



**The influences of communitarian philosophy in public policy:  
mapping the discourse of Scottish public library strategy**

Journal:	<i>Journal of Documentation</i>
Manuscript ID	JD-02-2023-0020.R1
Manuscript Type:	Article
Keywords:	Public Libraries, political philosophy, communitarianism, Scotland, strategy, charitable trusts, public policy

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3 **The influences of communitarian philosophy in public policy: mapping the discourse of**  
4 **Scottish public library strategy**  
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12 **Abstract**  
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14 **Design/methodology/approach:** The paper follows a qualitative research approach,  
15 combining content analysis and discourse analysis methodologies for the analysis of a corpus  
16 of Scottish public library trust documentation according to a thematic framework of  
17 communitarian values.  
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22 **Purpose:** This research investigates the presence of communitarian philosophy within  
23 contemporary Scottish public library strategy, exploring links between philosophy, politics,  
24 and practice.  
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28 **Findings:** The analysis revealed strong links between trust strategy and communitarian values,  
29 but also highlighted contradictions within this form of communitarianism which belied a  
30 deeper neoliberal philosophical foundation. The research therefore identified a communitarian  
31 strategic service shift which introduced benefits of social inclusion, community autonomy, and  
32 common good, but also brought concerns of an inherently weakened communal foundation and  
33 the survival of a neoliberal status quo.  
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39 **Research limitations/implications:** The analysis is focused on strategy in Scotland only, thus  
40 can only claim to be representative of that country. However, the growth in communitarian  
41 strategies in the public sector is informed from the analysis undertaken.  
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45 **Practical implications:** The paper provides a novel analysis of public library strategy thus  
46 contributes to our understanding of public library practice in the modern era.  
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49 **Social implications:** The impacts of communitarian philosophy in the public sphere are under-  
50 researched, how these changes impact on the mission of libraries needs to be better understood.  
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53 **Originality/value:** This is the first analysis to consider public library strategy from a  
54 communitarian point of view. As such it provides novel insights into a growing area of public  
55 service development.  
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## Introduction

This paper explores the relationship between communitarian philosophy and public libraries using the context of Scottish public library charitable trusts as an example of the trend. Philosophical communitarianism rejects liberalism's key tenet of individual justice as the universal right, prioritising instead the communal foundations of the individual. Communitarian politics revolve around harnessing community spirit and being, as opposed to sheltering the liberal individual in an atomised market environment.

A corpus of public library trust documentation was analysed using a thematic communitarian framework, developed by Frazer (1999, p.246-250), to identify strategic themes. Research methods followed a qualitative approach, utilising content analysis and discourse analysis within a wider context of document analysis. In doing so, the study encompassed a range of novel research areas. It combined the philosophical focus of communitarianism with the study of community-based public library services strategy in a manner unexplored in library and information sciences (LIS) literature, and rarely in public service governance research more generally. The paper explores the following research questions:

- To what extent does communitarianism inform contemporary Scottish public library trust strategy?
- If present, what values of communitarianism does contemporary Scottish public library trust strategy emphasise?
- What opportunities and concerns do these particular trends present for the future of the service?

## Research context

The subject of neoliberalism and its impact on library services and professional practice has been widely explored in the academic literature (for example see Budd, 1997, 2008; Greene and McMenemy, 2012; McMenemy, 2007, 2009, 2020; Stevenson, 2009, 2016). However, communitarianism as an influencing philosophy has been relatively unexplored despite its growing influence on Global North politics since the 1990s, and its subsequent impact on public policy.

The broad collection of philosophical and political ideals which we might label communitarianism has existed in many forms throughout religious groups, political ideologies,

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3 and governance strategies for thousands of years (Frazer, 1999). The label itself, however,  
4 emerges from a distinct development in 1980's Anglo-American philosophy.  
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7 A precisely articulated communitarian philosophy emerged in response to the liberal  
8 philosopher John Rawls, and his seminal work *A Theory of Justice* (1972). Specifically,  
9 communitarianism rejected the context of a barren, contextless individual of modern liberalism  
10 as the starting point for defining ontological and ethical universals. A subject always emerges  
11 from a community: a culture, a tradition, a life of social relationships. So, the individual who  
12 naturally chooses right (justice) as the first moral imperative is already a link in a specific  
13 cultural chain which leads them to that decision. Sandel articulates this precisely: 'justice is the  
14 first virtue of social institutions not absolutely, as truth is to theories, but only conditionally, as  
15 physical courage is to a war zone' (1998, p.31). MacIntyre describes these conditional cultural  
16 conditions from which we emerge:  
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25 I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts,  
26 inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my  
27 life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my life its own moral  
28 particularity' (2007, p.220)  
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33 For communitarians, the liberal proposition that the choices of the individual, absent of any  
34 other concept of good, mark the starting point against which we articulate justice is logically  
35 fallacious: "Rawls' attempt to situation the deontological self, properly reconstructed, carries  
36 us beyond deontology to a conception of community that marks the limits of justice and locates  
37 the incompleteness of the liberal ideal" (Sandel, 1998, 14). Communitarianism, by placing  
38 community as a formative step for the subject above individual justice, re-prioritises this  
39 concept of a universal common good.  
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45 For MacIntyre, the ethical reinstatement of community, and the return of the 'good', reinvokes  
46 the constructions of 'virtues' which have disintegrated under deontological liberalism. The  
47 reconstruction of the community marks the return of friendship, goodness; indeed, the very  
48 ability to build cultural notions of virtue: "the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for  
49 the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us  
50 to understand what more and what else the good life for man is" (MacIntyre, 2007, p.219).  
51 Communitarian philosophers prioritise the values which emerge from and sustain these virtues:  
52 the nurture of mutuality, trust, cultural tradition (Frazer, 1999). Against a liberal decree to  
53 maximise individual autonomy, communitarian philosophies centralise the priority of  
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3 community and therefore give precedence to the virtues and justices which uphold each specific  
4 communal structure.  
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7 Communitarian politics follows, above all, the priority of the community in terms of political  
8 and metaphysical autonomy; that “communities should have authority, that the individual  
9 should participate in the community in which she or he is rooted, and which has shaped her or  
10 him, that communities can produce and distribute goods that neither the commodity market nor  
11 governments can” (Frazer, 1999, p.35-36). Distinct values emerge from this foundation of an  
12 autonomous, functional community: civic spirit, responsibility, mutuality, consensus,  
13 participation, and the reinstatement of the human level. A communitarian politics translates  
14 the metaphysical proposition of communitarianism into a community-driven praxis.  
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### 21 *Communitarian Service Trends*

