a public can mobilize. On the other hand, these same problems are often temporary and very localised, making the emergence of sustained collective action, such as social movements, very difficult, even if other, non-emergency problems persist (Cowan, 2011; Madden and Marcuse, 2016). As such, housing issues that arise from emergencies can function as both catalysts and barriers to public formation. In addition, publics are more likely to form in urban centres and on large estates, where spatial proximity enables tenants to organise, especially if the proximity also nurtures close-knit communities (Madden and Marcuse, 2016). Reversely, the

emergence of housing publics in more rural areas, where tenants are geographically more dispersed, is considered more difficult -- even in the digital age (Best and Shucksmith, 2006; Taylor, 2008). Considering these factors, it appears that the Tenant Group in this thesis, which was formed in a geographically dispersed rural area of the Midlands and not in response to a dramatic event (such as regeneration or demolition) is somewhat atypical for a housing public, a point I return to in my analysis.

The rural location of the Tenant Group is important. Though almost 10 million people in the UK live in areas of England defined as rural (LGA, 2017) social housing studies and public policy research often neglect how varied social housing is spatially and geographically. Instead, all too often, the literature focuses on towns and cities -- primarily those in London and the Southeast – overlooking what makes rural areas different (Best et al, 2015). Some important housing policy reviews, published over the past two decades, have attempted to redress this (Best and Shucksmith, 2006; Taylor, 2008; Snelling, 2017; Baxter and Murphy, 2018). Together, these reviews suggest a desperate situation with many unique factors driving up the cost of housing construction, maintenance, and living, in rural areas. Among those listed are poor economies of scale; poor transport connections; constrained resourcing for specialist services; isolated communities; and limited alternative and emergency housing provision. Yet according to the Local Government Association (2018), rural issues are easily overlooked by policymakers since regional-level statistics show that on average rural areas tend to be more affluent. However, more situated research shows that even among the most affluent counties, there are areas where people experience deprivation, ill health, and inequalities (Best and Shucksmith, 2006). Regardless of reports on rural housing issues and Prime Minister Boris Johnson's so-called 'levelling up' agenda to invest more in peripheral areas North of London, recent housing legislation and policy do not address these unique factors in rural housing (MHCLG, 2020b). This situation reflects the setting for the formation of the Tenant Group, a group composed primarily of social housing tenants living in a rural area of the Midlands which is generally seen as affluent. This context also highlights the importance of exploring to what extent a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach and methods might enable a marginalised group in a rural area to act collectively as a public and make their issues heard by policymakers.

Below I review insights from the historical and political context in which social housing evolved in the UK to shed light on the climate in which the Tenant Group operates and consider implications for a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach. This wider context gives a sense of the ideological and socio-political tensions that underlie the reform of social housing services and policies. Equipped with this understanding, I then assess formal government initiatives, such

as tenant participation programmes, that attempt to involve social housing tenants to various degrees yet have been found to fall short of their declared goal of empowering social tenants (Section 4.2.4).

4.2.3 Insights for design from the historical and political context of social housing

To critically assess the landscape of social housing landscape in which tenants and I seek to act, this section draws on the research of critical scholars from housing studies (Bevan and Cowan, 2016; Keohane & Broughton, 2013) and in particular on the work of housing historians Malpass (2000) and Mullins and Murie (2006).

a) *Government provision of housing not informed by progressive ideology*

Following the First World War, the proportion of households in social housing rose from just 1% in 1918 to a peak of over 30% by the early 1980s (Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010). While this would seem to suggest strong support for the notion of state provision of housing, critical housing studies show social housing policies are highly contingent and contentious. Researchers argue that social housing policies were motivated primarily by practical considerations concerning social, economic and political pressures of the day, most significantly world wars and economic crashes (Malpass, 2000; Mullins and Murie, 2006; Robertson, 2017). Thus, Malpass (2000) concludes that the history and politics of social housing lacked a clear ideology and were never informed by 'systemic reform objectives' (2000, p. 591).

Other interpretations as to why state provision of housing was supported by policymakers and stakeholders also do not suggest a supportive social ideology. Variably, scholars have proposed that social housing was seen as a means of governance or social control: designed to appease the poor (Madden and Marcuse, 2016); a necessity in a competitive capitalist society, as without state subsidy poor people would be out on the street (Gauldie, 1974; Keohane and Broughton, 2013); and a matter of national security, to keep the threat of communism at bay (Madden and Marcuse, 2016). Common to all these interpretations is that social housing did not come about through an agreed ideology about the inherent value of social housing or a universal right to shelter. Thus, though the rise of a Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher in 1979 is widely seen as a major shift away from a government commitment to social housing (Keohane and Broughton, 2013; Malpass and Murie, 1982), the critical housing literature suggests that for both major parties support for the idea of social housing was driven primarily by pragmatic consideration rather than principles (Malpass, 2003; Mullins and Murie, 2006; Cowan and McDermont, 2008).

As we will see, this has significant implications for the kind of arguments, demands and language that an emerging public, focused on social housing issues, such as the Tenant Group, might feel it can legitimately make.

b) *The purpose of social housing was never clearly defined*

The ambiguity about the ideological underpinning of social housing may also be understood in part as a reflection of ideological differences between the major political parties which made social housing an especially contentious topic (Cowan and McDermont, 2008). While the parties could agree generally on the importance of securing decent affordable housing for all, state provision of housing came in conflict with Conservative party ideology which advocates individual self-sufficiency and minimal state intervention (Cowan and McDermont, 2008). For this reason, housing scholars argue that successive governments have avoided clearly articulating the purpose and meaning of social housing (Malpass, 2003; Mullins and Murie, 2006). This resulted, especially since the late 1970s, in multiple and sometimes conflicting motives and principles underlying government provision of social housing leading to a significant number of contradictory state interventions in both public and private housing (Cowan, 2016; Keohane and Broughton, 2013).

Moreover, the shrinking of state support for social housing and its commodification is often attributed to the rise of a particular ideology broadly referred to as neoliberalism, written about extensively in housing studies (see Haughton, Allmendinger and Oosterlynck, 2013b; Hodkinson, Watt and Mooney, 2013; Bevan and Cowan, 2016; Robertson, 2017). Neoliberalism, a label used more by its critics, promotes the principles of open market competition and a small state (Haughton, Allmendinger and Oosterlynck, 2013; Hodkinson, Watt and Mooney, 2013). This ideology is evident in attempts by the state to reduce spending on social housing through a variety of policies from the privatisation of housing provision to independent service providers, and the establishment of an increasingly narrow need-based criterion for social housing allocation, to name a few. As a consequence, Cowan and McDorment (2008) describe a sense of 'existential angst' concerning the purpose and viability of social housing, which I would later discover (through my design engagements and tenant-oriented policy analysis) seems to be internalised by some social tenants and constrains their propensity to demand improvements in social housing.

c) *The promotion of ownership*

Tellingly, according to housing researchers, Cairney and Jones (2016) and Bevan and Jennings (2019), the most consistent elements of UK housing policy since the late 1940s and onwards has been the promotion of homeownership – ultimately at the expense of social housing. While the proportion of social let households grew in the post-war years, the proportion of households that owned their own home rose even more dramatically, from 23% in 1918 to over 70% by the end of the twentieth century (Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010). This homeownership policy agenda is explained as motivated by longstanding financial, institutional, and ideological ties and mutual interests between government and industry (Cairney and Jones, 2016; Bevan and Jennings, 2019), which existed long before the ideological approach of neoliberalism was articulated.

Indeed, according to Malpass (2000) the 'housing market' as we know it today, with its enabling structure and administrative process for the purchase or sale of a property in a particular area, was essentially a government invention. Before governments intervened in housing developments in the 1930s, there was no demand for buying housing, or even an aspiration to own one's home. Governments and housebuilders needed to 'be proactive in convincing renters to become owners and creating a market for their product' (Robertson, 2017, p. 197). Thus, on account of government support in the 1940s of a private finance framework -- led by cooperative building societies and industry entrepreneurialism -- property ownership grew at a much faster rate than social housing (Malpass, 2000; Robertson, 2017). Thus, the bias in favour of ownership and the mutual interests and partnerships between governments and industry are not new and are deeply entrenched in the housing system and its policies, making the case for improved social housing services very difficult.

In sum, this section has shown that the tendency to romanticise the creation of social housing (and the welfare state) underplays the many contextual, historical and political forces that were uniquely aligned in post-war Britain and up until the late 1970s (Cowan and McDermont, 2008). Just as the initial participatory design experiments were the outcome of a very specific configuration around labour policies in Scandinavian countries, here too, there is a need to recognise the configuration of actors that shaped social housing agendas in the past and present. Though the Conservative party shifted to a more declared neoliberal approach in housing policy since the late 1970s, an approach associated with the prioritization of the homeownership agenda at the expense of social housing (Perry and Stephens, 2018), this section has shown how the motives for this change had been long in the making. Significantly, drawing from the critical housing studies literature, we learn that dominant narratives about the creation of social housing are often misrepresented. Specifically, we learn that: 1) the purpose of social housing was never precisely defined by policymakers (for lack of agreement and commitment), and 2) private

finance and profit-making have long been a part of the business model of the social housing system. As a result, social tenants today find themselves in a tenuous position as the purpose and principles underpinning social housing provision are questioned and as I show later, even denigrated (Cowan and McDermont, 2006; Perry and Stephens, 2018). Thus, social housing policy is understood here as highly contingent, contradictory and contentious – qualities that directly impact social tenants' daily lives and their ability to act for change in this domain.

These insights concerning the political and historical context in which social housing has evolved also highlight *the benefit of questioning dominant narratives and idealised rhetoric* – a strategy pursued further in this thesis through participatory design-inspired interventions. Importantly, critical housing research reviewed above, like populist agenda-setting research (e.g. Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984; Birkland, 1997; Kingdon, 2011) illustrates and documents that social housing policy is not the outcome of a rational or logical process, as it is often presented in rationalist accounts, but is messy and contentious and guided by normative essentialist narratives. Critically, for a *publics-oriented participatory design* practice that is oriented to influencing policy discourse and agendas from outside the policy network, it is important to recognise how such idealised narratives tend to present societal issues as uncontested matters of fact (Latour, 2005), masking their normative and moralistic tones in a universal language that depoliticizes the domain. *Thus, I propose that this suggests an opportunity for design with emerging publics to intervene in the idealised narratives about social housing policy and explore alternatives that may also help galvanise social tenants to engage in collective political action.*

4.2.4 Limitations of formal Tenant Participation

The idea that tenants can be involved in social housing policy discourse, at least to some extent - for instance, through participation in the administration of social housing - is not new and can be seen as part of the general ebbs and flows in the interest in citizen empowerment. Critically, as John (2009) writes, the periodical interest in participatory forms and community empowerment initiatives suggests that these are not necessarily deemed essential by either the public or the state. Nonetheless, in recent decades, the UK policy landscape is experiencing what Barnes et al (2007) describe an explosion of participative forums, some initiated by public officials to facilitate dialogue with the public and others initiated independently, and often based on voluntary, charitable or political activity. Reviewing the effectiveness of such initiatives and forums is significant if we are to argue that even with alternative routes for tenant participation, social housing is a policy domain rife with complex issues that are likely to trigger the formation of publics and therefore could benefit from the interventions of *a publics-oriented design* approach.

In housing, tenant participation first became a central part of the social housing rhetoric and policy in the 1980s (Hickman, 2006; McDermont, 2007; Preece, 2019). Introduced into a legislative framework in the 1980 Housing Act, these policies took on many forms and invited different levels of tenant involvement, from receiving written or oral information to participating in consumer panels or being members on the board of governance of a housing association (Bradley, 2013; Preece, 2019). The reforms were part of the Conservative government's attempt to reconfigure the role of social housing tenants from 'passive' welfare recipients to empowered and responsible individuals (Flint, 2003, 2004; Watt, 2008; Preece, 2019). Thus, it was rationalised that participation, would foster a 'responsible tenant' (Flint, 2004), a composite identity that McKee and Cooper, (2008) describe as part rational consumer and part active citizen, a neoliberal construct that the New Labour government also adopted (Barnes, et al, 2003).

Though the housing reforms were supposed to empower social tenants, their justification suggests a different motive (Flint, 2003, 2004). By asserting that without a change social housing is creating a dependency culture among tenants, the reforms reinforced a negative narrative. Moreover, since negative narratives are multifaceted, expecting social tenants to take responsibility has no impact on other negative facets of the narrative. Therefore, social tenants may still be portrayed as dependent, work-shy, or having too many kids even if they take part in a tenant participation programme (Flint, 2003). Given this negative and partial framing of tenant participation reforms, it is not surprising that housing policy researchers find that formal participation does not necessarily empower tenants (Flint, 2003, 2004; Watt, 2008; McKee, 2009, 2011b) and that tenants often view different participation programs with distrust and cynicism (Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad, 1994; Cowan and McDermont, 2008; McKee and Cooper, 2008; McKee, 2011). Thus, policies that force or reward tenants to act in a particular way and meet certain criteria, may reinforce the negative construction even if the justification is to empower tenants.

Interestingly, formal opportunities for the inclusion of tenants have also been found to threaten the perceived urgency of related issues or the perceived necessity to mobilise around the issue as it is assumed that the formal mechanism is sufficient, even if in practice it does not lead to change (Ingram, 2005; Meyer, 2005). An independent study conducted by TAROE Trust (2018), a national tenant charity whose declared aim is to work 'on behalf of tenants living in or seeking to access social housing in England'[26], shows that the formalisation of tenant participation

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[26]Quoted from https://www.taroetrust.org.uk on June 2019.

undermined the legitimacy of self-organised groups. According to this report, institutionalizing participation has resulted in self-organised tenant groups being excluded from the processes of discourse and decision-making (TAROE Trust, 2018, p.13). In some instances, housing associations have withdrawn funding for tenants' associations and federations and replaced them with market research techniques and consumer panels (Morgan, 2006; Preece, 2019).

Thus, the institutionalization of tenant participation has undermined the perceived authenticity of these mechanisms and reinforced to many tenants a sense of lost control and futility to the process (Smyth, 2013; Mahony and Stephansen, 2016; London Assembly, 2018). This critique has been repeated for decades by participation theorists and echoes Arnstein's (1969) early findings, captured in her 'ladder for citizen participation' model, that many forms of participation are manipulative and fail to distribute power (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). This failing is explored in a 2006 report by the Law Commission,[27] which focused on multiple unused formal routes to tenant dispute resolution. Seeking to explain why most tenants do not escalate an issue through formal channels, the report offers a surprisingly detailed account of many personal and social factors that impede tenant involvement.

> … far too often decisions by people experiencing housing problems as to whether to seek a solution, and if so which method to use, are based on the consideration of less relevant factors. These include: the existing power relations between the participants; the length of time a process takes; personal factors such as culture, education, status, gender and ethnicity; the participants' experience of and confidence in articulating problems; the relationship between the dispute resolution mechanism and the participants; who the person with the problem talks to about it; the emotions of the participant; the willingness and openness of the person, who created the problem, to respond to suggestions for doing something about it; the financial resources available to the person with the problem for dealing with it; and the outcomes sought by the person with the problem. (Law Commission, 2006: para 2.46)

These diverse intervening factors, labelled "less relevant" because they do not relate directly to the policy issue at hand, are nonetheless argued to make a difference between a tenant taking action or not. The analysis above makes clear that a social tenant's decision to pursue a housing issue and submit a complaint is not fully 'rational' and that participation is also socially constructed (Cowan, 2016). This highlights the shortcomings of a rationalist orientation to policy design and signals *the need in public policy to develop approaches that seek to learn from people how they interpret public services and policies targeting the*m.

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[27] The Law Commission is a statutory independent body that conducts research and makes recommendations to government.

This section showed that participatory approaches adopted by policymakers in the domain of social housing, though potentially empowering to marginalised groups, are often distrusted among social tenants (McKee, 2008; 2011). As a result, even social tenants who did choose to participate, often modified and restricted their claims to what they deemed 'possible rather than desirable' (Barnes et al. 2007, p. 96). This suggests a lack of suitability between methods of participation on offer for social housing tenants and the expectations and outcomes that these ultimately create. This mismatch between method and outcome is a problem flagged by Creighton (2005) and mentioned in the earlier discussion of Arnstein's forms of participation. Thus, to avoid the false equivalence between participation and empowerment discussed earlier in relation to participatory design (Section 2.2.1), some researchers propose that it is critical to acknowledge the often-unexamined power relations between tenants, institutions, and the state and how these materialise in the interplay between formal and informal mechanisms of participation (Hickman, 2006; Chilvers and Burgess, 2008).

The formation of the Tenant Group, which I introduce in the next chapter, can be understood in this context as a challenge by social tenants to formal programmes of participation as it is self-organised and run by member volunteers. In addition, given the shortcomings of various tenant participation programs reviewed above, exploring participatory design with a self-organised group or emerging public in this setting offers a suitable site for assessing the possible merits of a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach and to what extent it is especially beneficial to marginalized groups.

Chapter 5 – Entering the research site & public policy space: exploratory research

5.1 Introducing the Tenant Group

The Tenant Group, as I refer to the newly formed group, came into being on the impulse of one individual, but grew quickly to form a group of hundreds of disgruntled social tenants and an unknown number of leaseholders in a rural area of the Midlands. Out of respect to participants' request, all names in this case are anonymised, including identifying geographical markers. Nicole, a made-up name, is an artist and mother of four who has lived in social housing most of her life. She spearheaded the idea of forming a group in response to the surprise closure of her housing association's drop-in customer service office. Instead, tenants with issues were referred to a centralised national call Centre that knew nothing of the local housing stock and local communities. Thus, after years of dealing with poor service and severe mildew problems in her home, she felt this was the ultimate affront as it struck her that the housing association no longer bothered with the pretence of listening to tenants. In addition, she saw this as a serious risk to more vulnerable tenants who she believed would now have an even harder time accessing the support they needed, and they had a right. Thus, determined to challenge her housing association on this and other housing issues, in May 2018 Nicole created a Facebook group,   posting widely about it on social media sites. The response was immediate and quickly gained momentum as dozens, then hundreds joined, and thus, the Tenant Group was formed.

In her appeal for people to assemble, Nicole invited social tenants, leaseholders and owners living in the district in properties specifically owned and managed by the local housing association, hereon referred to as HA-x. Critically, by defining group membership along these lines, Nicole delineated group membership and identity in relation to a common landlord and site manager. This inadvertently defined HA-x as the target of group action and framed the group's housing-related concern as consumer issues, and therefore not necessarily as broader political and policy issues, deemed of public interest. Around the time I became involved with the group in October 2018, and possibly in part because of my involvement, the strategic question about who the group should target became a point of contention, dividing active members of the group between a majority who wanted to focus on the landlord and a minority, led by Nicole, that increasingly thought that the group needed to aim to have the issues addressed more systematically, rather

than on an individual basis, and thus appeal to actors involved in decision-making about housing services and policies.

Since its formation, the Tenant Group has experienced ups and downs in membership numbers and activity, which policy researchers Richardson & Sefton (2004) describe as typical in small community groups. In the first months, a core group of members volunteered to be a part of the group's committee. Though the committee grew to include seven members, according to Nicole, only three members were fully and consistently active in reaching out to stakeholders (charities, council and media), drumming up membership numbers, distributing flyers, administering the Facebook site, and generally trying to get their bearings and understanding of the issues and who the main local actors were. In these early months (June - September 2018), the group organised two public Q&A meetings with HA-x representatives, which were reported by local newspapers, and started to liaise with HA-x on behalf of group members. All the while, group membership, defined by the group as those who joined the Facebook forum, grew steadily over five months, from 80+ members in August 2018 to 370+ members in October 2018 (source: local newspaper articles, 2018). These numbers and the heated meetings in which tenants confronted HA-x officials showed the intensity of emotion which the housing issues generated and the deep sense of unfairness and distrust that tenants felt given the poor service, deteriorating standards and shortage of local social housing.

Though this study does not use social media content generated by the group as a source of data, I was told by committee members that Facebook was central to the group's formation and served multiple purposes for the group. It was used as a forum for public exchanges between members, raising awareness, mobilising actions, and getting feedback and information from members. It afforded committee members control of who joined the group and enabled group members to communicate privately with each other through messaging. On the other hand, according to committee members, the centrality of the Facebook platform also undermined their efforts to get members involved with collective group actions. Nicole described how the committee struggled to get members to move beyond what she described as 'Facebook moaning' (note, 10.10.18). Thus, by early October 2018, when I first approached the group, committee members reported that much of the initial excitement that was palpable in the first months had worn off. Member recruitment numbers levelled off, Facebook activity was low, and the committee was largely inactive, except a team of three that found themselves increasingly questioning the group's aims and strategy. As they agreed to take part in this study, I accompanied them on their journey to articulate and shape the issues and actions of the Tenant Group.

5.1.1   Exploratory fieldwork

My interactions with the Tenant Group stretched over seven months, from early October 2018 to early April 2019, but were most intense over six weeks between December and January 2018, and over a couple of weeks in March and April 2019. I had heard about the group through a colleague at Citizens Advice (CA) since Nicole, the group founder, had written to the local CA office to invite a representative to the Tenant Group's second public meeting with HA-x officials. Though no CA representative attended, I wrote her an email explaining that I heard about the Tenant Group through my volunteer work as a generalist advisor at CA. I introduced myself as a doctoral student in design for policy at Central Saint Martin's, University of the Arts London, interested in social housing. I proposed we meet to discuss the possibility that I work in dialogue with the Tenant Group as part of my research and explore through creative methods ways of shaping new narratives about social housing to influence policymakers. Nicole agreed and in our first meeting, we talked about my research project, our backgrounds and shared interests and Nicole's experiences with the Tenant Group. We found that we shared many interests and values regarding activism, social change, and creative practices. Nicole was keen to take part and support the project in her capacity as group founder and suggested I attend the group's next committee meeting so I could get other members on board.[28]

Recruiting group members to take part in planned design-inspired interventions was difficult and mirrored the experience of the group's committee. Committee members generally described a pattern where individual group members mostly reached out to the group on the Facebook forum or privately to committee members when they needed help in sorting a specific private issue relating to HA-x. According to Nicole, in October 2018, only a handful of members were active on the Facebook forum, while hundreds were silent. All group members who agreed to participate in my study (n=4) were active committee members, three of whom I was introduced at two different committee meetings to which I was invited.

Being introduced personally by a known contact was essential to meeting group members. However, even then introduction depended on their level of engagement with the Tenant Group and since committee meetings were regularly cancelled it was not until January 2019 (three months into my fieldwork) that I met the entire committee. As noted in the Methodology chapter, attempts to recruit more research participants through social media posts published by Nicole

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[28] When recruiting research participants, I used the Information Sheet (Appendix B) to introduce the research project and encourage discussion about it. If they agreed to proceed, the research participants signed the research Consent Form (Appendix C).

(on my behalf) were also unsuccessful. Thus, to counteract selection bias and access the perspective of individuals who were not interested in joining the Tenant Group, I managed to recruit two social tenants who were not group members but had the same landlord. these two non-members in a sense represent in this thesis the 'silent majority' of social tenants who do not action groups.

5.1.2 The local social housing landscape and central issues

Taking a step back, it is important to describe the circumstances of tenants and the housing landscape under which the Tenant Group operates in a rural area in the Midlands and a bit about HA-x. Established in 1966, HA-x Orbit is registered as a charitable community benefit society. It manages over 44,750 homes across England (RGS, 2019). These include a range of tenures including social and affordable rent, shared ownership, private rent, retirement living and market sale. HA-x has general needs stock in 73 local authorities and its geographical focus is on the Midlands, East and Southeast (RGS, 2019). In 1996, per Government rules, the Council where the Tenant Group operates sold its housing stock of over 5,000 units to HA-x. To this date, HA-x is the largest local provider, now managing over 7,000 properties in the district (District Council, 2018). Crucially, the district council no longer owns any social housing and is therefore reliant on the cooperation of HA-x and other independent social housing providers to meet its statutory obligations to manage local social housing allocation and house the homeless.

Table 5.1: Demographic data and tenure distribution across the district and national levels

Demographics	DISTRICT	NATIONAL - England
Population*	c. 125,000	c. 60 million
Median age	48	40
Dwellings based on tenure**	Social let 13% Private let 13% Owner 73%	Social let 18% Private let 20% Owner-occupied 64%
Employment ***	High-paid sectors 41% Low-paid sectors 34%	NA

*Population estimates mid-2017, ONS July 2018 / ** English Housing Survey, 2018 *** District Council Report, 2018

Though statistics about the demographics of tenants within HA-x are not available, data collated by ONS (2018) at the district level gives an overview of the local housing landscape at the time in which I conducted my research. In Table 5.1 above, I contrast the district-level demographics to the national level (collated by the English Housing Survey, 2018). This contrast shows that the proportion of social let (which includes both social and affordable let rates) is 13% at the district level, which is significantly smaller than the 18% availability in England. A similar pattern is in evidence with private lets, which account for only 13% of the households locally, while their proportion nationally stands at 20%. This gap is made up locally by a higher proportion of owner-occupied tenures, which in 2018 comprised 74% of dwellings in the district and 64% in England. This data reflects the relative affluence of the district, which is also evident in the proportion of high earners reported in the district (District Council, 2018) and reinforces my earlier argument about the importance of considering differences across districts.

A District Council Report on local housing provision (District Council, 2018) at the time I conducted my research, concluded that many households in the area cannot find suitable affordable accommodation. At the time of the report, 3,748 households were on the social registry waiting list (commonly referred to as the waiting list). To give a sense of the magnitude of the problem, these 3,748 households were comprised of 7,626 individuals of which 5,346 were adults and 2,280 were children (District Council, 2018). Based on informal conversations and semi-structured interviews with six social tenants I found that the shortage of social housing was also a concern for existing social tenants. They described the difficulty of finding alternative housing to meet their changing needs and circumstances and expressed concern for family and friends who were unable to find affordable housing locally and, in some instances, reluctantly moved elsewhere. Thus, the demographics show that the issue of housing affordability and housing shortage is especially acute in the area where the Tenant Group was formed.

