



# From community ownership to community fellowship

Qualitative analysis of the socio-economic  
consequences of asset redistribution in rural  
Scotland

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# From community ownership to community fellowship. Qualitative analysis of the socio-economic consequences of asset redistribution in rural Scotland

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## Abstract

Understanding inequalities regarding land and asset ownership is essential to comprehending rural areas. An unbalance situation regarding the ownership of assets, especially in rural areas where people are even more dependent on land management and the resources they can get from it, makes rural society more fragile. This thesis investigates the role of asset redistribution in the development of rural communities in the Global North, where the potential of community ownership to mitigate asset ownership inequalities and improve the lives of local people has been understudied, especially compared to some cases in the Global South. This study investigates how and in what ways land redistribution can contribute to building communities and improving the well-being of rural people. The fieldwork conducted in a rural community in the south of Scotland over five weeks follows a qualitative approach mixing eighteen in-depth interviews, three participant observation sessions and four transect walks made with community group members. The data collected have been analysed through the Community Capacity Framework, using the literature on the community ownership model and the concept of commoning. The case study demonstrates how the community follows a spiralling up trajectory led by positive retroaction thanks to the initiatives conducted by different community groups leading to the building of commons. In other words, the study shows that asset redistribution leading to community ownership benefits the local community by strengthening social ties. These significant social connections among local people allow the emergence of new collective projects reinforcing the economic attractiveness of the town and its surroundings and improving the well-being of the local people. The present paper contributes to the existing knowledge by demonstrating that the building of material commons can contribute to the creation/reinforcement of social bonds among local people. These newly-shaped social ties contribute to the formation and reinforcing the community spirit, making local people likely more able to answer present and future crises collectively.

*Keywords:* asset redistribution, commoning, community building, community capacity, spiralling up trajectory, social capital, rural development, Scotland.

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# Abbreviations

BE: Buccleuch Estates

CAT: Community Asset Transfer

CRtB: Community Right to Buy

CCF: Community Capacity Framework

LI: Langholm Initiative / the Initiative

LA: Langholm Alliance / the Alliance

EF : Eskdale Foundation

NCCRtB New Compulsory Community Right to Buy

SCDC: Scottish Community Development Centre

SOSE: South of Scotland Enterprise

TVNR: Tarras Valley Natural Reserve

# 1. Introduction

Inequality studies are one of the leading research topics raising several concerns, especially these last years' where they have been increasing drastically (World Bank 2020; OXFAM 2021). One sub-category of the analysis in rural areas is the inequality regarding land ownership. Understanding land ownership is a crucial factor in analysing rural societies. Land ownership inequalities have been one of the main concerns in developing a prosperous and peaceful society. Indeed, most people in rural areas directly depend on the land to sustain their livelihood, either directly (like farmers) or indirectly (intermediaries between farmers and retailers, for instance.).

A consensus seems to emerge on the significance of comprehending the inequalities concerning land ownership as a critical factor in understanding rural areas' social and economic development in many contexts (OXFAM 2016; Guereña & Wegerif 2019; Wegerif & Guereña 2020). Analysing the right over land and land tenures is central to analysing land inequalities. Depending on the context, it can include having the legal paper proving the property right recognised by the State, which is in charge of enforcing the private property rights as a last resort. The development of bureaucracies has reinforced this method of property distribution. In other contexts, it can also be by tradition, for instance, that some people claim the property and shared property over land tenure.

Some research has already been done on the topic of land inequalities contemporarily, mainly in the Global South, demonstrating its significance to learning and improving local livelihood. By examining land inequalities, one can understand the origins of some conflicts in rural areas, especially where these inequalities are radical (for instance, in Brazil (Albertus *et al.* 2018)). However, if land ownership inequalities can raise tensions<sup>1</sup>, some changes in favour of land redistributions tend to emerge. There have been wide-ranging movements in various contexts, studied primarily in the Global South (OXFAM 2016; Guereña & Wegerif 2019; Wegerif & Guereña 2020). Land redistribution can take many

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<sup>1</sup> Like civil war, as during Roman antiquity, the Gracchi brothers tried to redistribute the land to the poorest rural and landless urban people. However, such a process led to violent repression and the Social War in 89 BC (Nicolet 1980, Young 2004, Roselaar 2010).



forms, implying dividing existing properties into smaller ones to reach an equal repartition of the land, nationalisation of the land owned by the private landlord to redistribute to the landless for instance. If land inequalities seem to be most visible in Global South countries (Oxfam 2016; Albertus *et al.* 2018; Guereña & Wegerif 2019; Wegerif and Guereña 2020), it is to forget that vast and significant land ownership inequality can also be observed in Global North countries.

Indeed, land ownership inequality is a predominant issue in rural Scotland (Wightman 2013; 2014; Nicholson 2015; Peacock 2018; Picken & Nicolson 2019; Glass *et al.* 2019; Thomson *et al.* 2020; Combe *et al.* 2020). One thousand one hundred twenty-five owners held more than four million hectares, which means seventy per cent of Scotland's rural land (Thomson *et al.* 2020). Authors have underlined how politically embedded the issue of asset ownership in Scotland has been (Combe *et al.* 2020). Assets ownership inequalities still raise a lot of discussions in Scotland regarding the policies that should be implemented to mitigate issues raised by such inequalities (Wightman 2013; 2014; Peacock 2018; Combe *et al.* 2020). A legal framework has been implemented recently in Scotland to encourage the transfer of assets to community ownership (Combe *et al.* 2020; Lovett 2020). Authors who led some investigation on the Scottish case (see Lovett & Combe 2019) note that, because the last laws have been passed quite recently, there is very little research on the consequences of the new community-owned assets that has been done so far. This study will focus on the consequences of the asset redistribution process happening in Scotland

## 1.1 Thesis aims and research problem

Starting with analysing mechanisms implemented to mitigate land ownership inequalities in Scotland, this thesis focuses on the community ownership model that has been particularly popular in Scotland over the last years. The current paper aims to understand if, and then, how local communities build and reinforce themselves by purchasing assets and creating commons in the Global North, taking, for example, a case in rural Scotland, where asset ownership inequalities are significant.

Many authors emphasised the benefits that a community ownership system could bring to protect local ecosystems (Ostrom 1990; Acheson 2011) and the social (Singh 2017; Nightingale 2019), and the economic development of local communities. The original objective of the thesis was to verify if the community ownership was beneficial for improving local people's livelihood and then what types of benefits could be observed in the attempts to build community ownership in Global North rural communities.

Building on the research gap identified, it appears that some investigation needs to be led to understand how the purchase of an asset by a community could improve (or not) the well-being and sustainability of the local community in rural Scotland. Therefore, the study will aim to answer the following question, itself supplemented with two sub-questions:

**How, and in what ways, does asset redistribution contribute to building communities and improving well-being?**

- *How do local people experience the creation of commons/community-owned assets through the process of land redistribution?*
- *What were the different understandings and values guiding people's aspirations and steps that led to a transfer/purchase of assets?*

## 1.2 Thesis outlines

To better understand the issues raised in this thesis, I introduce a more detailed background in the second chapter (2). Then, I present an analytical framework that has been built to investigate the consequences of asset redistribution and its impact on the local community (3). I conducted a study using qualitative methods (see 4) in Langholm (Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland). This rural town has known economic depression due to deindustrialisation and the closure of the mills that provide most of the employment. The area is also facing historical land ownership inequalities. Then, the paper exposes the benefits and drawbacks of community ownership for rural people in the result section (5).

In the discussion chapter (6), I underline that asset redistribution leading to community ownership benefits the local community. These projects enable the reinforcement of social ties and open new economic perspectives while improving the protection of the natural environment. Langholm's community ownership of assets demonstrates how a community can follow a trajectory of positive retroaction through the synergic actions of its different community groups. Most importantly, it also reinforces the community spirit, making the community likely more able to answer future crises collectively.

## 2. Background

This chapter will expose the background of the study case. It starts with a literature review related to my study case (2.1) that points out the lack of knowledge regarding the consequences of asset redistribution and community ownership in rural Scotland. Then, drawing on the asset ownership inequalities and their consequences on the socio-economic context of rural Scotland (2.2), this section will then present the reasons for making Langholm a meaningful case of land ownership inequalities, potentially mitigated by the process of asset redistribution to the local people through communities (2.3).

### 2.1 Literature review

#### 2.1.1 What land means

Access to land is essential for rural people. Indeed, without control over the land, or over assets, rural people do not have access to the resources and tools that can help them to sustain their livelihood. To support this statement, asset ownership in rural areas and more precisely land ownership can be described as:

*“ [...] the ability to control the use of land and the benefits from that land and what is produced on it”. (Wegeif & Guereña 2020.)*

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Before going further, the term “land” needs to be more precisely defined. Following Li (2014), three essential points permit understanding what land is. Firstly, it is needed to understand how the uses and meanings of the land, that can differ from one stakeholder to another. Then, the second determination of the land is its materiality and form, which means that it is fixed in the space, and the value that people can assign to land can differ depending on where it is located and what type of resource it contains, or social and cultural significance it carries. Then, the land is represented by different actors (map, graphs, records of any type), and the way they are representing the land can allow them to take control or not over these lands. Li explains more globally that apprehending how people perceive the land is essential to define the land itself, even though it remains that its material

existence can be objectively grasped. Elden (2010), on the other hand, insists on the fact that:

*“Land is a relation of property, a finite resource that is distributed, allocated and owned, a political-economic question. Land is a resource over which there is competition”*

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In this perspective, the land is seen more exclusively as a resource. People are willing to buy more land to control and exploit more resources (forestry, wind turbine farm implementation, sheep farming, and tourism).

### 2.1.2 Land inequality and livelihood

Land knows different conceptualisations. In these definitions, land appears as something that people will compete for, to benefit from the resources present and exploitable on the land. Thus, land ownership inequality is when the competition has become dominated by a few stakeholders that have control over a large majority of the land. On a global scale, the general trend is that these inequalities keep increasing (Wegerif & Guereña 2020). That means that rural people genuinely dependent on the land are toiling with smaller parcels. The consequences of land ownership inequalities are extensive. They can imply a lack of production and then economic benefits, lack of power over local policies and land, but also social, political, and economic pressures coming from bigger stakeholders (e.g. State, corporations, more prominent land owners) that directly influence smaller stakeholders to behave in a certain way (e.g. plant specific crops) (Wegerif & Guereña 2020).

However, this issues of access to land and land ownership inequality has been mainly studied in the Global South countries. When entering “access to land” on different search engines (Google Scholar, SLU library, JSTOR), it appeared that the first fifty results (academic books and articles) were focusing only on Global South countries. Most of the empirical cases and investigations dealing with land access and land ownership in the Global South are always made through a spectrum focusing mainly on the economic issues, and secondarily on other types of consequences for rural communities (De Janvry *et al.* (2001). Some papers also insist on the fact that the access to land has to be studied in a more global context. Thus Cotula *et al.* (2008) are insisting for instance on the significance of the emergence of biofuel on the access to land for poor rural people in Global South countries.

The question of ownership in rural areas directly affects what people are enabled to achieve either individually or collectively. Thus, land inequality is a crucial topic that influences rural people’s lives. They are movements facing the global trend of increasing land inequalities. However, they have remained poorly explored so far (Wegerif & Guereña 2020), particularly in the Global North, since

the focus has been turned on Global South Countries. In Scotland, the situation is particularly unequal, with only a minority of landlords concentrating the land in their hands, as seen before (Land Reform Review Group 2014; Wightman 2015). Therefore, different legal frameworks have been implemented, as Lovett (2020) summarised (*c.f.* page 20) promoting the community ownership model in particular.

### 2.1.3 Community ownership

Communities are able to self-organise themselves to take control over an asset and manage it with excellent efficiency for their own benefit (Turner 2017). Community ownership could therefore appear as a solution for the rural areas poorly managed because of land concentration.

If the community might not be stable, it remains that the model of community ownership can permit a better management of resources at a local scale and also potentially improves the community life on social, economic and environmental aspects (Ostrom 1990; Acheson 2011). Ostrom (1990; 1999) demonstrated that the “collective property” does not lead necessarily to the overexploitation of the resource owned by the community. She distinguishes it from an open resource (asset or a natural resource that will be easily accessible and not under the control of the local community) that she called “common pools”. She explains how a resource managed under a regime of collective property is collectively owned and managed through some rules and social agreements, and how thereby, the resource might not be over-exploited. More precisely, she insists that community ownership can enable collective action that can help a community thrive.

Besides, some authors also conceptualised the fact that if the different types of capital (social, economic, cultural, and others) owned within a community were used adequately, this one could thrive and improve its standards of living (Emery & Flora 2006). Other scholars insisted on how a collective set of institutional and social rules could help organise the management of an asset or a natural resource and how these social rules could contribute to its better exploitation (Berkes *et al.* 1998). Thus, if I insisted so far on the significance of land ownership inequalities through an economic perspective, seeing mainly land and assets as resources, it seems that the latent social and human factors might also need to be understood to comprehend rural societies. Indeed, the community ownership model, which could appear as a solution to mitigate asset ownership inequalities, could also benefit rural communities from a social perspective.

### 2.1.4 Commoning

The concept of commoning understood in a broad context can be defined as the fact of leading:

Thus, some authors, like Nightingale (2019), argue that the ideas of “common” and “commoning” are based on an ongoing social process. This social process of commoning is built through different bonds, but primarily through intersubjective relations understood as the affection that people develop (or not) for each-others. Thereby, the concept of commoning can be observed within community.

However, it appears that such a concept of community, and its material concretisation, can be volatile. Indeed, the creation and then the long-term existence of a community is everything but evident (Young 1990; Nightingale 2019). The collective achievements a community can reach are constantly endangered by the incertitude related to the strength of the intersubjective relations local people build together and that frame the strength and unity of a community. This point is essential for those who wish to develop a proper apprehension of how a local community sustains itself (Nightingale 2019).

Nevertheless, taking for granted the pre-existence of a community, perceived as a group of people living in same area and sharing a common space, a set of common practice and common history, the principle of commoning go further. Commoning can be understood as something more than an equal repartition and use of the resources among people. Authors (Caffentzis & Federici 2014 see Singh 2017) underline that commoning is the improvement of everyone’s life through the fulfilment of the common interest, which can be materialised in a political engagement in favour of the community for instance. These authors argue that commoning is also a way of increasing the quality of life of local people involved. Thus, the concept of commoning is define as a process in which people living in a community gather to build something together, following a shared interest, and in doing so, improving their standard of living and the community spirit.

