

Hyperlocal Government Engagement online

Final report to CCN+

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1 Executive Summary

This report presents a seed research project funded by the CCN+, that investigated digital engagement by three neighbouring Scottish Community Councils (CCs) in a distinct area of a Scottish city. Recent work had shown that CCs generally do not use the internet well to engage with their citizens, despite being required to find and deliver citizens' views to Local Authorities. In fact, over half had no observable internet presence, while a large proportion of CCs that earlier had informative internet presences no longer do so. Therefore there is a pressing need to learn how CCs' internet use can be strengthened so that CCs can live up to their requirements.

This project researched whether the Community of Practice model could be used to understand relationships between CC members involved in digital engagement work, and to find techniques to improve practices. Interviews with CC members investigated how knowledge was and could be managed and the digital tools desired for digital engagement work. Action research was used to follow and support a CC beginning to use Twitter as a dissemination and engagement channel, to understand whether it could sustainably generate social capital despite CCs' low budgets and voluntary nature.

A Community of Practice was found supporting the digital engagement practitioners in the neighbouring CCs, and that this is situated within a context of interested non-practitioners who share knowledge with practitioners. However, the Community of Practice is fragile, and knowledge management is conspicuously absent. Knowledge management is also not used other CCs that have fuller suites of digital engagement channels. The action research strand showed that active use of Twitter can increase engagement with citizens, and that collaboration brings unexpected rewards.

This project investigated only one digital initiative set within one small Community of Practice. It is proposed to continue this work by investigating CCs' digital communication across Scotland – and similar organisations in other context – starting with bringing together CC members involved in digital engagement work from across Scotland, understanding the barriers they face and the solutions they have found, and starting to build relationships that can help share good practices.

2 Aims and Objectives

2.1 Impetus for this project

Surveys of CCs internet use in 2012 and 2014 showed that CCs in general do not use the internet effectively (Cruikshank, Ryan, & Smith, 2014; Ryan & Cruickshank, 2012). The surveys showed that there had been no improvement in CC internet use between 2012 and 2014, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: CC online presence data

SURVEY YEAR	DOES NOT EXIST	EXISTS, NOT ONLINE	ONLINE, OUT OF DATE	ONLINE, UP TO DATE ¹
2012	222 (16%)	490 (36%)	349 (25%)	308 (22%)
2014	211 (15%)	503 (37%)	348 (25%)	307 (22%)

Most CC internet presences are websites designed to inform citizens – only 111 ‘up to date’ CCs use Facebook and/or Twitter and so have channels for online 2-way engagement with their citizens². Just under 60 CCs use Twitter (Cruikshank, 2014). While the numbers of presences in each class were almost unchanged from 2012 to 2014, there was significant churn between the classes, with 223 (34%) online presences degrading or disappearing altogether. It was feared that the CCs who had not maintained up-to-date presences had lost self-efficacy and so are unlikely to return to internet use.

We felt that one way of reversing this trend was research into methods of sustaining CCs’ online presences. If factors that supported CCs internet use, especially to engage with their citizens, could be identified, later work could focus on applying those factors and developing strategies to strengthen this form of local democracy, helping to move Scotland from its current status as one of the least democratic countries in Europe (Bort, Mcalpine, & Morgan, 2012).

2.2 Project aims and objectives

This project was situated within an ongoing investigation of the current and future potential value of digital technologies in the work of hyperlocal government. Two strands were planned for this project: **CC-led community engagement** and **inter-CC engagement**. They were designed to take advantage of a relatively strong and active CC’s decision to build its engagement with its citizens, and of one of the researchers having a strong relationship with that CC.

The **CC-led community engagement** strand focussed on a single CC (CC1) and its immediate neighbours in a distinct area of a Scottish city. In May 2014, CC1 decided to make active use of its Twitter account that had previously mostly been used to automatically disseminate links to new posts on CC1’s website. It was logical therefore to make this Twitter initiative the focus of the first strand.