22 For Davies, communitarian values have begun to inform the structure of a range of public  
23 service strategies in a structure he describes as neocommunitarianism (2012).  
24 Neocommunitarian principles technocratically inform systems of governance with a  
25 communitarian recognition of a people’s communal structure. It is grounded in spheres such  
26 as behavioural neuroscience, which identify through observation the same conclusions  
27 produced by the communitarians:  
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34 “good” and “bad” behaviours—for example, in relation to nutrition—are known to be  
35 learnt from others, moving through social networks like contagions. They have a  
36 ritualistic element which cannot simply be altered through calculated attempts to  
37 manipulate costs and benefits’ (Davies, 2012, p.773)  
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42 This contemporary neuroscientific shift of communitarian discourse expresses a metaphysical  
43 proposition: that communitarian truths are psychologically grounded in individuals, that the  
44 current neoliberal schema is an unsustainable structure because it misunderstands the human  
45 texture which defines interaction. So neocommunitarian principles offer: “a technocratic shift  
46 away from the generalisable presuppositions of neoclassical economics, and towards more  
47 psychological interest in behaviour, wellbeing and the cultural nature of economic activity”  
48 (Davies, 2012, p.775). Such contemporary public service strategies—from healthcare to  
49 banking—structure their services around the communal values of the individual, rather than  
50 treating them as a blank canvas to exist as they wish within the market.  
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3 Communitarianism exists more explicitly in community-based public service strategy. The  
4 praxis of community development has always reflected communitarian tenets. Community  
5 development:  
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9 occurs when the conditions of surviving and thriving in a place are not being supplied  
10 by capital. Thus, community development emerges in the context of the current  
11 limitations of the capitalist political economy to fulfil the needs and desires of the  
12 community (DeFilippis & Saegert, 2012, p.5).  
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17 Just as communitarian thinkers identify the shadow of community in the blind spot of market-  
18 driven liberal philosophies and, therefore, work to cultivate those communal roots to establish  
19 a stronger, healthier society than the one begotten by liberalism, so community development  
20 practices seize the power of community to practically redress the disregarded margins of the  
21 capitalist liberal economy. Community development thinkers and activists recognise, “that  
22 relations within communities tend to be largely “win-win” relations and take that framework  
23 one step farther to assume that *individual* gains and interests in the community are synonymous  
24 with *collective*, or community gains and interests” (DeFilippis, 2012, p.36).  
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32 Community-based governance strategies have risen to the forefront of government strategies  
33 within the past three decades of UK public policy. Labour politicians, such as Gordon Brown  
34 in 1990, identify community bonds as vital tools which surpass the atomised apparatus of the  
35 neoliberal economy: “What the community can achieve by acting together to further individual  
36 well-being and freedom can be greater than anything individuals working only a free market  
37 ideology can achieve on their own” (Brown, 1990, p.20). This community perspective has  
38 encroached upon the centre of UK politics, so that by 2010 David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’  
39 turned communitarian principles into the centre of a Conservative national governance strategy  
40 (Stott, 2011). The Big Society focussed on community empowerment, mutualism and social  
41 networks as keystones in a functioning society (Coote, 2010; Wilson, 2011).  
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50 These communitarian principles manifested in distinct public service strategies: UK  
51 Government think-tank documents such as Cormac Russell’s ‘12 Domains of People Powered  
52 Change’ emphasise the importance of community empowerment (2016), while the 2011  
53 *Localism Act* enshrined the aim to steer power back into communities by reclaiming the power  
54 of local government, cultivating community empowerment, and encouraging the utilization of  
55 community assets.  
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3 Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) models in public service delivery have served  
4 a central role in this development of communitarian service strategy. ABCD models of public  
5 services work by mapping the strengths, or ‘assets’, of the individuals, groups, and institutions  
6 in any given community and connecting them to produce community-based social service  
7 work, simultaneously creating powerful, positive community bonds. Kretzmann and  
8 McKnight’s theoretical conceptions of ABCD reflect explicitly communitarian philosophical  
9 foundations: “Living a good life depends on whether [an individual’s] capacities can be used,  
10 abilities expressed, and gifts given. If they are, the person will be valued, feel powerful and  
11 well connected to the people around them” (1993, p.13).  
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15 Reflecting communitarian philosophy, the concept of a ‘good life’, emerging from communal  
16 self-identification and manifesting in the functional bonds which constitute an individual’s  
17 place in the community, replaces basic liberal principles of a common good. ABCD models  
18 stress ‘local definition’, ‘creativity’, ‘interdependence’; to ‘build and rebuild the relationships  
19 between and among residents, local associations, and local institutions’ (Kretzmann &  
20 McKnight, 1996, 27). These approaches have propagated in sectors such as health delivery  
21 (Morgan & Ziglio, 2010); and UN health promotions identify community empowerment as a  
22 key module in improving health (UN, 2000), and UK public health policies directly build upon  
23 ABCD service strategies. (Department of Health, 2004; Foot & Hopkins, 2010; NHS Scotland  
24 and Scottish Government, 2010). A large volume of literature explores how best to deliver  
25 ABCD approaches (see Popay, 2010).  
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29 The past fifteen years of Scottish public services approaches reflect a similar communitarian  
30 foundation. A defined ‘Scottish Approach’ to public services, coined in the 2007 minority  
31 Scottish National Party (SNP) administration, revolves around asset-based approaches and the  
32 local co-production of services (Housden, 2014; Cairney, Russel, St Denny, 2016; Coutts and  
33 Brotchie, 2017). Multiple Scottish Government policy directives, including the Christie  
34 Commission, place community empowerment and participation at the heart of overcoming  
35 inequality (Scottish Government, 2010; Christie, 2011). The 2015 *Community Empowerment*  
36 (*Scotland*) *Act* further established these communitarian directions through new policy  
37 committed to community planning and service delivery. Scottish public practices aim to  
38 manifest a good, communal life through the autonomous communal imagination and force of  
39 community power.  
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*Summary of Communitarianism: Philosophy, Politics, Practice*

Communitarianism, therefore, informs philosophical perspectives, political values, and service practice strategies. The following table summarises the relationship between these three interconnected forms when compared to neoliberalism:

	<i>Neoliberalism</i>	<i>Communitarianism</i>
<i>Metaphysical Priority</i>	Individual Right	Community
<i>Notions of the Self</i>	Atomised, Autonomous, Rational	Communal, Constituted, Value-driven
<i>Notions of Community</i>	Transactional	Epistemological
<i>Philosophical Values</i>	Choice, Rule of Law	Communal Life, Common Good, Virtues
<i>Political Values</i>	Free Market, Privatisation	Active Citizens, Mutuality, Civic Spirit
<i>Service Trends</i>	Managerial, Standardised, Citizen-consumer	Community-led, Specific, Citizen-producer

*Table 1: Neoliberalism and Communitarianism*

*Criticisms of Communitarian Philosophy*

Criticisms of communitarianism extend beyond analyses of its practical form. The literature highlights critical problems contained in the foundations of communitarian philosophy which inform the structure of any political communitarianism. For Frazer, communitarian analyses



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3 struggle to exceed purely descriptive depictions of the individual in society and lack the tools  
4 to explore the complex memberships, power structures, presences and absences of community  
5 formation (1998). Communitarian critics:  
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9 give us theories of meaning-generating communities yet no account of their power, no  
10 account of the political “meaningfulness” of the “meanings” they generate. In the  
11 absence of any analysis of these and other political questions, the degree of fragmentation  
12 which communitarianism entails seems fundamentally to undermine any pretensions it  
13 might have to be a critical opposed to a merely explanatory theory.’ (Frazer & Lacey,  
14 1993, 148)  
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20 As feminist critics, Frazer and Lacy are concerned with the uncritical pass which these  
21 philosophers offer communities: the lack of discussion regarding the ‘*materiality* of the  
22 meanings or values generated by non-powerful communities’ (1993, 137). Power structures the  
23 values of a community, which means that accepting community as a metaphysical structural  
24 matrix, means allowing the uncritical dissemination of this power.  
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29 For a communitarian like Walzer, inequality appears as a necessary part of fluid communal  
30 systems, where ‘men and women learn to live with the autonomy of distributions and to  
31 recognize that different outcomes for different people in different spheres make a just society’  
32 (1983, 320). This lack of a critical apparatus for interrogation reflects those problems of  
33 inequality and democracy met within communitarian policy.  
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### 38 *Public Libraries and Communitarianism*