Reaching this point in the literature review, it seems, on the one hand, that land ownership inequalities are endangering the quality of life of people in rural areas. On the other hand, the concept of commoning and its potential application could be a solution to the reinforcement of rural communities and the enhancement of life in rural areas. However, the conceptual borders of the concept of commoning seem to remain vague. Empirical evidence is missing to understand how the concept of commoning can be materially concretised. Besides, studies regarding the commoning project are mainly based in the Global South or the BRICS (Singh 2017). Hence, it might reveal itself useful to apprehend how the concept of commoning is led in the Global North through attempts to build community ownership. Indeed, land ownership inequality is present in the Global South and Global North countries, even though the topic has been poorly explored in comparison. Thus, further research needs to be done to precise the definition of

the concept of commoning, and this might be done by collecting more empirical evidence of its materialisation. To this extent, projects of land redistribution in Global North countries, where land inequality issues are present but not well studied, could be the opportunity to investigate the materialisation of the concept of commoning. This study could fill the gap in the lack of investigation on the potential of community building in rural communities in the Global North.

## 2.2 The Scottish case

### 2.2.1 An area subject to particularly strong inequalities

Thus, the case of Scotland is particularly relevant to raising the issue of land inequality in the Western World (Peacock 2018; Glass *et al.* 2019; Thomson *et al.* 2020; Combe *et al.* 2020). Combe *et al.* (2020) explain that private property remains the dominant model in Scotland from a legal perspective, with massive inequalities regarding the repartition of land ownership.

Land ownership inequality can be considered significant in defining Scottish rural areas. According to Wightman (2013), only four hundred thirty-two owners owned fifty per cent of all the rural land in Scotland in 2012. This ownership situation is mainly old families or individual landlords that own the assets in rural areas (Wightman 2013; Picken & Nicolson 2019).

Scottish society inherits a strong history that still shapes its contemporary society. The current political organisation and land repartition are, to some extent, the continuation of practices reproducing a social order. Some estates are conserved by some heir laird, which are also at the origin of the current land ownership inequalities (Picken & Nicolson 2019; Thomson *et al.* 2020). To this extent, Scottish people are embedded in the subdivision of the land between different areas controlled politically, socially, and economically by a small elite (Wightman 2013).

### 2.2.2 Evolution in the contemporaneity

The land ownership inequalities and concentration of power in a few hands is an issue for the development of the Scottish rural area in many aspects (Nicolson 2015; Peacock 2018). However, recent history has shown the emergence of some potential changes in the observable structure. For example, some civic movements for more representation in the local institutions are rising in Scotland (McAlpine *et al.* 2018), and the implementation of new bills of law through the Scottish parliament that rise in 1997 to mitigate the issue of land ownership in Scotland has led to reappropriation or redistribution of land previously privately owned.

### *Legislative framework developed to mitigate the issue of land ownership inequalities*

Scotland has known a long development of its legislative arsenal to reduce the land ownership inequalities. It started particularly in 1997 with the Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Act, which let communities the right to buy crofting areas previously owned by the State. It was followed in 2003 with Part 2 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act, which enables communities to give priority to a community group to purchase land over other potential buyers. To understand the current situation, Lovett (2020) analyses the different laws that successive Scottish governments have promulgated since 1997. Part 5 of the Community Right to Buy (CRtB) of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act, which saw its conception starting in 2016 and entered force in 2020, is particularly significant since it:

*“gives a properly constituted community body the right to force a sale of land for the purpose of furthering sustainable development [...] New Compulsory Community Right to Buy (NCCrTB), apply not just to rural estates but literally anywhere – in urban as well as rural areas – and they apply not just to land but to all kinds of real property, with a few prominent exceptions”.* (Lovett 2020)

---

This law has been conceived to target the issue of land ownership inequalities in Scotland, which try to cope with the gap, compared to most the western countries regarding land inequalities. Therefore, part of the focus in this paper will be directly oriented toward the consequences of applying this new legislation. In short, this legal framework gives more power to local people to take control over public or private assets, and can even permit this local group to force some sales or transfer of assets. This movement of land reappropriation is also often correlated with the attempt to create some community ownership led by civic groups and local people (McMorran *et al.* 2018; Combe *et al.* 2020).

Thus, commoning concept can be used to understand how land redistribution leading to community-owned assets, could be beneficial for rural communities especially in the South of Scotland, where the community project is still relatively new compared to in the North West (Mackenzie *et al.* 2004; Combe *et al.* 2020).

### *The current researches on asset redistribution in Scotland*

However, the consequences of a purchase or transfer of assets remain poorly explored in the Scottish case, and the few first cases that have been investigated are claiming that more researches are needed (Lovett 2019). Besides, most of the land purchases happened mainly in the North-West of Scotland, in the large area of the Highlands, where communities were historically exceptionally resilient and avant-gardist regarding the development of communities able to sustain themselves (Mackenzie *et al.* 2004). However, the south of Scotland, for multiple



reasons seems to lack analysis and research on community ownership, as underlined by Combe *et al.* (2020):

*“One of these is the tendency towards the ‘Highlandisation’ of the land reform debate, and a reminder not to ignore either the Lowlands or urban land questions. In part this is due to historical legacy – many of the key events and reforms took place in the Highlands and Islands first, and therefore they tend to loom large”.*

---

Indeed, Lowland populations’ experiences in community ownership are not comparable with the one happening in the North West of Scotland. However, some schemes, especially in the last decade, have been led to reinforce the position of these communities. Besides, Scotland faces a lack of devolution from the central authorities and a lack of local democracy, especially compared to the rest of Europe (McAlpine *et al.* 2018). This lack of devolution of power is not helping local communities in their development.

Therefore, understanding if, and then how, local communities in the south of Scotland try to implement some community ownership scheme and which type of benefits they can extract from them seems to be an understudied topic. Lovett and Combe (2019) went through a short primary analysis of a transfer of an asset in an urban environment in Edinburgh. However, their conclusions were mainly that more in-depth investigations were needed to understand plainly the consequences, at least in the middle term, of such transfer of assets to a community.

## 2.3 The Langholm case

### 2.3.1 Historical background

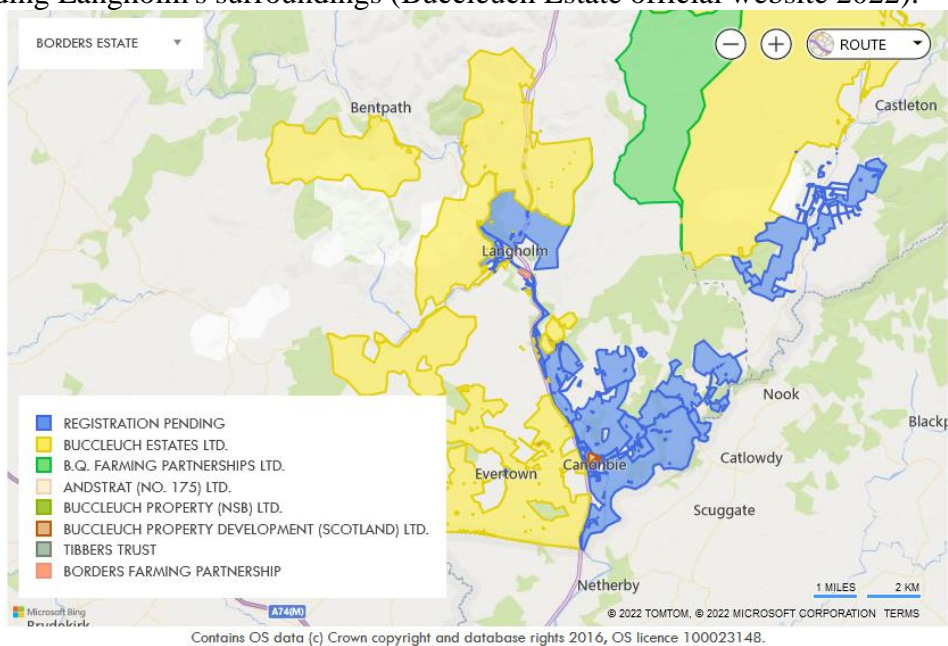
I picked Langholm for my study case, as it can be considered a relevant example that might syncretise a more expansive situation regarding its original social status and economic situation compared to other places in the South of Scotland. Langholm is a town located in Dumfries and Galloway local council area, at the border with England. This region knew multiple conflicts and opposition that shaped its current asset ownership situation.

Thus, the border between Scotland and England has remained almost unchanged since the treaty of York in 1237 until now (Green 2007). The conflicts happening regularly between the English and Scottish to control the area of the “Debatable Lands”, from which Langholm was close (Booth & Booth 2002) led, to a redefinition of the land ownership situation that remained confused until the reunion of the crowns under James I of England in 1603 (Robb 2018). Most of the area was brought under the control of the British State (Masson 1881). The

successive fights have directly influenced Langholm’s history of asset ownership. Most of the powerful Lords and Dukes’ heirs managed to remain in charge over the last four centuries until now. Wightman (2015), regarding the current land ownership situation in Scotland, explains that:

*“[...] land rights which appear legitimate and almost sacred today are, in fact, the product of a long and none-too-wholesome history. Whilst we’ve moved on a bit since then, the fact is that landowners today are the beneficiaries of the nefarious deeds of their ancestors, thanks to the legitimacy afforded by a land law system that their ancestors themselves constructed.”*

The legal ownership framework in Scotland is still particularly confused, as underlined by the Land Reform Review Group (2014). There is a lack of official statistics that might help determine who owns what, especially when it comes to rural areas (*Ibid.*). As shown with the map below, the Buccleuch Estates (BE) is still the major landlord around Langholm, despite its significant sales in the last years, especially to the Langholm Initiative (LI). Indeed, Buccleuch Estates claims to control 127,000 acres ( $\approx$  51 000 hectares) in their Borders Estate, including Langholm's surroundings (Buccleuch Estate official website 2022).



*Figure 1: Buccleuch Estates ownership around Langholm. Source : <https://www.buccleuch.com/the-estates/land-registration/> consulted the 07/02/2022*

Buildings inside the town are owned and rented through different schemes (mostly private), but the assets that have been or might be transferred through the CRtB process to communities were or are still owned by the Local Council of Dumfries and Galloway.

### 2.3.2 Contemporary economic, social and demographic perspectives

Langholm counts approximately 2200 inhabitants on the last census made in 2016. The town is closely surrounded by hills that reinforce its geographical and spatial isolation and, to some extent, limit its urban expansion. Carlisle is the most prominent and closest city, 32 kilometres south by car, and is located in England. Dumfries, the administrative centre of the Local Council, is 54 kilometres away.

In its more recent history, the town and its parish are facing and continue to face a decrease in the population (*Ibid.*), as it is expected more generally for the rest of Dumfries and Galloway<sup>2</sup>. If there are no precise statistics on the situation in Langholm, the population of the Dumfries and Galloway sees, as it is mainly composed of rural areas, an ageing population. It is mainly due to the loss of the industrial base and the lack of job perspective for the youths. Indeed, the town has faced a massive deindustrialisation when all the mills that used to provide most of the local employment closed down in the last twenty years.

Some tensions rose and are materially represented in the political claim for changes regarding the ownership situation in Scotland (Wightman 2014; Peacock 2018; Glass *et al.* 2019). These inequalities in land ownership increase the lack of economic and social development for the local people significantly and can also endanger the protection of the environment (Thomson *et al.* 2020). Indeed, the rural areas of Scotland, like most of the rural areas in Western Europe, are more vulnerable than urban ones regarding economic depression risk. This is due to an ageing population, and a less visible poverty, with a cost of living higher in rural than in urban areas (Glass *et al.* 2020).

Langholm's case is specific and relevant in our investigation regarding the transfer or purchase of assets by communities in the way that some local initiatives emerged spontaneously throughout the last three decades almost (*c.f.* section 4.1.2). These different organisations, charities, and trustees have been involved in developing new activities and initiatives to improve the livelihood of local people, and this on the social, environmental, and economic aspects, despite the loss of employment and youth. In the last five years, some of them managed to take control of some assets using different schemes, and others are trying to do the same. So far, the Langholm case can be considered singular since, despite the relatively small amount of original resources in appearance, especially on the financial and demographical aspect, several communities engage in a different type of buy-out or transfer of assets over the last five years.

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<sup>2</sup> The population is projected to go from 148 790 in 2018 to 144 575 in 2028, a 2.8% decrease (National Record of Scotland 2022)

## 3. Theories and Concepts

This chapter offers a presentation of the concepts and theories that support the analysis of the data collected. I insist first on the concepts of "community" and "social capital" elaborated in the literature. Then, I expose the interest in the capacities/capital framework concerning my study case. Finally, I rest on these two branches to draw an analytical framework that suits the specific case investigated in this qualitative study.

### 3.1 Community and building of commons

The word "community" has been used many times already in this thesis. It needs to be more precisely defined from a theoretical perspective. Indeed, a community is not only the administrative entity described by the Scottish public authorities: a community is also a social construct that deserves particular attention. As underlined by some authors (Young 2010; Nightingale 2019), a community is never self-evident: it is constantly subject to renegotiation regarding its boundaries, to define who and what is part of it or not.

The term community recovers an extensive scope of meanings (Dinnie & Fischer 2019). Diverse schools of thought tried to find perspectives to define how a community should be apprehended. If the community was initially perceived as embedded in a rural context, the concept has been progressively applied also to urban areas (Tönnies 2003). The way of analysing communities evolved along the methods chosen. For instance, it can consist in scrutinising the social bounds, real or imagined, that people think they have with their direct relatives (*Ibid.*). Authors have also insisted on the meaning given to the community in common sense by people. To this extent, the community includes the idea of geographical proximity, shared beliefs, and traditions (Newby 2013). Thus, a community is also built through interactions found in sharing common institutions (administrative services, political system but also past-time for instance) and ethnic origins or nationality (Pahl 2005; Studdert 2006; Mooney & Neal 2009). Regarding the research made to understand communities; authors like Dinnie and Fischer (2019) are trying to understand how:

*“...everyday experiences of community – both enacted and imagined – relate to the ways in which concrete and material expressions of community are enrolled in politics and policy-making. In other words, how do experiences and sense of community (in a place) influence the creation of more formal material structures and associations, which make communities govern-able?”*

---

In this thesis, this is the reverse phenomenon that is studied. That is to say: how building commons either through the purchase of land or the transfer of assets, can enact and strengthen the feeling of belonging to the community through the building and reinforcement of social bonds among its members. Thus, the core of the study will be to investigate not only the communities, perceived as the group of local people forming a legal entity, but more the process of commoning. Here commoning is the phenomenon by which the local people constitute themselves as a community through the asset redistribution process. To this extent, Singh's (2017) analysis in India has shown how the commons could be the place of:

*“[...] affective socio-nature encounters [...] that can foster subjectivities of 'being in common' with others. [...] thinking in terms of affective relations and the work that commons do (other than producing goods or resources)*

---

In Langholm case, I explore how the building commons, either through the purchase of land or the transfer of assets can enact and strengthen the feeling of belonging to the community.