Objectives included using action research (AR) to support and track development of the Twitter initiative, and ethnography to investigate learning and other human factors around digital engagement. The ethnography included interviews with members of the neighbouring CCs who managed their CCs’ digital communication, and simple social network analysis to investigate a potential Community of Practice (CoP) around digital communication, and contextualisation via a case study of a CC (CC4) in another large Scottish city that already had a full suite of digital engagement tools. Digital engagement is defined in this study as conversations and human interaction via the internet. Hence posting a minute to a CC website would not be included but disseminating links about it, or online conversations about its content, would be included

¹ Presences were classed as up to date if updates (e.g. adding minutes) has been made less than 2 months before the survey. This was to allow for minutes not being published until they had been accepted at the next meeting.

² This does not count blog websites that have comment facilities, but in our experience these facilities are rarely used.

The **inter-CC engagement** strand was conceived to investigate how CC1 and its neighbours (CC2 and CC3) might use digital techniques to support relationships and collaboration. Although the starting-point for this process was a face-to-face social occasion, it was assumed that aspects of the relationships would occur via digital channels ranging from simple email conversations to sharing (digital) engagement techniques and reactions to CC blog posts. Hence this strand's objectives were to use ethnography to examine pre-existing relationships and new relationships resulting from this process, and to examine joint initiatives stemming from new relationships.

Overall, the project aimed to identify engagement initiatives that generate social capital and can be sustained by CCs despite their low budgets and voluntary nature (Bort et al., 2012) and to investigate whether and how these spread between neighbouring CCs. Further practical aims included generating evidence to be drawn on by practitioners and policy-makers (for example, other CCs, Community Council Liaison Officers³, Improvement Service (IS)⁴, COSLA⁵, the Scottish Government's local government and communities directorate.

3 Key findings

3.1 Underlying theory

The idea of Communities of Practice (CoPs) has been widely used to investigate learning across and within organisations. CoPs can be conceived as a form of or tool for knowledge sharing (Sie, Aho, & Uden, 2014), especially sharing 'know-how' knowledge that is not easily transferred via traditional means such as instruction manuals (Nonaka, 1991). CoPs are groups of people who engage in a process of collected learning in a shared domain of human endeavour, learning how they do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) CoPs themselves are not necessarily intentional, nor is being a member of a CoP. Their crucial characteristics are a **shared domain of interest** (in this project, digital engagement by community councils); **community** (members share information, help each other and engage in joint activities) and **practice** (CoP members are practitioners. Hence CoPs are more than communities of interest.) Theory suggests that CoPs have core, active and peripheral members, and that members can move between these statuses (Wenger et al., 2002).

Because one aim of the project was to understand the learning and other human factors supporting CC members' digital engagement work, it was hypothesised that there is CoP linking CCs 1, 2 and 3, and that this CoP potentially links to other CCs and digital workers.

3.2 Action research advantages and outcomes

An action research strategy is aimed at dealing with real-world issues, leading to change in practices. Ideally it is a cyclical process where initial findings inform further changes but knowledge generation and application are integrated. Further, action researchers investigate their *own* practices (Denscombe, 2007 p123-1244). One of the researchers (Bruce Ryan) has a strong working relationship with CC1 – he has managed CC1's website for over a year⁶. Hence continuing to work *with* CC1 members as a practitioner to create positive changes, rather than doing research *on* CC1, was appropriate. This approach enabled Ryan to take part in CC1's engagement work as a colleague, adding in knowledge from previous research and experience, and to work closely with the relatively new CC1 members who wished to increase CC1's engagement. Hence the AR approach enabled mixing of practitioner and research perspectives to gain positive outcomes on both facets. Practice improvements are discussed here, while research questions are discussed in in section 3.3.

³ Local Authority officials charged with facilitating CCs and linking them with their parent LAs.

⁴ A body charged with increasing the efficiency, quality and accountability of local public services across Scotland

⁵ Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

⁶ Ryan has also taken minutes for CC1 for around two years, and now takes minutes for CC2 and another CC. He developed CC2's website, then coached CC2's secretary about its use until her resignation. He was also previously treasurer of a CC elsewhere.