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41 Writers such as Pateman and Williment have researched practical community engagement and  
42 developed ‘community-led’ frameworks for libraries which place the facilitated empowerment  
43 of all facets of a community at the heart of public library services (2013). They do not mention  
44 communitarianism in their studies but envision a public library service which is justified by,  
45 grounded in, and co-developed with equality, community values and community desires. They  
46 appeal, for example, to practices of co-produced service planning and one-to-one group-based  
47 needs identification for localised service delivery. Other writers explicitly identify  
48 communitarian philosophies as applicable structures for public library strategy. Irwin contrasts  
49 communitarian philosophy with liberal philosophy in relation to public library strategies to  
50 develop a framework of how community-based service delivery could alter public library  
51 perspectives in Canada (2012). Similarly, McMenemy (2021) invokes communitarian  
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3 principles to enumerate the contemporary public library dilemma of neutrality. Crucially, these  
4 literature trends represent a focus on community-based service as a possible framework, rather  
5 than research on how current community-based rhetoric currently works to form contemporary  
6 strategy.  
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10 Some literature explores how the community currently grounds public library strategies.  
11 Research has explored how public libraries serve and represent socially excluded portions of  
12 the community, from homeless outreach to LGBTQ+ representation (Willett & Broadley,  
13 2011; Vincent, 2015). Strensom et al.'s rigorous literature review of public library value  
14 identifies community development as one of public library services' three key foundations  
15 (2019). Likewise, Vårheim's research on social resilience and public libraries elucidates how  
16 public library services have helped to develop community social capital (2017). However,  
17 although these papers explore the relationships between and benefits of community and public  
18 libraries, they do not focus on strategic communitarian elements which guide public library  
19 strategy.  
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28 Goulding's analysis of the Big Society and public libraries specifically examines community-  
29 based service strategies in the context of public libraries (2013). She connects Big Society  
30 policy and documentation to public library trends, identifying how community empowerment  
31 fits within the contemporary English public library model. She isolates the rise of the voluntary  
32 sector and community-managed libraries as central to recent developments. Her analysis is,  
33 however, based on broad policy strokes and their possible relation to public library services,  
34 rather than examining specific public library strategy. Sen's detailed analysis on community  
35 orientation in Cumbrian public library strategy and delivery, however, identifies distinct  
36 community-led service delivery shifts, in which the community is both 'the focus of attention'  
37 and 'a source of solution to problems' and offers advice on fostering specific values such as  
38 leadership (2014, 510). Nevertheless, this study does not explore the relationship between these  
39 community-based service trends and the philosophical background of communitarianism.  
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50 **There are, therefore, gaps in the literature related to communitarianism as a political philosophy**  
51 **and its impact on public libraries. The exploration of the philosophy of communitarianism,**  
52 **what its key tenets are in relation to public services, and how it differs from liberalism and**  
53 **neoliberalism with their emphasis on the primacy of the individual, all need to be better**  
54 **understood if we are to genuinely engage with library services based on community needs over-**  
55 **riding those of individuals. The studies to date leave spaces to investigate contemporary**  
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3 practice, governance strategies and a connection between public library delivery and the  
4 philosophy of communitarianism.  
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7 *Scottish Public Libraries and Scottish Public Library Trusts*  
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10 Scottish public libraries are a devolved service; they range across 32 local councils and consist  
11 of 481 public libraries. The Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) strategy  
12 document *Ambition & opportunity: a strategy* crafts a distinct strategic governance model for  
13 Scottish public libraries. This strategy places the Scottish model within wider communitarian  
14 trends: it emphasises the need to ‘rethink’ public service models, consisting of:  
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19 greater integration of public services at a local level driven by better partnership,  
20 collaboration and effective local delivery ... towards ““bottom up” ways of working  
21 that give citizens and communities more control (SLIC, 2015, p.10).  
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25 Furthermore, the document consciously connected public library delivery with community-  
26 driven developments like the *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act* (2015) and the  
27 Convention of Scottish Local Authorities’ (COSLA) ‘Commission on Strengthening Local  
28 Democracy’ (2014). SLIC classifies the value of public libraries for their contribution to social  
29 wellbeing by invoking their connection to the community, whereby public libraries relieve the  
30 ‘social needs of individuals and groups in their communities’, nurture ‘community interest  
31 groups and members of the community looking to support one another’, help citizens ‘to  
32 become involved in their local communities and take part in local and national life’ and  
33 ‘strengthening the identify and sense of community’ (SLIC, 2015, 25). That is, Scottish public  
34 library strategy firmly places the devolved service within the rhetoric of recent communitarian  
35 trends. A Scottish focus for research exploring recent communitarian service developments,  
36 therefore, offers rich opportunities for identifying how public libraries strategies reflect  
37 community-based philosophies.  
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48 More specifically, this research will focus on Scottish public libraries run by Trusts. Trusts are  
49 a form of arm’s-length external organisations (ALEOs): alternative forms of public service  
50 delivery by organisations created by councils to run specific services under a formally separate  
51 management (Audit Scotland, 2018). Trusts are ALEOs with guaranteed charitable status, so  
52 that any profits are returned to the running of the organisation. Public libraries can be run by  
53 trusts in a wide range of permutations: as distinct culture trusts or combined with leisure trusts,  
54 encompassing the running of any collection of public libraries, sports, museums, arts, and  
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3 community assets. The emergence of public library Trusts in Scotland began with the creation  
4 of Glasgow Life in 2006, steadily increasing so that by 2021 eleven councils run public libraries  
5 through Trusts. A shift from council-run public libraries to Trust management offers a range  
6 of fiscal advantages to councils, from taxable and VAT benefits, new outlets for additional  
7 income such as funding, charitable donations and sponsorships, and an organisation structured  
8 towards a commercial focus (Audit Scotland, 2018). They also function to further localise these  
9 services towards a community: to ‘involve public stakeholders in the management and  
10 direction of their services’ (Audit Scotland, 2018, 13). They mark those innovative delivery  
11 options of the contemporary trends and hint towards communitarian service directions,  
12 untethered by the council and more easily defined by community control. An understanding of  
13 Scottish community-based public library service strategy must take these service changes into  
14 account. Furthermore, previous research has very rarely explored this form of public library  
15 delivery, therefore Trusts offer original grounds for contemporary research.

## 26 **Research Methods**

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28 A corpus of Scottish public library trust documents was assembled and coded deductively,  
29 according to a thematic framework of communitarian values, and inductively, for  
30 communitarian service practices. The dispersion of these coded themes was described  
31 numerically through content analysis and explored more thoroughly with discourse analysis.

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33 Document analysis offered a tool to examine a broad range of Scottish public library trust  
34 strategic directions. The research built on document analysis methodologies, described by  
35 Bowen as the “finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesising data contained  
36 in documents” (Bowen 2009, 28). Documents were sourced and selected through public  
37 library trust websites and Freedom of Information requests to councils. They were coded using  
38 a thematic framework of communitarian values, alongside inductive coding of community  
39 development practices. This data was synthesised using content analysis and discourse analysis  
40 methods.

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42 Content analysis methods created numerical depictions of communitarian value dispersion  
43 throughout the corpus of documents. This indicated general thematic focuses within the corpus:  
44 which themes were particularly prescient, and which neglected. Discourse analysis practices  
45 supplied a more nuanced perspective on communitarian values within the documents. They  
46 explored how communitarian values were invoked, highlighting how trust discourse ratified  
47 communitarian values through linguistic and thematic structure.

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3 Discourse analysis frameworks view language as ‘a form of social practice’ called discourse  
4 (Fairclough, 1995, p.7). Discourse is not simply descriptive, but constructive: the structural,  
5 power-driven framework of society is drawn through its linguistic presentation in discourse.  
6 The ‘texture’ of texts provides a representation of how individuals, groups, organisations  
7 construct their social realities. Discourse analysis is concerned with the absences of texts, the  
8 assumed ‘background knowledge’, which reveal the ideological assumptions which discourses  
9 place upon social reality. It works to “elucidate such naturalisations, and more generally to  
10 make clear social determinations and effects of discourse which are characteristically opaque  
11 to participants” (Fairclough, 1995, p.28).

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19 Discourse analysis can be utilised to examine a wide range of discourse practices, and this  
20 research continued examples of institutional discourse analysis described by Mayr (2015). In  
21 this perspective, “organizations exist only in so far as their members create them through  
22 discourse. This is not to claim that organizations are “nothing but discourse”, but rather that  
23 discourse is the principal means by which organizational members create a coherent social  
24 reality that frames their sense of who they are” (Mayr, 2015, p.755). The research undertaken  
25 for this paper used this framework to investigate how institutional public library trust discourse  
26 constructed the function and value of community.

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34 These methodological directions carried limitations. The numerical focus of content analysis  
35 methods take language at face value and therefore, arguably, limits the complexity of linguistic  
36 representations. Conversely, discourse analysis can result in evaluation which could be  
37 considered too subjective to portray an even representation of the data. However, although the  
38 interpretations of discourse analysis are necessarily qualitative, this does not mean they cannot  
39 be rigorous: indeed, the project attests to the necessity of qualitative analyses to understand  
40 some information and argues that narrative approaches to the investigation of social  
41 phenomena are as vital as quantitative approaches.

#### 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 *Thematic Framework*

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The framework of communitarianism for thematic coding was developed from an extensive  
review of communitarian literature, centring around Frazer’s communitarian framework  
structured by her analysis of communitarian discourse in political documents (Frazer, 1999,  
Appendix 1, p.246-250). Translating Frazer’s scheme to the context of the corpus and  
considering the shift from Frazer’s analysis of distinctly political writing to an analysis of

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3 organisational reports, some terms were altered to evaluate the corpus more effectively. The  
4 following coding themes were chosen:  
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- 6 • Active Citizens
- 7 • Civic Spirit
- 8 • Common Good
- 9 • Community Development
- 10 • Community Leaders
- 11 • Consensus
- 12 • Entrepreneurs
- 13 • Equality
- 14 • Local Activism
- 15 • Mutuality
- 16 • Participation
- 17 • Responsibility
- 18 • Self-Discipline
- 19 • Social Capital
- 20 • Strong Communities
- 21 • Voluntary Service

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37 The documents were, furthermore, coded inductively to identify communitarian practices  
38 within community development. This process isolated the following themes:  
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- 40 • Capacity building
- 41 • Community hubs
- 42 • Community-run services
- 43 • Co-production
- 44 • Facilitation
- 45 • Volunteering

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52 Thematic coding as a methodology for document analysis required a combination of nuanced  
53 reading and strong definitions. Coding therefore followed the following definitions for terms  
54 deemed ambiguous, providing a clear focus for analysis. These definitions are described in  
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57 Table 2:  
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<i>Value</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<i>Active Citizens</i>	Citizens actively involved with their community; not necessarily ‘Participation’
<i>Civic Spirit</i>	‘concerned with the welfare of the community as a whole’ (OED, 2021); carries a sense of emotion and locality
<i>Capacity</i>	‘the range of resources people have—knowledge about their area of common interest, skills and idea, shared experiences, and material resources’ (Scottish Community Development Centre, 2021)
<i>Community Development</i>	Development of the community defined, led and practiced by the community (See note below)
<i>Consensus</i>	‘a substructure which supports and enables the disagreement and conflict ... that on virtually every issue there are shared values, meanings and goals that can be appealed to’ (Frazer, 1999, 41)
<i>Entrepreneurs</i>	Referring to both individual entrepreneurs and an entrepreneurial attitude; towards ‘innovate models’
<i>Mutuality</i>	‘the quality or state of being mutual; the sharing of or in an emotion, desire, aim, etc.; fellow feeling, community, interdependence’ (OED, 2021)
<i>Participation</i>	Participation in community development: <i>not</i> participation in a public library service, e.g. digital literacy classes, but participation in the <i>running</i> of classes, e.g. volunteering, community groups, service co-production
<i>Social Capital</i>	‘the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively’ (Lexico, 2021)

Table 2: Definitions of Terms in Communitarian Framework

The definition of community development offers an example of the ambiguity of coding. For the purposes of this study, community development denotes development defined and led by

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2  
3 the community, following a global history of community development literature and the  
4 specific philosophical foundations of communitarianism. The use of the term ‘community  
5 development’ utilised throughout the corpus, however, was often ambiguous. Community  
6 development could refer to development led by community action and augmented or facilitated  
7 by public services, or it could be used as a term to denote the development of a community by  
8 a state-driven service, e.g. higher literacy levels developed through public library usage. These  
9 two definitions—between community-driven development and development of a community  
10 by public services—are critically different. It was therefore decided to only code the former  
11 definition of community development. This decision was made in the aim to explore  
12 specifically the communitarian manifestations of library trust strategy rather than the way  
13 library trust strategy identifies their benefits, and because coding conflicting definitions under  
14 the same code would lead to less precise results.