Notably, since there is no regulatory oversight of consumer (tenant) matters (Housing Act 2010), there is no centralized data about consumer complaints with HA-x. Instead, the central role of the Regulator of Social Housing remains to annually assess the governance and financial viability of housing associations. In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower, there has been a push to reintroduce oversight of consumer services but at the time of writing, this has not changed (MHCLG, 2018; Shelter, 2019). Through my fieldwork, I learned that in terms of formal routes to tenant participation, HA-x ran focus groups for a handful of social tenants that they chose as 'involved customers', and who stayed in the role indefinitely and were paid for their time. This involved customer group was contentious since research participants complained that the process for selecting involved customers and the selection of issues for discussion was not transparent. This

suggested to them that HA-x was more interested in giving the appearance of listening to tenants rather than involving a diverse group of tenants, including more critical voices. Consequently, tenants showed no interest in the findings and outcomes of the focus groups, which in any case the HA-x did not distribute. In addition, on occasion, the HA-x posted mail-in surveys, which research participants mocked for being substandard in quality, with careless typos and poor formatting. In sum, based on conversations with research participants (both Tenant Group members and non-members) it appears that the limited forms and routes to tenant participation that do exist are administered in an exclusionary and divisive manner. Two participants (one Tenant Group member and one non-member) expressed resentment and jealousy of 'involved customers', claiming that they were yet another mechanism of control and surveillance of tenants, with 'involved customers' operating as snitches. Though housing studies research shows that the use of market research techniques as a form of tenant participation is a growing trend in the social housing sector (Hickman, 2006; Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad, 2013; Preece, 2019), Nicole reported that many social tenants resented being cast as customers. She recounted how in the first public meeting with HA-x officials, one group member made the point that they were not consumers since they did not have a choice and could not take their business elsewhere. Still, HA-x officials continued to use the terminology, even after the public meeting, thus reinforcing tenants' perception that the HA-x did not listen to them.

In sum, the consumerist framing of tenants' role, which has become increasingly widespread in the more business-minded housing association (Hickman, 2006; Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad, 2013; Preece, 2019), was seen by research participants, and according to them by other Tenant Group members, as inadequate and exclusive and was therefore not trusted. Thus, I have found that formal opportunities for inclusion of tenants did not undermine the perceived necessity to mobilise around an issue, as argued by Ingram (2005) and Meyer (2005). However, there was a risk that formal participation depoliticized their issues since, as argued by participation researcher Christopher Kelty (2017, p.88), it legitimized the participation of individual tenants and consumer issues and not of collective tenant associations and collective issues. Given this context, the formation of the Tenant Group was a remarkable and gutsy thing to do. For lack of viable routes, the formation of the Tenant Group signalled an alternative and was a challenge to the dominance of the HA-x. The fact that it was founded and run by volunteer social tenants was critical to its appeal and as such, the active committee members described to me how they were motivated by a sense of possibility and commitment to try and achieve something.

Digging deeper, through my fieldwork meetings and interviews, I gained a better understanding

of the motives, capabilities, circumstances and central issues of Tenant Group members. Based on their interactions with group members on Facebook and questions raised by group members in the two public meetings, the three committee members reported five central issues that represented the bulk of members' complaints. The central issues identified were:

(1) service charges - not transparent, fair or affordable

(2) disrepair - poor service, properties below standard, problems long-standing

(3) social housing selloff – much-needed social let properties sold and not replaced

(4) short-term tenancies - lack of security /source of anxiety, stress

(5) lack of safeguarding for vulnerable tenants

According to Nicole, the first two issues, service charges (no.1) and disrepair (no.2), were the most talked about on the Facebook forum. These issues may be seen as consumer issues and were directed at the HA-x. However, I suggest that they may also be seen as indirect manifestations of public issues concerning, for instance, poor housing standards, lack of regulation and accountability. Thus, these are examples of issues that design researchers may investigate with social tenants as possible matters of concern to determine the level and scope of the design intervention. Similarly, with the other issues listed above, there is a considerable range in the scope in which these issues may be framed. For instance, social housing selloffs (no.3) impacted group members directly when they tried to transfer to another property due to their changing needs. However, framed more broadly, the consequences of social housing selloffs impacted the whole sector and low-income households as they struggled with the local housing shortage. Similarly, short-term tenancies (no.4) primarily impacted 'newer' tenants who were more likely to have short-term tenancies and worry about their renewal but also signal a shift in policy commitments to the notion of sustainable communities. Finally, with safeguarding (no.5), given the high concentration of vulnerable tenants in social housing and the additional barriers to their involvement, this issue if articulated further may be understood on a broader scope as requiring a more systemic intervention.

Regardless of whether these issues may be identified through their direct or indirect consequences, as individual or collective issues, in their current form, none induced Tenant Group members to act collectively to resolve them – at least not beyond joining the group and expressing their concern. As Nicole described it, although there were more than 370 members, 'the majority were only interested in the self and not the whole' (notes, 4.12.18). Thus, the group's issues remained not fully articulated. Ultimately, the issue of social housing selloffs (no.3), which was framed more widely as social housing shortage, was chosen by Nicole and another group member

(in Case 1) and later, by other committee members (in Case 2). However, before this issue was chosen, I conducted more foundational exploratory work with Nicole which explored non-participation among group members and informed our later approach.

5.2 Exploratory session   – reframing tenants as citizens

Why construct intervention?

In light of the difficulty of getting other group members involved in Tenant Group activities and my own research, I suggested that Nicole and I explore through participatory design activities how to address the issue of participation or lack thereof. In advance of the design session, I proposed, and Nicole agreed that the design brief would explore 'How can we transition group members from the mindset of tenants to citizens?' In future documentation and communications, I used the shorthand 'tenants2citizens', which succinctly captured this idea. Though my thesis aimed to work at both the individual and group level, I reasoned that engaging with Nicole, the group founder and its most active member, may potentially have a significant impact on the wider group and would hopefully lead to more members engaging with the Tenant Group and the thesis project. The design intervention was presented to Nicole as a probing exercise, using hands-on activities to explore how to engage group members in collective action by considering what might be getting in the way. Participatory design was used as it is an efficient way of gaining input and initiating a dialogue through activity-based research (Martin & Honington, 2009). The design session activities aimed to harness Nicole's knowledge and experience as a social tenant, a Tenant Group member and an artist and my knowledge of design research and, to a lesser extent, knowledge of local housing issues (based on my volunteer work at CA and desk research).

Since the design session had only one participant, in addition to introducing the framing, activities and materials to facilitate the workshop, I was also fully engaged and interacting with Nicole as we made things together and collaboratively explored this terrain. This required maintaining a critical distance of the evolving process, as required of a researcher and facilitator, and being attentive so that it was Nicole's perspective as a social tenant and Tenant Group member that took centre stage. Since it was just the two of us, the design session took place at Nicole's suggestion in her art studio, which is bright and spacious and has tables and chairs allowing for messy making activities. I took photos and made notes during and after to document this exploratory process.

5.2.1 Design-inspired research and analysis

I began the design session with the symbolic dumping of all the contents of a big bag of craft materials on a table. The materials consisted of markers, coloured paper, mesh, wires, stickers and more. This gesture intended to signal the somewhat haphazard process of hands-on inquiry, which was also guided by a practical aim, the design brief, which I wrote in bold letters on a piece of paper and hung on the wall. The design session consisted of one structured activity (an object document analysis) that I prepared in advance but was very open-ended otherwise.

The object document analysis[29] activity aimed to explore through a process of making and discourse how social tenants are constructed by public service providers; how this may impact their behaviour and attitudes; and generate ideas about how to engage group members in collective action. The document used was based on a form distributed by a local charity titled "Home-visit guidelines for support workers to assess when someone is not coping" (see: Appendix H). The form did not have any identifiers of the charity. The document title referred to a client "home-visit" by a support worker and consisted of seven bullet points describing different cues for assessing whether 'the client' is not coping. These consisted of a description of the condition of the property and the client. While the meaning of "not coping" is not specified, the 'cues' referred to are intended to enable support workers to assess a person's personal, mental and financial circumstances, to discern need. Based on this document, Nicole and I compiled a list of objects which were mentioned or implied in the document as 'cues' that a support worker may look out for.

> ### Object cues that signal if a client is not coping
>
> Objects: *Unopened letters, heater, gas meter, dirt, odour*
> Objects implied: *Mould, condensation, lighting, curtains, electricity, ashtrays, refuse.*

I asked Nicole to choose an object to explore. Nicole chose curtains and letters. We then proceeded through making and discussing these mundane things to explore their multiple meanings and consequences to the social tenants. Nicole made and hung a makeshift improvised curtain, the kind that looks temporary (but may not be) as it is made with materials that are ready-to-hand,

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[29] This method that I developed is not to be confused with document analysis, used as a method in interpretive policy analysis, and typically focused on language and discourse (See: Schwandt, 1998; Yanow, 2007; Bevir and Rhodes, 2015).

such as sheets or newspapers and propped up on a window with tape, poles, or anything that works. We contrasted how these objects are perceived or experienced from the perspective of the tenant (internal) to the perspective of someone from the outside (external), such as the support worker or a neighbour. I photographed the makeshift curtain and shared the image with Nicole in Google-Docs. In the following week, we added comments to the images and continued our discussion in a follow-up meeting. Using Google-Docs on the back of design-inspired activities, proved valuable as it offered a shared and easily accessible space to exchange ideas about central takeaways and enabled us to sharpen our understanding and capture new ideas that may arise only if given time to 'percolate'. This recalls Isabelle Stengers' (2005, .994) piece Latour and Weibel's *book on Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, which calls for creating space to slow down the construction of 'the common', by creating a space for hesitation. Our exchanges after the design activity invited this hesitation, as I illustrate below.

Exploring constructions of social tenants through objects and discourse

At first glance, generating knowledge through the contrast between internal and external perspectives on social tenants and objects in their homes may seem too simplistic and polarising. However, through deliberation nuances are revealed. Probing the ontology of these objects not only displays the multiplicity of interpretations but draws attention to their instability. At the design session, Nicole noticed how cues that may be interpreted by an outsider as an inability to cope may also be examples of effective coping strategies. For instance, Nicole described how someone trying to minimise costs may choose to only heat one room and keep their curtains closed at all times to keep the heat in. This may lead to clutter in the lived room and an absence of light, which may be judged by a support worker as a sign of not coping. Thus, an external perspective on coping that is based on object cues may generate accounts that are detached from a social tenant's lived experience and as such have limited explanatory power.

The screenshot shown in 5.2 (above), depicts a photo of the makeshift curtain Nicole made in the design session, shared and commented on in Google-Docs by me and Nicole. The comments highlight themes we discussed but also consist of new ideas. Regarding the image of the makeshift curtain, my message recalled our discussion of the sense of 'uncertainty, impermanence and anxiety' associated with short (fixed) term tenancies (also one of the central issues, no.4, identified by Tenant Group members). Nicole's message, below mine, notes that the makeshift curtain could potentially exist across all forms of tenure – not just short-term tenancies. She goes on to write: "Only differentials are the 'label' and cost of rent", using single quotation marks around the word label to cast doubt on its so-called objectivity (Figure 5.1). Four days later, Nicole

went further and made the relationship between the 'label' and 'cost of rent' more explicit, suggesting that the 'labels' were mostly based on differences in household income levels. In a conversation between us, she suggests that cues of not coping list are 'a clear indicator of standards of living being judged by entitled or privileged" (notes, 19.12.18). Indeed, returning to the Home-visit guidelines form, some cues can easily be explained by a lack of money (e.g. an empty fridge, no heating). Framing an assessment of a client's circumstances in terms of 'not coping' inevitably adds a judgemental register. As I wrote in my notes (19.12.18) "In a consumption-driven society, having money to maintain a certain standard of living is normalised, and therefore, not having money and not being able to maintain this 'standard' is stigmatised". This made me think of how the label 'broke', used to describe someone who has no money, essentially describes the person without money as somehow 'broken'.

Figure 5.1: Exploring constructions of social tenants through objects -1 'curtain'
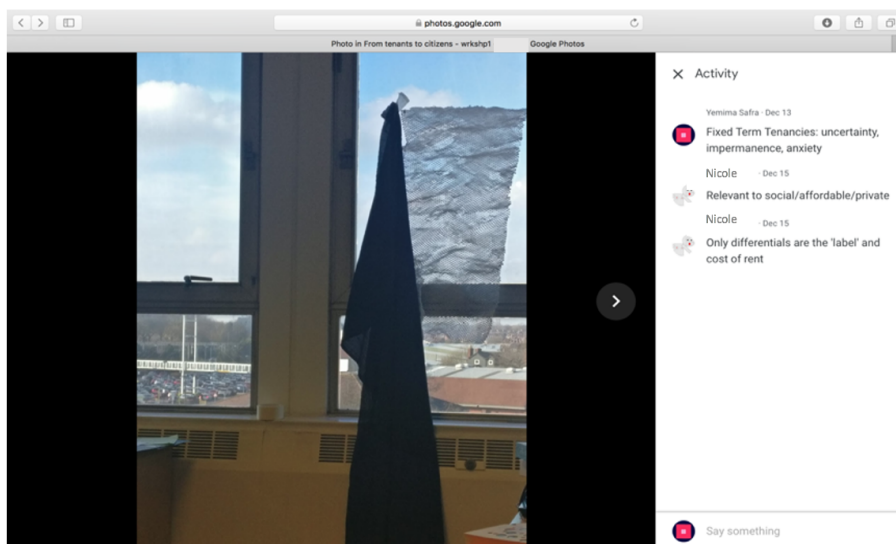
A screenshot from a Co-created shared doc

Moreover, as Nicole noted in our discussion, social tenants in this scenario might be blamed for their misfortune, regardless of context. For example, Nicole described in the design session the mould that covered large parts of her house, corroding the ceiling and walls. She said this had been getting progressively worse for years and no matter what she did, the mould would always return. Strikingly, she described the shame she felt at the state of her house, "I wrote to HA-x. I normally wouldn't write like this, but I wrote, 'It's so bad, I'm embarrassed to have people over. It's so hopeless, I have given up trying to make my *own* home look nice'" (Nicole, design session notes, 12.12.18 – emphasis of speaker shown in italics). Being judged for what one does not have is disempowering because in most cases the tenant is unable to change the situation without

support. When Nicole recounted her story, her voice trembled at the very end when she said, "I have given up trying to make my own home look nice". This was the only time I saw the hurt; usually, it did not surface.

Thus, one of the insights from the design intervention was that social tenants are judged for the very things that hurt, what they do not have and may even be too ashamed to ask. This could involve not having work, secure work, ability to work, health, a career, friends, family, education, literacy skills, digital skills, a new phone, Wi-Fi, etc. This is another consequence of the deficit approach identified in community development (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993) and prevalent in the M-Community Centre which is based on finding a 'lack of something' so that it can be fixed by an outsider. In the case of social tenants, this approach also appears to be built into the welfare system that supports them and that they depend on.

Table 5.2: Exploratory session: From tenants 2 citizens – actions, outcomes, and insights

Actions	Intended Outcomes	Outcomes	Insights
Format: Discursive & material	New understandings	Yes	Social tenants are judged for what they do not have ('being poor')
Activities: Object-focused document analysis	New capacities New resources	Yes Yes	Assessment of need ('not coping') is biased as based on assumptions and standards of the dominant group's lifestyle.
Materialising/Sharing & deliberation	Lead to further collective action	Yes	Some social tenants internalise stigmatising narratives.
Google-doc/ sharing & deliberation	Lead to future political action	No	For some social tenants disengagement is a way of coping with stigma. The role of 'citizen' does not appeal to social tenants.

Disengagement as a reaction to stigma

In the same design session, to explore barriers to public involvement, we began compiling a collection of possible barriers. Nicole wrote on separate pieces of paper issues and stigmas relating to social housing which constitute barriers and challenges (see Figure 5.2). Wanting to represent these as layers, she pasted them on the wall, one on the other. This resulted in a flimsy

construction that eventually collapsed, an outcome that struck Nicole as symbolic. In a sense, her construction gave weight (of a piece of paper) to each issue, making material the burden of these issues on social tenants. Though I find that the use of metaphors in making things often encourages superficial performativity, nonetheless, metaphors are highly effective in bringing in new perspectives and contexts to revitalise a concept (Morgan, 2014). When we returned to the image of this construction on Google Docs, she observed how the burden of these labels weighs on social tenants: 'Layers of labels placed by the society within a society – the weight of stigma' (Figure 5.2). In this somewhat cryptic phrasing, Nicole suggests that the labels are created ('placed') by society but also that in doing so they become a part of it ('within society') as if representing a natural order of things. In her next note, she returns to our focus on tenants2citizens and asks: 'Is disengagement a symptom of this weight?'. Nicole sees the stigmatisation of social tenants in society as a part of her life, and one of her ways of coping with

Figure 5.2: Exploring constructions of social tenants through objects – 2 'barriers'
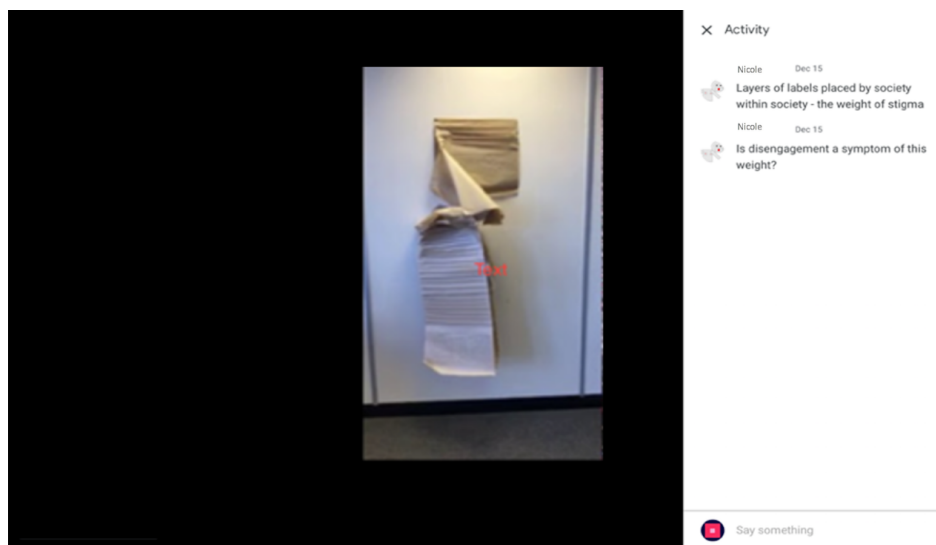
Screenshot of co-created shared -doc

it involves challenging it. Her representation of the burden reminded her of something she already knew, namely, that others may be less capable of challenging it.

Coming out of these design activities, there were new understandings for Nicole and me. First, there was a strong sense that challenging stigma and stereotypical narratives about social housing and social housing tenants was critical to any attempt to try to move members to think beyond specific tenant issues and consider collective action as a citizen group. As Nicole observed, this is complicated by the fact that people in social housing may internalize stigmatized narratives

('feel worthless'), and by the fact that the labels have come to be seen as a description of reality ('within society') and as the fault of the tenants themselves – because they are poor for instance.

To me, this understanding exposed the underlying normative assumption in the design brief which assumed that tenants *should* or would benefit from adopting the role of citizens. I had reached for the concept of citizens as a way of locating tenants in relation to the state and public policy. By proposing to cast their private housing issues as policy issues, I attempted to broaden the scope of their conflict (much like Schattschneider's socialization). However, now I realise that if the relationship to the state is experienced as one of subjugation, where the social tenant is made to feel unworthy of support and not holding a legitimate claim, it is not surprising that tenants did not see participation favourably and avoided appealing to the state. Therefore, adopting the concept of citizen, which is popular in the discourse of formal tenant participation where tenants are conceptualized as responsible citizens, in practice may be too restrictive and unlikely to appeal to Tenant Group members. Moreover, recognizing that there are many structural barriers to the formation of publics in social housing and that social tenants feel excluded, as discussed here due to discrimination, internalization of stigma, and misconceptions of powerholders, suggests that public involvement in social housing policy is an ontological problem, as tenants are not treated as a meaningful category in shaping housing services and policies. *This suggested a possible opportunity for a design intervention that focuses on how creating conditions where tenants would be seen as legitimate actors in social housing policy discourse. How might participatory design with emerging publics enable marginalized groups to overcome stigma, and stereotypical narratives and reshape public involvement in a manner that suits them?*

5.2.2 Analysis and conclusions (Exploratory session): Possible role for participatory design in the policy domain

Another insight from our interactions in the Exploratory session is that though Nicole had situated knowledge of living in social housing, it was curious to observe that she sometimes assumed an analytical detached tone when discussing problems of tenant group members. For example, in discussing stigma, Nicole talked about the role of media (notes, 19.12.18), explaining how it relentlessly portrays social tenants as to blame for the financial crisis.

> This stigma has been on the rise since the '80s but far more prevalent in the last 15 - 20 years. They are not considered valuable members of society and they don't feel like valuable members of society. (notes, 19.12.18)

While Nicole brings up important points, I'd like to stress how in assuming an analytical point of view Nicole refers to social tenants as 'they', thus removing herself from the phenomena described. This may be interpreted as an example of othering, a process of distinguishing oneself from others considered lesser, a phenomenon that is known to take place among social tenants and disadvantaged groups (Goffman, 1958; Jones, Lowe and West, 2019). Though Nicole may steer clear from identifying (and being identified) with those who internalise stigma in the manner she described above, this is at odds with her leadership role with the Tenant Group where she publicly identifies as a social tenant herself. When asked about it in person, Nicole said she did not notice she did this.

As a social tenant and a self-declared activist, Nicole moves both inside and outside of the experience of social housing and stigma. Though she draws on her local knowledge and lived experience, when she tries to validate her arguments, she also seems compelled to present them as an objective and rational account. Thus, to validate her opinion and gain legitimacy for her argument she uses language and framing that give an impression of distance and objectivity. She is cautious about speaking in the first person about her interpretations, possibly worried that these may easily be dismissed. It appears that Nicole assumes that in the context of social and public policy issues, there is a need to adopt a particular way of talking so that she will be taken seriously. As I discuss later (Case Study 2), being taken seriously is a central concern for all committee members – and again highlights the ontological struggle enfolded in the formation of the group composed of marginalised individuals (Fraser & Thurber, 2016). Thus, in her role as an activist, there is a dilemma about how to frame the rich situated knowledge that is shared by group members.

This dilemma recalls interpretivist policy scholar Schaffer' (2015) reference to experience-near and experience-distant concepts -- drawn from anthropologist Clifford Geertz (Geertz, 1983). Indeed, understanding social housing policy and its consequences from an interpretivist orientation is constructive here. While acknowledging the importance of grasping the social tenants' point of view (experience-near) is not new to participatory design, the interpretivist orientation to social inquiry, also makes use of experience-distant concepts which are necessary if one is to engage with any specialised community, in this case, the policy community (Schaffer, 2015). This is not to say that everyone who wants to influence public policy agendas and discourse needs to or can conduct policy analysis. However, I propose that design interventions in the policy domain may be thought of as enabling a form of policy analysis as they create conditions for people to mediate between experience-near and experience-distant concepts to frame the reality that they live in. While Geertz focuses on concepts in the form of particular

words and their interpretation as a point of analysis, interpretivist policy analysts also see meaning embedded in actions, texts and artefacts (Yanow, 2006; Dryzek 1982). Thus, in the next chapter, I proceed to develop an approach to analysing housing policy that leverages the stories that people tell about their 'housing history'. Further, by adopting an interpretivist method to policy analysis, I use these accounts, which use experience-near concepts, to reveal how social tenants interpret technical housing policy categories, such as housing tenure, and configure themselves in relation to these categories and the housing landscape. Thus, I continue to develop approaches and methods to contextualise policy categories and discourse and consider how to challenge these through design-inspired interventions.

Chapter 6 - The construction of tenants in housing policy: an interpretivist-inspired policy analysis

6.1 Introduction

Adopting a tenant-oriented interpretivist-inspired method to policy analysis, I explore in this chapter one of the most central constructs in housing policy, tenure. Through the personal accounts of participants, we begin to unravel the impact of the tenure construct on research participants' experiences and interpretations of their identities. To do this I look at the *policy categories* and *narratives* that shape and reinforce the construct of tenure (detailed in 3.3.2). *Policy categories*, or more specifically, *tenure categories,* are understood here as a device that helps policymakers shape the housing landscape by breaking it down into categories that give a socio-technical account of relationships between people and where they live (Cowan et al, 2010; Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010). Meanwhile, *policy narratives* are stories that governments and the policy community develop to explain and justify policy priorities, programmes and policies. In keeping with a constructivist worldview, the two are understood as co-constructed since tenure categories, which are defined by actors in the policy community, both reinforce and are reinforced by policy narratives (Thurber and Fraser, 2016; Jones, Lowe and West, 2019). Thus, it is recognised here that formal categories of tenure (Nicole's 'labels') are typically used to justify differential priorities recounted in housing policy narratives, and though they are presented in the policy literature as an objective phenomenon, they are made-up constructs that possess broader socio-political meanings and interpretations (Schaffer, 2015; Rhodes, 2018).

Below I analysed data from semi-structured contextual interviews held with six social housing tenants living in a rural area in the Midlands. Four of the research participants are members of the Tenant Group and two are not. Using a constructivist grounded approach to the analysis of interview transcripts[30], I pieced together my argument and knowledge claims by contrasting emerging themes to research from housing studies and housing policy research. This enabled me to contrast formal tenure categories and narratives with the meaning and significance given to

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[30] Since transcripts of the interviews are the primary source of data for this chapter, to streamline referencing, the interview transcript is not explicitly referenced, unless I quote from the transcript. Reference to data from fieldnotes is referenced as 'fieldnotes', followed by the date. Data from the design-inspired case studies is not used here.

them by research participants. Based on this analysis of taken-for-granted categories and narratives I consider implications for design-inspired interventions with social tenants (Section 7.3)

Below I analyse how participants see tenure categories and narratives in order to shed light on how people who are less likely to be owners make sense of their role and position in a housing landscape that emulates ownership. By assessing the extent to which tenants accept, reject, or adapt specific housing policy categories and policy narratives about tenure, I gain insights into how research participants are constructed in the housing policy landscape and how they see themselves (section 6.2). These leads to a discussion of how this impacts their propensity to participate in collective political action and a discussion for how to approach a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach with social tenants (Section 6.3).

6.2   Unpacking tenure – social tenants' perspective

Conversations about research participants' (n=6) housing history revealed that all had lived in a variety of tenures, including tenures that do not fit the three central categories of private, social and owners. Notably, tenure categories were not considered in isolation. Instead, discourse about tenure was based on comparisons of different attributes and experiences. The owner tenure was the standard or ideal to which social let was compared, even when participants were not prompted to compare tenure categories. This reflects the dominant status and valorisation of the owner tenure in policy narratives and public discourse (Cairney and Jones, 2016; Bevan and Jennings, 2019). Meanwhile, private let was barely discussed by research participants, even as a point of comparison to social let. Some tenants with children who lived in private let dismissed it as a 'dead-end' tenure because it was seen as too costly and insecure and did not lead to ownership. None of the participants had lived in a private let, but four out of the six had at some point been homeowners. Interestingly, this does not fit with the popular metaphor of the housing ladder as a staggered progression from social let and private let to ownership which informs housing policy strategy (HMCLG, 2019; 2020b). Given the centrality of the owner tenure in popular discourse, highlighted in housing studies (Gurney, 1999; Flint, 2003). I begin my analysis by unpicking the extent to which social tenants in this study accept, reject and adapt policy narratives and wider public discourse about ownership tenure and how this impacts them.