Despite the project's short time only allowing one cycle of improvement, namely, around two months of active Twitter use, practical outcomes include increased digital engagement with CC1's community (Table 2, including information on some local issues coming in from citizens), support of CC1's digital engagers, increased learning about CC1's community and other unexpected pieces of learning⁷. More residents are now attending CC1's meetings. The CoP around digital engagement has expanded to reach central government officials and MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament).

Table 2: Data from Twitter analytics tool and CC1 website

MONTH	TWITTER IMPRESSIONS	TWITTER ENGAGEMENTS	WEBSITE VIEWS
Oct-13	0	10	796
Nov-13	0	1	502
Dec-13	0	1	463
Jan-14	0	3	1003
Feb-14	0	15	1118
Mar-14	0	14	1005
Apr-14	0	10	798
May-14	0	14	1018
Jun-14	0	201	915
Jul-14	0	8	878
Aug-14	477	20	947
Sep-14	2869	88	934
Oct-14	1494	53	1125
Nov-14	10 320	328	1281
Dec-14	18 268	660	1118

These data were taken from <https://analytics.twitter.com> and CC1's website dashboard.

Learning included: tweet composition and tone (such as how to ensure that CC1 was not mistaken for its LA or central government), live-tweeting skills, use of a social media dashboard to monitor relevant topics, building this work into daily routines, Twitter's immediacy, discovering the types of people and organisations to follow, building relationships with other representatives and people within LA and Scottish Government circles

As expected, there has not yet been any effect on CC1's outcomes – this needs to be monitored over time. It has also not been possible to compare engagement rates with those of other CCs.

3.3 Findings from the CoP research

The findings are ordered by the research questions and themes that stemmed from the literature and the project's aims and objectives.

3.3.1 RQ 1: To what extent is there a digital community of practice?

Theme 1: Is there a digital community linking members of CCs 1, 2 and 3 and beyond?

We found that there is a patchy, fledgling community of practice that links the 3 CCs - that is there are people within each CC who are interested in and do digital engagement, and who communicate with each other to share knowledge. Over the course of the project, the CoP has extended to connect with other parts of central government – there is a bridge to other government tiers doing other forms of digital engagement. One of the researchers ('BR') has similarly connected with other CCs doing digital engagement.