### 24 *Describing the Corpus*

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27 The research project investigated whether communitarianism informed Scottish public library  
28 trust strategy through the document analysis. This project therefore necessitated an expansive  
29 document identification process to form a cohesive corpus of documents. The project gathered  
30 documentation for analysis through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, following data  
31 gathering methods from a large range of LIS research (See: Brown & McMenemy, 2013;  
32 Daniel, Hartnett & Meadows, 2017; MacDonald & McMenemy, 2012; Moles, 2021). These  
33 FOI requests consisted of a single request to each council for any key documentation regarding  
34 the proposal, organisation and delivery of public library trusts and garnered documents  
35 including business cases, business proposals and minutes. Trust websites were also explored  
36 for publicly available trust or public-library-specific publications including annual reports,  
37 strategic frameworks and value statements. A total of 109 documents were sourced; out of these  
38 109 items, 49 documents were identified as relevant. Irrelevant items included council minutes  
39 with purely administrative information, or documents detailing financial or employment  
40 transfer procedure information.

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42  
43 The corpus contained documents from 2006 to 2021 and from ten out of eleven Scottish  
44 councils currently running public libraries through Trusts. These councils were represented to  
45 varying degrees depending on what documentation was available through FOI request of  
46 website review. No relevant documentation was available for High Life Highland, the culture  
47 and sport trust for the Highlands Council. The documents ranged in type from business case to  
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annual report, business plan, delivery plan, strategic vision, feasibility report, and values documents.

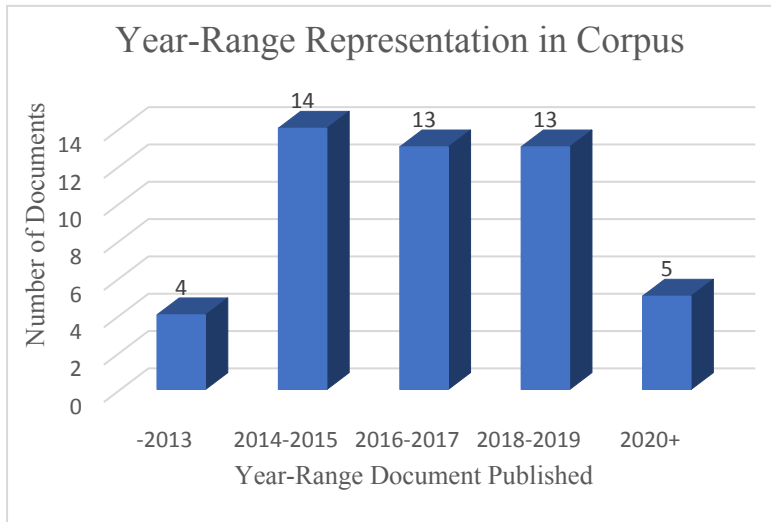


Figure 1 - Year-Range Representation in Corpus

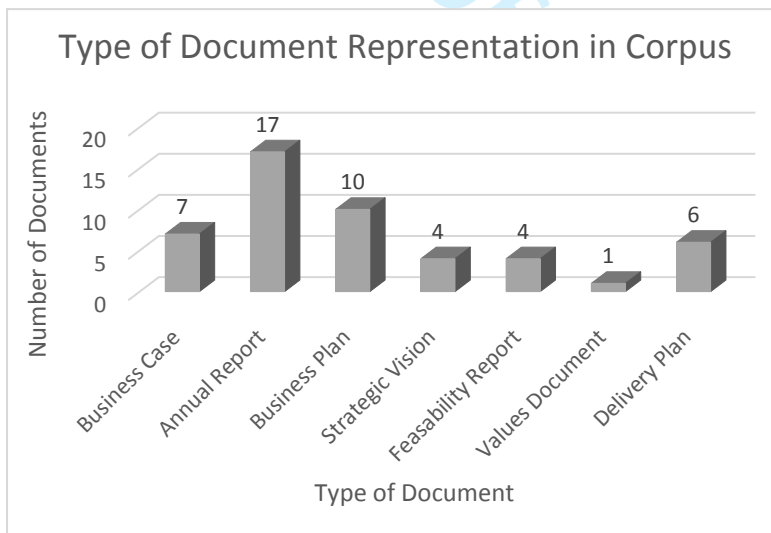


Figure 2 - Type of Document Representation in Corpus

The corpus contained limitations. This research cannot be used to compare communitarianism between Scottish councils or across years, as not every council or year is represented equally. Likewise, types of document may skew towards a different kind of discourse and therefore a different kind of information, so that councils or years in which certain types of documents are more prevalent may create different representations of their use of communitarian values or practices. The research therefore focuses on highlighting tendencies within the entire body of the corpus, rather than drawing comparisons. Furthermore, this is a corpus of documents

representing Scottish policy, and therefore cannot be simply extrapolated to any other public library system.

### Exploring the Corpus

The examined corpus indicated that Scottish public library trusts employed a range of communitarian values. The graph below describes the appearance and distribution of values:

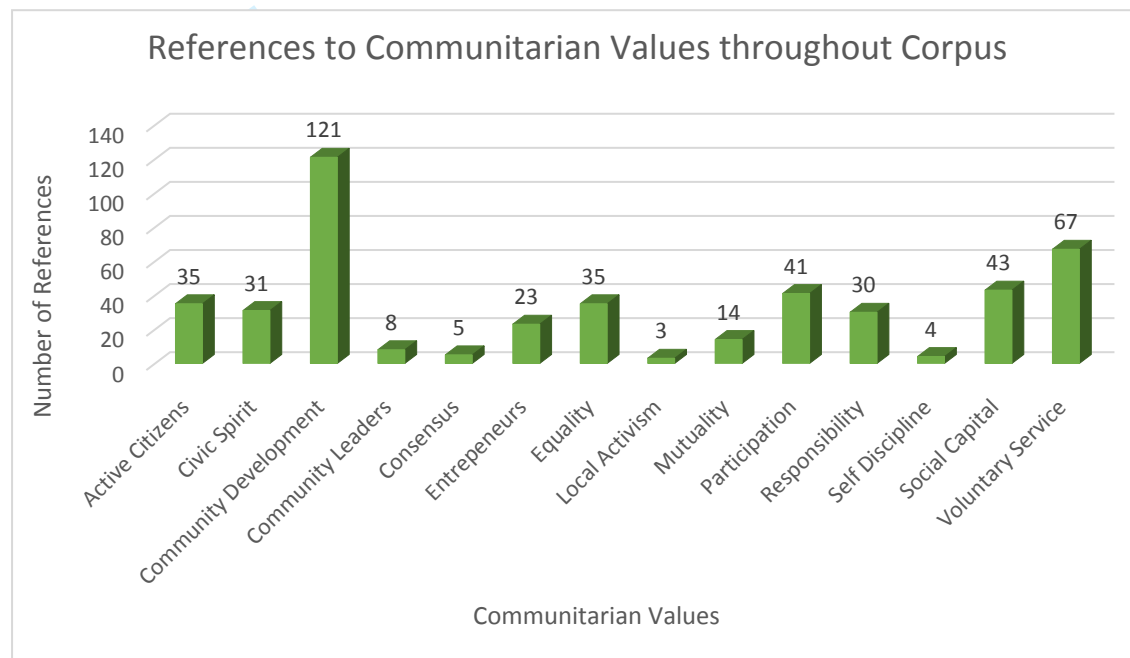


Figure 3 – References to Communitarian Values throughout Corpus

The next section will explore the dispersion of communitarian values throughout the corpus and examine the nature of their implementation, identifying precisely how these values inform a communitarian foundation. It will also evaluate neglected values, exploring how the absence of certain themes contributes to specific manifestation of this communitarianism.