Though most research participants (five out of six) would have preferred to be owner-occupiers, conversations suggest a more complex and contradictory picture. The potential practical merits of ownership were generally agreed upon by participants. Reasons given in favour of owner-occupation can be broken down into four categories which include: its potential asset value, the sense of security it affords, societal conventions and long-term benefits to the family. Below are some direct quotes from these conversations:

1) *Asset value*   'a good investment'

2) *Security*   'secure if you had money', 'can't throw you out if you pay the mortgage'
'something you can fall back on',

3) *Convention*   'what was done', 'part of making a family',
'I never lived in a rented property'

4) *Family benefit* 'something to pass on to the children', 'gives stability'

Notably, quotes from participants about security (no.2 above) show a crack in the ownership narrative as it is stipulated that security depends on one's ability to pay - though failure to do so is not a part of the ownership narrative. Thus, the policy narrative and public discourse about homeownership tend to be one-sided and underplay the risks involved, such as the possibility of losing one's home and the capital invested. The experiences of participants in this study however problematise the idealised narrative of ownership. All six participants made the common-sense observation that ownership was desirable if you can afford it. Based on accounts of their own experiences and those of people close to them it appears that specific circumstances, such as social inequalities and social characteristics relating to gender, health, and employment, made ownership less feasible for some. Four out of the six participants had previously owned a property and therefore spoke from personal experience. I summarise these here:

Nicole (in her mid-50s) bought a repossessed studio with her boyfriend in 1990 when she was 21. Paying the mortgage was a struggle and when they broke up a year later, they ended up having to sell at a loss. Thus, at a young age, Nicole found herself in debt.

Kate's (in her early 60s) boyfriend won the lottery and with a mortgage bought a big Victorian house he had always dreamed of owning. A year later, burdened with mortgage payments, bills and maintenance costs, he sold it at a loss (when factoring in the cost of selling and moving). Once their relationship broke down, he bought a caravan, which she said made more sense, and Kate became homeless.

Tracy (in her mid-50s) married at age 23 and bought a house with her husband, who ended up leaving her and their baby a year later in 1990. Being unemployed, she could not afford to buy her husband's share of the house and worried about losing out on her share as the market value of the house sunk. Terrified of being placed in a B&B away from her support network she scraped by on benefits. A year later she was allocated a new-build council house and managed to sell her house for a £10,000 profit.

Beth (in her 70s) was locked in her house for years by her husband who suffered from dementia and became increasingly controlling and violent. She finally escaped through a window left unlocked and was housed by the council in sheltered living accommodation. This is the first time in her life that she is living in rented accommodation.

These experiences, remarkably diverse for such a small sample, highlight how the benefits of ownership rest on assumptions of economic and personal stability. For Nicole, Kate, Tracey and Beth a relationship breakdown triggered the need to leave their home. Nicole and Tracey had to sell since neither could afford their mortgage, though Tracy did ultimately make a profit. All their experiences show the risk of urgent liquidation due to changes in personal circumstances and the risk of losses from the change in market value. Nicole described feeling 'cheated' because she thought buying was a 'good investment' but found herself in debt, which took a long time to repay. She did not specify by whom she feels cheated (nor did I ask) but by using the word she seemed to imply that the blame for this misfortune rests elsewhere. In a sense, 'buying into' the idealised narrative is encouraged as public discourse and policy narratives disproportionately focus on the merits of homeownership while underplaying the risks. Consequently, it is not surprising that participants underestimated the risk. In Kate's case, this involved underestimating the cost of maintaining and paying for a big house. Kate described how everyone advised her boyfriend to buy 'big', so rather than buying a smaller property outright, he took out a mortgage, and then found it crippling because all the lottery money was invested in the house. Thus, an important finding from this analysis is that *ownership narratives and conventions appear under strain among lower-income households or households with little disposable income.*

Still, a bias in favour of ownership is deep-seated and forms a central part of housing policy narratives, that reflect social norms, values and aspirations which are internalised by tenants. Tracy and Beth described buying a home after marrying as something 'that was done'. For Beth who comes from a middle-class background, homeownership was taken for granted since she was raised by home-owning parents. Tracy went on to describe homeownership more expansively as an integral 'part of making a family'. Though she grew up in a rental, she recounted how in the

1990s it seemed that everyone in employment could expect to buy and the fact that social tenants were buying their properties made it seem all the more feasible. Indeed, three of the four participants from the Tenant Group had parents who bought their social let through the government's Right to Buy programme. Thus, these accounts suggest that *home ownership is inferred by participants as a marker of a significant and almost universal life event.*

Thus, mirroring the ownership narrative, three participants described homeownership as a dream, a metaphor often used by policymakers and housing developers (Robertson, 2017; Soaita and McKee, 2019). While homeownership narratives are infused with affective themes, about the 'dream of ownership', 'home is the heart' and 'being a success' (quotes from the HA-x brochure for private sales and shared ownership), these are experienced as hollow if people are beset by personal and financial difficulties. None of the participants described any attachment to the property they owned or regretted once they moved on. In the most extreme account above told by Beth, the home was the setting for years of domestic abuse and physical imprisonment by her husband. While domestic abuse is experienced in all forms of tenure, upon reflecting on her experience and comparing it to her current accommodation, Beth explained that she preferred sheltered accommodation because she felt a part of a community of people who, for the most part, looked out for each other. Thus, Beth seems to imply that as a homeowner she did not have the protection of a community. These diverse experiences suggest that *the meaning of home is also highly abstract and emotive, and not necessarily connected to the ownership of a property, as idealised ownership narratives imply.*

Critically, though it is likely to be more disruptive for low-income households, tenure narratives and housing policies that idealise homeownership use universal language about its merits. Yet, unlike other capital investments, the home asset is much more enmeshed in people's everyday lives and their sense of well-being and security. Even though housing demand and value have increased dramatically over the decades, the mantra that housing is a 'good investment' underplays non-monetary costs. This holds for higher-income households as well, though the consequences are more profound and long-lasting for low-income households (Robertson, 2017). Thus, as housing scholar Susan J. Smith (2015) points out, the precariousness of homeownership for households is attributed to the same traits that make it appear a secure investment – namely its immobility and illiquidity. While this may benefit mortgage lenders, it encourages households (as many housing policy programmes do) to invest most of their money in an indivisible asset is a bias that requires closer evaluation. *Thus, the rationalization of homeownership as a 'secure' and 'smart' investment more consistently represents the business arguments of developers and lenders than of consumers.*

Keeping all these contradictions in mind, my analysis also finds that social tenants inevitably take part in perpetuating the idealisation of ownership. Indeed, current housing policies, most notably the Right to Buy programme (seen favourably by all participants) give tenants a stake in the ownership narrative by effectively giving low-income households the hope of owning their social let. Though many research participants explained that Right to Buy was out of reach for many – whether it was for lack of a steady income or due to their advanced age – no one challenged the programme even though three participants admitted it depletes much-needed social housing stock. Instead, the ownership narrative was accepted and sustained by its successes, as all research participants knew someone (usually in their parent's generation) who bought their council property.[31] These experiences, circulated in popular discourse, reinforce the asset-oriented rationale that drives ownership narratives and ignores the outliers and contradictions. Even though findings in housing studies show these outliers are not isolated.[32] Thus, it appears that the ownership narratives are accepted by participants, despite evidence that they exclude people who are similarly situated and come at the expense of other tenures (see: Gurney, 1999a, 1999b; Ruming, 2015; Roberts, 2017). So, while all participants dispute and are incensed by derogatory narratives about social housing, they do not necessarily challenge the ownership narratives which fuels this. Thus it seems that to understand how to challenge the stigmatising narratives of social housing and social tenants, there is a need to engage with housing narratives in general as the tenure categories are inseparable.

Exploring contradictions

Seeking to understand the social tenants' perspective, this apparent attachment to the ownership narrative suggests that it might have some merit for social tenants. Could holding on to the 'dream' of ownership be of merit to social tenants in its own right? Seeing participants' enrolment in the ownership narrative as aspirational helps explain how research participants both accept and reject ownership narratives. Seen as aspirational, ownership is something people strive for, regardless of how viable it may be. In addition, it enables anyone to legitimately participate in 'ownership talk'. This calms the ongoing tension that exists when one tenure is normalised as the preferred tenure, even though it is not accessible to all. Thus, *I propose that the aspirational*

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[31] Two participants proudly specified how much their parents paid to buy their social let (under 10K) and the sum it was sold for once their parents passed away (over 150K).

[32] Housing research shows that low-income households are much less likely to stay for long in the owner-occupier tenure and are also less likely to trade up or refinance their mortgage to lower interest rates, so yet again, are less likely to benefit from capital gains (Cowan, Carr and Wallace, 2018).

quality of the ownership narrative also thwarts challenges to the status quo which publics-oriented participatory design seeks to elicit. This is not an idea I have seen in the housing studies or housing policy literature and warrants further investigation. However, it does recall Marxist perspectives elaborated by Madden and Marcuse (2016) to explain why the government may provide housing, to keep the masses satisfied (detailed in section 5.2.3 – about the historical and political context of social housing). In retrospect, it strikes me that my question about 'what could be the logic behind these contradictions' would have been an ideal question to ask of research participants, possibly in a workshop setting, where through activities participants would themselves propose explanations and draw on these we could co-design ways of challenging existing conceptions of social housing and also of alternatives that could be shared more widely with decision-makers. In addition, the process of sharing findings from these conversations was limited to informal conversations with participants and could have possibly drawn wider interest if presented more visually or through prompts on the group's Facebook page. But then, these are just conjectures, which were not developed or trialled.

Table 6.1: Interpretivist-inspired tenant-oriented policy analysis – actions, outcome and, insights

Actions	Intended Outcomes	Outcomes	Insights
Semi-structured interviews Sharing & deliberation	New understandings	Yes	research participants both accept and reject ownership narratives.
	New capacities	Yes	
	New resources	Yes	popular narratives underplay the risks of homeownership and universalize its merits
	Lead to further collective action	Yes	
	Lead to future political action	No	the rationalization of homeownership highlights arguments of developers and lenders
	-		social tenants are fearful of losing their homes regardless of tenancy type and associated legal rights.

In sum, though research participants were aware of the biased representations of tenures and how the idealisation of homeownership was deeply enmeshed in societal norms and culture, our conversations encouraged them to give detailed accounts of the possible toll of these policy narratives. Discussing their experiences of different tenures highlighted to research participants how popular narratives underplay the risks of homeownership and assume a certain lifestyle and level of security that not everyone has. It also reinforced to some research participants the merits of social housing. For someone, like Nicole, who took a more activist stance, this led to questions about how to challenge stigmatizing narratives about social housing and social tenants, whereas others did not necessarily see their possible agency in this space. Meanwhile, as a researcher assuming a publics-oriented interventionist perspective, this led me to consider, how a publics-oriented participatory design approach, might enable group members to reconfigure derogatory policy categories and narratives. Would it be possible to develop with Tenant Group members alternative roles and relations to housing categories and narratives – possibly reframing it as desirable and even aspirational? If so, might such an intervention impact the likelihood of more social tenants getting involved in public formation?

6.3 Implications for *publics-oriented participatory design* practice

6.3.1   Analysing propensity to get involved in group actions

To understand the implications of social tenant's perspectives and behaviour concerning tenure, I seek to contextualise these in relation to the housing policy. One of the insights from the interviews and analysis was that changes to social housing policies about tenure over the past several decades have resulted in intended and unintended stratification within the social let tenure. This I propose, may explain the different propensities of tenants to get involved in political activities and therefore are significant to unravel here. To explore this idea, I draw out here three central factors that were repeatedly mentioned by research participants when they explained their own involvement with the Tenant Group and that of other social tenants, who chose not to get involved. These factors are the type of tenancy, the type of provider and the tenants' particular circumstances. Critically, all factors influence the security of one's tenure.

Type of tenancy – legal versus perceived security

Though the factors often overlap and are also highly situated, the most significant factor in the stratification of social lets in the literature is the type of tenancy. In referring to the legal rights of

different tenancies, I draw primarily on David Cowan's (2011) book, *Housing Law and Policy* and then contrast these legal categories with participants' perspectives of these categories to identify gaps.

There are four types of social tenancies. The most secure is called Secure tenancy, which is no longer offered, followed by Assured tenancy, which is also called 'lifetime' tenancy because it gives tenants the right to remain in their home for a lifetime as long as they uphold the tenancy conditions.[33] Next, Assured Short-term tenancy which has a fixed duration and its renewal is not guaranteed. The fourth type of tenancy is the newest and least secure, Starter tenancy, which has a 12-month 'probationary' period that tenants must complete before they are offered an Assured Short-term tenancy (Housing Act, 2012). Under Starter tenancies, the landlord may abruptly end the tenancy and tenants do not have any legal right to appeal an eviction (Cowan, 2011, p.368). Notably, as the newer tenancy types are progressively more transitional and short-term, the above order illustrates a shift in policy priorities, as governments increasingly move away from support of social housing.

Turning to social tenants' perspective of these policy categories and the interpretivist element in this policy analysis, it is interesting to note that feeling insecure is prevalent among almost all types of tenancies (Secure excluded). Research participants reported that other Tenant Group members were fearful of retaliation from HA-x. Crucially, even tenants with Assured tenancies felt insecure. Specifically, committee members (Nicole, Tracy and Ned) recounted multiple instances in which group members asked to remain anonymous in the context of the public Q&A meeting held with HA-x officials, and in the writing up of minutes for group meetings. Also, Nicole described how a government-led pilot of Right to Buy in housing associations (rolled out by HA-x) stirred anxiety among some group members, resulting in her getting a flurry of emails from members worried that the HA-x might decide to sell their property and force them to move elsewhere. These accounts powerfully illustrate the underlying fear that tenants have of losing their homes, regardless of the tenancy type.

Notably, while policy narratives about ownership enthuse about the security it affords (without stipulating this is contingent on one's circumstance, as noted previously) no such narrative exists for social lets, even with the Assured tenancy and even if tenants are meeting the terms of their

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[33] These were offered to tenants who started their rent after 1989. Since the passing of the Housing Act 2012, social housing providers have been permitted by the government to offer to new tenants the less secure, Assured Short-term Tenancies, rather than the 'lifetime' tenancies (see: Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018).

contract. Thus, by implication, insecurity becomes a trait of non-ownership tenures. As an extension of the logic of the ownership narratives, if someone does not own their home they do not have 'something you can fall back on', as Ned put it earlier in describing the merits of ownership. Thus, this tenant-oriented policy analysis finds that *housing legislation fails to register or remedy tenants' enduring sense of insecurity which is informed by societal biases towards different tenures that are reflected and affirmed by ownership narratives.*[34] Significantly, the impact of this mindset, which appears to be internalised by social tenants, impacts their attitudes and conduct, including the propensity to get involved in political action.

Type of social housing providers

Another factor that influences research participants' experience of the social let tenure and their sense of security relates to the housing provider. Compared to HAs, social tenants in council housing have more protections since, as public authorities, local authorities are regulated by the government and can be held accountable (Cowan and McDermont, 2007; Cowan and Morgan, 2009; Cowan, 2011). Of course, not all council housing providers necessarily provide better service than housing associations. However, the legal rights of these tenant groups do differ, and all research participants in this study believed that local authorities were usually more accommodating landlords – especially if someone was struggling to pay the rent or had personal issues. Kate and Ned attributed this to democratic accountability, reasoning that elected officials and the council leadership were more responsive to tenants' needs and complaints because they wanted their support on election day.

Another reason for the distinction between housing providers which ultimately impacts social tenants' sense of security and likelihood to engage in public formation are different business models of the council housing and independent housing associations. As governments have withdrawn subsidies for social housing provision, housing associations have been allowed to fund their activities through property sales and renting in the private market – something council housing cannot do (Holmans, 2005; Robertson, 2017). Tenants believed this hybrid public-private business model justifies a focus on profitmaking by housing associations and undermines the so-called social purpose of these organisations, a position also held by many housing researchers who critique this neoliberal approach (Hodkinson, Watt and Mooney, 2013; Robertson, 2017; Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018). In addition, it was also clear to research

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[34] Though my data is based on interviews with social tenants, the same may be the case with private tenants and leaseholders who are also non-owners.

participants that this has weakened their position vis a vis the social landlords, especially with the big national housing associations, such as HA-x, which they believed were more business-minded. Three participants cited HA-x record profits for 2018, which made headlines in the local paper, as evidence of a profit-driven mindset.[35] Moreover, speaking from experience, Ned and Tracy observed that small local providers that managed fewer properties usually gave better service and were more socially minded (e.g. respectful of social tenants and accommodating and conscientious with vulnerable tenants).

Personal traits and circumstances

Lastly, based on the data collected, it appears that personal traits and circumstances are significant in determining the propensity of a social tenant to get involved in collective political action. Since social housing allocation is based on need, which is assessed based on applicants' income/assets and personal circumstances, most tenants live in low-income households with multiple traits of disadvantage (ONS, 2017). Nonetheless, as can be inferred from tenants' stories, there is a range of income levels and skills among social tenants.[36] Three out of the six participants used variants on the theme of 'getting by'. For instance, Kate and her sister Lana, who did not join the Tenant Group described struggling with multiple issues relating to finances, health and wellbeing. Neither was able to hold paid employment. Kate in particular, who was homeless at the time, described life as a 'struggle', a 'battle', a 'fight' (notes, 23.1.19). Her account of hardship revolved around stories about herself and her close-knit family of seven siblings. She described individuals, like her brother who had a drug dependency problem and lived and thieved on the street, as having 'fallen out of the system' and as incapable of even applying for benefits which he was eligible for.

> They feel defeated, knowing it's a long fight ahead. It's so much effort to get support and benefits, it's easier for some not to deal, not to cope. People haven't got the fight in them. Don't matter how positive I am. They genuinely can't fight the fight. When you are mentally and physically unwell it becomes an impossible task (Kate, notes, 12.3.19).

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[35] The local paper, which is not referenced for the sake of anonymity, reports a revenue of over £350 million. An increase of 7% from the previous year, attributed mostly to an increase in private rental incomes.

[36] Though income levels were not discussed with participants, as I deemed this to be too intrusive and unjustified for this thesis, financial resilience can be deduced from people's stories and accounts, suggesting demographic factors such as social tenants' employment status, health and wellbeing, education and household composition.

Kate brings into this study, at least nominally, perspectives of people who are just barely getting by. Moreover, her account suggests that people like her brother constitute an easy-to-ignore group because they do not have the mental or physical strength to access the support they need and qualify for. Thus, problematically, those that are most affected and most vulnerable may be least likely to engage with a Tenant Group or a participatory design project.

Tracy sees it slightly differently. She observes that "the ones that are feeling it" (transcript, 28.3.19) were most attracted to the Tenant Group and were quick to volunteer to join the committee, but in the end, because they had so many "personal problems" (transcript, 28.3.19) and were, according to Tracy, "so full of their own needs that they couldn't be bothered to put themselves out to committee meetings" (transcript, 28.3.19) and therefore did not contribute. Thus, as reported by social movements researcher Emma Craddock (2020), taking action, and much more so collective political action (e.g. activism) may be seen as a luxury that only the relatively privileged, in terms of cultural and symbolic capital, can afford to engage in given the time, effort, cost and risk involved.

To sum up, understanding the stratification of social housing is important to participatory design practice with social tenants as it shows the diversity of social housing and the varied attachments and agonistic concerns that may hold sway. Research participants were uncomfortable talking about these differences and generally avoided them. For example, Tracy is the only participant who explicitly discusses how low-income households essentially compete for limited resources. She admits that she 'feels bad' (transcript, 28.1.19, p.2) and sees herself as 'part of the problem' (transcript, 28.1.19, p.2) because in her current situation, she would never qualify for social housing as she earns well, but sees how others, needier than her, struggle to access social housing or have less secure tenancies.

Significantly, these narratives inevitably undermine the perceived legitimacy of demands made by the social tenants and tensions that exist among social tenants and those who seek to also access the benefits of social housing. This is significant since from the perspective of the policy community, the Tenant Group, which is composed primarily of social tenants and focused on social housing issues, is inevitably identified and constructed into housing policy through the widely used category of tenure. Thus, yet again, it is evident that public involvement in social housing policy is an ontological problem, where social tenants are not seen as legitimate contributors and that raising concerns about social housing may be seen as risking their already tenuous positions as recipients of housing support.

6.3.2 Insights from a publics-oriented design intervention with social housing tenants

Drawing on insights from the Exploratory session (Tenant2Citizen, Phase 2), which revealed that tenants generally rejected the roles of consumers and citizens, and insights from tenants' perspectives and experience of tenure and housing narratives in the policy analysis (Phase 3), the design-inspired interventions in Case 1 and 2, may be understood as investigations of how social tenants may resist enacting the roles and relations constructed for them in public policy and create new roles and narratives, possible ones that are more inclusive and engage those who do not currently have access to social housing but believe in its merit. Thus assuming an approach that explores and challenges existing constructions of relationships and roles in housing policy, the interpretivist policy analysis suggests that a more publics-oriented design approach seeks to develop participatory design-inspired interventions with Tenant Group members that aim to challenge and bridge across tenure categories and thus make these assumed matters of fact into matters of concern. Below I elaborate on what this means.

Challenging policy narratives

It is well-established in the related literature and confirmed here that the overriding preference for homeownership in UK housing policy is justified and shaped by policy narratives and policies that are closely intertwined and predicated on the idealisation of the owner tenure. In this context, the benefits of the social let tenure are overlooked even as the shortage of housing and problems of affordability narrow many people's housing options. Indeed, in contrast to the derogatory portrayal of the social let tenure in policy narratives, and despite the housing problems that led to the formation of the Tenant Group, all participants in this study were positive about social housing. It was deemed common knowledge that social let offered cheaper rates and greater protections from evictions. This is supported by the English Housing Survey which compares tenures across measures of affordability, security and condition (DCLG, 2017).[37] Based on these insights, I propose that contrary to the singular narrative that valorises ownership, in today's housing landscape social housing may be reassessed as an aspirational tenure. This is

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[37] For instance, concerning the measure of affordability, social renting is the cheapest of all the tenures, with a mean weekly rent of £95 for council tenants and £106 for housing association renters in 2015-16, compared to £184 a week for private renters and £159 for the average mortgage payment (DCLG, 2017).

worthwhile, as it may enable social tenants to reconstruct the way that they are perceived and constructed into housing policy.

But how to counter the widespread conception of social housing tenure as an indicator of disadvantage or even deviance through participatory design-inspired interventions? As I have outlined here, the dominance of the owner tenure is deeply embedded in the neoliberal ideology that permeates governance structures and processes. Therefore, an attempt to challenge its hegemony may understandably seem impractical, especially for a small newly formed tenant group. Taking this into account, I suggest a slightly different approach and one that considers the fact that tenants, regardless of what they have been through, still prefer the owner tenure. Rather than challenging the ownership narrative, something that research participants were not inclined to do, design-inspired interventions with participants can develop alternatives. Such alternatives for instance might emphasise the demand for social housing and the demand for low-cost housing across all tenure groups.

Bridging across tenure categories

Based on interviews with social tenants, it is evident that tenure categories and narratives tend to reinforce divisions between tenures, with one tenure favoured and the other stigmatised. As a consequence, housing issues are often articulated along the lines of categories predefined by policies which as confirmed here, are not neutral. For instance, many contemporary housing-related issue-based groups form around issues that are tenure-specific, whether it is regeneration for social let or tenant rights for private let. This is sensible yet also overly restrictive since tenures often overlap and influence each other. In addition, as shown here concerning the social let tenure, there is an ever-increasing stratification of tenure categories, reflecting the complex patchwork of housing policies. As social housing allocations and developments are increasingly restrictive (Cowan, 2011; MHCLG, 2020b), the stratification of the social let tenure documented here further undermines the sense of security of the most disadvantaged groups. Importantly, for public formation, changes in administrative processes, eligibility criteria, and housing priorities (Pattison, Diacon, and Vine, 2010) create what Schattschneider (1960) termed as mobilisation bias which is likely to negatively impact the propensity of such groups to get involved in collective political action.

Still, despite this fragmentation of actors and issues relating to housing which results in competing interests and agendas, there are also obvious overarching issues that are problematic

for society at large. Housing shortage and housing affordability, as we find in Case Study 2, are a concern for many tenure groups, and therefore may be a way of expanding the issue (or conflict to use Schattschneider's terminology) thereby giving a wider incentive for public formation, Following Schattschneider's notion of societal fault lines that divide people, it appears that distinctions between public and private, and capitalist versus socialist approaches in policy, are central conflicts in society today and create fault lines between groups that may assemble around shared common and agonistic concerns. Designing with Tenant Group members initiatives that cross tenure divides may help create what Madden and Marcuse describe as *an alternative residential logic* (2016, p. 52). This example of taking a 'big picture' view of the housing landscape to support emerging publics, suggests that publics-oriented design-inspired interventions may have a role to play in developing methods and processes that may help bridge across existing policy categories and societal fault lines.

6.4   Lessons from an interpretivist-inspired policy analysis method

The interpretivist-inspired policy analysis modelled here explores how design researchers and participants may consider plausible explanations for gaps that exist between informal and formal perspectives about the social housing landscape. By seeking to understand the perspective of research participants and asking how apparent discrepancies make sense from the perspective of participants, researchers not only highlight the perspective of marginalised groups but also legitimise them. For example, consider the gap identified here between tenants' sense of security and the legal protections that they are afforded. This gap might be unknown to policymakers,[38] who might not be aware of the climate of fear that exists for some social tenants. Such an example shows how a gap between the declared purpose and rationale of policies, and how they are perceived and experienced by those they impact, may be revealed through interpretive methods. By acknowledging, integrating and analysing the perspectives and local knowledge of marginalised groups in this manner, participatory design can reveal these interpretations as valid ways of seeing and leverage this for issue articulation.

Inconsistencies and contradictions between formal and informal understanding and experience of policy categories, narratives and policies, were used as opportunities to explore and learn with

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[38] Tellingly, relatively recent legislation (Housing Act 2016) has secured protection from retaliatory action of landlords for private tenants. No such measures were put in place for social housing because, from a legal policy perspective, evictions are more difficult to carry out in the secure and assured tenancies exclusive to social housing.

participants. I found that, though participants are often aware of these tensions and contradictions, they tend to mirror dominant discourse and downplay them. However, through our inquiry, they were encouraged to consider the gap between mainstream representations of the social let tenure - as manifested, justified and perpetuated in policy narratives - and their own experiences, beliefs and aspirations. This moves towards understanding the relationship between experience-near and experience-distant concepts also results in insights into how tenants construct their identities and how they negotiate these contradictions.