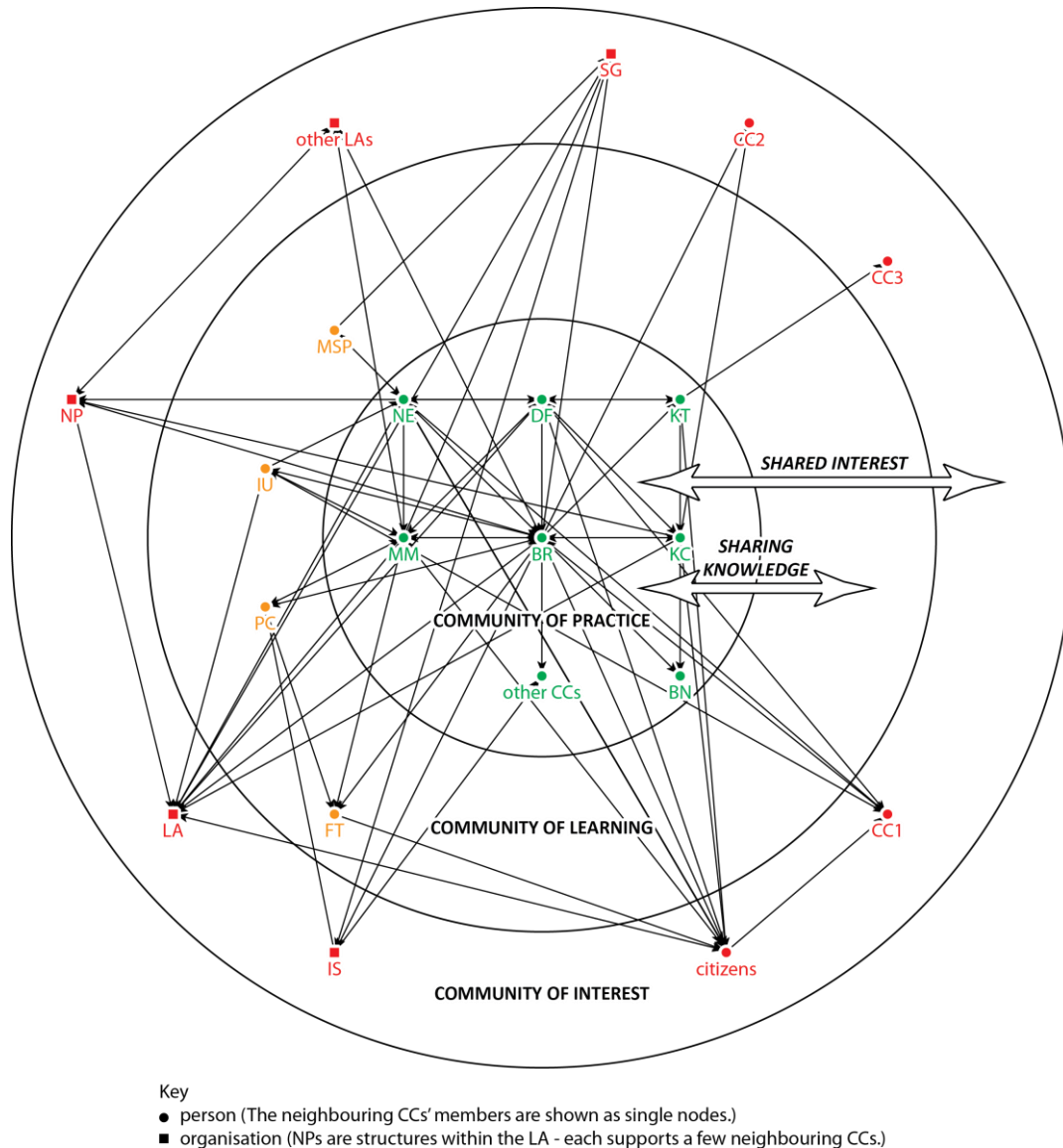
From analysing the people and organisations around the CoP, we believe that around the communities of practice, there may be **Communities of Learning** (CoLs) – people who are interested in the domain, and who share knowledge about it, but do not actually participate.

⁷ For example, one of the CC members learnt about research ethics from the researchers.

Around CoPs may be **Communities of Interest** (Col) – people and organisations interested in the domain and connected to the CoL via (electronic) communication links but not practising or sharing knowledge about the practice. In this case, the CoL uses digital techniques (email, Skype) to communicate about CC matters and share information with citizens.

The tentative CoP, CoL and Col are pictured in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Communities of Practice, Learning and Interest



Theme 2: Who are that community's stakeholders?

A typical CoP has a core group, 'surrounded' by active and peripheral members (Wenger et al., 2002). The core group is likely to be influential on other members' activities, so influencing the core group is likely to be effective in changing the whole CoP. Within the people and organisations in Figure 1, the key members are those who take an **active** interest in digital engagement, i.e. members of the CoP and CoL along with those citizens who take part in digital engagement. (As an analogy, almost anyone might have a passive interest in a road they use, but it is likely that only planners, local residents and local businesses will take active interests in planning around this road.) Further work on CoPs around CC digital engagement should try to identify such stakeholders, so that good practice can be disseminated widely and quickly.

Theme 3: Can digital techniques aid the CCs in their work?

Because the CCs in this research did not set out to work together, there was no existing demand for collaborative digital tools. Concerning engagement with citizens, the majority of CCs are not yet able to maintain simple websites. This may well be principally because those CCs which use the internet can do so simply because they are lucky enough to have members interested in facilitating this – CCs are currently not explicitly required to use the internet.

The use of a small number of tools (e.g. an informative website), and communication techniques (e.g. effective use of social media, email based on 'official' addresses such as chair@anyCC.net) suffice for CCs who wish to digitally engage with their citizens. More technologically advanced CCs such as CC4 see a role for digital mapping tools to collate data on local issues such as litter and dog mess, while CC1 is experimenting with cloud tools for collaboration on agendas. Dissemination of such techniques to CCs, along with encouraging examples, may aid other CCs struggling to make connections with their citizens.