Reflecting on affective relations present in small communities where each is dependent on the others may be particularly relevant in this study case. Indeed, the relatively remote situation of Langholm makes people more isolated and, therefore, more directly reliant on the social relationships developed with their direct acquaintances. Following some authors, including Singh (2017) and Nightingale (2019), understanding the socio-affective relations enacted or imagined inside communities is essential. It makes possible to comprehend how a sense of community is created and graspable, either from the inside by the community members or from the outside by people being excluded from it. Indeed, building some commons includes the idea that some people might not be allowed in it (Nightingale 2019). Thus, understanding the functioning of a community seems to include how socio-affective links are performed, enacted or imagined, and strengthened or weakened among a population that is “building some common”.

## 3.2 Capacities/capabilities framework

Underlining the significance of social relations for the well-functioning of communities might seem evident. However, understanding how these social relations are built and influenced is harder to define. As argued by Bebbington

(1999), it is not only the question of knowing which person/group owns formally a resource or an asset that matters, but it is also their "capabilities" to access their resource that should be taken into account.

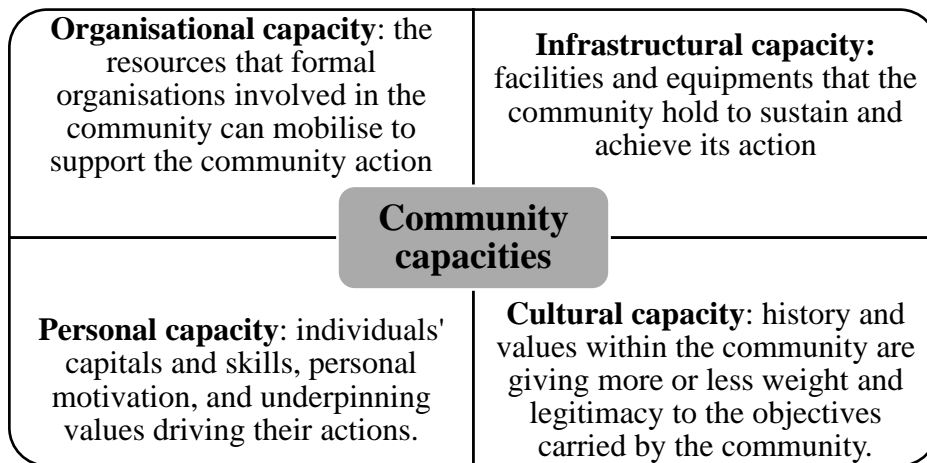
To expand our analytical tools, the use of the Community Capacity Framework (CCF) will be relevant here. This apprehension of community work is widely executed through the CCF in social science (Emery & Flora 2006; Middlemiss & Parrish 2009; Fischer & McKee 2017). An attempt to define this framework can be made following Esterling (1998 see Labonte 1999). Thus, the CCF is a tool supposed to investigate and bring to light:

*“the set of assets of strength that residents individually and collectively bring to the cause of improving local quality of life”*

---

Following this definition, a community capacity can be the competence, network, expertise, confidence towards community members, or also funds possessed by individuals and put in the service of the community. If a capital is considered here as a resource, a capacity is the application/use of this resource. Authors including Middlemiss and Parrish (2009) and later Fischer and McKee (2017) have developed and used a specific framework to analyse how a given community can achieve or not, its purpose depending on four main capacities.

Figure 2: Description of the Community Capacity Framework



By leading investigations using these “capacities” as parameters, one can draw connections from the individual to the collective level. It explains how individuals can improve collective capacities through their individual and collectively-built ones. Consequently, it becomes possible to investigate how the community can drive some actions. The CCF also permits grasping the influence of the economic and geographic environments on people’s behaviour and actions. However, as underlined by Fischer and McKee (2017), poor use of the CCF leads to describe the success or the failure of some community-led projects by a lack of the

different capacity described in the framework. This comes down to ticking the boxes of the list prescribed by the CCF without any reflectivity. It is needed to deepen our analysis of the CCF. Indeed, the four capacities are influenced by the different types of “capital” individuals own. For Inglis (2012), the notion of capital implies:

*“both resources – the ways in which actors can play a game – and stakes – what players are playing the game to get more of”.*

---

Following Bourdieu, there are three types of capital: the economic capital (based essentially on financial resources), the social capital (that one might understand as the quantity, density, and quality of one’s social network), and cultural capital (one’s knowledge and practical skills with a more or less socially recognize prestige) (Bourdieu & Wacqant 1992). However, considering these capitals as the only parameters will not be relevant. It will fail to grasp the dynamic perspective that “capacity” implies. Indeed, by using their capital, people are following a process that can be called capacity. These capacities are allowed by the use they make from their capitals, but the capacity in itself is not something static since it involves the possibility of an action (Fischer & McKee 2017). The concept of capital is needed to understand the CCF, but it is not sufficient.

Besides, Bourdieu’s development of the three capitals does not seem enough. It is required to widen this focus on the vision developed by Emery and Flora (2006) that precise seven types of capital instead of three in their development of the CCF (Natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built capital). In doing so, the analysis will gain precision regarding the description of the capacities at the individual or community level.

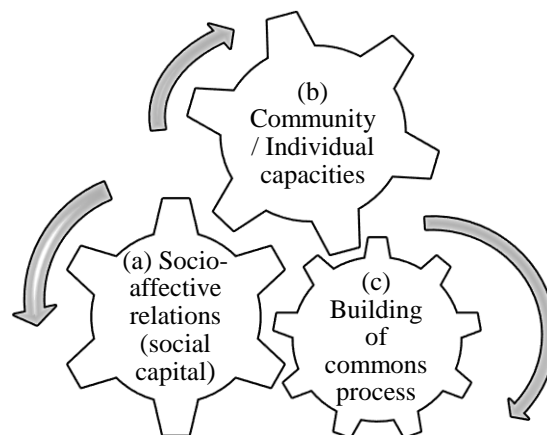
### 3.3 Conceptual framework developed for the Langholm case

The role of the social capital owned by individuals but put in the service of the community has been underlined as one of the essential criteria to explain the success or failure of a community-led project (Poortinga 2011; Singh 2017; Fischer & McKee 2017; Nightingale 2019). The social processes investigated cannot be studied in isolation because they influence each other. Indeed, following Emery and Flora (2006), the capital assets of a community can be affected by external stakeholders, either individuals or organisations, and encourage a phenomenon of “spiralling up” or “spiralling down”. It describes the increasing or decreasing level of the capital owned by a community and its consequences on the positive or negative social and economic development of a community (and, to some extent, its environmental protection).

The authors assume that witnessing the increase of the social capital for individuals is the onset of the spiralling up trajectory for a community (*Ibid.*). Thus, the analysis of the social capital on its different aspects (for example, quantity and quality of the social relations within the community, the share of knowledge, increasing the network, the capacity of mobilisation of people and their other types of capital) will be fundamental here.

However, the evaluation of the social capital possessed at the community level by the individuals and their socio-affective relation will not be enough to understand the social phenomena at stake. The capacities owned by the community, just as the implementation of the commons as a material process, will also need to be studied. Nevertheless, by building some commons, the capacities and social capital within the community could increase. Therefore, the potential retro-influenced of (a) social capital and the use of (b) capacities during the (c) communing process will also have to be investigated. The hypothesis followed is that these three main parameters of this investigation are retro-influencing each others following a spiralling up trajectory (Emery & Flora 2006), as summarised in figure 3 below.

*Figure 3: Hypothesis of research based on the conceptual frameworks used*



Thus, the CCF can be utilised as a framework to study a community's capabilities to succeed or not in the actions it conducts. This framework allows us also to build a stronger research hypothesis. It implies that the materialisation in the practice of the different implications of each concept used here to investigate the data of our study case is probably influencing the others in a positive dynamic. In other words, the research will aim to observe how each of these parameters, the community capacities (b), more specifically the social capital owned and used by individuals within the community (a), and the building of commons (c) are influencing each other, either positively or negatively, through the project of land and assets redistributions conducted in Langholm.



## 4. Methodology

This chapter aims to introduce a short section on the ethics concerns and the reflexions (4.1) that led to the building of a specific methodological framework, developed for this study case (4.2 and 4.4). This chapter also present in details the three different communities that have been specifically studied in this thesis.

### 4.1 Reflexive journey between the researcher and its subject

This section attempts a transcendental reflection regarding the development that took the work conducted to write this thesis. The research has been conducted through a “mixed-method research” (Creswell & Creswell 2018). The data collection period ran for five weeks (from the 24th of January until the 28th of February 2022). The study area has been defined a year in advance (in November 2021).

During this phase of pre-reflection on the master thesis topic, I tried to demonstrate some “self-awareness” (Robson & McCartan 2016). As a French white male, I am influenced by some bias of different nature (ethnic, social, religious, gender-related). Coming from a rural area (Normandy) and having been raised in the countryside, I considered myself legitimate enough to enter the study field of rural Scotland not as a complete outsider, even though I acknowledged some distance from the local people. Being not from Scotland either allows putting distance between what the participants considered self-evident in their social group and what an outsider could observe and analyse while conducting the study. Thus, the decision to investigate land ownership inequalities in Scotland was the most relevant. This study case offered me a position of relative legitimacy as a researcher and a suitable posture regarding the distance taken with the subject of study. Then, it is possible to introduce the data collection method used.

Using other methods than semi-structured interviews appeared essential for gathering other data types. These allow bringing another level of precision to the first assumptions that could be extracted from the interviews. The transfer/increase of capital among the population, for instance, would have been much harder to detect without the use of the participant observations where these

phenomena were easier to observe. Indeed, the pictures and observation notes were beneficial to, following the CCF, analysing the evolution of the different capitals invested and for which benefice the community.

However, underlining potential limitations in my work, the primary bias will be the high level of proximity I developed with the interviewees, especially as a young, untested researcher. It might have made the conclusions less objective since it is easy to be taken away by the enthusiasm for the participant's projects. Thus, I took some distance with the field when writing this paper.

Besides, some stakeholders have not been reached. Some current members of the EF or the BE would have been welcomed as critical stakeholders. However, this absence might have been partially replaced by some statements of previous members on the one hand and by an analysis of the document (business plans, official websites and statements) provided by both organisations.

## 4.2 Description of the data collection method – the semi-structured interviews

Living in Langholm during this period allowed combining three methods of data collection:

1. In-depth semi-structured interviews
2. Participant observation among volunteers of the communities
3. Transect walks and visits of the surroundings and the assets with local people involved in the transfer/purchase of assets

The semi-structured interview is the principal data collection method chosen. Interviews are seen as a "shortcut" (Robson & McCartan 2016) that helps to reach the people directly. The purpose of the interviews was to ask the people involved in the transfer or purchase of assets about their feelings, impressions, opinions, and involvement (See Appendix B for the original interviewee protocol).

However, the researcher's influence must be acknowledged in the data analysis regarding the disturbance such a choice of method brings to the field of study itself (*Ibid.*). Thus, eighteen in-depth semi-directed interviews have been led with seventeen different people. All the interviewees were white, between their twenties and seventies, comprising ten men and seven women (one of these has been interviewed two times). It has been easy to establish contact with local people who, for the community side especially, have been willing to share their experiences. Some resistance was encountered regarding the previous private owner of the lands bought by one community. Despite several attempts, this stakeholder never answered positively to any request for an interview.

Thirteen interviews have been recorded and then partially transcribed. The five remaining that have not been transcribed, mainly for technical reasons (poor quality of the sound capitation during the recording or were happening as informal discussions), have been analysed through the notes taken during these interviews. All of them lasted from thirteen minutes to almost two hours. These interviewees have been divided into four different groups (see Appendix A):

1. Members of the communities: nine interviewees (the communities studied are the Langholm Initiative, the Langholm Alliance, and the Eskdale Foundation),
2. Previous owners of the assets: one interviewee.
3. External advisors and experts: two interviewees.
4. Local inhabitants not directly involved in any communities: five interviewees.

For practical reasons, four out of the eighteen interviews have been conducted by zoom with the participants A.LI.E.3, B.1, D.1 and D.2 (see Appendix A for explanations regarding the coding).

### 4.3 Presentation of alternative data collection methods

It appears that our data collection process focused on two main points. The first was the analysis of the CAT process with the activities conducted by the Langholm Alliance (LA) and the Eskdale Foundation (EF): this has been achievable mainly through the interviews. On the other hand, I studied the consequences of lands purchase organised by the Langholm initiative (LI). It required more in-depth research and pushed the investigation through a diversification of the data-collection methods. Thus, I used participant observation during three rewilding sessions with the approval of the Langholm initiative staff. This part of the data collection has been driven alongside LI volunteers. The sessions took place the Friday mornings and lasted for two to three hours. Notes and pictures taken during these sessions compose the material of the analysis.