These insights build a collection of ideas, for possible exploration through designing with the group. For instance, several participants came out of the interviews with a renewed sense of the merit of social housing (interview notes, 12.12.19; transcript, 11.1.19, transcript, 28.1.19; transcript_T&N, 28.1.19). For example, Nicole expressed concern that her daughter doesn't understand and prefers to live in private rent because of the stigma (Interview notes, 12.12.19) and Ned returns to the point that social rent bungalows are increasingly sought after and hard to find. Thus, through discourse, there is an opening to explore through participatory activities with tenants where social housing may be framed as aspirational too. Such reconfigurations of existing policy narratives about tenure may support public formation among marginalized groups as they develop the notion that social housing is important, worth fighting for and a legitimate issue.

In sum, findings from the tenant-oriented interpretivist-inspired policy analysis conducted here showed that social tenants interviewed are acutely aware of the dominant housing policy narratives, which compared the social let unfavourably - as a site for dependency, anti-social behaviour and a place of last resort – to owner-occupiers. These divisions undermine the perceived legitimacy of demands made by social tenants, especially as private rent and house sale rates rise (CIH, 2020; EHS, 2020), thus impacting their propensity to get involved in policy issues. This climate also makes the formation of mix-tenure groups more difficult, even though housing issues, such as housing affordability and housing shortage, are common to all tenure groups (Turnstall and Pleace, 2018). Moreover, as shown here and supported in the housing studies literature (Flint, 2004; Bradley, 2013), these stigmatising categories and narratives are internalised by social tenants. For instance, as an extension of idealised narratives on ownership, participants reported how social renters inevitably feel insecure in a home they do not own regardless of the protections afforded to them by their tenancies. Thus, engaging tenants' perspectives on their experiences of social housing and its narratives is an indirect way to surface how policy process and content influence their propensity to participate. For participants and practitioners of publics-oriented participatory design this suggests that to enable political action, participatory design must challenge stigmatising narratives about social tenants and create

opportunities for the formation of publics. More broadly, this confirms that a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach needs to first reveal and contest systemic assumptions about people's roles and relationships to begin to unsettle predetermined roles and barriers to public involvement.

Chapter 7 – Exploring the application of *publics-oriented participatory design* with a social housing Tenant Group

7.1 Introduction

To explore how to expand the boundaries of their issues as suggested in the agenda-setting literature, and bridge across tenure categories as suggested here, I proposed collective methods of inquiry to enable participants to learn about an issue that concerned them, its consequences and be able to gauge the scope of the issue. On their part, committee members hoped to gain a new understanding of the local housing landscape and determine how to proceed as a group and intervene in this space. Selloffs of social housing were an issue identified earlier and chosen by committee members because it incensed many locals, not just social tenants, as all tenures were impacted by the housing shortage which was especially acute in the local villages (see Section 6.1.2). Below I outline the planned design-inspired interventions (Case Studies 1 and 2) to conduct the research and how they evolved and discuss to what extent participants gained new knowledge, skills, and relationships and felt empowered to challenge constraints and negative narratives associated with the social housing tenure. In sections 8.2 and 8.3, I detail the approach undertaken, and what transpired, and analyse unexpected outcomes and discrepancies I found in the design theory.

Further, though only a handful of group members participated in this research, the aim of the design intervention was always directed at influencing the Tenant Group as an emerging public (Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2010; Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012). Embracing the notion of infrastructuring as ongoing (Star and Ruhleder, 1996) and open-ended, I aimed to create with group members "socio-technical resources that intentionally enable adoption and appropriation beyond the initial scope of the design, a process that might include participants not present during the initial design" (Le Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013, p. 247). As such, activities, discussions and communications about my research project and the specific design sessions functioned as design-inspired interventions in that they represented proposals of how the Tenant Group may operate. In other words, by exploring possibilities for collective, proactive, and policy-oriented approaches and actions, the Tenant Group would potentially form into a public. However, as I detail below, these possibilities were for the most part not embraced by members of the group. In the closing section of this chapter, I assess why members rejected this *publics-*

oriented participatory design approach and what this means theoretically and methodologically to design with emerging publics.

Lastly, it is important to note that though my relationship with the Tenant Group committee was instrumental, with each side seeking to utilise the relationship to meet their specific interests and needs, it was underpinned by a mutual commitment to support each other. When very few people acknowledged and took interest in Nicole, Tracy and Ned's ambitious undertaking to lead a social housing action group, I, an outsider from a London university did. This reinforced their sense of pride and legitimacy in what they had already accomplished and may accomplish in the future. Moreover, according to Tracy, it was clear to the committee that my interventions were directed at issues that they chose to prioritise and aimed, as she put it, 'to move things forward' (transcript, 28.3.19, p.3). Focusing on my research experience and skills, the committee perceived I would be of use to them in researching the current state of local housing in the area, something they struggled to do. In return, they agreed to take part in my research and try approaches and methods that were very different from what they were used to. They were also very willing to share with me their trials and tribulations in organising and leading the group, allowing me to observe up close how their, sometimes, thankless volunteer work both excited and demoralised them. Though my and their commitments to the Tenant Group were very different, and from the beginning, I was clear that my involvement was limited in time and scope, the design project was mutually constituted based on our different yet overlapping interests. Thus, as the reader enters the design-inspired interventions below, I would like to stress that the power dynamics between myself and the research participants did not always mirror societal structures of status and power, but were dynamic, multi-layered, and messy.

7.2 Case Study 1 – Bridging the knowledge and tenure gap

Why construct the design intervention?

Based on insights from the Tenant2Citizen activity and discussions (Exploratory session), I began to develop ideas, which I shared with Nicole, about how to frame future design-inspired interventions. The aim was to develop a pragmatic framing for recruiting Tenant Group members (detailed below) to engage in co-designing methods that will challenge derogatory narratives about social tenants and bridge across tenure groups (notes, 3.1.2019). At this time, an unexpected event gave urgency to the design intervention: A Tenant Group member shared with

the group a link to a heated debate, which took place online on a local Facebook forum called the Village Notice Board[39] (name anonymized). The debate revolved around the issue of local social housing selloffs and drew the interest of a handful of Tenant Group members who joined the discussion. In addition, the same member wrote privately to Nicole to propose the Tenant Group did something about the issue, specifically about the shortage of stock for the elderly -- an issue that also interested Ned, one of the committee members. Excited by this appeal and influenced by the design session where we discussed the need to develop methods for bridging across tenure groups, Nicole proposed to initiate a meeting between members of the Village Notice Board and the Tenant Group in order to discuss and develop a plan for challenging authorities and HA-x about social housing selloffs.

In this context, Nicole asked if I would be interested in leading a participatory design session. In particular, she mentioned one of the inquiry methods I developed and shared with her called 'FOI challenge'. The idea behind the FOI challenge was to assemble group members to co-design ways of investigating housing issues using Freedom of Information requests using a digital platform called WhatDoTheyKnow.com, which makes FOI requests and responses to them accessible for all to see. Previously I had proposed to Nicole that using FOI requests may help group members learn about specific housing issues that concern them but also challenge the lack of transparency among independent housing providers who were not obligated (like public-run council housing) by FOI laws to respond to requests. Also, by participating in developing a collective method of inquiry using FOI requests and a digital platform, I proposed the group could meet to discuss the issues in greater depth and assert its agency. The hope was that such actions would move the group forward in challenging derogatory housing narratives and labels of social tenants while also developing their skills and knowledge about housing policies by co-designing and adapting the use of a formal tool for public inquiry (FOIs) to their specific needs and constraints. This reasoning is in line with the private sphere approach to public involvement (Fraser, 1990; Stall and Stoecker, 1998) which sees collective actions in the private sphere as a springboard for participants to gain capacities and influence in shaping discourse and activities in the public sphere. Nicole liked the idea of developing an activity for promoting collective research of their issues and wanted to integrate this into the first meetup about the issue of social housing selloffs. Thus, I, the design researcher, was the one who was invited to participate in an 'expert' role in what was initially conceived by Nicole as a Tenant Group initiative. To my delight, this invitation

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[39] The Village Notice Board is a Facebook group which provides information and discussion about local events, news, lost and found, items for sale, freecycle, and promotion of local businesses. It serves the residents of a village which has 3000 residents, though the group's membership consists of almost ten thousand members. Unlike the Tenant Group, the Village Notice Board is public and is visible and open to all even though it focuses on the life and community of a specific village in the West Midlands.

implied that Nicole believed design-based approaches and a publics-oriented approach could be useful to the group – a positive outcome from our work to date.

However, as the planning of the meetup proceeded, Nicole worried that she had not adequately consulted with group members about my involvement and the approach. To avoid upsetting committee members whom she described as wary of 'rocking the boat' (notes, 7.1.19), she asked that I lead the meetup in its entirety and that it be presented in the invitation as a part of my research project and not as a Tenant Group initiative. Since I had still not met other committee members, and these ideas were developed through fieldwork and the design session (Exploratory session), I agreed to take full responsibility for the planned event. Moreover, the groundwork for my intervention was already in place since in advance of the kick-off event (before Christmas 2018) Nicole, at my request, had posted about me on the forum and briefly introduced my name, institutional affiliation, and research interest in the group. Thus, members were already made aware of my work with Nicole and were informed that over the next three months, I, with Nicole's participation, would organise activities that explored with interested Tenant Group members possible ways to address housing issues that mattered to them. Though Nicole was still actively involved in planning the event and sharing information about it on the Facebook forum, this move also served to clarify the boundaries between group activities and my research project.

Before drafting invitations, I discussed with Nicole how to frame the housing issue in order to broaden its relevance to different tenure groups and diverse sets of people. Nicole observed that while the Village Notice Board discussion started with a post critiquing the selloffs of social housing bungalows in the village, the discussion quickly expanded to broader concerns about the general housing shortage in the area. Since the general housing shortage was an issue that was pertinent to more sets of people, we agreed that the kick-off event for my research project would be framed around the issue of general housing shortage and affordability, with specific mention of social housing selloffs as an important example of this broader issue.

7.2.1 Design-inspired research

An invitation for the first public event of the Housing Justice Project, as I called the entire research project with the Tenant group, was posted by Nicole on the Tenant Group forum and the Village Notice Board forum. The brief invitation shared on social media had a link to an Eventbrite[40] page

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[40] Eventbrite is an online platform for advertising and organising public events. It can register attendees even for free events, which allows organisers to gauge interest and plan accordingly. Using multiple online platforms to recruit participants limits the kind of participants invited. However, for this initial

I set up which gave more details about the motivation for the project, the identity of the organisers, who were invited and possible outcomes from participating (see Appendix J). To improve the clarity and accessibility of the text, these invitations were reviewed and amended in response to feedback from one of my supervisors and Nicole. In designing the invitation, I used a colourful hand-drawn illustration from a book called *Dear Data*,[41] upon which I added a scatter of icons depicting scales of justice within the icon of a house (Figure 7.1). I intended to make the invitation, and by implication, the event, appear creative and inviting.

The scheduled event was planned to take place at a local pub. Pubs have the advantage of being normative places of gathering that are usually centrally located. On the other hand, pubs are not neutral social spaces and certain people of specific religious denominations, ages or gender may not feel welcome. In the hope of addressing such concerns, I reserved a separate function room in the pub and noted this in the invitation. The pub chosen was located in the village where the Facebook debate began. This location, however, was not equally accessible to all Tenant Group members who are widely distributed across the district (an ongoing problem for Tenant Group events). Nonetheless, public transport to this pub was fairly good and, in the invite, help in getting to the event was offered.

For the event, the issue of housing availability and affordability, which was debated in the two Facebook forums were to be approached from the angle of the difficulty of understanding a complex policy landscape. The invitation to the event, posted on Eventbrite, opened as follows:

> The complex and tricky topic of housing, which impacts so many people's everyday lives, keeps coming up on our local Facebook forums. Yet our conversations seem to go nowhere since it is hard to know what is happening locally and what exactly local authorities and social landlords are doing.

Thus, the event was framed as a response and a continuation of their discussions. The invitation was written in the first-person plural form 'we', which I believed was justified given this event followed from participatory design work with Nicole, who actively took part in organising the event and was the one to suggest the joint meeting. The more detailed flyer, shown on the Eventbrite platform, went on to explain the project's rationale:

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event I decided to settle for recruiting more accessible potential participants (so-called 'low hanging fruits') and build on these contacts to reach out to less mobile, digitally literate and literate participants.

[41] *Dear Data* (Lupi and Posavec, 2018) is a book which documents a year-long project of two graphic designers who sent each other postcards capturing visually their documentation of different aspects of their daily lives. I planned to show the book to participants as an example of how data is essentially all around us and can be gathered and documented as we go through our day-to-day routines. Importantly, this process of collecting and generating data brings attention to things that we may normally take for granted and therefore do not notice.

Recognising that knowledge is power, the *Housing Justice* project invites you to 'shift the balance of knowledge'.[42]

By working with others in the community to better understand what is happening locally, you can:
● make your case
● hold housing associations and authorities to account
● challenge policies that negatively influence your daily lives

Figure 7.1: Illustration from invitation to Housing Justice kick-off meeting

Illustration above was taken from the book, *Dear Data* (2018) by Giorgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec ~ Housing Justice icon added by the researcher

Thus, the invitation gave my snapshot assessment of the situation based on my fieldwork, design research and reading of related literature on housing and agenda-setting. In the invitation, I avoided experience-distant language (such as 'participatory design' or 'publics') and used proactive language to differentiate this event and project from the digital forums where those invited were used to discussing local issues. The invitation offered a simple narrative - starting with an issue of concern, proposing a possible course of action and specifying what participants gain by taking part. Though my narrative created a simple Dewey-inspired knowledge-based proposition, namely about the importance of engaging in inquiry 'to fill the knowledge gap', the event was planned in a manner that would enable participants to shape what they thought was important to investigate and how.

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[42] Credit here to Nicole who came up with the turn of phrase, 'shift the balance of knowledge' in response to my proposal.

But how relevant or convincing was this narrative? Not a single person signed up for the event, which I eventually cancelled a day before after discussing this with Nicole.[43] To unpick why people chose not to attend the event, however, I first briefly describe the itinerary for the event in order to discuss the thinking behind the design-inspired interventions and what I could have done differently (see Appendix L, event itinerary). Planning the kick-off event, I prepared some background information about FOIs and activity instructions on a PowerPoint slideshow that would be shown in a side room in the pub on a wall-mounted flat-screen television and was aimed to make it easier for participants to follow (Deck, 10.1.19).[44] The program I planned consisted of an introduction[45] and two activities where I would guide participants working in pairs, or as one group, depending on how many people attended. Activities consisted of a sensitizing activity to orient participants to sources of data and the main activity, the 'FOI Challenge'. The first activity would entail participants exploring what resources they typically use to learn about local housing issues, and what information they believed was missing (Deck, 10.1.19; Cards, 10.1.19). This would lead to the main activity, learning to use an official resource (FOI) to achieve their goals and exploring how they may adapt it to meet their needs (Deck, 10.1.19). One constraint to be addressed was that non-public organisations, such as HA-x, are not obligated under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) to provide information to the public. The FOI challenge proposes that making issues public (on WhatDoTheyKnow.com) may be a way of contesting the lack of transparency and accountability of housing associations and authorities. Concurrently, the challenge presented to the group was to figure out ways of using FOIs to access the information they need. This would involve understanding what information they need, and which institutions may have it.

From the outset, I planned to explain that it was not the goal of the workshop to submit FOI requests but rather to explore how these may be used by participants in different ways by doing a run-through of the process as a group. To reinforce this and make sure participants did not feel

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[43] To save face and not draw attention to the lack of interest, the reason for cancellation was not given and the event was presented as postponed which left an opening for future activities. Nicole posted about this on the Tenant Group feed, and I did the same on the Eventbrite page, adding that updates will be posted in due course, and again, inviting all those interested to contact me or Nicole directly.

[44] Nicole suggested that using a slideshow was a bit formal, but I chose to use it to help distinguish this event from previous Tenant Group meetings and signal a constructive approach. Also, from my experience of design workshops, I find it useful to have slides defining the main concepts and detailing simple instructions for each activity. I did, however, make the slide presentation shorter on account of her feedback.

[45] This comprised of introducing me, Nicole and participants, explanation of my research project and signing of consent forms. I then would have briefly described the central issue of housing shortage and affordability, referring to the Facebook discussions in which participants took part, and the difficulty of assessing what is happening locally.

pressured to submit an FOI request, no FOIs would be submitted at the event. This would also furnish a tell-tale sign of impact if participants would subsequently submit FOIs and tell people about it on social media platforms. At the end of the event, participants who would be interested in further 'investigative' group work would be invited to share their contact information and also note their availability. Also, they would be asked to note any specific aspect of the policy issue of housing shortage and affordability that interested them. The purpose of doing this was to signal to participants that while they share a concern about the broad issue of housing shortage and affordability, the group's activities would also seek to acknowledge and address various instantiations of this broad issue. Lastly, to orient participants to the next step and encourage personal commitment, I planned to ask participants to put down in writing a note to themselves about what to do next.

In sum, the proposed event was my attempt to assemble a group of strangers and members of the Tenant Group who had expressed shared concerns and, through a participatory design-inspired approach that structures their inquiry as collaborative, see whether they adopt and develop this proactive approach and what adaptations might transpire in their involvement in the design of a collective inquiry method. Would they submit an FOI request? Would they coordinate their actions? Meet again? Invite friends to join? Develop an alternative method using FOI requests and the WhatDoTheyKnow platform? As listed in Table 7.1, intended outcomes included new knowledge about housing issues and forms of inquiry, as well as new capacities and new resources for approaching complex policy issues.

By creating the scaffolding and conditions for developing new methods that encouraged collective action, assessing the scope of the housing selloff issue and seeing how new understanding and actions unfold, I aimed to assess the possibility of publics formation through a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach. However, this assessment could not be carried out since the event did not materialize.

7.2.2 Analysis and conclusions (Case study 1)

In the analysis below, I consider research question 2, which asks, to what extent are the publics-oriented participatory design approach, and participatory design-inspired interventions in general, oriented to the public involvement of marginalized groups?

Tensions in the application of the publics-frame in participatory design practice

The fact that the event did not take place limits to a certain extent what can be said about designerly interventions and public formation but also opens an opportunity to reassess assumptions in *publics-oriented participatory design* about the nature of public formation and public involvement in complex social policy issues. Since *participatory design* approaches that use the publics-frame in general are reliant on public involvement, it is important to understand how the people the practices aim to enrol interpret and decide how participatory design constructs their involvement in social issues. The Housing Justice kick-off event undertook a Scandinavian-influenced participatory design approach which is typically agitational (in that it aims to challenge the status quo) and constructive (in that it proposes designs methods and alternatives) in its approach, methods and processes. However, though the approach is described in design literature as emancipatory (Ehn, 1988; Sangiorgi and Scott, 2018) because of its political orientation to social change and its focus on marginalised groups, it is rarely discussed how this approach is perceived by those it supposedly 'emancipates'.

In this subsection, I attempt to answer this question by exploring group members' interpretations of the proposed event. I focus on the accounts of two group members, Tracy and Ned, who are committee members who considered attending the event but decided not to (Fieldnote, committee meeting, 19.1.19).[46] As active members of the group, who volunteered their time and effort and attended all the committee and public meetings called by the group, they undoubtedly demonstrated a strong commitment to social housing issues and the Tenant Group. Thus, inquiring into their decision not to participate offers a serious assessment of possible concerns that those invited may find in the approach and methods that participatory design recruits in its attempt to enrol members of an emerging public. Moreover, because of their commitment to the group they had given attendance some consideration and were willing to share their concerns about how they understood the kick-off event. Their impression of the event and the *publics-oriented participatory design* approach was at this point based on the limited information available to them, which consisted of the invitations (Appendix J and K) and some private exchanges with Nicole about my research project. Notably, since they were still interested to see if I might be of use to the group, my impression was that they were cautious not to appear critical of my involvement and of the participatory design approach I undertook. Still, this process of assessment and inquiry was made possible because of my ongoing involvement with the Tenant

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[46] I met with Tracy and Ned at the group's committee meeting which I was invited to attend by Nicole. I introduced myself and my research and committee members agreed to take part in the study and signed the Consent Forms.

Group committee and my explanation that their feedback would help shape and improve my future approach to working with the group was an incentive for them. To consider the broader implications of my findings to *publics-oriented participatory design* approaches in the policy domain I contextualise the analysis of these conversations in terms of the literature on participatory design, political theory and participation research. These links to the literature are further developed in the following discussion chapter.

The interpretation and impact of power relations

Though Ned and Tracy had very different reasons for deciding not to attend the Housing Justice event, an analysis of their impressions of the event suggests that they both considered the impact of power relations when considering whether to attend the participatory design event. Ned explained that he did not attend because he thought the event was organised by the local Council as it sounded 'official' (fieldnotes, committee meeting, 19.1.19). Since there was no mention of the council in any of my and Nicole's communications with Ned (via email and messaging) or in the event invitation (Appendix J and K), his assumption that the event was council-led may be based on what he did know for certain, which was my institutional affiliation. This suggests that my identity may have been seen as too 'official'. Regardless of how Ned concluded that the event was council-led, or whether he was just trying to be polite, most notable here is that his assessment of the event as 'official' made it off-putting (in this context). The context was, as noted earlier, an event focusing on an issue that he was personally invested in and which he had taken actions to explore with the Tenant Group. In other words, opening the issue for exploration outside the framework of the group, in the realm of the 'official' that I and my initiative represented, was not something he wanted. Thus, given the institutional affiliation of designers and researchers, it is likely that participatory design projects may easily be seen as impinging on the newly afforded autonomy created by a marginalized group by self-organising.

Interestingly, Tracy did not perceive the event as official, her interpretation was almost the opposite as she believed the approach of the event was too confrontational towards powerful actors such as HA-x and the local council. As an example of what she meant by confrontational, she cited the name of the project, 'Housing Justice', which she said made her uncomfortable as it sounded 'too harsh'(fieldnotes, committee meeting, 19.1.18). She proposed that calling it 'Housing Fairness' may have appealed to more group members and not offended any powerful actors, but then hesitated, saying that maybe that was 'too soft' (fieldnotes, committee meeting, 19.1.18). In proposing 'softer' wording for the project name, Tracy gently hints that future events

signal and adopt a less confrontational approach, which she (and Ned) believed would appeal to more social housing tenants. Thus, in a sense, Tracy is also concerned about preserving the autonomy of the group and its ability to influence powerholders by not upsetting them. This position is supported by findings in the tenant-oriented policy analysis (Chapter 6). As the reader may recall, the interpretivist-inspired policy analysis revealed that social tenants were fearful of contesting social housing issues and housing-related institutions because the stakes in housing were deemed much too high. Thus, one of my insights from Case Study 1 (see Table 7.1), is that decisions about whether to get involved in political activities, such as the kick-off event for the Housing Justice project, are often informed by interpretations of one's relative position of power.

From Ned's perspective, unequal power relations with 'official' actors perceived to be leading the initiative led to his refusing to take part, whereas, from Tracy's perspective, unequal power relations with official powerholders seen as targeted by the event led to a concern about challenging the very institutions upon which social tenants depended upon for their housing and security. Notably, in both Ned and Tracy's interpretations, those invited to take part, at least the social tenants among them, were seen as less powerful which made them reluctant to attend. Thus, while Ned's concern for power relations highlights his view of the importance that tenants are self-organised, Tracy's concern highlights her view of the difficulty and risk for marginalised groups to self-organise and challenge those they depend on. Thus, the cancelled event reveals a predicament for *publics-oriented participatory design*: though the principles of participation and knowledge are central to its practice and aim to make participation in design empowering to typically marginalized groups, *the external position and institutional affiliation of design practitioners and researchers were likely off-putting and suspect to marginalised groups and ultimately were not perceived to erase power inequalities.*

Ned and Tracy's explanations of why they decided not to attend the event call into doubt certain assumptions about emancipatory approaches to participatory design with marginalised groups, such as claims to empowerment and the acceptability of agitational tactics. Since Ned had championed the issue of social housing sales in the group, Nicole was certain he would want to take part in the event (Memo, 12.1.19). Instead, it can also be argued that since he was not consulted earlier about the event, he may have perceived that 'his' initiative was being hijacked by an outsider – which may be off-putting. In addition, in policy research on community-based self-organised groups, Richardson (2005) finds that members are more likely to trust others who are similarly situated to them rather than those who are not. Since most participatory design projects are inevitably led or facilitated by experts who, in many cases, are not impacted by the issue at hand, as reported in the literature, they struggle to build this trust in short-term projects

such as this one, even after infrastructuring (Ehn, Nilsson and Topgaard, 2014). Thus, even though I have argued in this thesis for the importance of *publics-oriented participatory design* practice to engage with self-organised marginalised groups in order to preserve and bolster members' sense of autonomy and agency, my second insight is that *the very process of interjecting design approaches and methods exposes the inherent contradiction in publics-oriented participatory design – that it seeks to empower by influencing others.*

Table 7.1: Case study 1 - Bridging the knowledge and tenure gap – aims, actions, outcomes and insights

Aims	Actions	Intended Outcomes for practice of issue and public formation	Outcomes	Insights for future events
Explore approaches and methods to involve people in policy issues	*Design-inspired Activities*: 'Who knows what?'(Card sorting) 'FOI Challenge' (FOI writing event)	Assemble a mixed-tenure group	No	Social tenants' decision whether to participate is informed by interpretations of their relative position of power. Participatory design seeks to empower participants by influencing them, thus leading to distrust of design researcher-practitioner. Participatory design projects may be seen as impinging on the autonomy of a marginalized group.
		New knowledge	Yes	
		New capacities	Yes	
		New resources	Yes	
		Lead to further collective action	No	
		Lead to future political action	No	
		Lead to greater group coherence	No	

As discussed in my critique of *participatory design* research using the publics-frame (in the literature review), design projects are usually initiated by an external entity (professional or institutional). Though groups that organize around ideological causes, such as climate change, may be more likely to have members with varied skills that may bring in elements of participatory design, in the case of welfare-related issues, such as social housing, the skills and capabilities of member are different (Meyer, 2005) and it is less likely that one of the group members, especially in rural England, would be familiar with participatory design approaches. Therefore, my third insight is that in such a setting, *participatory design approaches and methods are almost inevitably*

brought from the 'outside' and may easily be seen by marginalized group members as impinging on their sense of autonomy and agency – the very traits that designing with emerging publics aims to bolster.