Theme 4: What knowledge management techniques are used, especially between CCs?

It was found that CoP members receive knowledge via various means, such as email from other CoP members, face-to-face support (including social media surgeries) and remote support from other CoP members and family members. Some CoP members have wide ranges of supportive networks and sources. However, knowledge is stored in disparate, inaccessible ways, such as in CoP members' heads, email accounts and personal devices, even for more 'advanced' CCs such as CC4. Hence explicit knowledge management is noticeably missing from this CoP. Finding methods to store and share knowledge that work for this CoP's members is hence needed. Ideally these methods and the knowledge within them will be accessible to other CCs.

3.3.2 RQ 2: What impact has learning had during the project?**Theme 5: How does this learning take place within the CoP?**

Despite the barriers discussed in Theme 6 below, learning has occurred during the project. This may best be summed up by a quote from an interviewee: *"serendipity and discovery happen when not working in isolation"*. Learning has taken place via face-to-face meetings, email and Skype exchanges, and remote-control of computers in tandem with phone conversations. Most of the face-to-face meetings and remote-control sessions were ad-hoc one-to-one coaching sessions, where explicit and tacit knowledge was shared. However, learning in CC1's twitter initiative was planned according to perceived needs and the member's skills and availability. Multi-way discussion via email was used to decide how to deal with tricky political questions raised via Twitter. Hence both face-to-face and remote methods are valuable. Given that CCs can be remote from each other, CoPs with members from non-neighbouring CCs will need to develop remote methods for sharing knowledge.

Theme 6: What are the effects of this learning on the stakeholders and other individuals involved?

Literature predicts empowerment (Yukawa, 2010), sense of community (Mills et al., 2014), social learning and connectedness (Barczyk & Duncan, 2013), developing mutual respect, confidence building, risk taking, deeper and more varied learning, learning with and from their peers, and greater enjoyment (Yukawa, 2010) education of newcomers, acquisition of new practices and sharing of repertoire (Gray, 2004).

All of these have been observed in the project. For example, a very new CC digital engager has derived emotional support, heightened awareness, a sense of her role as a representative of her CC, and has learnt more about what is 'out there', and that others are interested in the CC's work. Other interviewees confirm the support, acknowledging that part of their role is emotional support as well as teaching know-how.

Overall, learning has been a positive part of the process, and members have learnt more than how-to, explicit knowledge.

3.3.3 RQ3: How is digital engagement with citizens achieved?

Theme 7: What problems are perceived about digital engagement, learning to digitally engage and managing the generated knowledge?

The literature suggests that there are both social and technological barriers to knowledge sharing (Cooper, Grover, Pea, & Bookey, 2014; Sie et al., 2014). In previous research, it was found that use of the internet by CCs may be inhibited by factors such as cost (e.g. cost of time and of IT), the digital divide and rapidity (e.g. individual tweets may be rapidly buried) and that occasionally CC members can be hostile to digital engagement (Ryan, 2013).

Such barriers were observed in this project. For example, few members of CCs 1, 2 and 3 appear to be interested in digital engagement. Similarly, CC4 mentioned that other CCs in its LA tended to be 'intransigent, and stuck in their ways'. Hence CC1's website and increasing use of Twitter may be commensurate with its members' overall attitude to digital means.

Corroboration can be gained from CC4, which about 2 years ago gained a new secretary and several other members who were keen to engage with their citizens, and has developed a digital engagement team. While each team-member has day-to-day responsibility for a different facet of the engagement profile (e.g. one person manages the twitter account, another the website), by working together they have developed the skills to substitute for one another. CC4's website had around 1500 unique visitors in 2014, its Twitter feed has around 350 followers and its Facebook page has around 400 likes. The majority of visitors, followers and likers are local citizens, while the Twitter and Facebook audiences do not overlap. These audiences were built up by 'doing interesting things that attract participation and interest things ... that benefit the area'. CC4 uses photographs on Facebook posts to attract interest, and tries to give out constant stream of useful information. Such models of good practice should be disseminated.