#### *Community Development*

The research revealed how heavily Scottish public library trusts integrate community development within their service strategy. Out of 53 documents, 38 referred to community development practices, with 120 references throughout the corpus. Falkirk Council figured the shift to community development as a new ‘approach’ to service delivery. This shift involved “an approach to engaging communities; bringing people together to develop and deliver a common agenda – to improve the area – and taking charge in creating the future against a backcloth of uncertainty and challenge” (Falkirk Council, 2010, p.6).

The community creates a ‘common agenda’ for what service provision should look like, building public library services towards a community’s specific communal needs and therefore reflecting a communitarian perspective on public service value. Distinct communitarian values sustain this community development; the quotation invokes solidarity (‘bringing people together’), a common good (‘creating the future’) and responsibility (‘taking charge’). These invocations represent specific virtues which the trust expects to emerge from a community, reflecting again a communitarian approach to communal virtues in contrast to a neoliberal rejection of universal positive values.

Analysis of the practical implementations of community development in the corpus revealed six distinct community development themes of varying reference frequencies. These were: community-run services, capacity building, community hubs, co-production, facilitating, and volunteering. Crucially, the discourse surrounding these practices grounded them in a philosophically communitarian perspective.

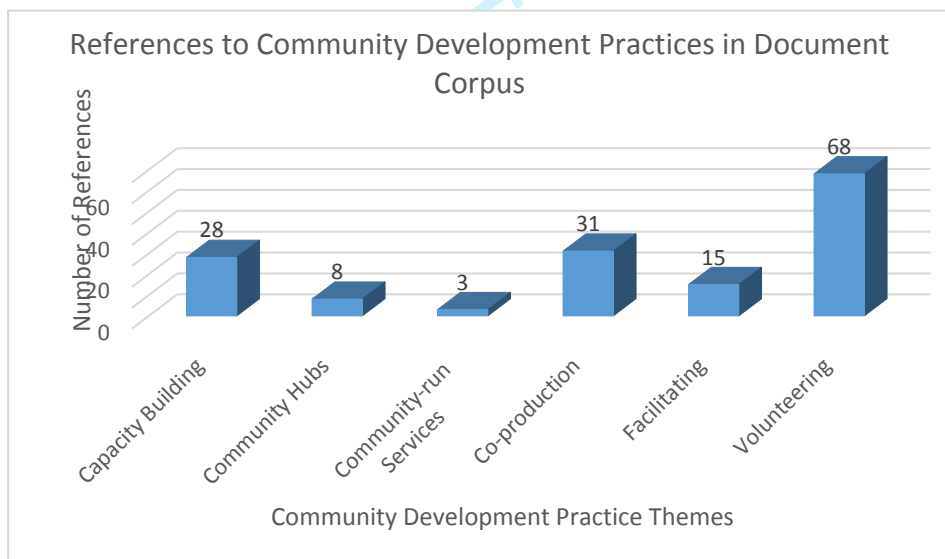


Figure 4 - References to Community Development Practices in Document Corpus

**Community-run services**, the complete management and delivery of services by the community, is a common concept within community development literature, but the practice theme was rarely acknowledged in the corpus. Falkirk Community Trust signified such a shift, gesturing towards, “Facilities that could be managed in partnership with community groups with a view to considering transferring them in part or whole over time” (Falkirk Community Trust, 2016, p.3)

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3 Trusts more frequently referenced practices of **co-production, facilitation and capacity**  
4 **building**. Perth & Kinross explicitly connected community development themes with the co-  
5 production of services:  
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9 Further embedding the voices of customers and communities in the planning and  
10 delivery of services. We will do this by developing a range of engagement opportunities  
11 to include open conversations, focus groups, community co-production projects and the  
12 further development of our champions' volunteers. (Culture Perth and Kinross, 2019,  
13 p.3)  
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18 These co-production projects instilled the particularity of community needs and visions into  
19 service delivery, again emphasising the priority of communal specificity. Capacity building  
20 and facilitating evoked a more distanced, fostering role for public libraries, which worked to  
21 cultivate a resilient community's own sustainable practices. Falkirk Council explicitly aligned  
22 their community capacity building measures with a wider community development shift:  
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27 Community capacity building is a coordinated process of deliberate interventions to  
28 improve individual's skills, knowledge and understanding, develop confidence,  
29 improve organisational procedures, and strengthen community organisations.  
30 Community capacity building refers to the investment in people, community  
31 organisations and practices that will enable communities to achieve their aims. (Falkirk  
32 Council, 2010, p.20).  
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38 Capacity building allows communities to manifest 'their aims', organising service delivery  
39 towards the specific, autonomous desires of communities. Facilitation practices continued this  
40 process, where public libraries took on the role of translating a community's capacity towards  
41 practical autonomy: "a transformational shift from managing to facilitating, helping and  
42 supporting others" (Falkirk Community Trust, 2016)  
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48 Instead of managing others in a hierarchical structure, a facilitating role supports communities  
49 to realise a position of local autonomy and orient services towards their particularity. The  
50 analysis therefore highlights how Scottish public library trusts consider, through their  
51 community development practices, the cultivation and expression of an autonomous  
52 community as part of their role, and in doing so prioritise a communitarian philosophy.  
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57 **Community hubs** also emerged as a unique community development strategy geared towards  
58 the unique opportunities inherent to public libraries. Community development occurred  
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3 through this orientation by allowing community organisations to utilise libraries for their  
4 development practices:  
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7         The vision for libraries is that they will act as community hubs or focal points. They  
8 are accessible and inclusive community spaces, contributing to personal and  
9 community development through both direct delivery and partnerships. They support  
10 literacy, learning and creativity (East Renfrewshire Council, 2014)  
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15 Building on the relationship which a public library has with its community, the concept of  
16 public libraries as community hubs broadens the ability of community organisations to use  
17 public libraries to extend their own community development processes. So, for example,  
18 MacMillan, the community-based and volunteer-run cancer information and support service,  
19 utilised Glasgow public libraries as physical spaces to offer consultations with the community.  
20 Other references to public libraries as hubs offered the space as a meeting room for community  
21 organisations. The sense of ‘accessible and inclusive’ is particularly important: the practice  
22 extends from the materiality of the public library as a space which the community already  
23 connects not only with service-specific themes of ‘literacy, learning, and creativity’, but also  
24 with more general foundations of locality and communality. In this way, public libraries as  
25 community hubs build community development practices, and their benefits, from the inherent  
26 benefits of community. That is, they utilise the benefits of communality which foregrounds  
27 communitarian thinking—e.g., inclusivity, trust, local knowledge, local bonds—as a  
28 foundation on which to build strong public services. They are communitarian practices, but  
29 they also attest to the possible strengths of communitarianism itself as a guide for public library  
30 strategy.  
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43 The most heavily referenced community development practice throughout the corpus was  
44 **voluntary service**. Two themes emerged describing how voluntary service informed public  
45 library strategy: as individual benefit, and as a locus for community connection. Trusts  
46 described volunteering roles as opportunities for personal development: for example, as  
47 ‘lifelong learning opportunities’ (AngusAlive, 2019, p.22) or to ‘develop skills and confidence  
48 of volunteers’ (LiveArgyll, 2018, p.17). This individual benefit often emerged from the  
49 community-grounded focus of volunteering, whereby a volunteering role helped individuals  
50 with ‘learning what it’s like to be involved with the community’ (Glasgow Life, 2015, p.32).  
51 The practice therefore revealed a deeply communitarian approach, wherein volunteering  
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3 improves the mental and physical life of the individual by connecting them with their  
4 community, thereby attesting to the necessity of a communitarian metaphysical approach.  
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7 Volunteering also represented the cultivation of community connection. For Glasgow Life,  
8 volunteering “will help build a sense of community belonging and participation, and support  
9 shared experiences and understanding between the city’s differing communities” (2015, p.27).  
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13 Through the material bonds created by volunteering, the practice built that community spirit  
14 valued by a communitarian perspective. Furthermore, this communal connection created  
15 positive benefits for public library services, such as “targeted opportunities supporting the  
16 mental health and economic wellbeing of traditionally more excluded audiences” (Glasgow  
17 Life, 2021, p.23).  
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22 Again, the practice reflected the benefits of communitarianism as well as following its value  
23 systems. Elsewhere, volunteering became a step in the path towards community development.  
24 Culture Perth and Kinross, for example, included advocacy of the voluntary sector in their bid  
25 to ‘advance citizenship and/or community development’ (2019, p.6), whereas Falkirk  
26 Community Trust’s community co-production plans aimed “to grow and identify volunteer  
27 capacity to take on some responsibilities right through to organisational and governance  
28 capacity to take on potential asset transfer” (2016, p.9).  
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35 Volunteers therefore played a large role in the community orientation of Scottish public library  
36 trust strategy. This role is practical, in the sense of volunteers simply delivering services, but it  
37 is also rhetorical, whereby volunteers, through the community-bound relationships they foster,  
38 become another facet of a thematic shift towards a communitarian public library services.  
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#### 42 *Communitarian Values*