Informed by the literature on participation in design is alert to the vulnerabilities of publics to manipulation and coercion (DiSalvo, Maki and Martin, 2007) and the risk that design interventions replicate power inequalities in the policy domain (DiSalvo, 2008; Julier and Moor, 2009), I made efforts to pre-empt concerns about my role and influence through the choice of the research site and ongoing infrastructuring. Infrastructuring included negotiating and coordinating my involvement with the group; being transparent about my motives and aims; identifying issues that concern the group; proposing design activities focusing on their chosen issue; designing for inclusiveness and more. Since committee meetings were repeatedly cancelled, ultimately it was only Nicole who participated in the first design session, which inspired by external events quickly led to the kick-off event idea without adequately involving other group members in the ideation process. Indeed, the hesitation of even the most active group members to attend the Housing Justice event highlighted that my infrastructuring activities were not sufficient since it was perceived that the group's autonomy was encroached upon by an outsider.

Thus, even *publics-oriented participatory design* initiatives that respond directly to issues raised by those impacted may be seen as opportunistically using participants' experiential and local knowledge for others' benefit. Hence, I argue that it is important that researchers and practitioners of *publics-oriented participatory design* recognise the contradictions inherent in the publics-frame of participatory design and the mixed opportunity and threat that participation represents to marginalised groups. This entails recognising that designerly intentions to make participation in design more inclusive, accessible, inviting and fair, ultimately cannot completely overcome a situation where participatory design approaches and methods are seen as an outside initiative, and therefore as a possible threat to the group's autonomy. Though the cancelled event was the culmination of three months of infrastructuring (in fits and starts) and exploratory participatory design work with a leader of one of the groups and was therefore not removed from their needs and perspectives, the organising of the event, without meeting with other committee members, was possibly too abrupt. Indeed, though Nicole's embrace of participatory design approaches and methods was exciting and her move to open the issue for wider engagement outside the Tenant Group by itself was a successful outcome from the Tenant2Citizen session (at least from the perspective of public formation), her cooperation may have also led to the

impression that I had too much influence on her – an important issue I elaborate on in the next subsection.

Lastly, recalling Tracy and Ned's considerations of power imbalances, their arguments also illustrate the importance of contextualising design interventions in a specific policy domain. Ned and Tracey's accounts, and the interpretivist-inspired policy analysis, both revealed the lack of security that social tenants feel and their fear of retaliation from the landlord they are dependent on. This suggests that in the policy domain of housing, the stake to participants is perceived as much greater and potentially more disruptive. Indeed, the literature on housing studies supports this, reporting that social housing publics arise primarily in response to emergencies, such as regeneration or demolition (Madden and Marcuse, 2016). Essentially, situations when people's way of life and housing is under threat and therefore, they may perceive that they have little more to lose. Carefully communicating intentions and consequences, setting clear expectations, and adapting design interventions to suit a particular policy context, may improve public involvement in participatory design initiatives.

Thus, following our conversation, I dropped the name of my research project, Housing Justice, which was seen as too confrontational and now appeared to me a bit bombastic. Meanwhile, having finally met Ned and Tracy and engaged them in conversation about the cancelled event and their experience and knowledge of the group and its members, they were now willing to take part in the new iteration of the Housing Justice event.

7.3   Case Study 2 – Mapping the decline of social housing stock

Why construct intervention?

Considering the barriers to participation described by Tracy and Ned, as well as Nicole in the Exploratory session, I proposed to work exclusively with the group's few active members, namely the committee, to co-design methods of engaging group members in collective inquiry about housing issues. In line with this, the committee chose to pursue the same issue that initially sparked the Housing Justice kick-off event - social housing selloffs – but this time, the orientation was to focus on engaging group members not on expanding the boundaries of the issue to include more people (fieldnotes, committee meeting, 14.1.19).

As noted earlier in the introduction of the group's central housing concerns (Section 6.1.2), this was an issue that Ned had championed. He and his wife were living in a social let bungalow, and had for months struggled to find another social let bungalow closer to his wife's place of work. To his dismay, Ned had found that most bungalow listings on the digital social housing platform[47] were either listed 'for sale' as shared ownership or 'to let' at the higher so-called affordable rate.[48] All the while, as he continued his house search, he kept hearing rumours of existing social let bungalows being refurbished and then either sold or re-let but at the higher affordable rate. Though the Tenant Group tried to get answers directly from HA-x officials about their local development strategy, committee members found HA-x officials' responses evasive and vague. Moreover, changing policy categories and policies, such as the introduction of the new, higher rate social rent, confusingly termed 'affordable rent' made it difficult to assess what was and was not being done to subsidise housing for different income levels.[49] This lack of transparency and the ambiguity of housing categories reinforced committee members' belief that accessing information about social housing development numbers was essential and that HA-x was hiding something (Fieldnotes, 17.10.18; 13.12.18).

To access data about housing selloffs, Ned had tried over the past couple of months to compile a list of local social housing sales by crowdsourcing information from Tenant Group members on the Facebook forum. Specifically, he had asked group members to share addresses of social lets that were either 'empty', 'for sale' or 'sold' (notes, committee meeting, 19.1.19). Hoping to use the collated data to put pressure on local stakeholders, Ned's strategy can be seen as the first step in a data-driven approach to advocacy (Asad and Le Dantec, 2017, p.6305) and as the beginning of collective political action at the local level. And though Ned's actions likely raised awareness among group members of the issue of social housing selloffs, at the time of our meeting, he was frustrated as very little progress had been made in collecting this data.

Though seen by committee members as vital to understanding the current state of local social housing and more specifically, to verifying their hunch that the proportion of housing at social let rates was shrinking in the district, the difficulty of conducting such an inquiry and accessing the

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[47] The Home Choice digital social housing platform used by all social housing providers in the area, not just HA-x.

[48] As an example, he estimated that based on his local search online, last week 115 bungalows were for sale as shared ownership, three were offered at the affordable let rate and none were available at the social let rate.

[49] In addition, the term *affordable housing* is increasingly used by housing professionals, policy professionals and the news and media professionals as an umbrella term to describe social housing in general thus lumping together affordable ownership, affordable rent and social rent.

relevant information impacted the group in multiple ways. Nicole expressed concern about how the group was perceived by important stakeholders. She described how members tended to jump to conclusions in group discussions (online and in public meetings) and suggested it was important that the Tenant Group 'do its research, otherwise, we look foolish' (notes, committee meeting, 19.1.19). Thus, accessing and collating quantitative data about the sales of social housing was seen as a way of gaining legitimacy for the Tenant Group and its issues. Another impact of this impasse was that the committee felt stuck and was not sure how to proceed. This, I believe influenced their decision to try and see if I, as a graduate researcher, could help them access and collate the sought-after information. Coming with a design orientation I proposed that we design an inquiry method together. In hindsight, I don't think members fully understood this as a collaborative process, as I discuss below.

In closing, at the first committee meeting that I attended, the committee agreed that building on the work conducted by Ned and on the work conducted with Nicole in the leadup to the Housing Justice kick-off event, I would lead a design session where committee members would explore and trial developing a collective approach to researching local housing selloffs. In this context, I proposed that it may be helpful to make the information visible, for instance by mapping, as this could help identify what housing related-information is missing and what other relevant information was overlooked. Nicole suggested FOIs may be used to access missing information and others agreed. Thus, the design session would also build on insights and approaches developed earlier with Nicole. In sum, it was agreed that I would lead a collective mapping activity to explore social housing sales in the district and that we would also explore methods of integrating and leveraging FOI requests(fieldnote, committee meeting, 19.1.19).

7.3.1 Design-inspired research

Contextualising social housing selloffs through a mapping activity

I met with Tracy and Ned at a pub of their choosing in the afternoon. Nicole, who was supposed to attend, had to cancel last minute. Ned brought with him the list he compiled, based on 'intel' shared by Tenant Group members about empty or sold social let properties that they knew about. The list included seven items with partial addresses and incomplete information about their status. Ned said he tried to get tenants to check actual addresses, but members usually did not reply to his follow-up questions. Thus, addresses were descriptive - for instance, a group member may describe a property as the second house around the corner from Cost Cutter. In addition, since the list was not updated, it was unknown whether a property that was identified as empty

or refurbished was eventually sold or let again and at what rate (social or affordable). In sum, the information collated from crowdsourcing was scant and partial due to multiple constraints in which the group operated which included dependence on volunteer work, no resources, and lack of research experience, and did not collectively render any logical pattern. To begin I cautiously suggested reformatting the list into a table format and adding a column to log in data about whether an empty property was eventually sold or let, and at what rate (Fieldnotes, 28.1.19).

With Ned's list in mind, I conducted with Ned and Tracy the card sorting activity ('Who knows what?') I had designed for the Housing Justice kick-off event (Cards, 10.1.19). Through this activity, Ned and Tracy were invited to discuss different sources of housing information that they used and were also encouraged to come up with new sources of information. Possible new sources that they came up with included Google-Earth tours, talking to real estate agents and doing 'undercover' investigative work (i.e., pretending to be a buyer). The activity revealed the challenge of knowing who knows what and of getting accurate district-level information. Even using Google Earth to pinpoint an address was not always possible as Tracy pointed out that Google-Earth was often not as up-to- date in the countryside (Fieldnotes, 28.1.19).

Following this, I invited them to think of the crowdsourced list Ned had compiled with group members and consider the purpose of collecting this data and what other information and sources may shed light on the same issue, apart from locating specific properties as Ned sought to do and which proved difficult. Ned, however, returned to his concern that the addresses were not precise. To shift the discussion, I made up on the fly a storytelling activity that I now refer to here as 'Tales of consequence'. In a Deweyan-inspired move, I asked what were the direct and indirect consequences of social let sales. I encouraged Ned and Tracy to share specific examples from their communities which I jotted down. This focus on consequences and examples of stories kept the discussion empirical and raised highly situated aspects of the housing shortage in rural areas thus broadening the range of relevant information which the group may decide to collate and possibly visualise on a map.

Consequences of housing shortage in rural Midland raised by Tracy and Ned included (Fieldnotes, 28.1.19):

- **younger families** moving out as they could not afford to stay in the village as the area was relatively affluent and expensive
- **elderly households** left without local family support because their grown children moved to a more affordable area

- **EU citizens** are seen as competition for limited resources
- the general shortage of housing, in particular bungalows and 3+bedroom family homes, fueled demand for social let properties among **potential buyers**
- **people in relatively affluent areas** did not care about social housing and even actively opposed developments with social lets.
- **fewer public transport links** and infrequent buses as most people owned cars and those who could not afford to or could not drive were in the minority
- **stores and public services**, such as bank and post office branches, closed as small villages became less sustainable and the more affluent could drive elsewhere to access these services.

This process of contextualising the issue effectively served to widen the framing of the issue, from a focus on sale statistics (e.g., addresses and numbers) into a broader narrative-based understanding of the housing landscape in a rural county in the Midlands. In their book *Acting in an Uncertain World*, science and technology researchers Callon et al (2011, p.82) describe a similar process, referring to the outcome as 'an inventory of what is at stake'. In my design activity, the process of contextualising the issue and making it into a matter of concern (Latour, 2008) moved Tracy and Ned to see how broader issues, such as the future and sustainability of villages, evidenced for example on the imagined map by the closing of stores or bus routes, are connected to their social housing concerns. Tactically, this process may also be likened to Schattschneider's (1960) process of socialization where a local issue is made political by widening the scope of the issue to draw in more stakeholders that are implicated. In addition, this process also drew attention to 'things' that may be used as evidence to document these local changes in their lives. These things make public matters of concern that could be visualised on a map, helping to make the connections between these multiple factors more tangible and accessible.

Though the precursory mapping intervention made explicit the diverse actors, attachments, and consequences involved and highlighted related issues, such as the future viability of villages for lower-income households, it did not appear to change Tracy and Ned's view of what information may be relevant to the group. Ned jokingly suggested that none of this was new to them or to many of the tenant group members. I agreed in part, suggesting that mapping all these consequences and factors makes for a good argument about the importance of the issue and that not all group members and decision-makers may have a sense of how social housing shortage is interrelated with other issues, such as village sustainability, care of the elderly, loneliness and

more.

To make the point that the list of things and their consequences amounts to evidence, or more accurately, can be used as a guide to what information may be useful for the group to compile and share, I asked Ned and Tracy how they would represent these consequences on a map, and what evidence might they collect. Tracy proposed mapping locations and closures of critical services (post, bank, surgery, supermarket) and businesses (café, bakery). Ned suggested listing bus routes that had been cancelled and showing the number of households per village, as well as representing tenure distributions in villages. I suggested that some of this evidence (e.g., closures, bus routes) is common knowledge to members of the Tenant Group that live in the dispersed villages across the district and would be information that members could share to help form a more complete picture of the local housing landscape. Moreover, this could be done as Ned had done before through crowdsourcing on the Facebook page and would be seen to build on his previous work, thus also giving members a sense that the group was progressing (Fieldnotes, 28.1.19).

After the activity, I was not completely sure that either of them, especially Ned, was swayed by the idea of expanding the scope of the inquiry and collating and constructing visually the broader context of the issue of social housing selloffs. In closing, Tracy offered to reformat Ned's list into a Table (per my recommendations) to be shared initially with committee members on Google Docs and Ned volunteered to trial his idea (from the 'who knows what?' activity) of going to HA-x and pretending to be a buyer. Notably, both had volunteered to do tasks that were related to the initial concept of accessing statistics of social let sales. Still, as in the design session with Nicole (Exploratory session), I expected that through ongoing discourse and actions, some ideas discussed in the design session may stick with Ned and Tracy and naturally evolve.

Using FOI requests as a design method

In the remaining time, we discussed FOI requests and possible methods that could be developed by the group to leverage this tool. I showed them the WhatDoTheyKnow platform. Both Tracy and Ned thought that a public platform for shared FOI requests was a very good idea but were not sure how this could be used as a collective method. As an example of a method, I introduced my idea of the FOI Challenge. The challenge here was to figure out who had relevant information and access it, as well as leverage the WhatDoTheyKnow platform to make public which institutions and policies lacked transparency and accountability and put pressure on them. In describing this one approach, I also explained to them the shortcomings of FOIs, including the fact that not all

kinds of information are collated[50] and not all organisations comply[51] or are obligated to comply with FOI requests, as in the case of housing associations.

Returning to our discussion of the card sorting activity 'Who knows?', I expressed a concern that FOIs may not be very accessible – neither Tracy nor Ned rated them highly as a source for information on housing issues. Also, I recounted how in preparation for the Housing Justice kick-off event, I had trialled the card activity with two social tenants and found that they did not understand what they were and knew how to go about submitting one (Fieldnotes, 11.1.19).[52] Tracy and Ned agreed that this may easily be the case for some group members. Still, Tracy especially liked the initial idea of organising FOI writing events where tenant members could together do the necessary research and letter drafting and make up new methods using FOI. To make it more inviting to group members, she suggested that FOI events might be held in small groups and a more private setting. She offered that the first FOI writing event takes place in her home and that she recruit a nephew and friend who were also group members. By proposing design ideas for refining the FOI methods, Tracy and Ned engaged in co-design and also proposed a possible solution for engaging group members but proposing a friend-brings-a-friend approach. Finally, Tracy and Ned thought that the first step should be to tell other group members about FOIs and the WhatDoTheyKnow platform. but neither of them wanted to post about it on the Tenant Group forum. At the end of our meeting in a brief exchange, I came to understand more fully why. Since this exchange was very informative and influenced my next steps, I describe it fully below before moving on to analyse its implications at the beginning of the next section (Fieldnotes, 28.1.19).

My perceived influence

Just as we were about to leave the pub, Tracy asked me if I had written Nicole's last Facebook post to the group. I was surprised but answered, truthfully, definitely not. Glancing at Ned, who seemed to agree with her, she showed me the post on her phone. The post summarised agreements from the last committee meeting (which I attended) and called for more active involvement of group members. I told them this was the first time I had seen the text and

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[50] FOI requests only give access to official information that is deemed important or legitimate by institutions to collect in the first place (Cheung, 2018).

[51] For research about compliance with FOI requests at different levels of governance see Worthy, John and Vannoni (2017) and Cheung (2018).

[52] Based on findings from a trial run of the 'Who Knows What?' activity, conducted to inform design of the kick-off event, with the participation of two social tenants not from the group, Kate & Lana (transcript, 11.1.19).

asked what part struck them as something that I would write. Tracy pointed at the screen at the only text in capital letters which read 'WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER'(Fieldnotes, 28.1.19). We all burst out laughing and I jokingly said, 'Great! The shouty part!', to which Tracy responded, 'No, not shouty, it's the together part'.[53] This playful yet meaningful exchange made me acutely aware that I was seen by the only remaining committee members as a big influence on Nicole. Secondly, if not that, it revealed that Nicole and I were seen to share a common language and approach, which called for collective and public-facing tactics and struck tenant members, like Tracy and Ned, as possibly less appropriate (fieldnote, 28.1.19). Reflecting on this later, I came to understand that Ned and Tracy did not want to post about FOI, a resource and method that their actions suggested they supported because they did not want to be seen as being influenced by me, an outsider, and someone whose methods and approach did not always align with their own.

Thus, with tenants' concern for my influence in mind, I made the decision that I would not push the co-design of methods and instead would see which general approach (mapping or FOI) was taken up and offer support where needed and requested. This decision was also informed by my recognition that Tracy and Ned inevitably had a better understanding of what would work with group members and that Nicole, the founder and artist, might be less representative of members' viewpoints – in part because she embraced and publicly associated herself with the participatory and agitational approaches that I introduced. From a research perspective, I concluded that I would use observations of members' actions or inaction as evidence of the short-term outcomes of the *publics-oriented participatory design* interventions and based on this, theorise about its possible impact on public formation.

7.3.2 Analysis and conclusions (Case study 2)

To assess the outcomes of the design intervention I consider discourse and actions that transpired following our explorations and discuss insights about the viability of making publics through a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach (Research question 1).

After our design planning session, the FOI element of the project seemed to slowly move forward, whereas the collective mapping method did not. Though Ned did not do any 'investigative' work (role-playing a potential buyer), he did submit an FOI request to the HA-x through WhatDoTheyKnow. In addition, he told me that he mentioned FOIs twice on the group forum: once to share with others that he submitted an FOI and another time when he argued about the

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[53] This segment was not audio recorded. The analysis is based on my fieldnotes written that same day, with brief quotes based on memory recall (Fieldnotes, 28.1.19).

importance of submitting FOI requests. In addition, he made the point that if HA-x was not held accountable and pressured to respond to tenants' legitimate questions, they would simply keep on ignoring the tenants. These first steps reinforced my earlier impression that Ned believed FOIs and WhatDoTheyKnow could be good resources. Though Ned's actions didn't contribute to planning or developing a collective inquiry method, they could inform future co-design activities as the group can follow the correspondence concerning the FOI request to HA-x on the WhatDoTheyKnow platform. Meanwhile, a date was scheduled for the first FOI writing event and Tracy recruited her niece, who was also a Tenant Group member, to participate.

Since these small yet concrete actions suggested that committee members preferred to pursue the co-design of FOI methods and not the mapping of crowdsourced local knowledge, it is worth considering why this might be the case. The mapping of social housing selloffs activity was used in Case Study 2 as a scaffolding for a broader discussion of the consequences of social housing selloffs to people's lives and communities. Thus, this design session enacted a new way of thinking about who or what things may be mobilised around the issue to help articulate it more fully. This contextualising effectively broadened the scope of the issue of social housing selloffs and proposed new resources and capacities for leveraging group members' situated knowledge (See outcomes in Table 7.2). In addition, the activity, as suggested to Ned and Tracy, highlighted what situated knowledge that members possess may be mobilised to articulate their issues. On the other hand, by identifying the issue more broadly, as something involving many actors at a macro-scale, this activity may have made the approach seem more daunting and impractical.

Indeed, talking with Ned and Tracy I discovered that though they were concerned about their village communities and their sustainability, they were reluctant to pursue this more expansive line of inquiry and chose to focus more on social housing issues from the perspective of social housing tenants and the FOI tool. This is consistent with research about other groups concerned with public health issues, which finds that in the early stages of issue and public formation it is preferable for an emerging public to not be too inclusive and encompassing in the issues they seek to address (Callon et al, 2010). Similarly, Marres (2007) observes that since articulating societal issues takes considerable time and effort, emerging publics inevitably begin as small and exclusive initiatives. Thus, my first insight from Case Study 2 (see Table 7.2) is that the use of exploratory methods that contextualise an issue and thereby broaden its scope in a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach may be less appealing to resource-poor emerging publics.

Table 7.2: Case 2 - Mapping social housing selloffs – aims, actions, outcomes and insights

Aims	Actions	Intended Outcomes	Outcomes	Insights
Co-design collective inquiry methods

Explore diverse forms of data and knowledge | *Format*:

Discursive & material

Design activities:

'Who knows what?' (Card sorting)

'Consequences' (Planning collective mapping) | Assemble a mixed-tenure group | No | Revealed the challenge of knowing who knows what.

Exploratory methods that contextualise and broaden the scope of an issue, might be less appealing to resource-poor emerging publics.

The participatory design principles of participation and knowledge were not uniformly perceived as important or beneficial by research participants.

Design principles of participation and knowledge may not always be congruent with the principles that move groups to assemble and act as a public. |
		New knowledge	Yes	
		New capacities	Yes	
		New resources	Yes	
		Lead to further collective action	No	
		Lead to future political action	No	
		Lead to greater group coherence	No	

Following this rationale, since the Tenant Group has very few resources at its disposal, the decision to seek out relevant public data through FOIs makes sense and is likely more appealing to a resource-poor emerging public than trying to generate crowdsourced situated data, as Ned had already tried and failed. Finally, based on what committee members said about FOIs, it appeared that part of the interest in their use related to the legitimacy that members believed such a legally sanctioned tool afforded the group – an issue I return to when I discuss principles that guide members. More broadly, the initiative to co-design an FOI method with group members marked a new orientation for the group since first, *this initiative did not focus on solving individual members' private issues and second, it did not target HA-x officials to resolve the issue*. Thus, the beginning of a shift in the approach of the Tenant Group and what issues they are concerned with is in evidence. Returning to Table 7.2, I conclude that outcomes in Case Study 2, at this stage, included generating new understandings, new capacities and new resources for investigating the issues of social housing selloffs. However, since these preliminary actions were isolated, they did not yet lead to coordinated collective action, much less political action in the public policy domain,

which Dewey and Fraser (1990) deemed essential for public formation. As for greater group coherence, again, it was too early to tell.

To develop the use of FOIs into a method for collective inquiry and mount public pressure on different authorities, a more coordinated and considered approach was needed. The proposed FOI writing events were intended to be the first site where such co-design would take place and through guided activities, members would explore methods that suited their needs, capabilities and preferences, and would, in tandem, begin to help the group cohere. Unfortunately, in March 2019, just days before the FOI writing event was to take place, Tracy wrote to tell me that she had left the group following a disagreement with Nicole.[54] Tracy was upset and suggested that we meet instead at a pub for a chat. Thus, the FOI writing event was unceremoniously called off by Tracy and was not picked up by other committee members. *Without the FOI event, it was too early to determine to what extent participatory design-inspired interventions would contribute to the group's cohesion, and in Deweyan terms, to public formation.*

A different perspective on participation

Another insight from Case Study 2 (see Table 7.2), was that though my *publics-oriented participatory design* interventions were informed by the design principles of participation and knowledge, which advocate for the use of participatory approaches and situated knowledge, I found that these principles were not uniformly perceived as important or beneficial by research participants. Within the group's committee, the aim of wider participation was not always seen as a guiding principle for their actions. As committee members cautiously admitted, they preferred that some tenants, qualified as 'difficult' (e.g., angry, mentally unstable, unruly tenants), not be encouraged to participate (but instead be represented by the group) to prevent damaging the relationship with HA-x. This rationale, though also expressed by Nicole, was also seen by her as problematic as she increasingly began to think that the group's role of bridging between its members and the HA-x undermined the group's autonomy and discouraged more proactive and agitational actions that would challenge the *status quo* and the HA-x.

In addition, the participatory approach, methods and language undertaken in my research to construct an inclusive and open process, were also seen as blurring the boundaries between the group and my research project, and therefore seen to threaten the group's sense of autonomy.

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[54] Tracy left following a disagreement with Nicole and a former committee member (who suddenly re-emerged) about a Council grant Tracy had applied for on behalf of the Tenant Group (in her capacity as a committee member) to fund possible future Tenant Group outreach activities.

The exchange with Tracy and Ned about who authored Nicole's post implied that participation ('the together part' as Tracy dubbed it) was seen as one of the distinguishing features of the approach I represented. But more critically, this feature of participatory design practice was not necessarily seen as desirable or redeeming, since as has been established here, committee members were concerned about being influenced or being perceived as being influenced by an outsider.

Echoing Halskov and Hansen's (2015) argument about the importance of clarifying what is meant by participation, I propose that it is *critical to scrutinise the remit given to design researchers and practitioners by the emerging publics they work with.* Using Arnstein's (1969) 'ladder for citizen participation' as a conceptual framework, it is possible to assess how my involvement with the group was constructed and what level of participation committee members afforded to my participatory design research. Focusing on Arnstein's six levels of participation – which in rising order consist of 'informing', 'consultation', 'deciding together'[55], 'partnership', 'delegated power' and 'citizen control' – it may be argued that committee members were initially content to enrol my research at the level of 'informing' and 'consultation', as they reasoned that my expertise in social inquiry and knowledge of the social housing policy landscape from my research and work with CA, may be useful to them. However, by proposing new ways of acting as a group, my *publics-oriented participatory design*-inspired interventions had more far-reaching influence, interjecting into the realm of group decision-making and strategy associated with higher levels of participation ('deciding together' or 'partnership'). As DiSalvo explains "claiming and asserting that things should be other than they are and attempting to produce the means to achieve that change are not neutral activities" (2012, p.16). Thus**,** while Nicole was interested in collaboratively engaging me and hoped our joint activities would impact group decision-making and direction, Ned and Tracy, took part in the design session, but were critical of my perceived influence on Nicole and sought to further clarify boundaries between my research initiatives and group initiatives.

This analysis illustrates that Arnstein's model of citizen participation has wide application and may be used by design researchers to better understand participation as co-constructed. More importantly, it proposes that emerging publics share power with design researchers and practitioners and that this relationship necessitates ongoing negotiation and care. As a self-organised group, in this thesis, it was the group's committee members who possessed the decision-making power to determine the level and scope of involvement allowed to outside

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[55] Arnstein's 'placation'.

experts and stakeholders – not the other way around. Indeed, committee members on multiple occasions had to negotiate the group's boundaries with external stakeholders, such as councillors, the HA-x and myself. Thus, *I propose here that since participation is both the aim and means in participatory design and fundamental to the approach, designing with emerging publics whose autonomy is essential to them requires more careful negotiation between designers and participants*. This involves negotiating the level of participation and power-sharing more explicitly.