Also, the three neighbouring CCs in this study do not have a forum for sharing knowledge about digital engagement – or any other aspect of their work. Interviewees also saw the time taken on CC work as a barrier. Further barriers included lack of experience, success stories and knowledge management tools and consequences of CCs being geographically based.

CC4 found that some of its LA's computers have old operating systems and browsers: this caused problems when trying to share information. In addition, only certain LA officials can access social media.

Hence there are both social and technical barriers to overcome if CCs are to develop digital engagement with their citizens. However, CC4 shows that CCs can achieve good levels of engagement through digital and other channels by themselves.

3.3.4 RQ4: Are CCs that are more highly engaged than others are more successful at developing resources for policy generation and implementation?

A further aim in the project proposal was *to test the theory that hyperlocal government bodies that are more highly engaged than others are more successful at developing resources for policy generation and implementation*. Clearly, of the neighbouring CCs, CC1 has increased its digital engagement while CC3 has stood still and CC2 has markedly declined. In non-digital channels, CC1 members play active roles in LA 'regional' structures that feed into LA work, e.g. a stakeholder group around a major planning issue, work on a local museum and a local participatory budgeting scheme. It is active in planning work, often proactively working with planners and developers. This has garnered respect for CC1, according to an LA councillor. This is a single example – further work will be needed to investigate this area.

3.3.5 Conclusion

The action research approach has had practical benefits in supporting and strengthening one CCs' engagement with its citizens. Knowledge has been shared and increased, with lessons coming from unexpected directions.

Social capital has been built by increasing contacts between levels of government and making bridges between citizens and representatives.

Key members of the digital community around the CCs in this project can be identified. Evidence has been found of a (currently weak) CoP linking members of three neighbouring CCs, although explicit knowledge management is conspicuously absent. The Communities of Practice model has been established as a useful framework for understanding how CC members share knowledge about digital engagement, and to highlight in this case the need for *intentional* knowledge management. It appears that CoPs may be associated with ‘circles’ of interested non-practitioners: the transitions between the different circles will be a potential area for future study

Digital techniques can aid CCs in their work. The required techniques are relatively commonplace: informative websites and use of ‘official’ email addresses. Other techniques such as digital scheduling tools and mapping could be used by those CCs with the required technical skills. However, the ‘magic’ recipe is having the enthusiasm and confidence to gain and use digital techniques, along with places to learn them. This project indicates that communal learning is a valuable way forward – sharing and generating knowledge. Having like-minded colleagues is, unsurprisingly, invaluable in this regard.

This seed project has naturally just scratched the surface of this area. Further work to identify, link up and spread skills through such CoPs throughout Scotland would provide research opportunities, as well as sharing skills and ideas between CCs to raise the general level of engagement with their citizens.

4 Key issues

We perceive several general issues stemming from the observations in this project.

Firstly, there is effectively **no intentional knowledge management** – knowledge is not stored in accessible places and, apart from CC1’s Twitter initiative, there has been no planned skill-sharing. Further, there is no natural meeting-point or cause that encourages practitioners from the different CCs to meet up, so there is a barrier to sharing tacit knowledge. There are also some personal barriers, such as poor relationships between some CoP members.

Secondly, there is a current **lack of official support for social media training for CCs** though this situation may be changing. Some LAs understand that such training needs to be ongoing, to account for CC members retiring, and that several flavours may be needed to allow for the different levels of experience within CCs and the channels the CCs wish to use. It may well also be worthwhile managing the knowledge gained in such training so that it is less likely to be lost over time.

On the other hand, a CC can develop a team of digital communicators without calling on external support, but the risk there is that knowledge is kept within the silos of the individual CC. This is not what the CCs would wish – they are willing to share their knowledge but have not found reliable fora for this. This provides a motivation to widen and cross-link existing communities.

Thirdly, following on from the notion of CCs as knowledge silos, **engagement and collaboration between neighbouring CCs is not automatic**. This is so even when as in this study, the CCs are facing similar social and structural problems.