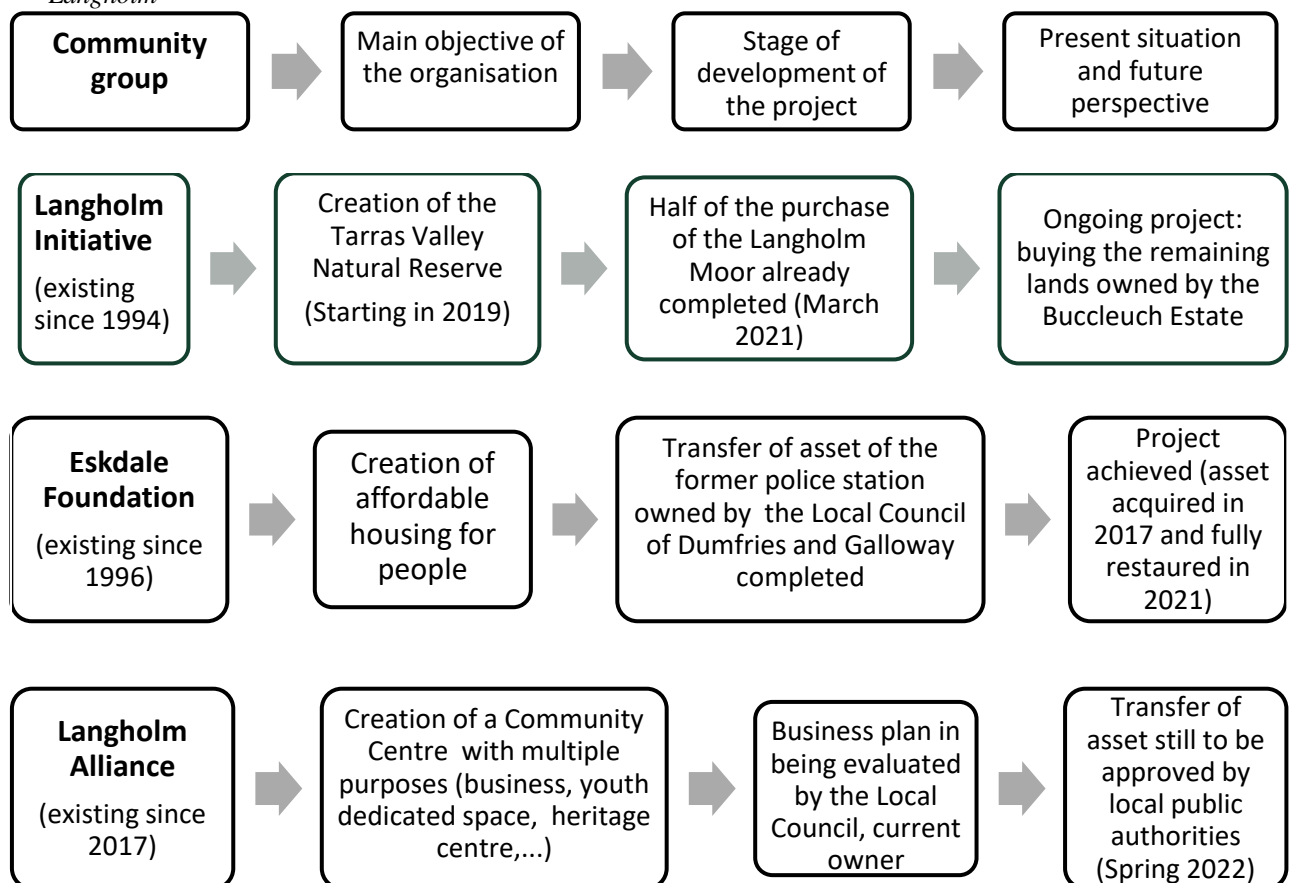
To put things into perspective, it is necessary to develop an external view of the different stakeholders' discourses during the interviews or the participant observation. Thereby, some transect walks and visits made by cars have been conducted with local people. Knowing the rural characteristic of Langholm and its surrounding, using a car was sometimes needed to cross the entirety of the Natural reserve or to see the change in the rural landscape in general. Three local people drove me through either the natural reserve (two times) or through Langholm hills to witness the evolution of the share of the space between the forestry industry,

the wind turbine farms, and the pastures. An inhabitant led one transect walk in the close surrounding, and five longer transect walks were achieved alone. While still in the study field, that step back permitted precise analysis and put the data collected through the interviews and participant observation in perspective.

#### 4.4 Description of the three community groups studied

The central part of our analysis has been conducted on the members of communities. Thus, the following charts describe (following the model of figure 4) the three different communities and their actions regarding the redistribution of assets in Langholm.

*Figure 4: Presentation of the different buyout – transfer of assets to community groups present in Langholm*



All these cases are representative of the asset redistribution process. Assets originally privately owned (or owned by the State) have been purchased by or transferred to the different community groups. This description of the different methods used to investigate the exposed being achieved; it is now time to present the results of this research work. The next section of this paper exposes the findings extracted from the data collected

## 5. Empirical results

This chapter aims to present the main findings extracted from the data collected. I present the results of the fieldwork in four sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter (5.2) will demonstrate the significance of the cultural capacity to understand the socio-historical context in which Langholm's inhabitants are embedded. That strongly influences their ability to act in contemporaneity as a community. A second sub-chapter (5.3) will focus on how local people use their capital and capacities and describe the decisive influence of these personal capacities in building commons and communities. It will lead to exposing the community's organisational capacity (5.4), which is interdependent with all the other capacities and appears as a consequence and as a prerequisite of the others. Finally, the infrastructural capacity present in Langholm will be developed (5.5).

### 5.1 Capital and Capacities in Langholm - interpretation from the Community Capacity Framework perspective

Langholm might be an exceptional case (in the South of Scotland especially) of a population willing to reach community ownership of assets to build and reinforce the community. This case might also be an example of how rural communities improve their community spirit, resilience, and local development in Western Europe. This section presents the empirical evidence demonstrating that folks in Langholm are particularly endowed with a wide range of capitals.

Following Emery and Flora (2006) there are seven types of capitals: Natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built capital. All capitals are connected and are subject to retro-influencing. It means that the use of capital can increase or decrease the number of others in the community. For instance, using social capital to develop connections and personal networks can ease a raise funding and thus, increase the economic capital of a community group. The expression of the capitals will be captured with the analysis of the data made through the CCF. Indeed, this section aims to understand what made Langholm a particular case and why so many projects emerged and succeed, especially regarding land and asset redistribution.

## 5.2 Cultural capacity

I present first the cultural capacity present in Langholm, understood here as the history and values that give more or less weight and legitimacy to the objectives carried by the community (Emery & Flora 2006). Many Scottish people have a strong sense of identity, especially in unique regions like the Highlands, the islands, or at the Scottish borders (Lynch 2011). Being located very close to the border, especially the "debatable land", Langholm's specific geography and history has shaped local people's identities. This is reflected throughout the interviews conducted in Langholm, but also with stakeholders who were not local inhabitants, that the town's residents hold a strong connection to their local history, which has shaped the community's values and identity.

A few days after I arrived in Langholm, the person I rented a room from told me that it would be interesting for me to meet with a man who was locally considered as the informal librarian of the town, and also one of the elders who knew the most about the local history. Thus, I agreed to meet. On a rainy afternoon, surrounded by his cats, the unofficial librarian of the town (as a volunteer, he is in charge of the town's archives) started to describe, in contrast with the peaceful atmosphere of the moment, how the violent local history at the end of the Middle-Age with the union of England and Scotland has shaped the current land distribution:

*Interviewee C.2: When the time flows at some point the Duke of Buccleuch claimed ownership on the land called the debatable land as well as the borders between England and Scotland. And he gained it by the right of the sword [The Buccleuch family] tend to be not only powerful and full of arms, but they also ruled through the law. [The King James the First] then start a task force launched from Edinburgh [...] I think in the first year they hanged something like near a thousand people without trial just for the King to say "I am the boss now".*

---

However, in reaction to this violent repression against them, local people decided to unite, especially after the situation stabilised. It appears that the defence of common-use of land is not new in Langholm history but quite old, and some traditions, especially the "Common Ridings" (the town's day) happening every year at the very end of July, as explained by the same interviewee:

*Interviewee C.2: The biggest event in the town is the common ridding. And that takes you back to the period when the Duke of Buccleuch and the land owners around here, all land owners in Europe, wherever you go, I know elsewhere, were...pretty greedy guys.*

*- What do you mean by that?*

*Interviewee C.2: They always wanted more! They were always willing to go in someone else territory. You know, you are always here because I let you stay here, and that was the problem with Langholm for centuries. The common land that was necessary for the common people, for a place to*

*grease some cattle, for a place to have free wood fire or free space to grow their own crops, these are basic rights in many places. And in this area we had none of these basic rights.*

---

Thus, the cultural capital has a positive influence on the social capital, since people started to create bonds from this period when they had to unite to face discriminations and oppression from the nobility. The current strong social connection among the local population can be inherited from this period. The land ownership inequality situation has constantly been an issue for Scotland and Langholm. The Duke of Buccleuch even refused the right to local people to have these common lands so that everybody could find the minimum necessary for their livelihood. However, if the region of the South of Scotland has constantly been disputed and subject to different types of violence and expropriation from different lords, local people in Langholm managed to guarantee their rights on some commons:

*Interviewee C.2: A chart said that these areas belong to the people. The case for Langholm went to the high court in Edinburgh [...].*

*- And when was it?*

*Interviewee C.2: [...] it will be the century before [before the 20<sup>th</sup>, so the 19<sup>th</sup> century] you have to fight for your rights and laws. When you got them, it is not guaranteed. [...] Once they have been fought for, and we agreed on the delimitation, it is still to be defended. So each year, members of the community, the oldest, those who are ruling the town, will nominate a delegate who would [...] ride around the landmarks to prove that "this is actually our right to be here, and take these resources"*

*- And when does it started, this common ownership system?*

*Interviewee C.2: My head is saying the common riding started in 1880".*

---

Strong community identity and shared values are visible at every scale, especially in the interviews made with other stakeholders or inhabitants who underlined the strength of the community and the solidarity developed between inhabitants also in the contemporaneity. What comes out is that a strong feeling of identification and unity emerged in Langholm through a thorough history, which is also supported by the literature on the local area (Both & Both 2002; Young 2004; Robb 2018). Historically disputed, proximity with the debatable land pushed the local people to be more resilient. This arguably helped them to endure and adapt to many situations until now.

This strong identity is also due to geographical isolation gave the people a strong sense of self-sufficiency. As underlined by one inhabitant (C.5), Langholm is located "twenty miles away from everything at least!". All the interviewees, including external stakeholders not living in Langholm, acknowledge this geographical isolation. It will be more explicitly described in the "infrastructural capacities." However, some stakeholders also underlined that such isolation developed a feeling of autonomy and solidarity among the local people. Furthermore, Langholm's remoteness does not mean that the town was deprived

of any advantage. The town thrived for almost two centuries thanks to the development of the activity around the mills thanks to the Esk River. The geographical isolation enable people to organise themselves in establishing the mills. This was possible through the social links already shaping the community. The “*Muckle Toon*” (literally the “big town”), as local inhabitants call it, was attractive to workers. It conserved its independence even in the recent years, relying on the last mills to keep some economic activity locally. The risk due to a lack of diversity in the economic strategy for the town could lead to a great loss of employment in case of a crisis touching this specific activity. As underlined by Langholm Alliance’s chairman (A.L.A.1), this situation occurred because of the outsourcing of the tweed production out of Scotland:

*In the last twenty years we lost one thousand two hundreds jobs here.  
- Because of the closure of the mills?  
Yes, five mills closed down. When I was sixteen, fifteen, you did walk out of the school and you were wondering “What am I gonna to do now?”.  
You just got a job at the mill.*

---

Many stakeholders have underlined Langholm's people's "spirit of initiative." However, the community spirit built over the last decades, and even centuries, has shaped local people's mentalities in a particular way. Thus, just after the loss of jobs in recent years, a new strategy has been adopted through the development of tourism, pushed primarily by local communities, as underlined by the chairman of the main cultural centre in town (C.1):

*We're way behind lots of other places with tourism. And this is because we didn't need it. We had a textile industry, we weren't bothered about tourism. But now textile is gone. Tourism is the only way forward, tourism on small business units there...and the IT industry.*

---

The cultural capacity in Langholm is strong, forged by a long history of geographical and political isolation that led the people to take by themselves responsible for managing their local development. Even in contemporary history, local people feel relatively isolated and, to some extent, partially neglected by the local authorities of the Dumfries and Galloway Council, as highlighted by a staff member of the Langholm Alliance (A.L.A.2) and writer at the local newspaper:

*We are on the far eastern side of Dumfries and Galloway, and sometimes you can feel that we are ignored because Dumfries is the regional centre for the county, for the local authority. And we are very much culturally more akin to Scottish borders towns actually.*

---

To end this section, the second interview with the same stakeholders quoted above (A.L.A.2) raised an interesting perspective on the late evolution of the symbolic links uniting the community. These values and this common identity built over the



years because of multiple social, political, and environmental resistances will play a significant role in supporting the implementation of commoning projects. Indeed, with the collapse of the local industry, it is possible that part of the local identity has collapsed. This is what underlined the member of staff of the Langholm Alliance:

*Interviewee A.L.A.2.: These businesses [the mills] have gone down. So I think, you know, people have to commute more than before. And because it was quite a static population in Langholm, before. I mean, the town was dynamic, isn't it? But there was a lot of common culture. Probably more than there is now, because people were working in a common industry. So there might have been five different tweeds, but they were all doing similar jobs. And so there was a kind of common understanding, and things like sport...the rugby was very big here. So there was quite a common culture for a long time. I mean, and people didn't travel out the globe a lot, because they didn't have to, they could get work here*

---

This statement shows that if people lose a part of their identity due to the collapse of local industry, there is a perception that they also have to stick together even more to protect the community and the individuals. Thus, if the cultural identity was built mainly around the fact that people had the same type of job and shared the same hobbies during their spare time, a new balance needs to be found for the survival of the local community. Thus, equilibrium was found by creating new projects, especially during the last two decades. These new perspectives were opened mainly by community organisations. The following sub-section aims to underline the personal capacities of people within these community groups.

## 5.3 Personal capacity

### 5.3.1 Introduction

This sub-section presents the different types of capital possessed by the local people drawing on Emery and Flora (2006). The built capital is evocated in the following sub-section 5.5.1.

People use their capacities to fulfil a broader purpose. Thus, to present this section dealing with personal capacities, it is good to remember that people's capitals support the organisational capacity that will be developed in 5.4. This said, I observed various capitals present and expressed at different level during the data collection. The determining point to remember is that the capitals observed are inter-connected and are constantly influencing each other's. In the case of the local communities and the stakeholders working in Langholm, it appears that the capitals are increasing positively among the individuals through the project conducted for the benefits of the community.

### 5.3.2 The social capital: the oil that makes the machinery of the communing work

Through the data analysis process, different capitals started to be isolated and categorised. However, it appeared that two types of capitals were constantly presents: the human and social capitals. The social capital is the compelling factor that articulates and coordinates the different capitals, allowing them to be expressed and, thus, affect the realisation of all community-led projects.

Social capital is understood here as the whole of the social relations created/sustained between individuals and institutions such as communities, political stakeholders, administrative employees, economic actors, civil society, and others. The term institution is understood as social structures in general. Thus, the institutions are, in this context, built around norms more than rules (Hodgson 2006). That is how local people have a mutual belief that they should help each other if they want the community to thrive. Even though no explicit rules are coming from the top (the state asking for the community to take initiatives like taking responsibility for their local services, for instance), local people will nevertheless take over and launch projects to improve their local life. They will take the responsibility to ask for the proper support but will conduct most of the project by themselves.