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45 Communitarian values upheld these community development practices, as well as public  
46 library services more generally. The invocation of these values highlighted how Trust strategy  
47 prioritised the community as both an end and as a means, as value and as function, of public  
48 service strategy, firmly embedding communitarianism within public library discourse.  
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53 **Active citizenship** themes repeatedly emerged in the corpus. Falkirk Council defines part of  
54 its Trust strategy as, “Strengthening communities, reducing social exclusion and increasing  
55 active citizenship through developing lifelong learning, youth learning and community  
56 capacity building” (Falkirk Council, 2010, p.vi).  
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3 Active citizenship is figured as a benefit of community development alongside strong  
4 communities and social inclusion. The rhetoric therefore reflects a communitarian  
5 philosophical foundation through this figure of active community members as a positive value  
6 of public library service strategy. This example also describes how communitarian discourse  
7 builds a relationship between values and practice within service strategy. Community  
8 development practices—education, capacity building—gain their value through their ability to  
9 form active citizens engaged within strong communities; active citizenship is, in turn,  
10 strengthened through those community development practices. Practice and value reciprocally  
11 stabilize one another, tied together by the communitarian foundation of a strong, engaged  
12 community as an ideal result of public library strategy.

21 References to **civic spirit** also emphasised the value of community. They include invocations  
22 of ‘community cohesion’ (Falkirk, 2016, p.10), ‘community culture’ (Perth & Kinross, 2019),  
23 ‘a sense of place’ (Glasgow Life, 2014, p.55). Glasgow Life connected civic spirit to  
24 community development practices, so that “encouraging more volunteering amongst residents  
25 and workers in cultural activities in the city and the city fringes will help build a sense of  
26 community belonging and participation, and support shared experiences and understanding  
27 between the city’s differing communities” (Glasgow Life, 2015, p.27).

33 Volunteering is valued because of the civic spirit it instils within and between communities.  
34 Again, community emerges as the mechanism and the benefit of community development  
35 practices. Civic spirit also oriented public library service delivery itself. East Renfrewshire  
36 Culture and Leisure attested that “we care passionately about our mutual success, and are  
37 motivated to grow and develop by being part of a flourishing community” (2016, p.15) ‘A  
38 flourishing community’ is here positioned not simply as a product of services, but as a catalyst  
39 for service delivery excellence: civic spirit inspires strong services, as well as resulting in  
40 strong communities. The priority of civic spirit is therefore interwoven through discourse,  
41 positioning strong communities as an essential ingredient for the development of public  
42 libraries and therefore embedding the importance of community within the value-formation of  
43 service delivery approaches. The discourse of civic spirit displays the extent to which this  
44 communitarian strategy direction prioritises community as both value and mechanism.

55 Councils frequently referred to the maintenance of a **common good**. East Ayrshire Leisure, for  
56 example, declare the ambition to “deliver inclusive, sustainable and accessible services to  
57 enable our communities and visitors to live their best life” (East Ayrshire leisure, 2020, p.3).

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3 The notion of enabling an ambiguous ‘best life’ is not necessarily communitarian in theme; it  
4 aligns neatly with liberal notions of individual choice and autonomy. Depictions of the  
5 common good, however, were often related to community cohesion. Leisure & Culture  
6 Dundee, for example sought to ‘contribute to social wellbeing, tackling social isolation,  
7 inequality, disadvantage, fractured communities and ill health’ (2017, p.3), where this  
8 ‘wellbeing’ is dependent on reconnecting strong, equal communities, and therefore contain a  
9 communitarian understanding of the individual as an essentially communal being. This  
10 connection between common good and community extended to community development,  
11 where East Renfrewshire Culture & Leisure sought, “an East Renfrewshire where sport, art and  
12 cultural community participation is a way of life for everyone; where it is at the heart of our  
13 communities and makes a positive impact on everyone’s lives” (East Renfrewshire Culture and  
14 Leisure, 2016, p.286).

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17 Public library trust strategies therefore emphasised the communitarian value of common good  
18 and connected it explicitly to a communal being within community engagement.

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21 Service strategies similarly emphasised **equality**. Inclusion and accessibility stood at the heart  
22 of delivery approaches: “This ambition has led us to examine our approach in a number of key  
23 areas such as equalities, diversity and inclusion as we seek to create opportunities for all to  
24 engage with and participate in our wide range of services” (AngusAlive, 2017, p.22).

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27 The emphasis of equality connects notions of common good and participation to a democratic  
28 position. It exhibits a communitarian strategy explicit in its desire to represent the entirety of  
29 that community.

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32 Public library trust strategy repeatedly advocated for **entrepreneurial** approaches to service  
33 delivery. This referred to commercially orientated entrepreneurialism, for example: “We will  
34 be a trusted and valued organisation, secure in our role as a leader for culture and sport and  
35 with diminishing reliance on Council funding; we will be more flexible, entrepreneurial and  
36 commercially minded” (Falkirk Community Trust, 2018, p.24). But the documents also  
37 combined the role of the entrepreneur with communitarian service approaches. The shift to  
38 community-based service structures of co-production and community partnerships required an  
39 ‘innovative’ approach for ‘working smarter’:  
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3 To work collaboratively with key partners and stakeholders in the development of  
4 programmes and activities whilst exploring innovative delivery models which ensure  
5 best value for our customers (East Ayrshire Leisure, 2020, p.23)  
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9 To be an effective contributor we need to be involved in genuine partnerships that move  
10 from planning together to working smarter together. With fewer resources, this is the  
11 step change [sic] needed to make a positive impact for communities. (Falkirk  
12 Community Trust, 2019, p.7).  
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16 Trusts therefore aligned a community-based service approach with a spirit of market  
17 entrepreneurialism.  
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21 **Participation** was a significantly large theme throughout the corpus. Functionally,  
22 participation practices included the voluntary sector, community groups, co-planning and  
23 community-run services. But these practical experiences also carried rhetorical value. Glasgow  
24 City Council’s initial case for a Trust, for example, emphasised “the continued development of  
25 pathways to participation within a strengthening area infrastructure ensuring a clear interface  
26 with locally based organisations and community planning partners” (McConnell, 2006, p.2).  
27 Angus Alive described their reasoning for a prioritised participation, “Communities lie at the  
28 heart of community planning: they can and do achieve things for themselves, and we need to  
29 build on this and increase the level of influence and control that local people have over the  
30 decisions and services that have an impact on their lives” (Angus Alive, 2018, p.70).  
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39 Both calls for participation placed communitarianism at the heart of a shift in public library  
40 service delivery, where a strong community guides the service towards its own needs.  
41 Participation was also connected with the common good, wherein “increasing participation in  
42 community-led cultural projects and initiatives, including the Living Communities model, and  
43 by growing volunteer numbers” (Creative Perth & Kinross, 2016, p.5) fulfilled Creative Perth  
44 & Kinross’ strategic aim of inspiring and informing communities. Participation again  
45 represents both a communitarian service practice, where community autonomy foregrounds  
46 service delivery, and a communitarian value-proposition, where participation is valued because  
47 it connects the individual with their community.  
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55 References to **social capital** reiterated the importance of community. Trust strategies  
56 emphasised the profit of community relationships—with community organisations, charities,  
57 community groups, volunteers, individuals—to service delivery. For example: “We recognise  
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3 through seeking mutually beneficial partnerships we can each make an important contribution  
4 to delivering a shared vision that will have a positive impact upon the lives of local residents”  
5 (East Ayrshire Leisure, 2020b, p.16). The reference to social capital represents the  
6 communitarian ‘shared vision’ which emerges from these partnerships rather than the vision of  
7 a distant, disconnected management system, where the particular texture of services which  
8 emerged from community relationships, the social capital of these bonds, were aligned with a  
9 particular communitarian ‘positive impact’. References emphasised the communal common  
10 good which emerges from social capital: of ‘social engagement, community interaction’ (East  
11 Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure, 2016), or “a sense of community belonging and  
12 participation, and support shared experiences and understanding between the city’s different  
13 communities” (Glasgow Life, 2015, p.34). The benefits of social capital emerge reciprocally  
14 with the creation of cohesive community. Social capital represented, once more, a relationship  
15 between the function and the value of the communitarian public library strategy shifts: they  
16 produce, through communal partnerships, strong community-directed services, which in turn  
17 build towards the ideal of cohesive community which informs those partnerships.  
18 Communitarianism is, through social capital, reciprocally woven through public library  
19 strategy discourse.