Finally, **there can be no expectation that community councillors will be pro-active about digital engagement**, though some may be keen on digital communication and engagement. The lesson from this is simply ‘as you so, so shall you reap’ – the more that is put into digital engagement, the better the outcomes are.

5 Next steps

As academics, we are concerned to create and disseminate theories and knowledge derived from research. As practitioners and citizens who wish to live in a developed, functioning democracy that makes the best possible use of available digital resources, we wish to enable development of better practices around digital communication. As will be seen though, there is no clear boundary to be drawn in work of this nature – the research and findings and practitioner outcomes will always inform each other. The next steps are split between interrelated research and practitioner sections.

5.1 Further research

Given the churn noted in section 2.1, it would be invaluable to ascertain exactly why so many CCs have given up using the internet. This research would also look into the effects this has had on their work and their relationships with their citizens and other structures.

Investigating CCs' visible social media use may help find other potential CoPs in this area and examples of good practice around digital engagement.

While there is some evidence that digitally connected CCs are better at developing policy and influencing matters, further research is needed to confirm this.

As we have shown there is a CoP, albeit patchy and having no effective knowledge management, the next stage would be investigation of CoPs in different but relevant contexts, e.g. English Parish Councils, elsewhere in Scotland, or in similar European countries. This would focus on knowledge management in such CoPs, looking for examples of good practice. It would also investigate whether the model shown in Figure 1 occurs more widely. This work would also investigate whether and how the nodes in the different circles differ, for example in terms of clique-membership and in-/out-degree.

In any such social media research, allowances should be made for the different audiences of social media channels, for public data feeds not necessarily providing accurate representations, for large numbers of spammers and 'bots' potentially distorting results and for designs dictating user responses (Ruths & Pfeffer, 2014).

A limitation to this research was that internal conflicts nearly caused CC2 to cease to exist: the sole member apparently interested in digital engagement and working with other CCs resigned as this project's fieldwork started. No collaborative initiatives started during the project's lifetime, so it would be worthwhile investigating this again when circumstances allow.

Finally, the current research carried out only one action research cycle and investigated a single CCs' learning of a single digital engagement channel. This has already led to some potentially valuable findings and an increased engagement with citizens, it is too early for this to have noticeably affected the CCs outcomes. Hence this work should be continued to find how increased digital engagement affects how CCs works and what they do.

5.2 Practitioner actions

If there are other CoPs focussing on CC digital engagement in other areas of Scotland, linking them could increase their strength. Other suggestions include education in how to use social and other digital tools. As we have found, learning to use these tools often requires time and face-to-face teaching and learning, which is more likely in a densely linked CoP. Twitter analytics show that CC1's Twitter initiative has had some effect. However, analytics of other Twitter-using CCs and similar bodies would be needed to contextualise this data, perhaps by observing other CCs as they start to use social media.

Identifying stakeholders and core members of CoPs would help disseminate knowledge and good practices more efficiently. Hence identifying such stakeholders and building their connections would be beneficial.

There is a keen need for knowledge management structures and strategies to support the CoPs and individual CC members working on digital engagement, especially to combat the high churn noted in section 2.1 and the

loss of knowledge when members retire. Managing the knowledge shared in training provided by LAs would also help this knowledge to be retained. Therefore identifying knowledge management techniques that CC members can use, and disseminating knowledge sources and digital techniques that CCs can use is called for. Such sources could include the new Scottish CC portal at <http://www.communitycouncils.org.uk>, if this can be developed into a means for CCs mentoring each other.

CCs might also use digital mapping techniques with crowd-sourced data on local issues – this might help cement relationships with citizens, as well as helping LAs plan strategies around such issues.

The research took place at a time of heightened engagement with politics as the Scottish Independence debate came to a head during the project. Taking advantage of this, CCs could fill in gaps in LA Council awareness/engagement, to facilitate relations between LA and citizens. (In practice, this currently occurs by some CCs being members of some LA-wide planning fora.) The Community Empowerment Bill, due to become law later in 2015, may well change relationships between CCs and their LAs – investigation of how CCs react to this, and how they use digital techniques to understand citizens' feelings about local services that might be affected by this law.