Social and human capitals have to be understood together. Following Emery and Flora (2006), human capital is considered all the way people can find to increase their resources (material and immaterial) and increase their access to external resources to improve the community-building process. Still following the authors, the social capital is the sum of social connections that make things happen in a community. Then, both human and social capitals were particularly visible in the Langholm case; both these capitals were often combined. They also had an effective influence on the building of communing projects. One of the main stances of this thesis is that social capital is the necessary condition for the realisation of any project and that, in the case of the communities present in Langholm, the social capital action has been decisive regarding the exceptional vitality of the community project led in the town and its surroundings.

To demonstrate this statement, the exceptional level of social ties has been underlined in the different community-led projects in Langholm. Some newly retired people came to settle in Langholm for the unparalleled level of community-led projects. They underlined that this community is particularly active and robust due to the strength of the social cohesion. Many stakeholders insisted on the importance of the network to achieve any personal and collective aims. The social bonds between stakeholders permit the building of the cultural capacity described above, that is to say, a strong identity and shared values that strengthen the community. The presence of these social bonds is particularly visible in this section of the interview when the informant working for the

Langholm Alliance (A.L.A.2) was underlining the necessity to build a network to conduct the projects she was/is in charge of:

*I realised that some people are really good at networking. And probably I'm good at networking. [...] I just have a way of working with people. And maybe, you know, my father...he was very much a community person as well. He was good with people. And he knew lots of people. You know, he was involved in a lot of different communities and things as well. [...] So I think building networks is really important.*

- Why is it?

*I mean, you don't know why it is really important that people work together because it's really complex. Everything is connected to each other [...]. It's really community safety. And so as you know, in any aspects of development you need to create network. I think what is really important in that is...a sort of principle of reciprocity. If I do something for you, you do something for me. A network it's an exchange, in that kind of invisible way.*

---

It shows that having a network has always been and is still very important in Langholm and leads to many different consequences. Building a network is necessary for anyone who wants to conduct a project in the town. It might reveal itself as helpful when a stakeholder requires conducting a project and will need access to resources he/she does not possess personally. Second, the services given within the community thanks to the social ties built through the networking activity (this one being intentional or not) implies that social links are reinforced in the local community by the fact that people will be willing to pay back the service received. People were open to giving some of their time genuinely, especially the retired people who were pleased to participate in the volunteering session. As underlined by the Langholm Initiative project officer:

- *And do you think that the volunteers could be willing to join more often than just on the Friday mornings?*

*Interviewee A.L.I.E.1: Definitely! They are amazing. The Initiative is lucky to have them to support the...the work on the field. But even though they might want to do more, we simply can't give them more things to do.*

- *Ok, but why is that?*

*Interviewee A.L.I.E.1: Oh!?! Simply because the project is still very new...I mean, we just finished the first half of the purchase quite recently, and we are still conducting the second part. We need first to finish to work on the plan for the reserve, and after we might organise the volunteering team more efficiently...and perhaps increasing the things we could do as well.*

---

This part demonstrates the involvement of the volunteers. However, while discussing with them, it was never clear that they had any other official claim than participating in the project itself. Some are willing to pursue their personal aspirations, while others are just happy and satisfied “to be a part of the adventure” (A.L.I.P.1). To this extent, one hypothesis is that volunteers find a sort of personal reward in fulfilling their aspirations by participating in restoring natural ecological habitats. It can also be acknowledged that some participants

enjoy the company of the other participants and are happy to have the opportunity to meet regularly, especially with people sharing the same (ecological) values. Indeed, the building of material commons (meaning here the Natural reserve managed by the LI) is also the occasion to build what I call “immaterial common”, which are the social bonds among people. At the end of the volunteering session, a group picture is taken to share the moment with the volunteers who could not join the specific day (see Appendix C.1). Besides, each session end usually with a hot drink offered by the project officer in the name of the Langholm Initiative:



*Figure 5: In the foreground, the project officer of the Langholm Initiative prepares some cups for the volunteers. In the background, some volunteers are drinking hot drinks with a biscuit and discussing together. © Adrien Chanteloup*

It is a moment of conviviality where everybody is discussing everything (from the work accomplished during the day, of course, local news, and personal discussions about each other's everyday life).

The mobilisation of the volunteer group is also visible on social media (especially Facebook), where they maintain the links and keep each other's updates on the last news regarding the Natural Reserve news, the specific needs for the volunteering sessions, combining a mix of practical information and informal, friendly discussions. It is probable that without these socio-affective ties created during the communing project; this very same project will not even take place, or at least will not be as successful as they are in Langholm. The employee of the LI who was in charge of organising the transfer of the asset and the chairperson of the LI were also underlining the significance of these social bonds:

*Interviewee A.L.I.E.4: So, um, we had a very tight deadline to do that [gathering the money for the purchase]. It was all, but eight months we had to do that work in. So, yeah, we got to find the funding, have appointments with consultants, and hope to get good consultants, which we fortunately did. So my role in all that was to manage that whole process and I did it with a voluntary group made up of community members in Langholm*

*Initiative board members and they act to release the sale, make public and, try to advertise what we were doing.*

*Interviewee A.L.I.E.2: ...but there was no dissentient. We worked very well; it was a great team...*

*Interviewee A.L.I.E.4: Oh, no, it worked brilliantly. It's all the names on there [he is showing the flyer on which the buyout process is explained for the public]. And then these [he is pointing at another part of the flyer] were the consultants for doing the feasibility studies and then you need a land agent value for looking at that. And then we did a renewable energy feasibility study as well. So you went to manage all these different things happening. And fortunately, just coincidence before I left my previous company, I had just done an evaluation on an estate and be managing that.*

---

The Langholm case is also quite singular because of firstly the presence of (a) people with much capital in the secluded area (especially regarding the skills and knowledge to deal with administrative and technical issues) but also mainly because (b) the social links that people built, and kept building to achieve their aims during the project. The social capital is a binder that makes all the other capacities work. Without it, no exchange between individuals/institutions is possible, and no project can be conducted.

The capacity for sympathy stimulated by the LI to raise the money to fulfil the buyout of the moor or the network used by the LA members to raise funds and build the organisation and its activities in just a couple of years demonstrates the significance of the social capital for the building of community project. The social links of many different types built either between individuals or through intermediaries, make these projects work. Therefore, we can describe the trajectory of the Langholm community as a spiralling up trajectory (Emery & Flora 2006), understood here as a positive retro-reaction of social process: each action conducted by a community group encourages the creation of social bonds between individuals through collective actions, and in doing so, reinforce the efficiency of the collective actions themselves by the strengthening of the social bonds between individuals.

However, in the case of the social capital, it appears that all the different capitals (quoted in the beginning of the section 5.3.1) are connected to each other's. The social capital is only the decisive element that connects all the others, and allows them, in our case, to enhance the other individual and community capacities. Distinct from the cultural capacity discussed earlier, cultural capital has been observed in various ways.

### 5.3.3 Cultural capital

The cultural capital following Bourdieu is all the knowledge and skills owned and used by an individual, with a different level of recognition in the society (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). This cultural capital is particularly visible with some stakeholders demonstrating a particular level of knowledge such as the

project officer who was in charge of managing the purchase of the Langholm Moor:

*Interviewee A.L.I.E.4: I've got an academic background in land management, and in business administration, um, and a master in land conservation. So, two degrees that does not seems related at all. ((augh) [...]. So that's my sort of strange mix [...] It ended up sort of proven very, very useful and this is what I've wanted for my career*

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Regarding the purchase of the land, all underlined that the entire operation would probably not have been successful without this person and his level of knowledge and dedication to the task. Using the strong connection built over the past years and the common adventure of finalising the first part of the buyout, the LI managed to keep this key stakeholder in its staff even though he got very interesting job offers away from Langholm. It demonstrates the significance of social capital since the strong connection established between LI staff and this stakeholder convinced this last one to remain in Langholm to achieve the buyout.

Nevertheless, if acknowledging the necessity to own some cultural capital and knowledge, especially when it comes to fulfilling some administrative tasks, the same project officer also highlights the necessity to develop other types of skills and ask for the support of other stakeholders. He explains that the local people also benefitted from a special education regarding ecological restoration, which helped a lot to (a) decide on the buyout of the land to create a natural reserve being readily accepted and (b) brought support to the project officer himself to define the outline of the process. Because of this strong cultural capital created on the long run through a common history and emotional attachment to the land around the town, and more recently the development of environmental courses within the population, the natural capital around Langholm has been preserved: local people's cultural capital permits to support the project of the land buyout.

*Interviewee A.L.I.E.4: The Initiative had already delivered 10 years of environmental education on that site. So you've got 10 years of people knowing, learning online, their kids going up onto it year after year, understanding land use, understanding how it's being used, how it could be used, all that sort of stuff. You've then got a huge cultural tie to that specific land for a huge amount of people. Emotionally, you've got a connection, and then you've got economic decline [...] You've got all these things coming together. And then on a skills basis, I happened to move here and then you've got the Initiative going into a really strong position where it was at the time...all these things don't come together usually*

---

If the necessity to master a cultural capital gained in the higher education system to fulfil some administrative tasks, as was the case with our free different organisation trying to purchase or execute an asset transfer, it is not the only type of cultural capital needed. Indeed, some skills are required among the volunteers



to execute some tasks to improve natural habitat restoration. Some manual skills are needed and applied to cut the fences with the help of wire cutters with the LI projects, for instance. The human capital, understood here as the individual skills allowing individual to increase the capacity of the community and also to lead a community project (Emery & Flora 2006) are therefore particularly mobilised.

The engagement of participants in the volunteering project was also led by the influence of their education. While exchanging with volunteers during the participant session, some of them were willing and able to discuss a wide range and topics, implying to master some quite advanced knowledge in sociology, history, geography, and economics. To this extent, the human and cultural capital observed among the volunteers could be considered as particularly high. Interviewees' academic and professional backgrounds helped driving them to engage in the community projects and improve them. For instance, one of the participants who used to work in the high-level medicine area decided to come to Langholm for pre-retirement because he heard about the project of the natural reserve. He has always been committed to understanding global warming issues. In the following statement, it can be acknowledged that he is referring to different social issues that require mobilised a wide range of knowledge:

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*Interviewee A.L.I.P.2: I've always had an interest in rewilding and nature, regeneration, and ecology. I took early retirement last year, and moved to Langholm. At that point, one of the reasons I moved was because I knew that the nature reserve was here, and I want to actually contribute. There are lots of big problems that we have in our society. We have climate change, loss of biodiversity, ecocide which I think is terrible, and the unsustainable economic model.*

---

The interviewee also mentions that, because of his awareness of global warming, he is willing to transfer his civic engagement for the community to a political engagement for the Scottish Green Party. It seems then that the sphere of cultural capital has reached the limit where it coincides with the political capital.

#### 5.3.4 Political capital

Because of their background and the cultural capital they have accumulated, some stakeholders are involved in politics or at least have an engaged position. Some participants explicitly expose their stands for the community project embedded in a broader political perspective. Thus, during a participant observation session in which we were removing some fences from a fen, I was working alongside one volunteer who was telling while towing some wood post in the mud a very engaged and politicised statement to explain its engagement in the current project:

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*Interviewee A.L.I.P.1: I turn back capitalist merchandising and socialism to engage now in a collaborative approach, you know. This is why I am here fundamentally. If it was just me, the land should be owned by no one.*

---

This participant used to be a teacher and explained that he was engaged in deprived areas. Now, he spent most of his spare time getting involved in some environmental protection projects, and he also insisted on its political engagement. This relatively short statement in terms of words mobilised a lot of different concepts, and political views since the author of the sentence described its rejection of the dominant neo-liberal capitalist system and the social-democratic political system that failed to contain the drawbacks of the neo-liberal doctrine according to him. This demonstrates the high level of knowledge, and cultural capital, that this stakeholder is able to mobilised to defend its political convictions, that conducted him to participate in the community project.

Some stakeholders do not only have political thoughts but get directly engaged with the representative system by running for elections. Thus, the chairperson of the Langholm Alliance has been engaged in the local and regional political institutions for the last thirty years. In the private sitting room of the central hotel of the town (from which the manager is the current community councillor and personal acquaintance of our interviewee), where he invited me for a tea, he came back on his long personal political background

*Interviewee A.L.A.1: I became elected to the Langholm and Eskdale district in 1988. From that I decided to stand for the regional council in 1990. So I was elected to that. And then when the decision was made to put all the councils together in the Dumfries and Galloway Local Council [...] a shadow council was formed and I also got elected to that. And for a moment I was deputy leader of the shadow council, deputy leader of the regional council, and when they came together, I was also deputy leader of the new Dumfries and Galloway council. And I ended up to be the convenor of the council. During this time I also chair the social work services, that is looking after a lot of things like emptying bins and things and sit in every committee of the council. And I was a councillor until 2017*

---

The chairperson of the LA took the chance of building its organisation by claiming that its purpose was to represent not only the Alliance but had the objective to talk for the community, meaning Langholm's inhabitants. Here, the existence of any kind of political capital perceived as a concrete engagement within the governmental institutions is inextricably linked to the existence of a strong social capital materialised by a deep and rich network just as within the community as in the political institutions themselves. The long term engagement in the local institutions from this stakeholder opened some gates and facilitated the implementation of the project by knowing how the funds for local community projects are granted by the public authorities, for instance. Thanks to his political capital, someone like the chairperson of the LA can drive some organisations and people in a position of power. Discussing the political capital as access to power leads to the next section dedicated to the access and the use of financial capital made by local organisations.



### 5.3.5 Financial capital

This section investigates how the financial capital is captured and then used by individuals or communities to reinforce the community-building process, either for a specific organisation or for Langholm taken as a whole community.

As underlined by many stakeholders involved in the community, any projects launched require funds. Depending on the size of the project conducted and the purpose, local people can turn to different providers, either public or private. Thus, examples have been noticed during the fieldwork, especially during the interviews where people described how they managed to achieve their projects. However, the social capital is mobilised once again to secure the access to the different type of funds.