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33 These values of participation, social capital and active citizenship—inscribed through  
34 discourse as integral values for creating a strong community and therefore service excellence—  
35 emerged alongside the theme of **responsibility**. Innovative shifts to communitarian service  
36 strategy carried the notion of a community which is responsible for maintaining its services,  
37 from the desire, “to advance citizenship and/or community development (which may include  
38 the promotion of civic responsibility, volunteering, the voluntary sector and/or the  
39 effectiveness or efficiency of charities)” (Culture Perth & Kinross, 2019, p.6) which connected  
40 community development and responsibility, towards hints of a martial “call to action ... to play  
41 a greater role in the delivery and management of local services, buildings and facilities”  
42 (Glasgow Life, 2020, p.9).

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51 The starkest of these calls came from Falkirk Community Trust, which stated that “the future  
52 would require a shift ‘from entitlement to community responsibility’” (2016, p.3). The priority  
53 of community development—practiced through participation, sown through civic spirit—was  
54 figured as a shift away from an ‘entitlement’ to services. The term is critical. If, for example,  
55 communitarianism practice is based on nurturing ‘a shared vision’ between organisations and  
56 communities, to what extent does the community’s vision contain the belief that they should

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3 not be entitled to public library services and should instead assume responsibility for them? If  
4 this shared vision is limited, how does the value of responsibility align with other  
5 communitarian values of consensus and mutuality? Furthermore, and aligning with Glasgow  
6 Life's 'call to action', this responsibility was connected to financial difficulties, figuring  
7 community responsibility as a necessity 'against a backcloth of uncertainty and challenge',  
8 towards the 'destiny' of public library services (Falkirk Council, 2010, 6, p.15). The value of  
9 responsibility, pulled together with concepts of entitlement, civic spirit, and the foundations of  
10 community development itself, became, in places, a form of stipulation towards the continued  
11 existence of public library services. It signified a contradiction between consensus and  
12 responsibility which lay at the heart of these communitarian service strategies.  
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### 20 21 *Neglected Values*

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23 Although documents in the corpus referenced a range of communitarian values, some values  
24 were neglected: community leaders, consensus, local activism, mutuality, and self-discipline.  
25 Some of these absences reveal critical gaps in the structure of communitarianism formed by  
26 strategy discourse. **Community leaders** emerged infrequently, and when referenced tended  
27 towards obscure descriptions. East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure placed 'volunteering and  
28 leadership' in their community innovation aims but offered no detail on what this would look  
29 like (2016, p.20). Meanwhile, Falkirk Community Council figured the trust itself as a  
30 community leader, in a similar role to facilitation practices, and envisioned building leadership  
31 development within its community: "the Trust as lead body on culture and sport to focus on  
32 developing core services and growing its leadership and community development capacity"  
33 (2016, p.5). Again, no detail of such leadership building accompanied this reference. The  
34 relative absence of community leaders as a communitarian focus is critical for analysing  
35 Scottish public library strategy in relation to communitarian practice literature, where Sen  
36 identified the role of leaders as a crucial facet of successful community-based service practice  
37 (2014).  
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50 The relative neglect of **consensus** and **mutuality** raised concerns beyond practical  
51 implementation issues. When referenced, consensus related to values which the whole  
52 community agreed upon, where 'what the community values most will drive all programmes  
53 and services' (Falkirk Community Trust, 2016, p.4). Mutuality was suggested implicitly in  
54 terms such as 'genuine community partnerships' (Falkirk Community Trust, 2019, p.2), or  
55 explicitly, for example: "We recognise through seeking mutually beneficial partnerships we  
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3 can each make an important contribution to delivering a shared vision that will have a positive  
4 impact upon the lives of local residents” (East Ayrshire Leisure, 2020, p.16).  
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7 They emphasised, therefore, that the relationships from which community development emerge  
8 must be reciprocal to function. But the foundational importance of this concept of mutuality,  
9 and similarly consensus, highlighted the criticality implicit to the relative neglect to these  
10 concepts. How is consensus reached? How is ‘what the community values most’ defined? Does  
11 such a consistent, equal, representative value exist, and to what extent is the discussion carried?  
12 What does a ‘mutually beneficial partnership’ look like? How are these relationships  
13 developed, and do the nature of these partnerships emerge from both parties? These questions  
14 were not examined in trust strategies and highlight a critical point within their discourse of  
15 communitarianism.  
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23 Analysis of communitarian values employed throughout the discourse therefore identified the  
24 following formulations of Scottish public library trust strategy:  
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- 27 1. the priority of community within Scottish public library trust strategy.
- 28 2. how discourse (re)presents this prioritised value of community reciprocally as value  
29 and function; and
- 30 3. the critical tension formed between the values of responsibility, consensus, and  
31 mutuality.  
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### 37 **Discussion: Towards a Communitarian Public Library Service Strategy?**

  
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39 This research has illustrated how communitarianism informs Scottish public library trust  
40 strategy. Documents in the corpus explicitly constructed an image of autonomous, specific  
41 communities with inherent values at the centre of public library services. They prioritised  
42 communal connection and the common good as defined by communities. This image was  
43 political: it emphasised the importance of active citizenship; it promoted and celebrated civic  
44 spirit. These communitarian foundations translated directly into community-led practices such  
45 as community development, co-production, and volunteering, which worked, in turn, to  
46 construct that very strong community with communal goals. Philosophy, political values, and  
47 practice reciprocally informed one another in the construction a communitarian service  
48 strategy.  
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57 Such a strategy shift brought unique benefits. Trust strategies repeatedly valorised, in their  
58 invocation of communitarian political values, service directions which strengthened social  
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3 inclusion, equality, a common good and the autonomy of community. These directives became  
4 not only important points of note, but naturalised and inarguable requirements under a  
5 philosophically communitarian value system. That is, the communitarian public library service  
6 strategy emerges from these foundational tenets; they define the structure of a service direction  
7 which holds community as its fundamental truth. Social inclusion, equality, common good, and  
8 communal autonomy were therefore deeply rigid benefits of a communitarian public library  
9 strategy.

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11 However, the research also identified points of tension within this image of communitarianism.  
12 The sharp focus on responsibility and the relative neglect of consensus and mutuality raised  
13 interwoven questions regarding community attitudes towards responsibility and what the  
14 construction of mutual bonds and genuine consensus look like in relation to community  
15 development. One critical question emerged: would communities agree with the renewed stress  
16 placed on personal and communal responsibility which accompanies a communitarian service  
17 shift? An acceptance of responsibility would necessarily accompany local, grassroots  
18 community development, borne strictly from the combined desires and actions of community  
19 members. The community-based service approaches exhibited here, however, do not emerge  
20 from the community, but from the top-down: they are service alterations suggested by  
21 management and not, as the research demonstrates, related to 'local activism' efforts. These  
22 questions are important because they open a critical problem within the communitarianism  
23 politic described here. If the community does not desire a shift towards communitarian public  
24 library strategies, the sustained invocation of communitarian values cannot, neither ethically  
25 or functionally, be named communitarian in spirit.