The strategies and support tactics in Table 3 may be relevant for CoPs such as the one linking CC1, CC2 and CC3.

Table 3: strategies for Active Communities (of Practice)

STRATEGY	STRATEGIC SUPPORT
Introduce other CoPs to best practices	Knowledge management systems
	Education program
	Offline workshops
	Offline meetings
	Highlighting examples of good practice
Create collective knowledge at the organization level	Incentive systems
	Awards systems
	Knowledge management systems
	Using existing central KM resources
	Inter-functional CoP: links with hyper-local journalism
Support other communities	Mentoring program
	Education program
	Build links to liaison officers
	Joint meetings
	Competitive exhibition (Highlighting examples of good practice)

Adapted from (Kim, Hong, & Suh, 2012)

Some of these may be achieved via the new CC portal, if it can reconfigured as a knowledge-sharing and mentoring tool. However, using the KnowledgeHub⁸ may well be more efficient – it already exists, has discussion tools and enables links with many experienced local government practitioners.

CCs might also store and share knowledge via 'cloud' systems such as Google Docs – CC1 will experiment with this early in 2015.

Some of the above tactics will be attempted early in 2015: a workshop to bring together CC digital engagers, find common problems and share solutions is being organised by this project's researchers. This will be offline, but delegates will be asked about knowledge management solutions they use or could use. Also the KnowledgeHub will be used to include interested CC members who cannot attend this meeting but who wish to contribute to its outcomes, and for ongoing discussion after the event. This should provide an effective trial of its use among CC members.

⁸ <https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk>

6 Impact and dissemination

The impact of this research includes strengthening working relationships with the Improvement Service and relevant Scottish Government officials. Presentations on previous related work and on the aims of this research were given at a meeting of Community Council Liaison Officers (CCLOs) in October – attendance at this meeting helped cement relationships between the researchers, CCLOs, the IS and SG officials.

At this meeting, CCLOs helped verify and prioritise recommendations for strengthening CC online presences from the 2012 and 2014 surveys. The recommendations were prioritised as shown in Table 4:

Table 4: Recommendations for improving CC online presences

IMPLEMENT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE	RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPLEMENT WHEN POSSIBLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CC Schemes should state that CCs are expected to have their own online presences • All LAs should publish their CC schemes and guidance online • CCLOs need to be trained to support CCs as they go online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the national portal to provide support and guidance for CCs to share their own experiences and best practice. This could include a directory of successful examples. • Supporting CCs' use of digital methods and social media • Promotion of LA and SG planning portals, including feeds of relevant items to individual CCs and electronic submission of and feedback on submissions • CCs to plan for continuity/sustainability, develop web-teams • CCLOs should act as links between CCs who have poor internet presences and those who have rich presences • Encouragement of e-participation techniques by CCs

A further presentation was made to CC1 about its online and social media performance.

Connections have been made with CCs in many areas of Scotland – these will be cemented in a workshop to be held in January. (See section 7 below.) Resources have been gathered and shared via a research blog – see <http://bruceryan.info/resources>.

7 Funding

Funding has been secured from Edinburgh Napier University's public engagement stream to share the lessons from this project through a 1-day workshop for CCs members who wish to improve their digital engagement work. The workshop will investigate the problems most commonly faced by CCs around digital enablement, and enable delegates to share solutions they have found. It will also enable delegates to build relationships across LA boundaries, a problem discovered in (Ryan, 2013), as a step towards building a Scotland-wide CoP around CC digital engagement.

Support in kind has been offered by researchers at Edinburgh University, the Improvement Service and the Democratic Society⁹. Scottish Government officials have asked to be involved with this workshop, so that they can present to and directly converse with CC members. Topics will include the forthcoming Community Empowerment Bill, designed to give community bodies such as CCs much greater influence over local services and other local matters.

The network that will be created among delegates to this event will be used as the basis for a substantive research proposal to follow the topics discussed above.

⁹ <http://www.demsoc.org>

8 References

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