To start with the private one, Langholm, despite its relatively small size, welcomed some very wealthy people, especially the investors who managed to make their profits when the town knew an exceptional industrial development. Thus, the chairperson of the Langholm Initiative (A.L.I.E.2) described how one of the wealthiest people in the town created a private trust with the purpose to offer grants and financial support to local people and organisations willing to encourage the development of the Langholm community:

- *I also understood that you still have a lot of, patronage, isn't it? Like, uh, like, um, charity things going on?*

A.L.I.E.2: *Oh yeah, yeah, indeed. .*

- *Like with Mr. [X]?*

A.L.I.E.2: *Aye, uh, that's the funder's forum, it's composed of a number of...um...really quite wealthy people within the community. And they will give a grant as well if you apply to the limited amounts, but it's a bit like the Dragon's den...it's quite a scary experience (laugh) when you have to present you case!*

- *Why?*

A.L.I.E.2: *Because like, well, most of them are former business people. So you have to sell it [the project], and it can be quite scary... but they have helped us in the past.*

---

This philanthropic system is, to some extent, beneficial for the community. As underlined by the stakeholders interviewed, the local “funder’s forum” is composed of wealthy people who are funding some community helped them to build<sup>3</sup>. However, if the intention can seem laudable, by their wealth and the economic and social dominant position they stand, the funder’s forum can impose their views and opinions on people’s original projects. This domination is what underlined one of the members of the LA:

- *Yes, I heard about Mr. X...who apparently was willing to help..?*

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<sup>3</sup> Usually, it seems that these funders are some local industrial who made money thanks to their mills and other business in the town.

*A.L.A.2: Yes X. [...] He is very keen to do things for the community, but when he [...] gives an organization a grant, he puts a lot of stipulations. Sometimes people find that a little bit restrictive, what they can do with his money. So people perceive him also as a controller you know? ...I mean, also for every funder there are all the stipulations, [...] guidelines for grant giving organizations that they should follow.*

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The perspective brought by this part is that the philanthropic system working through private donors is raising the different types of benefits and advantages but could tend to maintain a social and economic hierarchy in which the people without particular wealth belonging to the community might feel censored regarding their aspirations.

However, the community's financial capital does not only come from influential private philanthropists. The community can mobilise people through fundraising campaigns, targeting small private donors and public organisations. Thus, in the case of the LI buyout, the community had to raise a considerable amount of money to finance the purchase of thousands of acres of land. To do so, they primarily communicate through all the media available to stimulate potential donations. One story mentioned by almost all people connected to the Initiative was that a Primary School in Glasgow that heard about the project through regional news and decided to raise some funds by organising actions to promote the creation of the future Natural Reserve. If the donation was relatively small regarding the millions needed to achieve the purchase, the intention behind such a gesture deeply touched all the participants. Highlighting the link between cultural and financial capital, some people were so emotionally and culturally attached to the land that they transferred this attachment through a monetary donation. Thus, a man who used to live in Langholm bequeaths ten thousand pounds to the Initiative in his will. The power of communication and sympathy for these organisations was significant to increase donations.

If private donors play a role, they are not the biggest funders of the community projects. Indeed, many of the funds dedicated to the different community projects come directly from public organisms. Thus, the National Lottery Community Fund is one of the main funders that helped several of the ones led in Langholm. Besides, the Scottish Government finance external organisations existing to support communities. Indeed, the implementation of the NCCRtB and the different legal frameworks promoted by the public authorities over the last ten years have pushed for subsidising communities and organisms in charge of supporting these ones. The account from this stakeholder from the Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS), which supported the Eskdale Foundation to take control over the police station, is particularly relevant here:

*D.2: We're funded by the Scottish Government to support the sustainable transfer of public assets into community ownership. And we support the local authorities and public bodies, and also the communities. [...] There's*

*a range of assets available now, communities have to choose what's the most appropriate. So it's an artificial division, keeping just the public assets when they there are private assets in the mix. So we are increasingly supporting communities to choose the most valuable assets. We've been funded for 11 years now, and we support the delivery of part five of the community empowerment Act.*

---

This statement from the program manager of the DTAS was enlightening to understand that communities in Scotland can not only benefit from public money to purchase/transfer the, but a legislative arsenal has also been implemented to support them in their action. Thus, external organisations are financed by public authorities to help them to conduct their projects. The local community which does not own the human and cultural capital needed to launch a CAT can therefore, while mobilising social capital by asking to external organisations like the DTAS some support, gain these cultural and human capitals required. Therefore, public investments, direct or indirect, are implemented to support the local development of the community. The use and the combination of these different capitals reinforce the capacity for the community to organise projects.

## 5.4 Organisational capacity

As exposed in the last section, Langholm is overflowing with individuals owning a high level of capital. These capitals cannot be considered individually since they are used simultaneously and influence, positively in the Langholm case, one the others within individuals' set of capitals and between individuals. In this section, I present the organisational capacity in Langholm. The town is highly provided with many different charities, trustees, and organisations (around seventy-five listed by various stakeholders) that demonstrate the extreme vitality of the fabric of the community. The LI, in particular, is one of the three organisations that play a significant role in the local community. Talking with the development manager of the LI in the early days of my arrival was the chance to directly understand the breadth of the activities led by the LI only. While given some background information on the Initiative, the development manager (Interviewee A.L.I.E.3) underlines that:

*...the Langholm Initiative is a development trust. It's been going over 25 years, and has worked on sort of specific self-contained projects that kind of have a beginning and an end. So it might be a project to do with textiles or weaving or looking at ways of helping young people into employments. So taking on board, the ownership of this piece of land and the buildings was new for the Initiative. But it was driven by the fact that the Duke of Buccleuch was going to put land on the open market. And this land culturally was very important for the local community. In total, the community wanted to buy ten and a half thousands acres.*

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Thanks to this extract a lot can be said, starting with the organisation's longevity with twenty-eight years of existence and the reference to the cultural aspect and significance of the Land for the Community. The capacity for adaptation and improvement in the organisational capacities of the LI is also revealed here. Indeed, the organisation has constantly expanded its range of activity, reaching an extensive point with the buyout of this large amount of land. This purchase required a massive investment of time, energy, and money for the member of the Initiative to work on the project and mobilise external stakeholders and local inhabitants to support the project. The capacity for mobilisation of local people is awe-inspiring, as described in this part of a discussion with the Chairperson of the LI and the member in charge of the first part of the buyout of the land. He explained how, despite the pressure of the BE (at the beginning), who were urging the LI to demonstrate the actual support Langholm community to support the project, they reacted with excellent efficiency:

*A.L.I.E.4: Now we felt that we were closer to the community and [...] we were fairly certain, we could demonstrate there would be support to investigate this option [i.e. buyout by the community]. So then we've got a group of volunteers and we went door to door in the community with this idea of getting signatures. (laughs). So after about 10 days, there was, um, over 800 people to say support and at that point Buccleuch said: "okay, we get it". (laughs) And we start to talk about what sort of deadlines there would be, and the process we were going to go through, because it wasn't using the legislative tools.*

---

In this part, one can see a clear demonstration of local people's capacity to organise and combine different events on the field and legal actions. This is also a combination of capitals that is seen here: the social and cultural capitals are used to obtain some financial capital in order to protect the natural capital of the community by buying the land to the BE and creating the Natural reserve. Besides, the LI was organising all of this under the pressure of BE, which was willing to sell the land in the first place but was also ready to put it on the open market if the LI could not provide a demonstration of local support in a month.

To some extent, the same process was implemented by the Eskdale Foundation when they managed to get the transfer of the police station to build housing. The EF policy was, according to their original business plan, to open some housing at affordable prices to encourage people to settle in the town and also preserve one of the dominant buildings in the town. To build the project itself, it seems that the community spirit and the wide range of capacities owned by the individual composing the EF was already quite good enough to build the project almost by themselves, according to the local ward officer (Interviewee D.1) who was in charge of facilitating the project for the Local Council:

*With the Langholm example, which was a true community asset transfer, they had...I would say in Langholm, they have high capacity compared to other communities within Annandale, Eskdale and across Dumfries and Galloway. So their business plan was very robust. And it was really only informing their business plan where it would if they were asking questions about costs, and finances, or if they needed some advice, perhaps from one of the council architects on the crosswalks...I was just facilitating that to make sure they had the right information and the right plans.*

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This part demonstrates the high capacity of the EF to lead and organise its project. The ward officer also underlined that in comparison with other communities, Langholm was mainly inhabited by people with a high level of organisational capacity, meaning a wide range of capital owned by individuals, as could be acknowledged in the last section of analysis through the CCF.

Regarding the capacity of the organisation mobilised by the LA, a good summary of their abilities can be found in the description of its chairperson regarding the elaboration of the business plan related to Langholm's development:

*Interviewee A.LA.1: Two years ago, we started to work with an organisation called Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC). And through them, because one of the things we were told, as I say, when we got involved with what we call SOSE, South of Scotland Enterprise, is we needed to develop a community plan. And so we're looking at that and thinking, wow, the cost of this! And one of our board members was in this organization called SCDC. So we talked to them, and they allocated an officer to work with us. And over the next year, we had community meeting with just ordinary people for business, and the different organizations, where the plan was collated and drawn together. Then we had a full day in the Buccleuch Centre where it was open to the public to come and ask questions. When that was finalized, SCDC agreed that they would get the plan put together, pay for the print of the first 100 because it costed around 3000. So that's where the community plan came from. It came through the Alliance, but with input from the whole community. It's not the Alliance's plan, it's Langholm's plan. So we call it Langholm Community Plan.*

---

Looking at this description of the process, one can underline that the resources that the Alliance can mobilise are vast and social capital plays a fundamental role. Without the right network to create an excellent connection to support the action of the community, any project could emerge. In this case, the connection between members of the Alliance and external organisations such as SCDC or SOSE was decisive to reach the help of outsider of the community with the required technical expertise to help the community shapes its projects. Then, it can be noticed that beyond the mobilisation of external organisations, their actions have been closely coordinated with the local people's will and desires through public consultations. The plan itself has been conceived also with the support and input of the other local community organisation. The articulation of different types of actions,

mobilising cultural, social and financial capitals conducted by different interested parties demonstrates a particularly important organisational capacity.

The description of the organisational capacities of the Langholm Initiative can finally be seen during some participant observation sessions. The LI organises sessions conducted by a project officer every Friday morning. This team aims to concretise the ambition of "ecological restoration" desired by the LI on the moor lands. To fulfil the will to protect their natural capital, the LI needs to muster volunteers willing to conduct concrete actions. When being on the field, I could witness the substantial effects of these volunteers' teams. When I was there, they focused on removing fences that used to enclose pheasants. Thus, the day starts by gathering the team around the project officer.



*Figure 6: Beginning of the session with the LI project officer in charge to coordinate the team of volunteers (in the centre of the picture). © Adrien Chanteloup*

Most of the tools used during these sessions were provided by the Langholm Initiative and are visible in the pickup boot. That means the LI was already able to buy and gather this equipment to equip its team. During these sessions, some volunteers were also able to bring some heavier types of equipment (power saw) that the Initiative did not provide. However, the project officer declined the offer of material for insurance reasons, meaning that the LI is also structured in a legal framework. If the community is registered as Development Trust, it implies the need to adhere to specific rules, especially towards its volunteers. At the same time, that allows the LI to raise money and grants and guarantee to have insurance in the event of a problem. That demonstrates the capacity of the organisation to manage some administrative issues.

The LI also communicated well enough about its events and actions to gather all these people regularly. To this extent, social media are used and beneficial to communicate about the volunteering group. It also allowed people to coordinate the actions conducted on the field. In practice, it leads to gathering every Friday available volunteers (around ten-twelve on average). It also brings together the community beyond the gatherings on the Friday mornings, bonding them also through the connection that allows social media. This online connection permit to



the volunteers to organise themselves more efficiently, but also to keep contact with each other's on a more regular basis.

The project officer also confided while coming back from one session that she would open another volunteering session during the week because people would still be willing to help more. It is also because most of the volunteers are retired, and therefore might have free time. Nevertheless, the efficiency of the volunteer team can be demonstrated by the results of their field work (see Appendix C.2). Some of the volunteers benefitted from the experience of manual work. It helps to improve the group's efficiency to have some technical leaders in it. The work needs to be done collectively (especially when it comes to pulling the wood posts or wire fences out of the ground and carrying them out of the forest area). There is no particular time given to execute the task, and this is mainly the goodwill of the volunteer and the condition of work (weather, moral of the team, energy left) that decide the schedule. During all the sessions, the project officer gave the direction and the overarching objectives of the day. Then, many micro-decisions were made informally, following joint agreement thus enabling efficiency.



*Figure 7: Project officer of the Langholm Initiative leading the work conducted by the volunteers.  
© Adrien Chanteloup*

Because they are used to the tasks conducted, the volunteers are also aware of what they should do on the field. This reflects their ability to utilise their personal capacities towards the service of the community. In this section, I focused on expressing the will and types of capital carried by the stakeholders involved in the different community projects and how it led to the achievement of community projects. It is time to see how cultural, personal and organisational capacities influence and are influenced by the infrastructural capacity.

## 5.5 Infrastructural capacity

Thus, Langholm as a community and the individuals composing it are particularly well endowed in different capacities and capital and know-how to optimise their

use. However, the remaining capacity present in the CCF, the infrastructural capacity, is probably the weakest capacity visible in Langholm.

### 5.5.1 The Built capital

This capacity could also be apprehended as “built capital” and implies all infrastructures the community can exploit to reinforce itself. Firstly, Langholm is geographically isolated. Just after arriving in town, my host introduced me to the geographical situation of Langholm by saying that the town was “20 miles away from everything” (C.5). Access is allowed almost only for people having a car. A bus line runs to Carlisle or Edinburgh, but many stakeholders underline that this was not the easiest and most practical way to travel. This lack of public transportation is often raised as an issue. There is a project of reopening a train line supported by many different stakeholders, especially the chairperson of the Langholm Alliance, but it is far from being done yet.

However, a local saying explains that “A day away from Langholm is a day wasted”. Indeed, the town and its surroundings concentrate enough local services and entertainment to provide most of the local people needs in their everyday lives. There is a local hospital, a wide range of shops providing services and goods, a cinema, some sports facilities, a cultural centre that welcome musical performance, theatre plays, and public meetings. The natural landscape has also been adapted, and a wide range of hikes and walks is offered to the tourists and local inhabitants with specific installations on the way (bridges, barriers, ladders) to allow hikers to have a safe path. Even though some of the stakeholders highlight some lack of connection to the rest of the country, it remains that the local infrastructures are pretty developed. Regarding the development of new infrastructures in Langholm, they seem to be compromised in the future by the town position in an enclosed valley (see Appendix C.3). Besides, stakeholders also identified as an issue that the town was at the extremity of the Local Council area of Dumfries and Galloway. Thus, the council, consciously or not, tended to give more importance to other places and forget about the extremity of its territory. However, this relative isolation and the fact that the natural landscapes remains preserved around the town conducted to the development of specific connections between local people and their environment.