In sum, with this final case study, we see a possible shift in the intentions of the group's committee. First, after the cancellation of the initial kick-off event and a meeting with the remaining committee members, the active tenant group members expressed an interest in engaging in exploratory research about a specific housing issue of their choosing and met with me to begin co-designing such an approach. Second, committee members take actions that extend beyond supporting individual members with their problems and undertake to develop a method for investigating and contesting an issue more holistically while also seeking to engage more group members. Significantly, this is the first time that the group had taken actions that did not directly involve an appeal to HA-x to resolve an issue. This may be understood as a shift away from a consumer mindset to resolving their problems as members consider other routes for understanding their issues and gathering evidence to make their case. However, since the FOI approach was never trialled and the Group's committee shrunk to two and was in crisis, it remained too early to determine to what extent participatory design-inspired interventions would contribute to the formation of a public.

Still, based on a reflexive analysis of findings in Case Studies 1 and 2, and the lack of full engagement from the Tenant Group I have argued here the Tenant Group's perspective on participation was insightful. It appears that for emerging publics the principles of participation and knowledge which informed my approach to *publics-oriented participatory design* may not always be congruent with the principles that move groups to assemble and act as publics. Indeed, participatory design approaches and methods may appear contradictory to emerging publics as they claim to empower participants by influencing them, a scenario that recalls formal tenant participation initiatives. Inevitably, the external position and institutional affiliation of design practitioners and researchers led to suspicion and distrust about the intention and outcomes of participation and ultimately were not perceived to erase power inequalities. Throughout my research and in my analysis, I found that the theme of protecting the group's autonomy was much more central to participants' thinking than garnering participation and situated knowledge, as idealised in participatory design rhetoric. In addition, more broadly speaking, questions about

the inherent value of participation need to be asked of researchers, as they too can be seen as participants engaged in the issue and public-making processes of emerging publics. Since decisions to engage or not engage in collective action were based in large part on committee members' interpretations of power relations, or more specifically about their position as a disadvantaged party, vis a via a powerful stakeholder (the HA-X) or an external researcher, intervening in their issue and public making. Thus, the question of the meaning of participation is expanded when understood in terms of power dynamics. Drawing on this, I conclude that a publics-oriented practice necessitates greater clarity about participation as a form of power-sharing with the researcher-practitioner and powerful stakeholders and requires more explicit and ongoing negotiation and care about who participates, when, how and to what end.

In the next chapter (Chapter 8), I develop this idea further and consider (retroactively) how to adapt the *publics-oriented participatory design* approach to enable it to support emerging publics by designing for the principles that are most important to these groups. In the case of the Tenant Group, in addition to autonomy, another central principle that came through as a central theme in the tenant-oriented policy analysis was the principle of maintaining dignity, as individuals and as a group. Thus, in the next chapter, based on a content analysis of discourse with participants, I elaborate on how the principles of autonomy and dignity shed light on the research participants' viewpoints on participation, collective political action and public formation. In doing so I make the case for *publics-oriented participatory design* practice that is guided by principles that motivate and inform a people's involvement in social issues.

Chapter 8: Discussion: towards a more *publics-oriented participatory design* approach

8.1 Introduction

Having discussed outcomes and insights from the sequence of design-inspired interventions in the previous chapters, in the discussion below I elaborate on discrepancies I found between participatory design theory and practice and my attempts to explore a *publics-oriented participatory design* with marginalised groups. In assessing and theorising about the limitations of a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach with marginalised groups, I integrate findings from the previous chapters that respond to my first research question about the extent to which this approach may enable public involvement in policy discourse and agenda setting. Based on this analysis, I make recommendations as to how to mitigate these issues, with implications for the wider practice of participatory design using the publics-frame. While in the analysis below I continue to draw on the case of the Tenant Group, I also seek to theorise more broadly about the nature of public formation and the dynamic between participatory design, marginalised publics, and the complex process of public formation in the wider context of public policy discourse and agendas.

Though my proposed *publics-oriented participatory design* approach sought to bolster different routes to public involvement based on insights from agenda-setting and feminist political theory, multiple barriers and constraints to tenant involvement with the Tenant Group and consequently to public formation persisted. To summarise, these included challenges thrown up by my outsider role as a design researcher; the contradictory aim and approach of seeking to empower participants by influencing them; the persistence of power imbalances between marginalised and dominant groups involved; the uncertainty about the value of broad participation and their own lived-experience and knowledge; and the lack of identification the principles of participation and knowledge that informed the publics-oriented approach. These insights paint a picture of well-intentioned initiatives that may be interpreted by some Tenant Group members as a perceived threat to the group's hard-earned yet fragile sense of autonomy at having self-organised. Thus, in this final chapter, I also return to my second research question about the suitability of a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach for marginalized groups and consider implications more widely to participatory design research. To contextualise my discussion, I return to the literature on agenda-setting, feminist political theory and social movements.

8.2 Understanding the contentiousness of agitational forms of activism

In my analysis in the previous chapter, I discussed how agitational activities, which are often undertaken in participatory design practices under the broad categories of political design (DiSalvo, 2009) and design activism (Fuad-Luke, 2009; Markussen, 2013; Asad and Le Dantec, 2015) and participatory design using the publics-frame, did not always appeal to members of the Tenant Group. Expanding on this, in this section, I analyse to what extent the *publics-oriented participatory design* approach and methods investigated here were found suitable for marginalised groups, as asked in my second research question. To do so, I return to a close reading of the case explored in this study and analyse committee members' different constructions of the activist identity in the context of research on social movements that explore this topic (Bobel, 2007; Cortese, 2015; Craddock, 2019, 2020). Building on this analysis, I further develop the argument from the previous chapter, that to develop a truly effective *publics-oriented participatory design* approach design researchers need to pay attention to the central principles that inform research participants' attitudes and behaviours about different forms of public involvement, at the local community level and policy level. Thus, this section critiques aspects of my proposed *publics-oriented participatory design* approach, which I found wanting, proposes alternatives and theorises about implications for participatory design theory and its principles of participation and knowledge by synthesising insights from political theory and the social movements literature.

As detailed in previous chapters, research participants in this study, primarily members of the Tenant Group, had varied perspectives on activism and agitational activities– some quite negative. Broadly speaking, Beth (who joined much later and was interviewed for the policy analysis) and Nicole, saw themselves as activists and understood activism with the group as a long-term strategy for influencing policy agendas through ongoing activities oriented to raising members' and stakeholders' awareness of their issues and if needed, influencing policy discourse. They were both interested in steering the group in this direction. In contrast, Tracy and Ned were very surprised that I would think to qualify their activities with the group as activism and instead were highly critical of activism, which they defined narrowly in terms of its more agitational and public-facing forms. Consequently, their response to my attempt to engage the group in assessing the scope of their issue and whether they need to operate at a macro-level and attempt to influence policy discourse, agenda and actors, was reduced to a push for activism that was deemed not suitable for the group, for reasons I explore below.

The existence of multiple identity constructions and ways of self-identifying as an activist is evidenced in the social movement literature (Bobel, 2007; Cortese, 2015; Craddock, 2019, 2020), which shows that activist identities are complex, multi-layered and hybrid, as they interact with other identities. Nonetheless, Chris Bobel (2007) notes that there is a tendency in the social movements literature to assume that participants in social movements automatically identify as activists, an assumption that also permeates the emancipatory approach in Scandinavian participatory design and this study. Indeed, the realisation that some research participants do not identify as activists came as a surprise to me. Interestingly, though a handful of scholars support the finding that people 'doing activism' do not necessarily identify as activists (e.g. Bobel, 2007; Cortese, 2015; Craddock, 2019, 2020) they argue that this is due to an unattainably high standard given to activists, resulting in people feeling unworthy of the title (Bobel, 2007). This, however, is not the case in my research. Instead, I found that active group members (Tracy and Ned) refused to identify as activists because they saw activism in an unfavourable light. Given this very different interpretation, it is valuable to pause on Tracy and Ned's resistance to this role and consider what are the implications for the approaches and methods of *publics-oriented participatory design* if group members do not see themselves as activists engaging in collective political action.

To explore this, I begin with an excerpt from a conversation that I had with Tracy and Ned (Transcript, 28.1.19, p.5-6) which I quote at length as it is highly suggestive of the mindset and principles which, throughout this thesis, I argue inform how some social tenants approach their involvement with the group and my design-inspired interventions.

Tracy: Activism is an interesting word I find 'cause there is no way that I would consider going on a...

Ned: Protest march!

Tracy: Yeah! -- Ever! I would not do that. I just would never do that.

Ned: Stand in the rain!

   (everyone laughs)

Yemi: And you're not sunshine protesters either?

Tracy: I just wouldn't do it because I don't like it. I don't like the concept of it.

Yemi: What's the concept of it?

Tracy: The concept to me is people just bringing attention to themselves, to a particular cause. And I see them on TV and I'm like, really?! Do you think anybody gives a shit about that? The only people that give a shit about that are the people that are rallying for it.

Yemi: How is the *Tenant Group different?

Tracy: I just wouldn't do it.

Yemi: But how is the *Tenant Group different? You are a concerned group ...

Ned: We are working behind the scenes.

Tracy: Yes! Yes!

Yemi: So, it's less about 'look at me, look at me' and more about?

Ned: Changing things.

Tracy: This is about changing things. We were brought up not to draw whatsit to ourselves and I would never do it.

Ned: ...(unclear)....

Yemi: And activism doesn't change things?

Ned: It's too much competition.

Yemi: What do you mean?

Ned: Everyone trying to get attention.

This discussion at the local pub shows that both Tracy and Ned associate activism with its more visible manifestations. In this excerpt, they mention protest marches and media coverage on television. Later (not quoted here) they mentioned newspaper coverage, political posters and sit-ins. Thus, even though the social movements literature identifies many forms of activism (see Barnes and Prior, 2009), some being more agitational in their approach and others more deliberative (such as consultations and public forums), it is often the more publics-facing agitational forms upon which it is judged by the general public.

Moreover, as noted earlier, though activism is often assumed to be a positive phenomenon in the literature of participatory design, political theory and social movements, as I evidence here, it is a fraught concept to those it purports to empower. For instance, Tracy and Ned describe activism and activists with derision. In the excerpt above, Ned throws out the image of protesters standing in the rain which gets Tracy and Ned rolling in laughter. Though I did not explicitly ask for an explanation, might Ned's imagery of soppy-wet activists hint at the futility of their actions? Tracy's comments, however, show her view that activists aren't as selfless as this image of marching in the rain suggests. She pointedly suggests that 'The only people that give a shit about that are the people that are rallying for it" (transcript, 28.1.19, p.6), thus challenging the notion that activists represent a bigger group or cause and arguing that they are in it for themselves.

Both Tracy and Ned believe that activists have ulterior motives and interests and that in addition to the cause they claim to represent, they are motivated by self-interest -- like the desire to bring attention to themselves. In another conversation, Tracy (transcript, 28.3.19, p.4) clarifies that she sees this as showing off how 'good' they are, or at least how good they think they are. She attributes this so-called virtue-signalling to local community activists and left-leaning politicians. Indeed Tracy, who proudly identifies as a Conservative voter, seems to associate activism with more left-leaning ideologies and parties, which may also explain her negative view of activism. In addition, Tracy critiques activists and politicians for getting involved in issues that don't impact them directly and that they don't know enough about. This raises another point of contention about activist identities, and by extension design researchers. This is explored by social movements scholars, including Bobel (2007), Cortese (2015) and Craddock, (2019, 2020), who find that the motives of activists that are not directly impacted by an issue are seen as suspect, whereas activists that have 'lived experience' of the issue are more likely to be perceived as authentic and trustworthy. Public policy researchers working in the domain of public participation, Richardson and Sefton (2005) identify a similar pattern in research of activists in community action groups. Problematically, for designers and researchers (such as me) working with emerging publics in the domain of public services and policies, even if they do not identify as activists, the fact that they often do not have lived experience of the issue, means their motives and actions may be seen as suspect, much like the activists that Tracy and Ned deride.

Thus, it is evident that the perceived value of participation is contingent, situated and contested in emerging publics. Tracy and Ned do not only critique the involvement of outsiders and stakeholders, but the tactics associated with the public-facing activists. In the excerpt above, Ned rules out tactics of activism in that he says, "It's too much competition" because "everyone is trying to get attention" (transcript, 28.1.19, p.6). This comment suggests that Ned's image of activists standing in the rain may indeed point at the futility of making an issue public, not necessarily because this tactic is ineffective, but as he reveals later in the passage because there are simply too many groups doing the same, clambering for the attention of dominant publics; the broadcasting, print and social media; and decisionmakers, including policymakers. Thus, the competition and power that are at the centre of agenda-setting theories are seen by Ned to make public-facing tactics and strategies futile for marginalised groups -- with consequences for the likelihood of public formation. As argued by pragmatist and agenda-setting theorists alike, a public is unlikely to coalesce around an issue if those impacted perceive that such a route is ineffective (Dewey, 1991, p.118; Schattschneider, 1960, p.). Of course, this holds if the only motive and output expected from forming a public are to remedy a social issue, an assumption I take

issue with, in the following section, where I argue that the mechanism of publics also serves other functions that research into participatory design with publics must be more attentive to.

Interestingly, given committee members' awareness of the imbalance of power and competition among groups vying for the attention of powerholders, later in our conversation Ned and Tracy suggest that this can lead to sensational and even deceptive tactics as activists attempt to change the balance of power. As an example, Ned cited a recent post in the group's Facebook forum in which a member shared a link to an article about her housing problem in the local paper. This article included a photo of the tenant group member standing beside a crumbling wall in her HA-x home. In her post, she argued that the 'bad press' pushed HA-x to finally replaster her walls and she urged other members to pursue the same tactic. Ned, however, was sceptical of her claim and said that it looked like she had "put a hammer to it [the wall]" (transcript, 28.1.19, p.8). Tracy agreed and they discussed another case of a Tenant Group member who they felt manipulated the welfare system and made inauthentic claims which they feared damaged the validity of other legitimate claims and the group as a whole. This discussion highlights potential concerns about veracity, representation and presentation of knowledge from lived experience, which may be overlooked if knowledge is taken at face value. Thus, Tracy and Ned worry that activist tactics that attempted to leverage the power of personal narratives amplified in print and social media often led to a portrayal of social tenants as victims and perpetuated stereotypes of dependency and substandard living. They felt the victim narrative was not only personally demeaning but also counterproductive as it undermined the group's autonomy, sense of dignity and legitimacy in the housing landscape.

This relationship between individual and collective identity is supported by empirical research in social movements that finds that taking part in a group nurtures a strong sense of collective identity (Bobel, 2007). Committee members identified with the group and were concerned about how the group was perceived. Critically for the Tenant Group, the social movements literature shows that this is also evident among so-called casual participants who are less active but come to identify with the group (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). Thus, the goal of maintaining the group's identity and authority informs committee members' approach to group formation and possibly that of the many other group members. Thus, one begins to see how the different constructions of activism are highly normative.[57]

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[57] Tracy explains her negative view of activism as stemming from her upbringing. She recounts how as a teenager she was "very for the workers, the people, the small person" (transcript, 28.1.19). However, Tracy's mother was mortified by her daughter's activism and discouraged it.

Thus, based on considerations for what routes are deemed normative and appropriate, Tracy and Ned generally described their approach as "working behind-the-scenes" (transcript, 28.1.19, p.6) to get issues resolved. What is intriguing here is that both have no issue with challenging the status quo and doing many things that activists do, as long as they are done discretely. Thus, they reject the construction of the 'ideal activist', outlined by Craddock (2019, 2020), and instead, see their approach as more constructive than agitational since they work to build a constructive relationship with HA-x officials and local councillors in order to resolve members' issues. In keeping with this approach, they do not prioritise getting all group members actively involved, as Nicole initially sought, since they are weary that some group members will behave poorly and undermine the group's legitimacy and relationships.

In sum, Ned and Tracy did not see themselves as activists because they did not support more public-facing agitational tactics which they associated with activism, since they qualified these as:

a) Self-interested
b) Attention-seeking (a form of virtue-signalling)
c) Too competitive and therefore less effective
d) Too competitive and therefore encourage sensational and exaggerated claims
e) Encouraging victim narratives that reinforce stigmatising stereotypes
f) Encouraging victim narratives that delegitimise group's claims
g) Normatively inappropriate and therefore damaging to the group

Thus, I propose that this apparent rejection of more public-facing forms and tactics of activism may explain, in part, the reluctance of other group members to get involved in the collective activities of the Tenant Group and my proposed participatory design events. Importantly, as I have started to argue here, these concerns about public-facing activities again suggest that the principles of participation and knowledge are not paramount in the Tenant Group's approach to identifying their issues and shaping a collective course of action. Instead, Ned and Tracy, and according to them many other members, are concerned first and foremost with issues of group legitimacy and practical considerations of how to get their issues resolved.

In this context, the role of 'activist', much like the role of the responsible 'citizen' (which was advanced by successive UK governments since the 1980s) and its hybrid form 'consumer citizen' (articulated by New Labour in the late 1990s and prevalent today), is yet another normative construction that has little popular purchase with many members of the Tenant Group as it seems less immediate and pertinent to solving their issues. This is supported by findings by social movements researcher, Daniel Cortese (2015) who finds that self-identifying as an activist is

context-dependent and that those other identities, such as being working class, may take precedence. This demonstrates how individuals negotiate various dynamic identities and relationships and how in order to enable public involvement for marginalized design researchers and practitioners would be advised not to assume that pre-established roles (e.g. citizen, consumer, activist) are acceptable and instead consider how participants choose to frame their involvement. Importantly, *exploring through design-based activities what identities motivate people to act is entwined with finding out with participants what principles are driving them to get involved and dedicate time and effort to a social issue*.

In addition, the analysis above shows that participants are aware of how formal institutions and stakeholders are implicated in the process of constructing these pre-established roles and therefore influence the tactics and roles marginalized groups see as available to them. For instance, in this study, it was found that social tenants often rejected normative roles assigned to them (such as citizen and consumer) but were also alert to their marginality in society and therefore weary of possible limitations and risks of adopting solely agitational roles, language and tactics. Thus, even spaces of resistance, like a self-organised issue-based group, such as the Tenant Group, can reinforce dominant power structures and identities, while ostensibly fighting against them. In this respect, a *publics-oriented participatory design* approach that introduces activities that are deemed agitational or activist (e.g. aim to challenge prevalent housing narratives), may be viewed by potential participants as disconnected from what some may deem as more appropriate and more importantly, practical identities and routes to influence. Thus, to consider further if participatory design is, as is often claimed in the design literature, especially suitable for involving marginalized groups, below I reconsider based on my engagements with the tenant group members what design principles they may gravitate to.

8.3 Bringing participants' principles to the fore of participatory design

Though participatory design in general aims to benefit and empower participants, as discussed in the previous chapter, in exploring a publics-oriented approach with an emerging public I found that the principles of participation and knowledge, that have endured as broadly accepted central principles to the participatory design approach, were not uniformly perceived as important or beneficial by research participants and to a certain extent undermined public involvement. Thus, I argue that failing to recognise this, *publics-oriented design* may unwittingly ignore principles that are much more important to participants. This suggests a scenario where *publics-oriented participatory design* practice and research is not adequately publics-oriented *as it prioritises its own design principles over those of emerging publics*. Hence, it is possible that design interventions,

with Tenant Group members did not lead to political action, as befitting a Deweyan public, in part, because the central principles that informed my participatory design approach (participation and knowledge) were not aligned with the central principles that - based on my analysis of discourse and design-inspired interventions – I propose below, informed group members. Thus, one of the theoretical and methodological contributions of this thesis is to propose that in order to support public formation, *a publics-oriented participatory design practice needs to identify and accordingly adapt its approach and methods to align with the principles that members of emerging publics believe are most important.*

Notably, while I recommend that researchers integrate this into their practice, in this study the understanding of the mismatch between the principles of participatory design and those that moved tenants only came retrospectively based on reflexive analysis. This is valuable to understanding how a publics-oriented approach may indeed contribute to public involvement, but also to consider how to make the approach more suitable for marginalized groups. Thus, going back to the data collected through interviews, informal discourse and design-inspired interventions, I identified two recurring themes which I argued were fundamental to understanding committee members' thinking about their involvement in the group and its formation. As a result, my analysis was not validated with participants or applied in practice, which limits the validity of these interpretations and claims.

I termed these *autonomy* and *dignity and explained them briefly here*. The principle of *autonomy* refers to all aspects and manifestations of self-rule, whereas, the principle of *dignity*, refers to being seen by others as worthy of respect. As argued in my analysis of the case studies (Sections 7.2.2 and 7.3.2), committee members' explanation of their decisions about the nature of their involvement and the group's aims and strategy, repeatedly returned to considerations of how to secure and maintain the group's autonomy and dignity. As implied by Tracy when she noted that apart from improving housing services, one of her hopes for the group was that it would succeeds in making the HA-x "actually realize that we are people!" (Tracy, transcript, 28.1.19, p.8).[58] This and other interactions with research participants documented earlier bring to light how *public involvement in social issues is not only about remedying the issue at hand but also about much deeper moral claims* – in this case, to be treated with respect and dignity – as "people!". This

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[58] "I don't know whether it [the Tenant Group] can change policy, but I would like to think that it will make them [HA-x] think, well actually, we are really doing a crap job -- and actually realize that we are people!" (Tracy, transcript, 28.1.19. p.8).

implies that the recurring themes of autonomy and dignity are more than just concerns, but as argued here, principles that reflect societal values, and therefore, are central to informing and guiding social tenants' attitudes, behaviour and identity.

Following this argument, public formation can be understood as motivated not only by the issues, as argued in Dewey inspired STS and participatory design practice, but also, as proposed by feminist political theory, by the need for a mechanism that will enable people on the margins to articulate what issues concern them (autonomy) and be considered as worthy and legitimate actors (dignity). Thus, the mechanism or tool of publics, which according to Fraser (1990) comprises of assembling of diverse yet similarly situated individuals by creating a separate space for withdrawal and regroupment outside formal channels, may also be understood as a mechanism that enables a newly formed group to develop a sense of autonomy and dignity. In other words, *by introducing autonomy and dignity as principles that drive marginalised groups to form a public, public involvement is not framed solely as sparked by needs or problems that need solving. Instead, greater emphasis is placed on public formation as a solution, since by assembling* into a public, its members are often afforded a greater sense of autonomy and dignity.

All research participants expressed satisfaction and pride at what they accomplished as a group and as individuals by forming a group. Though the term empowerment was never used by me or others it is implied in their stories. For committee members especially, this sense of empowerment was transformative, as they described with satisfaction and surprise how housing association officials, who typically ignored them, were pushed to act on their complaints (at least initially). Indeed, research in social movements finds that by engaging in organising and mobilising efforts and other forms of activism, participants modify how they see the world and how they see themselves (Rupp and Taylor, 1987; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Klandermans, 1994). Thus, I find that public involvement in social issues can be understood as driven by multiple normative, affective and moral motivations, which suggests that a publics-oriented design approach needs to recognise that public involvement and public formation is about much more than trying to influence public policy discourse and agendas.

Does this undermine the political and democratic significance of the proposed *publics-oriented participatory design*? I believe not. To reiterate, it is not only issues that spark the formation of publics and motivate public involvement, but also the need for a mechanism that can create conditions of greater autonomy and dignity. As such, designing for these principles contributes to the process of issue and public formation among marginalised groups. Given the centrality of principles in guiding and anchoring participatory design practice, researchers and practitioners

using design approaches with emerging publics would do well to explore ways to identify and embrace principles that are more salient to marginalised groups.

Though the principles of autonomy and dignity were not explicitly named at the outset of the project, and I did not seek out to identify or design for participants' principles, these emerged through discussion and reflection with group members and my content analysis of interviews and notes. Through meetings, semi-structured interviews, observations, design-inspired interventions and a tenant-oriented policy analysis, these principles came to light as highly informative of the motives, decisions and actions of group members in forming a potential public. Thus, it is argued here that *it cannot be assumed that participation and knowledge are the most important principles for participatory design using the publics-frame, especially in the case of more marginalised groups*. Furthermore, to be publics-oriented and facilitate public involvement of marginalized groups, it is recommended that design researchers, practitioners and policy researchers exploring design for policy develop methods to articulate the principles that motivate and guide public involvement in design as a preliminary stage in any *publics-oriented participatory desig*n project.

While my analysis is based on one case, the principles of autonomy and dignity may be relevant to many groups that are marginalised in one way or another. Also, it is suggested, though requires further investigation, that these principles may be generalised to other marginalised groups and policy domains and be used to guide *publics-oriented participatory design*-inspired interventions. The attention to principles or values in design practice is not new, as exemplified by the Scandinavian tradition of participatory design. Also in recent years, partly in response to the expansion of participatory design into other domains outside industry, there is revived interest in designing for users' values (Harper, 2008; Halloran *et al.*, 2009; Iversen, Halskov and Leong, 2010) as a way to uphold the value-centred approach of Scandinavian design. However, in contrast, in this study, I extend this argument to designing with emerging Deweyan publics which are often comprised of marginalized groups and focus on participatory design about social policy issues. In addition, in this study, I have found that principles can trigger and motivate the emergence and formation of publics and have proposed principles that stand out as especially important for marginalized groups.

8.4 Acknowledging the multiple functions of publics

The challenge of identifying the scope of unarticulated issues

In this study I found that participants were reluctant to see their housing issues as public issues, even after experiencing design-inspired interventions aimed at contextualizing the issues and reassessing them as matters of concern (Latour, 2005). It appears that since committee members were often successful in resolving members' private issues by liaising with HA-x, this was interpreted by some as evidence that the strategy of operating on the local scale, in the private sphere, was satisfactory (Fieldnote, 19.1.19; Transcript, 28.1.19). In fact, given their short-term success, some committee members (Ned and Tracy) were not interested in design-inspired interventions that explored micro-level issues (e.g. disrepair, poor service, insecure tenancies) since these were seen as matters of fact, not requiring further investigation. In contrast, committee members who were willing to use outside support and expertise when deemed necessary (Section 7.3.2), were interested in working with me on an issue that they felt they had had less success (e.g. social housing selloffs) since they could not resolve it, even in the short-term and at the individual level, by appealing to the HA-x. This 'practical' approach on the part of the group committee ignores that even private or local issues may be a part of a more systemic problem that may not be readily apparent. Thus, encouraging participants to choose an issue of their choosing may undermine an important feature of the *publics-oriented participatory design* approach which involves investigating the scale in which to operate to determine whether it is a policy issue.

This highlights how investigation into the scope of an issue cannot be advanced on its own and is integral to the process of issue articulation. However, if marginalized groups with limited resources prefer to focus on short-term immediate issues that concern them, how can design researchers encourage critical inquiry? Fraser's (1990) insights into the dual function of publics is insightful here. As the reader may recall, Fraser describes two contrasting functions, one, withdrawal and regroupment and two, agitation. Though Fraser does not labour the point, both functions are made possible because publics create a separate "space", or "base" for their members so they may "withdraw", "regroup", "train" and "agitate" (1990, p.69). Space here is not only physical but also conceptual. Based on this interpretation of public formation, I suggest that we may think of this *separate space as the bedrock of public formation* as it gives marginalised group members who may otherwise be reluctant to engage.