### 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 *The Re-Emergence of Neoliberalism*

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45 Neoliberal philosophical-political foundations re-emerge here through a range of critical  
46 strategy aspects revealed in the literature: citizen-consumers, the function of discourse and a  
47 harkening to neoliberal service trends. As discussed earlier, neoliberalism emphasises freedom  
48 of choice for the individual within a market-driven economy with minimal Government  
49 influence. In the relation between neoliberalism and public services, the literature presents the  
50 figure of the citizen-consumer: "the notion of a citizen as a consumer of public services who  
51 expects to exercise choice in the provision of public services, just as s/he exercises choice in  
52 the "consumer society"" (Clarke et al., 2007, p.1). The shift to *responsibilisation* exhibited  
53 through the corpus similarly transforms the function of community-based public services into  
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3 a choice for the citizen-consumer: does the individual want local, interconnected public library  
4 services; or, even, do they want functioning public library services at all, under the threat of  
5 severe budget constraints? If so, then they must become active citizens, participate, take on  
6 service responsibility.  
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10 The nature of this choice alters under the function of communitarian neoliberalism. Choice in  
11 overtly neoliberal citizen-consumer public library perspectives emerges in the transformation  
12 of public services into market-driven structures which reflect private sector machinations,  
13 encouraging 'customers' to engage with public libraries as it fits their needs as consumers.  
14 Here, however, community production complicates the path towards consumption. Public  
15 library strategies depend on communities to construct those functional public library services  
16 which they then utilise, altering the role of communities, and individuals within communities,  
17 within the market. They become not only citizen-consumers, but producers; suppliers. Such a  
18 role aligns with discussions of community development and responsabilisation (Hastings, et al.,  
19 2015), or with Fraser's analysis of neoliberalism and community development, wherein  
20 community producers learn, or gain capacity, through their instillation into neoliberal modes  
21 of managerialism (2018). This unique consolidation of citizen-consumer and production  
22 requires further analysis within a separate study of market roles, but what immediately stands  
23 out is how such a neoliberal-communitarian proposition embeds the community, and the  
24 individual, only further, and with more complex implications, into market politics.  
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37 Crucially, the neoliberal condition of choice foregrounding communitarian politics emerges  
38 alongside the technocratic function of discourse. For Davies, discourse is one of those  
39 'technical artefacts that might be relied upon to preserve liberal ideas' (2012, p.770).  
40 Professional, technocratic language tends readers towards 'intuitive' acceptance of certain  
41 ideological values (Harvey, 2005; Basu, 2004); it propagates through binary linguistic  
42 oppositions, marking 'common-sense' ideological directions (Clarke, 2007). The tight value-  
43 presentation of community represented in the documents represents, in this light, not simply a  
44 communitarian philosophical and political belief system, but the constricting function of  
45 discourse. The research identified repeatedly an interwoven value-function relationship  
46 exhibited by strategy discourse: the value of community informed the function of community-  
47 based service practices, and vice-versa. Active citizenship, for example, offered the benefit of  
48 community bonds, which in turn incentivised the advocacy of active citizenship. So, the value  
49 of community, in this formulation, becomes a cog around which certain implicit choices  
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3 revolve, from which it is impossible to untangle genuine, unambiguous vindications of  
4 communal bonds and the implicit construction of community development as coercive choice.  
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7 Appeals, within public library trust strategy, to develop the communality of communities—  
8 improving social inclusion, personal improvement, and the bonds between different groups  
9 within communities—could reflect a straightforward communitarian attitude towards society.  
10 Such appeals would emerge in certain open questions: if the community values participation,  
11 how could we seek to integrate that participation within public library services? If communal  
12 bonds are essential to the common good, how can public library services nurture those bonds?  
13 If the community requires a sense of civic spirit, how can we celebrate that within our public  
14 libraries? Indeed, many examples throughout the documents precisely reflect such ruminations.  
15 The community hub model maintains valued public library services while helping to integrate  
16 lateral community development efforts. Volunteering can stand as a way for individuals to get  
17 involved in community work for those who desire it and thus develop both themselves and the  
18 community.  
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29 This positive position only alters when discourse ties community-driven values unilaterally to  
30 certain choices within certain service approaches. If the open questions above represent  
31 genuine communitarian sentiments, the neoliberal approaches identified here arguably  
32 transform them into binary choices, where the answer—standardised implementation of  
33 community responsibility—is already decided and the values become pathways into  
34 manifesting that goal.  
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39 Critically, the re-emergence of the neoliberal citizen-consumer within the technocratic function  
40 of discourse under a communitarian veil accompanies multiple neoliberal political processes  
41 which emerge from these public library strategies, including standardisation, differentiation,  
42 deprofessionalism, and managerialism. Standardisation marks a ‘one-size-fits-all’ foundational  
43 approach to service delivery which emphasises equity and equality, while differentiation  
44 emphasises tailoring to specific needs of individual consumers (Needham, 2007). In this  
45 context, the universal implementation of local, community-based service practices emerges,  
46 oxymoronicly, as a process of public service standardisation; one which grows not from  
47 community desires, but from a neoliberal public service politic. Simultaneously, the  
48 communitarian model naturally accommodates differentiation towards the specific market  
49 requirements of communities. Needham also identifies deprofessionalism and managerialism  
50 trends along the same line of consumerism, where a neoliberal perspective on public services  
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3 no longer relies upon archaic and hegemonic professional attitudes to provide services in the  
4 form which best suits citizen-consumers need (2007). Managerial, entrepreneurial attitudes  
5 instead siphon services more skilfully towards this customer base. The emphasis on community  
6 co-production, or the voluntary sector, for public library work, alongside an entrepreneurial  
7 approach to services, marks a capitulation to deprofessionalisation in public library workforces,  
8 which replaces professionals with entrepreneurial community members. Meanwhile, the top-  
9 down implementation of community-based public library services themselves represents, again  
10 oxymoronically, a symptom of managerialism which trumps the service desires of both  
11 community and professionals.  
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Communitarian Scottish public library trust service strategy therefore could arguably refract  
neoliberal foundations and the maintenance of a public service status quo. The situation could  
mirror the neocommunitarianism articulated by Davies, wherein, “neoliberal problems and  
solutions have not gone away: regulators and policy makers still need to set the conditions of  
choice and competition, bureaucrats and professionals will continue to be subject to rationalist  
audits, neoclassical economics remains a dominant tool for modelling the future ...  
[neocommunitarian] “nudging” and behavioural interventions aims to teach and encourage  
people *how* to behave in a more rational, coherent fashion so as to enable the *survival* of  
neoliberalism” (2012, p.775).

If trusts seek to create a communitarian public service strategy through communitarian politics,  
then, a strong communitarianism must emerge from the strong coalescence of communal  
values: mutuality, consensus, trust. However, where relationships are not reciprocal but  
coercive, not chosen locally by the community but universally implemented upon them, and  
directed by neoliberal discourse, then these key elements of trust and mutuality falter. And a  
communitarian strategy which emerges from such faltering roots already lacks, according to  
its own logic, the critical foundations which would crystallise a successful communitarian  
spirit. A communitarian public library service strategy which rises from neoliberal roots is not  
only questionably communitarian, but also always already weakened by the ramifications of  
its own model.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored the extent to which the philosophy of communitarianism has informed  
Scottish public library trust strategy. The findings reveal how strategy document discourse  
expressed a communitarian ethic based upon nurturing a distinct, autonomous community,



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3 structured through communitarian political values, and practiced through emergent  
4 community-based service strategies. The priorities of social inclusion, equality and common  
5 good emerged as powerful, positive political values which accompanied a communitarian  
6 strategy.  
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10 The form of communitarianism established by trust strategy contained, however, structural  
11 contradictions. The research highlighted the relationship between communitarian  
12 developments and neoliberal foundations. It identified how discourse wove communitarian  
13 values into a binary choice which represented not the open construction of a communal value  
14 system, but a universal service approach implemented from the top-down, directed towards  
15 community responsibility as a market role.  
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21 The research therefore illuminated distinct recommendations for public library service strategy.  
22 The documentation emphasised the benefits wrought by a communitarian public library service  
23 approach, reinstating a communal connection to citizenship disavowed by liberal perspectives.  
24 However, this approach requires the rigid adherence to critical values. The relationship  
25 between neoliberalism and communitarianism emerges from the reduction of community  
26 action to a binary choice which instils a market-propelling action from individuals; it emerges  
27 from the constriction of discourse towards a goal decided by management in a manner which  
28 reduces trust and endangers the practice as a whole. Public library service strategies which seek  
29 to crystallise the benefits of communitarianism through community-based practices and  
30 communitarian politics must therefore enshrine those critical values of mutuality and consensus  
31 from the community upwards. Responsibility, although necessary to a communitarian politic,  
32 must co-exist with mutual understandings to realise the common goal of a connected, caring,  
33 civically engaged community. The strategy necessities identified by this research open the  
34 gates to a stronger community-based public service which aligns with the logics of its  
35 philosophical foundation.  
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#### 48 *Research Limitations and Future Directions*

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50 The spread of documents and councils investigated limited the conclusions available from the  
51 research. The corpus did not represent all Scottish council trusts equally, and the analysis did  
52 not quote them equally, therefore the research conclusions are not necessarily applicable to all  
53 trusts under examination. This analysis instead, therefore, acts as an identification of possible  
54 community-based service routes; a rubric against which to judge communitarian public library  
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3 approaches. Further research could focus the spread of strategies examined, to differentiate  
4 varying practices.  
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7 The level of detail available from documentation also limited the applicability of these  
8 conclusions. This project focused on strategy as described in documentation; day-to-day  
9 service delivery may vary drastically from the generalised discourse observed in documents.  
10 The complexity of human behaviour in delivery opens possibilities of transformation,  
11 resistance, and subversion of management directions. An understanding of communitarianism  
12 and public libraries requires a more detailed engagement with this human level of delivery  
13 through practical research. Likewise, the current study was also unable to explore  
14 communitarian service practices in detail; the specific organisation of practices—co-  
15 production, capacity-building, facilitation, volunteering, and participation more generally—  
16 require deeper analysis through practical research.  
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25 The research identified further lateral opportunities for future study. The role of the community  
26 as producer and consumer within a communitarian-neoliberal market requires critical analysis  
27 within a paradigm of market roles. What does it mean for the community to become another  
28 system within a capital-driven service model? How does this alter our understanding of the  
29 nature of community; what substantive form does the community take within a machinated  
30 market function? Is it successful; does the role as service producer indeed inculcate a cohesive  
31 community model?  
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38 More generally, the research highlighted the need for further investigation of public libraries  
39 run by trusts. Not enough literature explores the nature of trusts: how their unique funding  
40 proposition functions, the tenability of their sustained existence, their role within the market,  
41 or the ramifications of public libraries as charitable organisations disconnected from councils.  
42 This study's novel communitarian focus reduced its ability to focus on the broad range of  
43 alterations which trusts place upon public library strategy, but it identified the need for further  
44 research.  
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