### 5.5.2 The connection between people and their environment

Firstly, nature is a significant stakeholder in building social bonds among people in the rural community. In the case of Langholm, people are attached to the area and feel connected not just for economic motives but also for historical, personal, and emotional reasons. During the transect walks, local people made descriptions of local stories. They were sharing memories and how they felt connected



personally to the place. The landscape has been shaped by generations living in the area (for more than two centuries for some families). Some people recognise themselves in the landscape and consider it their heritage.

Plunging on the other side of Whita Hill, we arrived with one stakeholder driving through the area at the Tarras Water, captured in the picture below. This small river crosses the natural reserve. Some of the stakeholders described their memories related to this area since they came here when they were children to play and swim during the summer. Now, they bring their children and grandchildren to play here. This spot at the heart of the Natural Reserve remains a special place for many of Langholm's inhabitants, who feel connected to this area. Many of them described their will to conserve the place as it is for the future generation as they could benefit it for themselves.



*Figure 8: View on the Tarras Water, crossing the Tarras Valley Natural Reserve created by the Langholm Initiative. © Adrien Chanteloup*

### 5.5.3 The shift in the perception of the land

This sub-section focuses mainly on the case of the Langholm initiative purchase of land. Indeed, the two other communities studied took control (or are willing to) over some buildings in the town. With the natural reserve, the LI is creating a space where animals, plants, and humans can interact. To this extent, some people will express respect, admiration and devotion even towards the natural environment and reinforced by creating the natural reserve. I perceived it through some discussions during the volunteering session and the interviews conducted with some of the volunteers. While removing some wood posts in the moor, I started a discussion with a participant (A.L.I.P.2) involved in several other organisations that promote openly or do not rewilding operations. When we had the time to rest a bit, I asked him as a joke why he was here precisely when, as a retired person, he could do another thing than hard manual work in a swamp on a rainy and windy Friday morning, and he answered very thoughtfully:

*I am here for nature. If it was just me, you know, the land should be owned by no one. I am here because I want to protect what can be protected, and there are some beautiful nature, plants, and animals around here. I really care about that, and the UK has been terrible at protecting it, when it was the most important thing to do perhaps. For me...to some extent, I am talking about nature like people are talking about religion.*

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For some participants, volunteering for the natural reserve fulfils aspirations beyond the creation of social links with humans only and with non-human beings and with nature taking as a whole, as seen for our last stakeholder. He also mentioned that he considered that nature, in his mind, could be considered from a religious perspective. Later in the conversation, we started to discuss the Buddhist temple established not so far from Langholm in Eskdalmuir, and the vision of nature this stakeholder had was relatively close to the ideal of respect and balance in the Buddhist philosophy is carrying. Following this, another interviewee (A.L.I.P.1) synthesised the links between the human community and nature. He was discussing the strength of the community in Langholm:

*A.L.I.P.1: So it has got extraordinary community spirit. I liked it is (Langholm) actually quite close to the Buddhist monastery as well, because I quite like visiting up there. I think that's got a lot to offer and I just love being out in nature.*

*- So if you're going to the Buddhist temple, is it related to your, I guess, your appreciation of nature and spirituality?*

*A.L.I.P.1: Yeah, I think so. Yeah, I mean how to describe it... Um, I've been on a lifelong journey as we all are in; trying to find meaning in life, find out what's important. And it strikes me that community is important. Reaching a balance between us and nature is important. So that we have exceeded up planetary boundaries as a species and we have to rectify that.*

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The project around nature protection and environmental respect is also the occasion to observe that if not built directly, the natural reserve becomes the pretext for people to meet (visible through the social gathering it generates, people's enthusiasm to meet, work and chat together) and build some commons around common ideals. So far, the perception of the natural capital was seen from a productionist perspective: the landscape and the resources it could contain have been used and exploited: forestry, wind farm, cattle farming, and hunting (see Appendix C.4). If this productionist perspective tends to be criticised more and more, especially in an organisation like the LI, other stakeholders try to find a middle way to reconcile the different views. Some promote the emergence of new activities related to eco-tourism. The landscapes in themselves could be considered natural resources, and other activities can emerge, like visiting the natural reserve and workshops to discover the wildlife. These activities could be connected with cultural activities related to the local cultural centre for some stakeholders.

## 6. Discussion

Having explored in-depth the different capitals and capacities of the local inhabitants and how these capacities could be used for the development of the community, it is now time to see the influence of the community-led project on the community building process. Thus, I offer to discuss the empirical results with the help of the literature developed in sections 2.1 and 3.

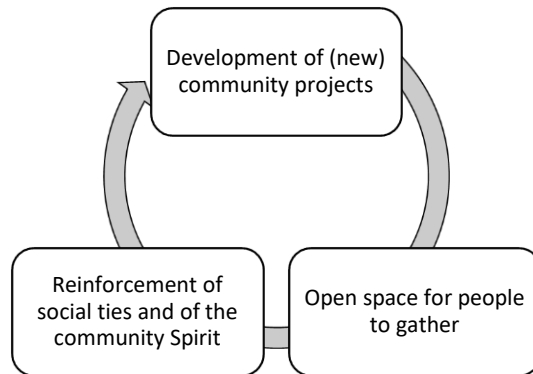
### 6.1 The positive retro influence of the communing projects on the community

#### 6.1.1 Description of the spiralling up trajectory in Langholm

As seen in the last section, Langholm already had a strong community spirit built through a long historical background and a particular geographical position and was reinforced lately by economic and social parameters. However, acknowledging that social bonds shape the community and that individuals hold a high level of different capital is not enough (Emery & Flora 2006; Fischer & McKee 2017). Indeed, during the data collection, I could recognise that the social links between people in the community were everything but static, in the sense that they were constantly renegotiated, and reinforced in the case of Langholm.

Similarly, the different types of capitals owned by people were also used and modified. Indeed, these existing social bonds and capital constantly increase by implementing new community projects. Through the retro-influenced effect, as described in Emery and Flora (2006), these community projects are increasing the social bonds within the community by creating new opportunities for people to gather around the creation of common material or immaterial projects; with, for consequence, the reinforcement of the social cohesion within the community. The community is following a spiralling up trajectory (*Ibid.*), seeing the level of capital owned by the community increasing thanks to the community projects conducted. Then, with a more excellent community spirit, people are even more pushed to develop new community projects which will reinforce the community spirit.

Figure 9: Spiralling-up trajectory open through the creation of commons by the communities



Through the transect walks made around Langholm, it was evident that the different community-owned assets or community projects are opening new spaces for people to meet and share moments of discussion and conviviality (Singh 2017; Nightingale 2019). Plus, the EF opened new housing for people willing to settle in Langholm. They mobilised the legal and human resources to implement the CAT of the police station. They also used support from local inhabitants, who were willing to keep the building standing in good condition. In the EF case, community members were putting their resources at the service of the reinforcement of the community itself. The main argument defended in this thesis, and exposed in the empirical section results, is that the Langholm community followed so far a spiralling up trajectory (Emery & Flora 2006).

### 6.1.2 Reasons of the spiralling up dynamic

As seen in section 5, the different types of capital owned by the stakeholders are reinforced while used within the community projects. One explanation for this is that the solid social connections within the community facilitated the use and transmission of capital among the stakeholders. By exchanging their knowledge, skills and relations, local people participating in community projects improved their personal capacity to act while enhancing the number and the quality of the actions conducted by the community. These transfers in capital lead to a global increase in the community capacity level.

Such efficiency in the transmission and increase of capacities was also due to a relative absence of tension in a globally homogeneous population from the ethnic, religious and economic perspectives. Talking of a common subjectivity in Langholm permit to understand the positive trajectory of Langholm's community. As argued by Nightingale (2019), the concept of subjectivity is more relevant to understand how people's perceptions are constructed in a specific context and are subject to permanent evolution. Thus, Langholm inhabitants' subjectivities are mainly oriented towards the communing process due to a background and a current context that lead them to improve the building of their community. To

keep exploring the consequences of the communing projects observed in Langholm, the reinforcement of the social links was even more visible through the participant observation during the ecological restoration sessions made with volunteers of the LI.

## 6.2 The creation of immaterial commons through the building of material ones

During these ecological restoration sessions, an immaterial connection is implicitly created between the volunteers when building the commons. In these circumstances, the building of commons was the occasion to build the community spirit. The joint effort made during these volunteering sessions built some links of solidarity between the volunteers, who need each other to accomplish tasks that will be much harder to achieve alone. One of the volunteers said at the end of a session that he came here to fulfil his will to see the land owned by the community. It was significant for him to support the idea of the community owning the land by participating in the collective effort to make this idea materially implemented. In doing so, it was also the opportunity to demonstrate a particular community spirit present in Langholm through shared experiences and common identity (Dinnie & Fischer 2019).

To this extent, a connection can be made between material and immaterial commons. The building of material commons with the creation of the natural reserve pursued by the volunteers is consequently opening an immaterial exchange space. People are using this space to discuss and, not necessarily on the communing project only, as testified by the meetings around a hot drink after the volunteering sessions for instance. This social gathering is the day's highlight and demonstrates the opening of what I call here "immaterial commons". These immaterial commons are all the social relations linking people around a shared experience built thanks to the space open by creating material commons, such as the TVNR. The commons are an opportunity for the local community to open, or reopen, some social gathering spaces. Facing a double phenomenon of global decrease and ageing population, rural areas see the meeting possibilities diminishing. Thus, the spaces opened by the community projects, like the natural reserve that allows people to work together through the volunteering session, also create new social links.

The plan of the LA to obtain the transfer of an asset of the former primary school is directly dedicated to this purpose of opening new spaces, with the specificity to be even more intergenerational and business oriented. The creation of commons is the occasion for the reinforcement of the community spirit. If authors have underlined that community ownership might be experienced in many

different ways (Dinnie & Fischer 2019) and that community ownership might not always be a success (Fischer & McKee 2017), it appeared that the community was reinforced by the creation of these commons in our case, following a spiralling up trajectory (Emery & Flora 2006).

One volunteer (A.L.I.P.1) described that he decided to settle in Langholm because of a strong community spirit already existing (visible especially with a wide range of community organisations) and because the activity of these community groups reinforces this community spirit. The community activities also increase the economic and social dynamism of the town in general, and the employment level since these communities directly hire people to work for them, or indirectly, by promoting tourism especially.

Another stakeholder (C3), a writer in the local newspaper who moved recently to Langholm after leaving France because of Brexit, settled in Langholm because his wife was originally from the town. As a recently retired person, he smoothly got involved in the community by working for different local organisations, especially the local newspaper. He described how astonished he was by the community spirit when he arrived in the town in the first months.

One of the central points of this thesis is that the efficiency of the community-led project is mainly due to the strength of the social ties uniting people living in Langholm. Then, the strong community spirit becomes an argument for people to settle in Langholm, and their new presence and involvement reinforce the community. If the community projects seem to have been easily implemented, it is also because of the presence of an exceptional social cohesion visible in many different opportunities. Consequently, the next section of this chapter will deal with the significance of social capital in understanding the community projects conducted in Langholm.

## 6.3 The significance of the social capital

### 6.3.1 The benefits of strong social capital for a rural community

Dinnie and Fischer (2019) expose a wide range of community ownership experiences, which should be understood as context-dependent. Community ownership can be tough to achieve and can even fail and negatively affect the community (Fischer & McKee 2017). Some might also argue that community ownership when it comes to managing natural resources can be a danger for protecting these resources in the middle-long term. The present paper can confirm the first assumption defended by these authors (each community experience is singular and context-dependent). However, our study denies the second assumption (community ownership is subject to failing) and the third one (community ownership leads to overuse or destruction of natural resources).

This case demonstrates the exceptional capacity of the Langholm population to handle situations that could endanger the existence of the community in the long run (economic collapse and decrease and ageing of the population). The social capital, personal skills and contacts, are moulded in the long term. They are influenced by a specific historical, geographical and economic context that has conducted the local people to develop the robust social relations that shaped the current community. Community groups took decisive initiatives that allowed the community to thrive and open new possibilities for the community to conserve some economic dynamism and reinforce social links (without talking of the benefits for the environment that the creation of the TVNR by the LI will encourage). The success of Langholm as a prospering rural town is mainly due to the social capital. Without such strong connections among the people, allowing the share of knowledge and skills, most projects will probably have failed.

### 6.3.2 Future challenges for the community

#### *Political and civic engagement(s)*

Not taking into account the influence of political ideas on people's actions will be a mistake since, as described in 5.3.4, a lot of the volunteers, if not necessarily involved in a political party, are engaged in what they are doing following ideas and commitments that can be considered as political. Then, some stakeholders are directly involved in the political system, such as elected representatives or former ones. Thus, the effectiveness or non-effectiveness of some initiatives is also influenced by stakeholders with their agendas (*c.f.* 5.3.4). This is also what supports Harriss (2001) when he explains that:

*Local organisation or community action on their own are liable to be ineffectual, or to be vehicles for the interests of more powerful people, in the absence of significant external linkages, especially (not exclusively) through political organisations*

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This statement can be used to interpret the LA case. The LA was created by a stakeholder who used to be a Local Councillor and has seen his seat taken away during the last local election in 2017. Creating the LA could thus be perceived as the continuity of its engagement with the community but also as a way to preserve its social capital and political influence. In the Langholm case, it will not be accurate to say that local political manoeuvre could endanger the development of initiatives that could support the local development of the community. Moreover, some local debate and contestation between local representatives and stakeholders can be the demonstration of perennial democratic life within the community as long as the conflicts remain expressed in a constructive way (*i.e.* with an agreement to disagree among stakeholders).

However, without disagreeing frontally with its action, some local stakeholders expressed doubts regarding the durability of the LA and its interest for the community. Indeed, many local organisations are already leading a significant number of projects and the creation of a new one was not perceived as absolutely necessary. Besides, the risk for Langholm is to have too many organisations that will start to be in concurrence ones with the others. Emery and Flora (2006) underline that capturing funds is essential to launch projects. Suppose there are too many projects in such a concentrated area as Langholm. In that case, it is probable that despite the value of the projects themselves, public authorities and private investors or donators will probably not have the funds to cover them all.

Thus, by having such a strong social capital in the town, leading to a growing number of local community actions, Langholm might face a proliferation of initiatives. The number of people available to dedicate some time and energy will be divided by the number of projects conducted in the area. Such multiplication of projects will divide the funds allocated to each and, in the end, reduce the global benefits that the community could take away from more minor projects that will benefit from a more significant application of capital. Indeed, without talking about financial concerns, a small community like Langholm does not benefit from an extensible human reservoir.