The Facebook forum initially sparked this kind of engagement – enabling hundreds of similarly situated individuals to assemble and share their diverse yet overlapping concerns without fear of being judged or dismissed for being social tenants and complaining about housing issues. However, face-to-face interactions among group members, such as committee meetings, group meetings and my design sessions and interviews were not widely embraced and, as discussed

earlier, were possibly perceived as riskier by group members who feared retaliation from HA-x and local authorities (Section 7.3.1). More critically, accounts from research participants suggest that this space was not deliberative. This means that communication between members did not involve an examination and reformulation of existing hegemonic discourse or members' shared and agonistic concerns.

Though initially the group was conceived as a mixed tenure group united by a common landlord, according to Nicole, communication on the Facebook forum and directly with members was dominated by social housing concerns. Moreover, as social tenants were the most active and vocal on the Facebook forum, and committee members almost exclusively addressed their private issues. Other issues and consequences relating to other tenure groups (e.g. private let, leaseholders, owners) received little to no attention. Given this situation, in this thesis, I describe the group as concerned with social housing even though attempts were made in Case Studies 2 and 3 to expand the scope of the issue to draw in other tenures. Thus, though the committee group outlined the issues raised by the group, and presented these as common issues, in practice the group's concerns and attachments were diverse and even agonistic yet presented in a consensual narrative that undermined their ability to regroup. Design-inspired interventions through visualising, framing, and making things did not change this.

Critically, according to Fraser, it is the split function of detachment and regroupment that explains how publics can overcome structural inequalities. Since the Tenant Group may have not sufficiently regrouped around more fully articulated issues and remained strongly identified with the category of social tenants, this may have undermined the group ability to act collectively in the public sphere. Thus, even though my involvement potentially undermined the function of detachment, as it was perceived by participants as encroaching on their sense of autonomy (for committee members) and security (for other members who chose not to meet me) (Section 8.1.2), the need for marginalized groups to regroup in order to form a public suggests a possible role for participatory design. Specifically, by supporting the process of issue-articulation through critical and material practices *publics-oriented participatory design* may enable a newly formed group to regroup. Thus, I propose that while the tension between, on the one hand, creating and guarding a separate space for marginalised group members (detachment) and on the other hand, allowing for external experts to support issue articulation (regroupment) is constant, it must be negotiated if a group is to engage in public-facing agitational activities, assuming that is necessary for change.

Thus, applying Fraser's dual function model to the Tenant Group, it appears that the group was effective at withdrawal, yet struggled to regroup thus possibly undermining capacity for agitation.

According to Fraser (1990) to become a public, a group must also engage in "agitational activities directed towards wider publics" (Fraser, 1990, p.69) thus enabling a newly formed group to cohere as a 'counter' to dominant publics. However, as I have documented here, some committee members, and according to them, most Tenant Group members, were reluctant to engage in agitational actions. Considering my analysis above, this reluctance may be understood as a result of the function of withdrawal and regroupment, described by Fraser (1990) as essential for developing the group's sense of autonomy, security and purpose, being not sufficiently robust.

Critically, though Fraser argues that the functions of one, withdrawal and regroupment and two, agitation are essential for the formation of publics, she does not detail how these functions interact. Based on the analysis above, it may be surmised that Tenant Group members were reluctant to engage in more agitational actions, such as my design-inspired interventions, because the functions of withdrawal and regroupment, essential for developing a group's sense of autonomy, security and purpose, were not yet fulfilled. Further, it is possible that if the function of withdrawal and regroupment is not sufficiently robust, as in the case of the Tenant Group, marginalised groups may be reluctant and ill-equipped to engage in more agitational activities. Thus, expanding on Fraser's model of the dual-function of publics, which described the functions of withdrawal and regroupment and agitation as ongoing and co-existent, I propose that the inward-facing functions may be foundational to agitation. This suggests that to be able to engage in participatory design-inspired interventions that seek to agitate for change in the public sphere, design researchers, practitioners and policy researchers working with emerging publics need to identify whether there is a need to first focus on inward-facing group activities that support the functions of withdrawal and regroupment before being able to realistically undertake public-facing activities that support the agitation function.

Notably, though design labs using the *publics-frame* are sometimes conceptualized as such secure and separate spaces, based on my findings, I would argue that they are not. As they are typically initiated and funded by and affiliated with formal institutions – such as universities and local governments – they may not promote the withdrawal and regroupment functions that Fraser describes as essential. While infrastructuring attempts to counter this and build infrastructures that will sustain beyond the duration of a participatory design project, findings in this study confirm that more attention needs to be given to public formation.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

With this chapter, I draw the different strands of this dissertation together to summarise the key contributions and articulate the implications of *publics-oriented participatory design* with marginalised groups in the context of public policy. One strand of this thesis is concerned with the Deweyan construct of publics and its theoretical and practical application in participatory design practice. The central concepts I investigated were the application of Deweyan publics, the process of public formation and discerning policy issues. The other strand is concerned with the extent to which the publics-frame in participatory design is suitable for marginalised groups. To recall what is at stake, for Dewey and other pragmatist theorists of democracy, the ongoing formation of multiple publics is seen as vital to democracies because they are a tool that enables people to articulate and address complex ill-defined societal issues. If these remain unarticulated and unheeded, and publics are not formed, this may result in further harm and discontent among those negatively impacted and undermine trust and support for democratic institutions and processes. These idealistic arguments are problematized in the literature on agenda-setting and feminist political theory but are still upheld as central to the notion of publics. Meanwhile, at stake for participatory design research and practice is the ambition and aim to contribute to the design of public services and policies, specifically, by supporting the complex processes of issue and public formation for groups operating on the margins of formal policy-making processes. How this may be achieved and what design approaches and methods may contribute to complex policy domains remains unclear.

With these stakes in mind, I set out in this thesis to assess a new approach to participatory design with publics. Through empirical investigations with an emerging public, I conducted an interpretivist-policy analysis and design-inspired interventions, to analyse and theorise about the proposed *publics-oriented participatory design* approach. However, having explored ways of establishing an appropriate research site and exploring different routes to building public involvement, I concluded that the Tenant Group, for all its potential, did not cohere into a public within the timeframe of the study. Drawing on literature from feminist political theory, the study of social movements, and participatory design research, and integrating insights from practice with the Tenant Group, I have theorised in this thesis why this might be. Thus, this thesis contributes to a more situated and holistic understanding of the application of the publics-frame and the limitations and potential of design-inspired interventions with marginalized groups.

9.1 Contributions

1) Clarification of the application of Deweyan concept of publics in participatory design

Having critiqued the application of publics in related participatory design research as too vague, inconsistent and at times even inaccurate, one of the contributions to this literature in this thesis is to model how design researchers and policy researchers may develop at the outset of their research a criterion for a suitable site to research a potentially emerging public. The criterion for an emerging publics and suitable research site was informed by the literature in participatory design, STS and political theory and was refined through reflexive analysis of data collected from initial exploratory fieldwork. Trialled empirically, it helps to clarify the application of Dewey's concept of publics in the context of participatory design research using the publics frame.

The criterion developed comprised of identifying and engaging with a newly formed, self-organised issue-based group brought together by a shared geographic area and shared area of concern, that may be a broader public issue. Notably, this criterion does not assume that a public has cohered even though a shared concern has triggered the formation of an issue-based group – an improvement on existing research. This introduces more rigour in distinguishing between emerging and existing publics. The site of research is delineated as an emergent public in that it is newly formed and has not yet fully articulated its issue and the scale in which it needs to operate to have it addressed. Further, the criterion does not suggest that the likelihood of a formation of a public is a criterion or singular goal. Instead, the focus on an emerging issue, that may be a public issue, is central to understanding the formation of a public. As such, interactions with and among members of an emerging publics are valuable, as a forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion, regardless of whether a public is formed or not. This reduces researcher bias and the making of claims that a public was formed as a result of design-based interventions.

Further, by flagging the need to discern whether an issue is local or public, does not assume that operating at a local or governmental scale is better or worse but rather that it is context-dependent. By proposing that researchers clearly identify and articulate a suitable research site for emerging publics, this thesis more firmly situates design research with emerging publics in relation to the policy domain where such interventions can potentially be more impactful.

In addition, the criterion developed here seeks to mitigate problems with power dynamics raised in the literature. By seeking to engage with a self-organised group that is already involved in

exploring a particular social issue of their choosing, this criterion helps minimise the influence of the researcher, related institutions and funders. Critically, by using this criterion, it is the emerging public that is tasked with determining the level of engagement of the outside researcher(s) rather than the researcher determining the level of engagement of the potential public. As argued earlier, such an approach may help promote an emerging public's sense of autonomy in their interactions with design researchers and create more suitable conditions for public formation. In addition, since making sense of complex societal issues and their consequences, especially if these are not known, legitimized, or prioritized by the policy community is very challenging, especially for resource-poor marginalized groups, it was found that emerging publics were still interested in recruiting the support or expertise of outsider researchers.

2) *Contextualising participatory design with publics in the public policy domain through a publics-oriented participatory design approach"*

Second, by drawing on literature in agenda-setting and feminist political theory, this thesis contributes to a broader understanding of how to locate publics in the policy process, even if on the margins, and models methods for contextualising local issues in the policy domain. One of the central features of this approach entails, synthesising insights from the literature on barriers and opportunities for publics involvement to inform design-inspired interventions aimed at promoting public formation among marginalised groups. For instance, by considering how existing policies, processes and structures of agenda-setting constrain and generate forms of public involvement, *publics-oriented participatory design* research and practice may be better equipped to support the complex processes of issue and public formation.

3) *Insights into the interaction between publics-oriented participatory design and public formation*

Through concerns and resistance from participants to some of my design-inspired interventions, this thesis presents lessons and insights into the interaction between a more *publics-oriented participatory design* approach and the process of public formation among marginalized groups. One conclusion drawn is that agitational public-facing tactics may not be suitable for newly formed marginalised groups and that design researchers may need to be attentive to aligning principles of design (such as participation and local knowledge) to those of participants and investing in internal-facing tactics to reinforce public formation.

The contentiousness of activism and other constructions of public involvement in marginalised groups

Attempting to enact constructions of public involvement, such as an engaged citizen and activist, that are prevalent in participatory design and other disciplines involved in participatory approaches (Mahony and Stephansen, 2016), I have found that these roles and relations are rejected by members of this marginalized group. Some research participants viewed activists and their tactics in a negative light, suggesting that they were overly attention-seeking, competitive and sensationalistic and, contrasted their own actions with the Tenant Group as more pragmatic and discrete. This suggests that the current theoretical framing of publics in participatory design research and practice is not aligned with what some marginalised groups (such as social tenants) may deem appropriate and viable routes to influence.

Notably, in Dewey's conceptualisation, publics do not arise out of a sense of moral or civic duty – as implied by the constructs of engaged citizens and activists – but out of necessity and hardship. Specifically, he argues that people are forced to form publics because if they don't act on their issues, no one else would. Thus, the imperative to get involved is entwined with the emerging public's experience of exclusion, hardship and vulnerability, which as shown in the tenant-oriented policy analysis, goes a long way to explain why social tenants prefer not to draw attention to themselves and adapt, rather than contest, the status quo. Thus, as argued earlier, these findings suggest that even spaces of resistance, like a self-organised issue-based group, can reinforce dominant power structures and identities, while ostensibly fighting against them. In addition, analysis of engagements and interviews with committee members, reinforced by findings by Fraser & Thurber (2016), highlight the ontological struggle enfolded in the formation of the group composed of marginalised individuals. Thus, in her role as an activist, there is a dilemma about how to frame the rich situated knowledge that is shared by group members.

Aligning design principles to those of participants

I have argued here that the foundational principles of participation and knowledge, which informed the *publics-oriented participatory design* approach and are central to Scandinavian participatory design practice and theory, may not always be congruent with the principles that move groups to assemble and act as publics. In this study, I found that participation, which is both the aim and means in participatory design and fundamental to the approach, was not necessarily seen as desirable by research participants, as it blurred the boundaries between the group and other stakeholders (such as me and HA-x) and therefore was perceived as a threat to the group's

autonomy. Similarly, with knowledge, research participants were suspicious of attempts to recruit or learn from their lived experience and were judgemental of those who did not have their lived experience and acted on their behalf. In addition, though they were interested in accessing more technical quantitative knowledge which may help them to gain legitimacy for their issues, they were less interested in my emphasis on building on their situated knowledge. It is possible that with continued design interventions, this may have changed. Given the centrality of the principles of participation and knowledge in anchoring the democratising ideals of participatory design practice, I propose that to be truly publics-oriented, design with emerging publics needs to explore ways to identify and design for principles that are more salient to marginalised groups. In this study I have identified the principles of autonomy and dignity, often denied to social tenants, as central principles that may move and guide marginalised groups.

4) ***Insights on the potential benefits of using an interpretivist-inspired policy analysis method in participatory design with marginalised groups***

This thesis proposed and tested whether *publics-oriented participatory design* interventions can be augmented and improved by borrowing ideas and methods from the interpretivist policy analysis literature. This contrasts with the prevailing norm in design research, which rarely distinguishes between rationalist policy analysis, with its positivist ontology, and interpretivist policy analysis, with its constructivist ontology. More specifically, I have argued here that the interpretivist approach offers a methodology and methods that are grounded in knowledge of the public policy content and process, to which it brings a focus on people's experiences and interpretations of social policy issues, constructs and narratives. By adopting this approach in the context of design-inspired research, I have tested one method used in interpretive policy analysis, that design researchers may use to uncover possible gaps between formal policy categories and narratives of housing policy and how these are experienced and interpreted by social tenants. Understanding social housing policy and its impact on tenants from an interpretivist orientation was shown to be highly constructive here. While acknowledging the importance of grasping the social tenants' point of view (experience-near) is not new to participatory design, the interpretivist orientation to social inquiry, also makes use of experience-distant concepts which are necessary if one is to engage with any specialised community, in this case, the policy community (Schaffer, 2015).

In addition, using a publics-oriented interpretivist-inspired approach to policy analysis, this thesis showed how such a method may highlight contradictions between formal and informal

understandings of policy categories and narratives. While it is argued here that participants may be aware of these contradictions, given their design interventions may then seek to challenge with emerging publics. Moreover, drawing from the interpretivist policy analysis literature (e.g. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2013a, 2013b; Yanow, 2013) design researchers may learn a variety of analytical methods which may be adapted to different lines of inquiry.

9.2 Recommendations for practice

Since the participatory design principles of participation and knowledge did not seem to be a priority to members of the Tenant Group, I have found here that it may be necessary for design researchers and policy researchers working at the intersection of design and policy to identify the principles that do inform research participants' viewpoints, decisions and actions, in a particular context and time. Therefore, I recommend that in future iterations of *publics-oriented participatory design* practice and other forms of participatory design practice with emerging publics are attentive to:

Aligning design and participants' principles

> Design practitioners and researchers seek to identify and design for principles that are pertinent to emerging publics and therefore guide individuals' decisions and actions to get involved in policy discourse.

> Since publics are heterogeneous and dynamic, design practitioners and researchers need to make sure that principles pertinent to emerging publics are negotiated and periodically revisited to promote alignment.

> *designing with emerging publics whose autonomy is essential to them requires more careful negotiation between designers and participants*. This involves negotiating the level of participation and power-sharing more explicitly.

Aligning design interventions with different functions of publics

Design practitioners and researchers identify and design for principles that are pertinent to emerging publics in order to create conditions that enable an emerging public to focus on inward-facing functions that support processes of issue articulation essential for more outward-facing agitational approaches, as befitting a public.

Design practitioners and researchers leverage approaches, models and theories from public policy and political theory to add context and insights about how people are constructed in the policy domain and spark ideas for design interventions. Some examples of models applied in this study include Schattschneider's theory of conflict in agenda-setting, Arnstein's ladder of participation, and Fraser's Dual Function model.

Design practitioners and researchers develop new approaches and methods that are attentive to the multiple functions of publics, which include both inward-facing functions, which create a space for disparate groups to articulate their shared issues, and outward-facing functions, which enable an emerging public to cohere around an issue that they seek to change.

Leveraging interpretive policy analysis

Design practitioners and researchers need to distinguish between rationalist policy and interpretivist policy analysis and understand how to leverage the benefits of each.

Since participatory design recruits interpretive approaches and methods, design practitioners and researchers can learn from interpretivist policy analysts how to locate and justify the use of interpretive approaches in the public policy domain.

9.3 Limitations

This study has several potential limitations that have implications for my findings and my ability to answer the given research questions. In terms of study design, the number of tenant group members and residents who agreed to take part in my study was very small, which limits the generalisability of my findings. In the exploratory stage of my research, conducted in the Community Centre, the sample of five research participants was sufficient to draw insights and conclusions that helped me refine my criterion for my research site. However, in the design-inspired interventions with the Tenant Group, I had initially assumed I would be able to recruit

more participants than at the Community Centre since the Tenant Group was a larger and self-organised group that had already assembled around a specific area of concern. Instead, I found it difficult to recruit research participants in addition to the three committee members who were, effectively, the leaders of the group. To compensate for this I recruited and interviewed two social tenants from outside the group, who lived in the same district and currently or previously had the same landlord. In addition, and mirroring challenges experienced by the committee members, my design-inspired interventions were oriented to designing for participation as well as articulating the issue of concern.

Another possible limitation of the study design was its sample selection method. One possible selection bias arose because the three main participants were the Tenant Group leaders, and thus perhaps did not reflect the perspectives of inactive members, as well as of individuals who chose not to join the group. The recruitment of the two social tenants from outside the group helped to overcome this bias, as they served as a proxy for the 'silent majority' of social tenants who either did not join the Tenant Group or did join but stayed inactive. In addition, following methods in design research (Koskinen et al, 2011; Simonsen, 2014; Sangiorgi and Scott, 2018) my sample was not intended to be representative of the group or social tenants in the district (though participants did come from a mixed demographic background, with a variety of traits associated with marginalisation). Thus, though qualitative research typically seeks to increase its generalisability by drawing on a large sample and many data sources (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2006), given my attentiveness to barriers to participation and my focus on issue and group formation through *publics-oriented participatory design* interventions, the recruitment of all Tenant Group committee members seems sufficient for exploring my research questions about participatory design and public formation. This is in line with purposive sampling, which involves choosing participants based on their knowledge, experience and affiliation with the subject under investigation (Brown, 1980).

The short duration of the study may also seem to be of concern. As public formation is a situated, emergent and iterative social process, the limited time frame of my fieldwork did not allow for a more longitudinal assessment of the possible long-term impact of my design-inspired interventions. However, the timeframe used here is typical of design research, where it is argued by design theorists and practitioners that unlike in the social sciences, using fragments of data often 'suffices' to yield ideas about the design context, to discover previously unacknowledged needs and issues, and to derive implications for design at a specific space and time (Buur and Sitorus, 2007; Halse, 2008).

Finally, given my narrow focus on social tenants in a specific district in the Midlands of England, the design-inspired interventions and my findings are highly situated and context-specific. To counter this, I have used triangulation of methods, data and theory (Flick, 2018). This has included the use of multiple methods and integrating into my analysis empirical findings from housing studies, which include data about national and local demographics of social tenants and other tenures, details of specific social housing policies, and more. Further, in my analysis, I draw on design theory and feminist political theory to contextualise and problematise these situated observations and findings and propose wider implications for the practice of participatory design with marginalised groups.

9.4 Future research

It was proposed here that the principles that move people to assemble around an issue may not be concerned with the principles of participation and knowledge espoused in the Scandinavian strand of participatory design. While I have proposed that the principles of autonomy and dignity appeared to be central to understanding participants' interpretations and actions, it remains to be researched whether these principles may be generalized to other publics and other policy domains where design may seek to intervene. Further, I conjecture that given the Tenant Groups' marginal position relative to dominant groups, these principles are likely to be shared by other marginalised groups. However, this requires further exploration. In addition, future design research may explore methods of identifying and negotiating with research participants the principles that most inform their interpretations, decisions and actions about whether to get involved in public policy discourse and public formation.

In addition, I have argued that interpretivist policy analysis, which typically aims to challenge conventional framing and underlying assumptions of problems, constructs, and narratives in public policy, and expose the construction of meaning by the individuals studied, may be a useful methodology for participatory design public services and policies. While I have modelled one way of adapting interpretivist policy analysis in the framework of a participatory design research project, there are many other methods used by interpretive policy analysts and a more systemic investigation of its potential is necessary. In addition, I recommend exploring the application of methods of interpretivist-inspired publics-oriented policy analysis as a design intervention. Such an approach would explore how to create conditions where policy analysis about participants' interpretations and experiences may also generate a process of discovery for research

participants about their issues, roles and relations to public policy. In addition, under recommendations for practice, I propose that since the interpretivist approach to policy analysis was developed as a critique of rational policy analysis, which is more widely used in government and institutions, participatory design which also entails interpretive approaches may learn from interpretivist policy analysts how to locate and justify the use of interpretive approaches in the public policy domain. Such a research direction would also encourage design practitioners concerned with public services and policies to assess and articulate the unique contribution of design-based interpretive approaches and how these may fit with the work of interpretive and rational policy analysts.

Finally, I have argued that it is possible that to be able to regroup around collective issues, contribute new ideas and perspectives and agitate for change, marginalised groups need to have a secure space where interactions with others that are similarly situated instil in them a sense of confidence and self-dignity that emboldens them to act in the public sphere. Yet more evidence is needed to get a better understanding of the multiple functions of publics and the interaction between these different functions. More empirical research is needed about the possible application of Fraser's dual function model of publics to *publics-oriented participatory design* practice and research.

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Addendum

Appendices

A. Literature review search strategy

B. Exploratory research: Participant information sheet - Community Centre

C. Case studies: Participant information sheet – Tenant Group

D. Exploratory research: Participant consent form - Community Centre

E. Case studies: Participant consent form - Tenant Group

F. Participants' personal and housing details

G. Exploratory Research: Home-visit guidelines for support workers

H. Interpretivist-inspired Policy Analysis: Contextual interview protocol – social housing

I. Design-inspired intervention: Housing Justice event invite – long copy

J. Design-inspired intervention: Housing Justice event invite – short copy

K. Design-inspired intervention: Housing Justice kick-off event itinerary

L. Design-inspired intervention: Content produced by researcher on FOIs & WhatDoTheyKnow platform posted on Tenant Group forum by committee group

M. Tenant Group Fieldwork - activities, participants, purpose & documentation

N. Interpretivist-inspired policy analysis: Secondary sources of data used in analysis – policy reports and surveys

O. Primary data sources, identified by documentation type, date, context and notation for referencing in the thesis

Annex

I. Social housing glossary

II. Central actors in UK social housing landscape

Literature review search strategy

Method: database search, snowballing based on reading

Duration: ongoing and integral to research process and practice

Central search themes:

DESIGN: participatory design, design research, Deweyan publics, counterpublics, design things, issue-articulation, matters of concern, design activism

POLICY: public participation, policy process models, agenda-setting process, policy analysis, interpretivist policy analysis, constructionist policy analysis, policy narratives

HOUSING: social housing policy, tenant participation, housing publics, barriers to participation, tenures

Journal sources:

The most relevant journals covering social design and co-design:
- CoDesign
- Design Issues
- Design Studies
- Design Philosophy Papers
- Design and Culture

The most relevant journals covering public policy:
- Critical Social Policy
- Journal of Social Policy
- Policy and Politics

The most relevant journals covering housing studies:
- Critical Social Policy
- Journal of Social Policy
- Housing Studies
- Housing, Theory and Society
- Urban Studies

Participant Information
Harnessing collaborative documentary and co-design to influence policy development

Thank you for your interest in this research project!
Before you decide whether to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to explore inventive video methods for engaging people in policy development. Video methods designed to encourage inquiry, reflection and learning will be developed and tested, and hopefully, will influence policy agenda and narratives.

Why have you been invited?

Anyone can take part. However, to benefit from diverse perspectives and experiences, we are interested in speaking to a mix of people from local communities, local government, third sector and public sector.

Do you have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. However, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. Please note, however, that any data (or images) collected up to the point of withdrawal may be used within the study.

What will you be asked to do if you agree to take part?

We would like to interview you to discuss social issues that concern you and if you are interested, we can schedule to meet again to discuss possibilities for working together on a creative project that looks at these policy issues with others in the community. Interviews and meetings will take place at a place of your choice.

How much of your time will participation involve?

The interviews will take approximately 20 minutes or longer. If you are interested, we can schedule additional meetings to discuss possibilities for working together on a joint project.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking part?

This study involves working on creative projects in a group to engage people in policy development. As such it is likely to be fun and interesting. You will get to collaborate with a diverse mix of people from different background and at the same time contribute to a better understanding of the strengths, weaknesses and potential of video in supporting policy change. As for disadvantages, mostly it's the time you must set aside to participate in the workshop.

What will be done with my data?

All your data, including photos, video, and interview transcripts, will be stored on UAL's secure network. Research results will be presented in the final PhD thesis, at conferences, academic journals, meetings and seminars in government departments, think tanks or universities. Please note that on the attached Consent Form, you may choose whether you want your real name used in the results.

Who is organising and funding the research? Who has reviewed the study?

This research is funded by a joint UAL and Kings College London studentship. It has been reviewed by Central Saint Martin's College Research Degrees Sub-Committee and has been found to meet the University's Code of Practice on Research Ethics.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any concerns about this research, please do not hesitate to contact:

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Participant Information
Housing Justice: Developing media methods
to shift the balance of knowledge in housing policy

Thank you for your interest in this research project!
Housing Justice is a research project initiated by Yemima Safra as part of her PhD research at Central Saint Martin's, London. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to develop and test the potential of using different forms of media to engage people in understanding, contesting and shaping the policy domain – specifically, through a focus on social housing policy.

Why have you been invited?

This study focuses on grassroots groups, like tenant action groups, and on other active citizens like yourself. We hope that people with different kinds of tenancies will take part so we may learn from their varied experiences, perspectives and knowledge.

Do you have to take part?

No, participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. Please note, however, that any data or images collected up to the point of withdrawal may be used within the study but can be anonymized if you prefer.

What will you be asked to do?

Before taking part, I will ask you to sign a Consent Form. In the study, guided participatory design activities are used to explore a housing issue of your choosing. In small groups you will develop methods and approaches for identifying and collecting information about the housing issue you have chosen. In the beginning and end of the project, I will ask for feedback about your experience and perspective in a brief interview. To document project activities, meetings and interviews I will make audio recordings, take photographs and make notes.

How much of your time will participation involve?