#### *The lack of renewal of the volunteers in the community groups*

A lack of renewal within the active members of each community group in the coming years, or a lack of capability in slowing the decrease of the young population able to take the helm, could endanger the prosperity of the community. The social capital is mainly developed in the older part of the population, who is in charge of most of the activities conducted by the different community groups. Authors (McMorran *et al.* 2014; Fischer & Mckee 2017) have underlined the risk of fatigue in work conducted by volunteer groups. The erosion of the social capital materialised by the lack of renewal in the different community groups could endanger the spiralling up trajectory followed by the Langholm community.

Thus, some solutions should be urgently found to ensure the continuation of community work. The preservation of the community activities might be found in replacing some members of the different community groups who are willing to let their position to younger members who might be willing to get involved in the community groups. However, as underlined by many stakeholders, this is not possible most of the time since this part of the population is usually composed of workers who do not benefit from enough free time to engage fully in other activities. Another possibility will be to professionalise even more the community group activities. It is the solution taken by some local community groups (especially the LA and LI, where some of the employees have been interviewed, even though they still rest on some volunteers). Remain the lack of renewal of the



volunteers, especially in the board of the different community groups where some members entrusted that they were willing to retire “for real”, and that might be a challenge. Encouraging new members to step into the different community groups might be one of the keys to ensuring that the community groups keep thriving. Langholm already benefits from strong social connections. It might be easier in such a context to find new volunteers who could be convinced to give a bit of their time to take over the work started by the current members if some of them decide to retire for the good of their community activities.

## 6.4 Concluding remarks

Regarding the three study cases, the EF has accomplished its objective: the Langholm police station has successfully been transformed into housing. According to the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), the EF is thriving, benefiting from the rent of the new housing built. The LI already managed to purchase half of the moorland they want to take control of. They are now willing to raise 2.2 million pounds before May 2022 to achieve the purchase of the second half of the land sold by the Buccleuch Estates. In the expectancy of achieving this second part of the buyout, the actions already conducted by the LI revealed to be incredibly beneficial for the community so far, at the economic but, more importantly, social and environmental level. Finally, the LA is still a very new organisation in the town, and it has raised quite some interrogations regarding the issues it will face in the coming years, to achieve its project in the middle and long run, and still have to find its place in a community fabric already dense.

Therefore, the answer to our research question is that community-led projects in favour of asset redistribution leading to community ownership are beneficial for local communities, enabling the reinforcement of social ties and opening new economic perspectives while improving the protection of the natural environment.

### 6.4.1 Key findings and contribution to knowledge

This paper concludes that Langholm demonstrate how a community can follow a spiralling up trajectory through the synergic actions of its different community groups. This case could be taken as an example to follow for other rural communities, despite its limitation regarding its capacity for reproduction due to the specific context it is embedded in.

*The spiralling up trajectory from a focus on the economic perspective...*

This thesis has used the spiralling up trajectory concept defined by Emery and Flora (2006). However, some differences in the context and the way the authors used such a concept tend to emerge. From a context analysis, first of all, the

community groups studied are quite different. Emery and Flora's investigation in Nebraska (USA) also tends to focus on the economic variable, targeting the effect of the different financial investments on the local entrepreneurial sphere.

Their vision of social capital is merely seen as another way to improve entrepreneurship and economic development. In short, their vision of local development is embedded in a productionist, capitalist framework, which considers that the development of rural communities is above all related to their capability to thrive economically. To this extent, Langholm was facing a potential spiralling-down trajectory: loss of most of the employment and also, as in a lot of other rural areas, an ageing population that will not be "productive" anymore on the economic aspect.

However, the concept of spiralling up trajectory developed by the authors can be used, as it has been made in this study case, to demonstrate that the development of a community not through an economic focus only. One could expect the significance social ties in the evaluation of rural policy to be overwhelmed by the growing importance of the economic perceptive in rural policies. It is to forget that the well-being of a community should be measured not only through the economic outcomes but also by the social, cultural and environmental ones. The different community groups studied demonstrated that social bonds especially were more important than anything else since this is through the use of this social capital that all the other projects that permitted the Langholm renaissance actually happened.

*...to a social perspective for better rural development strategies*

Despite their emphasis on the economic datum, Emery and Flora's (2006) assumption about the need to invest in human and social capital to reinforce a community is correct. I will also agree with the demonstration made by the authors that capitals tend to reinforce and develop one the others when the community as a whole is following a spiralling up trajectory. However, I will emit some limits on the significance of the economic datum. Not recognising its significance for rural communities will be absurd. However, rural development strategies should be perceived as something other than the increase in cash flows and the opening of new businesses or the increase in goods production.

The well-being of communities cannot be measured in the light of economic development only. In the Langholm case and the analysis developed on it, people took considerable care in reinforcing social links, which were perceived as something more important to ensure the town's prosperity in the long run. Indeed, the high qualities of the social connexions among the people are the source of the excellent transfer and increase of all the different types of capital, at the community scale as for individuals. Thus, my key point here is to defend that

investments that could promote the reinforcement of social capital are the ones that should be encouraged to enhance the rural development of local communities.

#### 6.4.2 From the building of commons to the building of a community

##### *The issues related to the use and application of the social capital in rural development strategy*

The concept of social capital appears as multiform and, thereby, difficult to define. Something unprecise as “social bonds” or “qualitative networks” are hard to measure, especially in quantitative terms. Therefore, investing in such capital might be hard for policymakers and investors. However, our case shows that one type of investment might potentially generate a massive amount of social capital.

Organising an asset redistributions to switch from private or public (State) ownership to community ownership might be a risk. The State, letting some assets go away, could be (a) accused of withdrawing and flying away from its responsibility and (b) see some assets being poorly managed and damaged under community ownership because of a lack of capacities owned by this one. On the other hand, taking over an asset can be extremely challenging for a community which does not have the necessary capitals (human, cultural, financial, social, mainly) to take care of the asset.

##### *The opening of commons as a source of reinforcement of the community*

However, what has been demonstrated in our case is that the community ownership model, when successful as it seems to be so far in Langholm, can be the source of a strong anchor point from which a community can start to raise new projects. One original perspective developed in this paper is that, through the building of material commons, some "immaterial commons" emerge, developing new social connections and reinforcing the community network. From this strong network of connection built among a community thanks to an asset communally owned, the social capital developed can permit the development of new projects or the improvement of existing ones.

Langholm's study demonstrates that solid social relations built among the population reinforced the capacity to develop community projects because of an increased will of the people to provide time, money, and energy to fulfil such projects. A community-owned asset opens some ground for people to gather and exchange. The fruit of the increase of exchange in the building of commons is a more robust community network that can open more space (material and immaterial) for community projects. This trajectory contributes to the building and reinforcement of the rural communities that become more able to endure different types of social, economic and environmental crises.

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## Popular science summary

Many obstacles exist that endanger fair and flourishing prospects for rural areas throughout the globe. One of the main ones is land and asset ownership inequalities. This problem has been mainly studied in Global South countries, where it is a significant concern. Nevertheless, Global North countries are also familiar with this issue that puts rural communities at risk of lack of economic dynamism, destruction of social ties among local people, and environmental damage.

Thus, the thesis investigates the consequences of asset redistribution through community ownership schemes. This research underlines that community-led projects favouring asset redistribution leading to community ownership of local assets (land and buildings) are beneficial for local communities. These projects enable the reinforcement of social ties and open new economic perspectives while improving the protection of the natural environment. The Langholm case has led to creating a natural reserve, affordable housing for local people, and opening a new project for a community centre welcoming the eldest and youngest people in the same space while opening a new workspace for small companies.

Langholm's community ownership of assets demonstrates how a community can follow a trajectory of positive retroaction of its different community groups. Most importantly, these community-owned assets reinforce the community spirit, making the community more able to answer future crises collectively.



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Thanks also to my family for letting me do what I want, going to a country to study, to another one to conduct field work, and never complaining about me being unable to stand still.

Afterwards, thanks to the friends I met before and during these two last years, who had the bravery to support me all this time. I still ignore how you achieved such a performance, but I cannot doubt that if I had become a better person, it would be thanks to you.

Finally, thanks to Carl Fredrik Sundvall, the architect of the Carolina Rediviva Library in Uppsala. I could not end these acknowledgements without thinking about the hours spent between the walls he designed.

Letting my eyes linger on the past two years, I am now looking forward to the brighter future of rural communities that this thesis aims to inspire.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Presentation of the interviewees

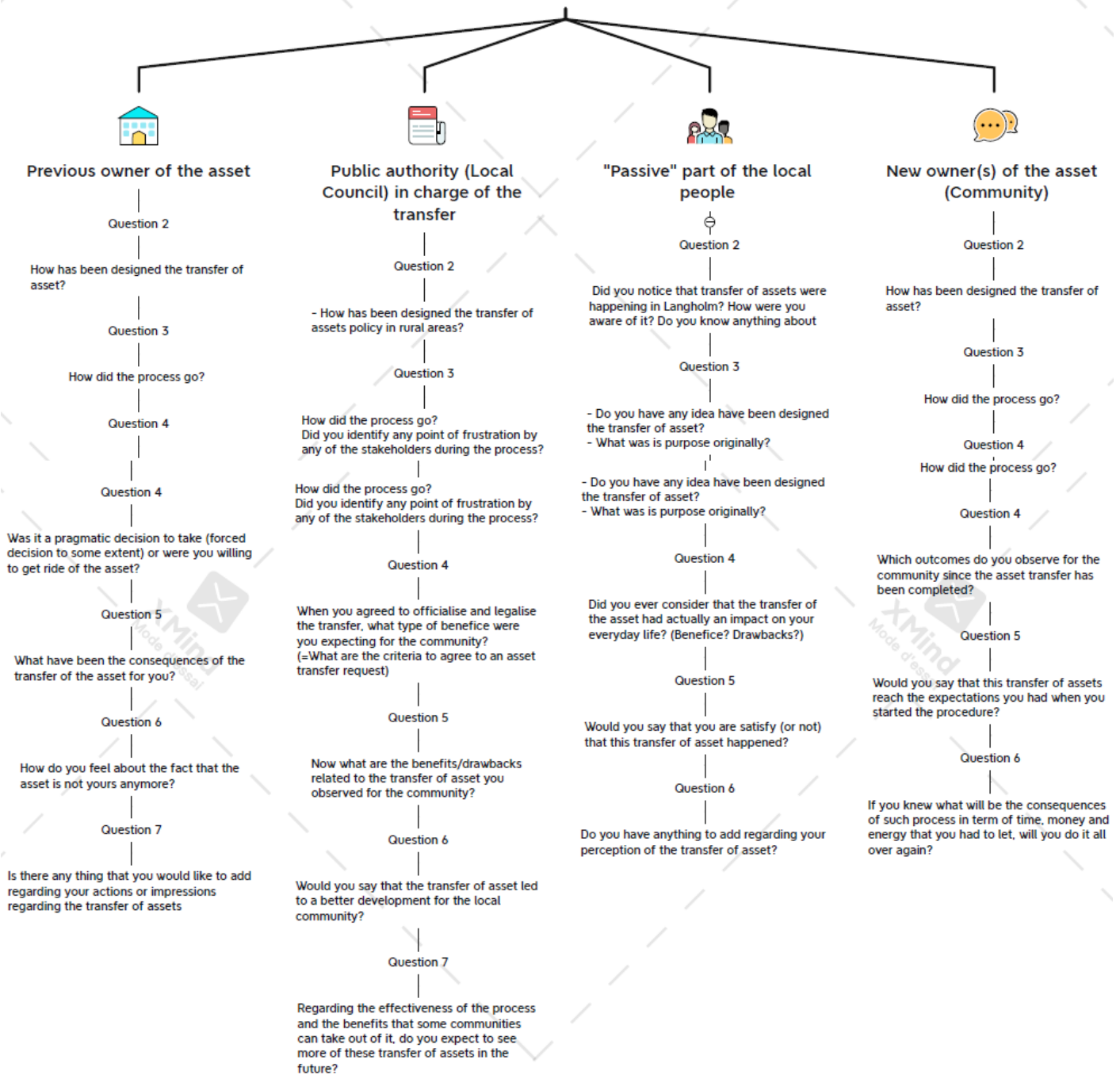
Stakeholders			
Communities (A)	Langholm Initiative (L.I.)	Employees and officials	Project officer volunteering team (1)
			Chairwoman (2)
			Development Manager (3)
			Project officer purchase and business plan development (4)
	Participant		Volunteer n°1 (1)
			Volunteer n°2 (2)
Langholm Alliance (L.A.)		Chairman (1)	
		Employee (Fund Raiser) (2)	
Eskdale Foundation (E.F.)		Former member	
Previous owner (B)	Local Council administrative representative (for the Langholm Alliance and Eskdale Foundation CAT cases)		Project manager Asset Transfer and Leases at Dumfries and Galloway Local Council (1)
	Buccleuch Estate		Access denied
External experts (D)			Ward Manager (Administrative representative of the Local Council) (1)
			Programme manager of the Community Ownership support services working within the Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS) (2)
Local inhabitants (not directly involved in any community) (C)			Chairman of the Buccleuch Centre and Chairman of Langholm Walk (1)
			Librarian (informal historian of Langholm) (2)
			Retired person, recently arrive in Langholm, working for the community newspaper (3)
			Retired person, spent all his life in Langholm as a shepherd (4)
			Director of the Buccleuch Centre and local teacher (5)

The coding of the interviewee in the thesis is based on a reading from the left to the right. To quote the chairman of the Langholm Alliance belonging to the Community group, the code will be “interviewee A.L.A.1” for instance. In the case of the Langholm Initiative, the distinction between participant and employees and official members is made by using the letters P (participant) and E (employees and official members).

Appendix B: Original interview protocol



**Interview protocol  
Langholm Transfer  
of Asset Study case**



Question 1 was common to all the interviewees: To which extent are you involve in the transfer of asset?

### *Appendix C.1*



*The project officer of the LI took the picture on the 4th of February. Nine volunteers joined (the project officer and me excluded). © Tarras Valley Volunteers Facebook Group*

### *Appendix C.2*

The picture below shows the amount of garbage from the fences the volunteer team managed to remove in three sessions:



*Material extracted by the Langholm Initiative members. © Adrien Chanteloup*

### *Appendix C.3*



*View of Langholm, in the middle of the valley crossed by the Esk river. © Adrien Chanteloup*

### *Appendix C.4*

In the following picture can be seen the demonstration of the exploitation of the land in the Langholm area so far:



*In the foreground, new trees were recently planted for forestry; in the background, a wind farm. The picture was taken from Mid Hill, in a field used for sheep farming. © Adrien Chanteloup.*



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