An initial introductory interview will take 20 minutes or more, if you like, and may be held in person or on the phone. Co-design activities led by me will take a minimum of 30 minutes or 1.5 hours for workshops and follow-up conversations and meetings will vary in length depending on your interest in developing the design ideas. You are encouraged to make this project your own by choosing the housing issue you want to focus on and sharing methods developed with others. In this respect how much time you invest in this project depends on you.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking part?

Though this may vary from person to person, for most, the experience of meeting like-minded people and being engaged in an issue that truly matters to you is very rewarding. You will get to collaborate with a diverse mix of people and at the same time contribute to developing creative methods for collecting useful data, as well as gain some insights about housing issues and influencing policy. As for disadvantages, mostly it's the time that the project may take up.

What will be done with my data?

My documentation of the study, through audio, photos, emails and notes will be stored in a password protected personal computer. During the course of this study, I will be analysing this information and drawing insights from it. These research outcomes will be presented in the final PhD thesis, and may also be presented at conferences, academic journals, meetings and seminars in government departments, think tanks or universities.

If you like, information you provide may be anonymous. On the Consent Form you may choose whether you want your real name shared in the results or not.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed by Central Saint Martin's College Research Degrees Sub-Committee and has been found to meet the University's Code of Practice on Research Ethics.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any concerns about this research, please do not hesitate to contact:

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ual: KING'S College LONDON
University of London

Project:

Harnessing collaborative documentary and co-design to influence policy

Thank you for reading the participant information sheet. If you are happy to participate, please tick the relevant boxes to confirm that you agree and sign below.

Taking Part

I agree to take part in this doctoral research project.   □
This may entail guided activities, participation in a small group workshops
and being interviewed.

I understand that my taking part is voluntary.   □
I may choose what activity to participate in and I can withdraw without giving any reason.

Use of the information I provide

I understand my personal details, such as, phone number and email will <u>not</u>   □
be revealed to people outside the project.

I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and   □
other research outputs.

Which do you prefer?
   Yes, you may use my real name in the above   □
   No, you may <u>not</u> use my real name in the above   □

_____   _____   _____
Name of participant   Signature   Date

UAL: **KING'S College LONDON** University of London

Consent Form

Housing Justice: developing media methods to shift the balance of knowledge in housing policy issues

Thank you for reading the participant information sheet. If you are happy to participate, please tick the relevant boxes to confirm that you agree and sign below.

Taking Part

I agree to take part in this doctoral research project. ☐
This may entail guided activities, participation in a small group workshops
and being interviewed.

I understand that my taking part is voluntary. ☐
I may choose what activity to participate in and I can withdraw without giving any reason.

Use of the information I provide

I understand my personal details, such as, phone number and email will <u>not</u> ☐
be revealed to people outside the project.

I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and ☐
other research outputs.

Which do you prefer?
   Yes, you may use my real name in the above ☐
   No, you may <u>not</u> use my real name in the above ☐

I understand that photographs of me are used to document the project and may be used in publications, web pages, and other research outputs. If I do not want to be photographed or videotaped at a particular activity, meeting or interview I may tell the researcher.

_____ _____ _____
Name of participant   Signature   Date

Appendix F: Participants' personal and housing details

Participant code, made-up name, approximate age and gender	Affiliation	Tenure type / tenancy type/ accommodation type
P11 /**Nicole** 50+ /F	Tenant Group	Social let / Secure. General needs
P12 /**Tracy** 55+/F	Tenant Group	Social let / Secure. General needs
P13 /**Ned** 60+/M	Tenant Group	Social let / Fixed Term Supported housing
P14 / **Beth** 70+/F	Tenant Group	Social let / Starter Secure housing
P15 / **Kate** 55+/F	Social tenant – *not* a Tenant Group member	Homeless / no tenancy Homeless
P16 / **Lana** 40+/F	Social tenant – *not* a Tenant Group member	Social let / Assured General needs
P1 / **Jack** 30+/M	Community Centre - Development Officer	Not relevant
P2/ **Maria** Middle-aged / F	Community Centre	Not relevant
P3 /**Damien** Middle-aged /M	Community Centre	Not relevant
P4/ **Tom** Middle-aged /M	Community Centre	Not relevant
P5 / **Amy** Middle-aged /F	Community Centre	Not relevant

Appendix G: Exploratory research: Home-visit guideline for support workers

Home-visit guidelines for support workers to assess when someone is not coping:

- Client is difficult to reach, does not come to the door even when present.

- Client has poor personal hygiene (looks unkept, unwashed, odour).

- Property is not well maintained (condition dirty, unkept, cluttered).

- The temperature of the property is uncomfortable (too hot or too cold).

- Essential services (water/electricity/gas) have been discontinued.

- Stack of unopened official letters visible, or no letters visible.

- The property is dark, lights kept off, curtains closed.

Appendix H: Interpretivist-inspired Policy Analysis: Contextual interview protocol – social housing

<u>**CONTEXTUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**</u>

    Format
Semi-structured audio-recorded interview
Paired or individual
Duration: minimum 30 minutes
Location: determined by interviewee

    Selection criteria
Involved in local social housing issues or the tenant group
Live in some form of low-income housing

CORE THEMES AND GUIDING QUESTIONS:

General beliefs and attitudes towards social housing
    Please complete the sentence. There is no right answer. You can answer quickly with anything that comes to mind (Ask follow-up questions for detail). *In your opinion --*
        Social housing is….
        Housing associations are…
        Housing policy
        Right to Buy
        The Tenant Group
        Central government
        Political parties
        Democracy
        Freedom of Information Requests

Personal housing history
    Starting with your childhood can you describe to me where you have lived and the kind of housing. What was it like? (Ask for concrete examples & personal experiences.)
    Pay attention to use of housing narratives and related assumptions. Ask specific questions about these:
    Do you think homeownership is more secure?
    Do you think homeowners make better neighbours?
    Do you think social housing is stigmatized?
    Have you experienced stigma as a social tenant?

Activism and the Tenant Group
    Have you previously been part of some sort of action group?
    Why did you get involved in the Tenant Group?
    What do you want to achieve?
    What lessons have you learned?
    Do you think your activities could influence policy?
    In terms of housing policy, if you could, what would you like to change?

Invitation to the kick-off meeting of a new project –

HOUSING JUSTICE: Shifting the balance of knowledge

The complex and tricky topic of housing, which impacts so many people's everyday lives, keeps coming up on our local Facebook forums. Yet our conversations seem to go nowhere since it is hard to know what is happening locally and what exactly local authorities and social landlords are doing.

So, if you are frustrated with the lack of transparency and accountability on important housing issues - like housing availability, affordability, security and fairness.
And if you interested in exploring new ways to challenge these and access the information you need.
Then drop by to our kick-off meeting a new community project called Housing Justice. There is no obligation in coming, so worth the try. We will be doing all sorts of activities over the next three months.

Of course, we realise this is short notice and that not everyone can make it at such a time or place. So, if you are interested but can't come for any reason or would like to come but need some assistance - do get in touch! We'd be happy to figure something out.

WHO ARE WE?
This project is led by Yemima Safra, a PhD researcher at Central St Martins, London, in partnership with Nicole* X, artist and founder of the *Tenant Group* in XXX*.

THE AIM of *HOUSING JUSTICE*
Recognising that knowledge is power, the *Housing Justice* project invites you to 'shift the balance of knowledge'. By working with others in the community to better understand what is happening locally, so you can:
   ● make your case
   ● hold housing associations and authorities to account
   ● challenge policies that negatively influence your daily lives

To achieve this, we will be developing and trialling the use of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, mapping tools and other creative ways in which we can fill in those knowledge gaps.

WHO IS THIS FOR?
Anyone who is concerned about housing, including social and private housing tenants; leaseholders, shared ownership and owners; Tenant Group members and others. No advance skills are needed, only your curiosity, resourcefulness, knowledge and experience of local housing and -- a bit of time to spare ;)

LOCATION: xxx *Pub**
DATE & TIME: Tuesday, 15th January, 6.45 - 8.00 pm
        We look forward to meeting you!
And thank you to XX Pub* for kindly allowing us to use their x room (*names anonymised)

Are you are frustrated with the lack of transparency and accountability on important housing issues? Issues like housing availability, affordability, security and fairness?

If so, then drop by to our kick-off event and find out more about a new community project called *Housing Justice*. We will be looking at creative ways to challenge - as a group - the lack of accountability in local housing policies. There is no obligation in coming, so worth the try.

Also, if you are interested but cannot come for any reason, or are in need of some assistance, just get in touch. We will be doing all sorts of activities over the next three months.
For more details about us and what we plan to do, look up our invite page on *Eventbrite.*

We look forward to meeting you!
LOCATION: The xxx Pub, Village name
DATE & TIME: Tuesday, 15th January, 6.30 - 8.00 pm (starts at 6.45)

Appendix K: Design-inspired Intervention: Housing Justice kick-off event itinerary

Event: Housing Justice: shifting the balance of knowledge
Date: Tuesday 16/1/19 at 6.30- 8.00
Location: xx Pub

6:30   Setup / drinks -- hand out Information Sheet

6:45   Introduction Yemi/ Nicole
        Yemi - My research & what it involves, Q&A
                Information sheet & Consent form signed

7:00   Participants introduce themselves
        Yemi - Introduce problem: sell-offs of social housing (identified in Facebook forum)
                Challenge: lack of transparency and accountability

7:10   Exploring sources of information
        Activity in pairs: Who knows what?

7:30   Yemi - Introduce FOIs and WhatDoTheyKnow platform
        Group activity: FOI challenge
                Discuss & draft FOI requests for policy issue

7:50   What next?
        Circulate contact sheet
        Activity: Note to Self

8:00   Thanks

Appendix L: Design-inspired intervention: Content produced by researcher on FOIs and whatdotheyknow.com platform posted on Tenant Group forum by group committee

30/1/19

Want answers about housing issues from government and public authorities?

Check out a brilliant platform where you can learn more about Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, see submitted FOI requests and answers, and even easily submit one yourself.
https://www.whatdotheyknow.com

Also, you might want to know that Housing Associations are not obligated to share information under the FOI Act. This means that as Housing Association tenants you do not have access to the same information as council housing tenants. Hardly fair.
If you want to do something about it, or just have some questions, get in touch!

The Tenant Group can create new ways of using FOIs and getting answers.

Appendix M: Tenant Group fieldwork - activities, participants, purpose & documentation

Date & site	Activity & participants	Purpose	Documentation
September 2018	Identify research site – Social networking through professional contact network, reading local papers, desk research	Find newly formed tenant group (Is it a public?)	Notes, emails, news article about formation of local tenant group (June 2018)
October 2, 2018	Introductory email to Tenant Group founder (Nicole)	Schedule meeting	Emails
October 10, 2018 – Café	Meeting 1 –Nicole (1.5 hours)	Introductions, about my project, discuss possible mutual benefits of working with Tenant Group	Notes
October 17, 2018 Café	Meeting 2 – Nicole (2 hours)	Learn about group concerns, core people, relations with HA, choose issue for collaboration	Notes
November 24, 2018 Pub - *Cancelled due to illness*	Committee meeting –	Introduce myself, project & recruit members	Emails
November 28, 2018 - *Cancelled due to illness*	Walking & photo tour - Nicole & committee members	Meet committee members, introduce project / Develop method to engage people in social housing issues	Emails
Dec x, 2018 *Cancelled by N due to family emergency*	Meeting – Nicole	Meet committee members, introduce project	x
Dec 12, 2018 Nicole's Studio	Meeting 3 – Nicole **tenant2citizens** (2 hours)	Exploratory session - Exploring barriers to tenant engagement. Develop new method of inquiry.	Notes, photographs, co-created shared doc
Dec 12, 2018	Nicole – Contextual interview (1 hour)	*Data collection for Interpretive policy analysis*	Notes
Dec 19, 2018	Notes from discussion of Exploratory session	Insights about burden of stigma, assumptions about citizenship	Notes
Dec 19, 2018	Nicole posts on TG Facebook	Introduces me and HJ project to TG	Notes
January 3, **2019** Studio	Meeting 4 – Nicole (2 hours)	Discuss possible media methods (e.g FOI, photo documentation of tenancy reviews, housing (activist) histories)	Notes, illustrations
January 2019	Emailed older housing activists / Nicole called	Developing stories of role models - housing (activist) histories	Emails

January 5, 2019	Nicole – email inviting me to run design intervention	Nicole proposes calling a wider meeting re sell-off of social housing	Email
January 7, 2019	Phone call – Nicole torn regarding changing relationship with group	*Case study 1 - planning* Situating workshop activity – autonomy of Housing Justice project	Notes
January 8, 2019 -	Phone call - Nicole	Negotiate relationship with Nicole/ Discuss tension between her role in group and practice	Notes
January 8, 2019 Café	Prep for kick-off	*Case study 1 - planning* Discuss, trial & feedback with Nicole	Emails, materials, cards, slides,
January 15, 2019 Pub Cancelled due to lack of interest	Housing Justice Kick-off event	*Case study 1 – event* Engage a wider group of concerned citizens. Experiment with new approaches for collective research (e.g. FOI challenge, mapping)	Email discussion with Nicole, slides, workshop agenda
January 19, 2019 pub	Committee Meeting (1) third for the group – Nicole, Tracy, Ned	Meet new committee, discuss future action / Feedback about cancelled Housing Justice kick-off event	Notes, minutes
January 23, 2019 Tesco Café	Kate **–** Informal interview (30 min)	*Data collection - Interpretive policy analysis*	Audio & transcript
January 23, 2019 Lana's house	Kate and Lana (2 hours)	Trial 'who know what?' - card sorting activity. Met more family members discussed my PhD project. Policy issue: finding adequate 'house swaps'.	Audio & transcript and photos
January 28, 2019	Ned – Contextual interview (30 minutes) Interview Protocol 1	*Data collection for Interpretive policy analysis*	Audio, transcription
January 28, *2019*	Tracy – Contextual interview (30 minutes) Interview Protocol 1	*Data collection for Interpretive policy analysis*	Audio, transcription
January 28, 2019 *Nicole could not attend*	'Who know what?' activity Discussed mapping FOI challenge invite send	*Case study 2* Develop new ways to bridge knowledge gap: FOI challenge, mapping sold	Audio, transcription, photos

Appendix N: Interpretivist-inspired Policy Analysis: Secondary sources of data – policy reports and surveys

Title	Author	Date
50 years of the English Housing Survey	MHCLG	2017
Evidence Log: District Housing Strategy. West Midlands, England.	District Council	2018
The charter of social housing residents: social housing white paper	MHCLG	2017
Social housing green paper	MHCLG	Aug.2018
English Housing Survey: Homeownership report 2017-2018	EHS, MHCLG	2018
English Housing Survey: Headline report 2018-2019	EHS, MHCLG	2019
English Housing Survey: Headline report 2019-2020	EHS, MHCLG	2020
Social lettings statistical release: April 2017- March 2018, England	MHCLG	Nov. 2018
Social lettings statistical release: April 2018- March 2019, England	MHCLG	Nov. 2019
Trends in tenure, England	MHCLG	Feb. 2018
Live tables of dwelling stock (including vacant stock)	MHCLG	2018, 2019
UK Housing Review compendium	Chartered Institute of Housing	2018, 2019, 2020
Private registered provider social housing stock in England – statistical data	Regulator of social housing	2017-2018; 2018-2019
Tenure Rights and Responsibilities Report	Joseph Rowntree Foundation	2010
Housing law and policy (book)	Cowan, D.	2019
A vision of social housing report	Shelter	2019
Living working countryside: the Taylor review of rural economy and affordable housing.	Taylor, M.	2008
Homes for rural communities: report of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Rural Housing Policy Forum.	Best, R. and Shucksmith, M	2006
Social housing evidence review: housing report	Turnstall, R.K. and Pleace, N	2018

Appendix O: Primary data sources, identified by documentation type, date, context and notation for referencing in the thesis

Document ation type	Date	Context where data was produced	Notation:
Field-note	14.8.18	Exploratory research: M-community Centre - Site visit -	Fieldnote, 14.8.18
Memo	14.8.18	Exploratory research: M-community Centre - Meeting w. director	Memo, 14.8.18
Fieldnote	18.8.24	Exploratory research: Informal conversation about subject matter expert on local social housing, Citizens' Advise field case worker	Fieldnote, 18.8.24
Memo	24.8.18	Exploratory research: M-community Centre – Meeting w. Jack, community development worker, M-Community Centre and Jo, Community Worker from local council	Memo, 24.8.18
Email	26.9.18	Exploratory research: M-community Centre – I email Jack, summary of central aims of my research	Email ,26.9.18
Fieldnote	4.9.18	Exploratory research: M-community Centre -Tea circle meeting, M-Community Centre (visit no.1)	Memo, 4.9.18
Memo	5.9.18	Exploratory research: M-community Centre - Women's club meeting, M-Community Centre (visit no.2)	Memo, 5.9.18
Field-note	19.9.18	Exploratory research: M-community Centre - conversation with Jack	Fieldnote, 19.9.18
Memo	2.10.18	Exploratory research: M-community Centre -Tea circle meeting, M-Community Centre (visit no.3)	Memo, 2.10.18
Memo	2.10.18	Exploratory research: M-community Centre - Tea circle meeting, M-Community Centre (visit no.4)	Memo, 2.10.18
Email	2.10.18	Exploratory research: I write an email to Tenant Group founder - Nicole	Email, 2.10.18
Memo	*8.10.18*	Exploratory research: photo club (design idea 3)	Memo, 8.10.18
Fieldnote	10.10.18	Exploratory research: Meeting 1 –Nicole (1.5 hours) - introductions	Fieldnote 10.10.18
Fieldnote	17.10.18	Interpretivist policy analysis - Meeting 1 –Nicole (1.5 hours) – contextual interview (not audio recorded)	Fieldnotes, 17.10.18
Memo	17.10.18	Field research: Meeting 2 – Nicole (2 hours) – learning about groups concerns, central actors and possible issues for collaboration	Memo, 17.10.18
Memo	18.10.18	Weighing alternatives – Community Centre vs. Tenant Group	Memo, 18.10.18

Memo	24.11.18	Field research: cancelled committee meeting	Memo, , 24.11.18
Memo	28.11.18	Field research: Walking & photo tour - Nicole & committee members - *Cancelled due to illness*	Memo, 28.11.18
Email	4.12.18	Exploratory research: I write Nicole, Tenant Group founder, about group non-participation	Email, 4.12.18
Fieldnotes	12.12.18	Interpretivist policy analysis: Nicole – Contextual interview (not audio recorded, notes taken during interview)	Fieldnotes, 12.12.18
Memo	12.12.18	Exploratory session – Transitioning tenant2citizens - with Nicole	Memo, 12.12.18
Photos of artefacts	12.12.18	Exploratory session: Transitioning tenant2citizens - with Nicole	Photos, 12.12.18
Cocreated shared document	13.12.18	Exploratory session: Transitioning tenant2citizens - with Nicole	Co-created shared doc, 13.12.18
Memo	19.12.18	Infrastructuring: Nicole introduces me and my research to the n Tenant Group Facebook	Memo, 12.19.19
Fieldnote	3.1.19	Field research: Meeting 4 – Nicole (2 hours)	Fieldnote, 3.1.19
Memo	5.1.19	Exploratory: Emailed older housing activists / Nicole called Ideas for engagements – women role models stories	Memo, 5.1.19
Memo	5.1.19	Infrastructuring: Nicole – email inviting me to run design intervention	Memo, 5.1.19
Memo	7.1.19	Infrastructuring: Memo based on phone call with Nicole	Memo, 7.1.19
Memo	8.1.19	Infrastructuring: Memo based on phone call with Nicole	Memo 8.1.19
Power point doc	10.1.19	Case 1:Prep for Housing Justice kick-off event	Presentation, 10.1.19
Artefacts - Cards for activity	10.1.19	Case 1:Prep for Housing Justice kick-off event	Artefact, 10.1.19
Audio recording & transcript	11.1.19	Interpretivist policy analysis: Kate – semi-structured interview (30+ min)	Transcript, 11.1.19
Fieldnotes	11.1.19 Lana's house	Case 1: Prep Housing Justice kick-off event - Kate and Lana - Trial 'Who know what?' - card sorting activity.	Fieldnotes, 11.1.19

Photos	11.1.19 Lana's house	Case 1: Prep Housing Justice kick-off event - Kate and Lana - Trial 'who know what?' - card sorting activity.	Photos, 11.1.19
Memo	14.1.19	Case 1: Prep Housing Justice kick-off event - Meeting with Nicole	Memo, 14.1.19
Document - event itinerary	14.1.19	Case 1: Prep Housing Justice Kick-off event	Itinerary, 14.1.19
Memo	15.1.19 Pub	Case 1: Housing Justice Kick-off event - cancelled	Memo, 15.1.19
Fieldnotes	19.1.19 Pub	Case 1 & 2: Committee Meeting (1) Attended: Nicole, Tracy, Ned - discussed cancelled event & future engagements	Fieldnote, 19.1.19
Memo	23.1.19	Public event at Open Oxford House Housing Matters: 'Social housing: Past, present, and future' Speaker: Eileen Short from Defend Council Housing campaign	Memo, 23.1.19
Audio recording & transcript	28.1.19	Interpretivist policy analysis: Ned – Contextual interview (30+ minutes) - Interview Protocol 1	Transcript, 28.1.19
Audio recording & transcript	28.1.19	Interpretivist policy analysis: Tracy & Ned – Contextual interview (60 minutes) Interview Protocol 1	Transcript, 28.1.19
Audio recording & transcript	28.1.19	Case 2: design-inspired activities 'Who knows what?' / Planning "Mapping activity" "Tales of Consequence" FOI challenge planning	Transcript, 28.1.19
Fieldnotes	28.1.19	Case 2: about activity and my perceived influence on Nicole	Fieldnote, 28.1.19
Audio, transcription	15.2.19	Interpretivist policy analysis: Beth– Contextual interview (60 minutes) Interview Protocol 1	Transcript, 15.2.19
photos	15.2.19	Case 2: Beth – tour of supported housing Centre	Photos, 15.2.19
Fieldnotes	25.3.19	Committee meeting (2) Large meeting. Three councillors invited. Tracy not in attendance.	Fieldnote, 25.3.19
Audio, transcription	28.3.19	Case 2: Tracy – pub meeting Discussed her leaving the group	Fieldnote, 28.3.19

ANNEX

Annex I - Social housing glossary

TENURE categories:

- *Owner occupier*: this category includes households in accommodation which they either own outright, are buying with a mortgage or as part of a shared ownership scheme (more under Intermediate tenure).

- *Social rent*: this category includes households renting from Local Authorities (including Arms' Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and Housing Action Trusts) and Housing Associations, Local Housing Companies, co-operatives and charitable trusts.

- *Private rent*: this category includes all other tenants including all whose accommodation is tied to their job. It also includes people living rent-free (for example, people living in a flat belonging to a relative).

- *Intermediate tenure*: this category, also known as Shared Ownership or Shared Equity, enables people to privately buy a share of a property being sold and pay a subsidised rent on the remainder.

RENT levels:

- *Private rent:* letting by private landlord, usually at local market rate. Can be partly subsidized for those eligible by Housing Benefit (see below)*.*

- *Affordable rent:* lettings by local authorities or housing associations at rent of up to 80% market rent.

- *Social rent:* lettings by local authorities or housing associations (PRPs), with guideline target rents determined through a national rent regime and priorities for eligibility set locally by the council.

Annex II. Central actors in social housing landscape

The housing system is highly complex and includes many actors from the public sector, private sector, charities and individuals with a range of needs and circumstances. The central actors reviewed include tenants; social housings providers, such as council housing and private registered providers; private landlords, and private developers; national government, and local authorities; finance institutions and third sector organisations, such as charities, think tanks and universities.

TENANTS

Roughly speaking there are two kinds of tenants: private and social, who rent properties from the private rental sector or the social rental sector (Mullins and Murie, 2006; Cowan et al, 2010). The boundaries between the two are porous, as both private and social tenants may be recipients of social welfare (e.g. housing benefit) (Cowan et al, 2010; Pattison, Diacon and Vine, 2010, 2010).

SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDERS

Social housing, which consists of different levels and kinds of subsidised accommodation, accounts for 17 percent of all homes in 2018–19 (MHCLG, 2019). The social housing sector is made up of two kinds of social housing providers: Local Authorities and Private Registered Providers.

> *COUNCIL HOUSING (Local authorities)*
> Social housing provided and sometimes managed by local authorities is commonly referred to as Council Housing to low-income households based on a lottery allocation system.

> *HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS (Private Registered Providers of social housing*)
> Private Registered Providers, commonly referred to as Housing Associations (HA), are private organisations that provide social housing on a non-profit basis. Housing associations are central provider of social housing and comprise 75% of the sector (MHCLG, 2020a).

PRIVATE LANDLORDS

Though not social housing providers, private landlords in the private rental sector are playing an increasingly important role in social housing policy (Cowan & McDorment, 2008). They provide housing for those excluded from social housing, such as tenants deemed 'unhousables' because they are considered too financially risky to house by housing associations (Cowan & McDorment,

2008; Bevan & Cowan, 2016) and make up for the shortage in social housing (Shelter, 2019).

PRIVATE DEVELOPERS

To further reduce the need for governments to finance housing development, since the 1980s UK governments have created incentives for private developers to build housing for both the social sector and the private sector (Malpass, 2000). Since 2007, private developments are the main way of securing affordable housing in England, accounting for 65% of newly completed affordable homes (Malpass, 2000).

NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Housing policy is led by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). To achieve these goals, a variety of departments and public bodies are involved in the planning and delivery: Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for benefits and welfare reforms; Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) for tax credits; and HM Treasury that sets the budget, which effectively determines housing priorities (that is, who gets funding, and the level of funding).

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Local authorities have many roles in the delivery of housing policy. These include managing social housing allocation; overseeing the local planning system; and upholding various statutory housing duties, such as provision for the homeless (Morrisson, 2017). The local authorities' statutory duties include administering claims for Housing Benefit (HB) on behalf of the Department for Work & Pensions and providing accommodation and support for local residents deemed homeless or at risk of homelessness.

FINANCE INSTITUTIONS

Private financing for social housing comes from banks, building societies, financial bonds and stock exchange (Gibb, 2019). These finance institutions were first brought in to fund social housing development by the Thatcher government to cut public spending (Housing Act 1988). This mixed public-private funding regime (*mixed-funding* for short) consisted of public grants from government or local councils and private loans from banks, building societies, financial bonds and stock exchange (Cowan, 2011).

REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING

The scope of government's regulatory reach, the style of regulation and the entities involved have varied over time (Marsh, 2018). In 2010, regulatory oversight of consumer (tenant) matters was

discontinued, and the central concerns of the Regulator of Social Housing became the governance and financial viability of housing associations. In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower there has been a push to reintroduce oversight of consumer services (MHCLG, 2018; Shelter, 2019).