Can malleable ideas survive metricised governance? The politics of operationalising Inclusive Growth

Authors: Smith, K.E. and Hill O'Connor, C. (with additional input from Hughes, C. Macintyre, A., Meier, P. & Purshouse, R.)

Abstract: Advocates of 'inclusive growth' claim it provides policymakers with a means of combining economic success with social inclusivity, making it highly attractive across a wide range of settings. Here, we explore how and why three UK policy organisations (a devolved national government, a regional combined authority, and a local council) are each framing inclusive growth as a means of tackling persistent policy problems, from health inequalities to child poverty and climate change. Drawing on 51 semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis and policy ethnography, we argue that inclusive growth is a classic 'chameleonic idea', strategically imbued with malleable qualities that serve to obscure substantive, unresolved tensions (i.e. to depoliticise key policy issues). These characteristics are helpful in achieving alliances, both within policy organisations and between these organisations and their multiple stakeholders. Overall, we identify five types of alliance that inclusive growth appears to be aiding within our three case study policy organisations: (i) public alliances (e.g. local communities, especially voters); (ii) cross-government alliances (e.g. between organisational teams working on health, employment/labour market and the economy); (iii) ideational alliances (e.g. researchers, think tanks, international organisations working to promote and shape inclusive growth ideas); (iv) alliances to achieve change (potential implementers such as large, local employers); and (v) resourcing alliances (notably the UK Government). However, these same qualities mean that inclusive growth is challenging to operationalise, especially in governance settings that are dominated by metrics. Although metrics have themselves also been presented as a means of depoliticising policy issues (e.g. Lingard, 2011), the process of representing a malleable idea via a set of metricised indicators involves simplification and stabilisation, both of which risk disrupting the fragile coalitions that malleability enables (by unintentionally re-politicising potential trade-offs).

As policy organisations attempt to agree how to track and appraise their inclusive growth work via metricised indicators, the malleability and fluidity of the idea is inevitably reduced. These decisions serve to institutionalise, and make public, a particular vision of inclusive growth and, in so doing, risks rupturing the range of supportive alliances that the chameleonic nature of inclusive growth had helped to attract. To overcome these difficulties, all three policy organisations are currently exploring the potential of complex systems modelling for inclusive growth policy. We conclude by reflecting on the potential of this new intersectoral 'evidence tool' for enabling each policy partner to progress their inclusive growth ambitions within metricised policy settings.

1. Introduction

Inclusive growth, which involves redesigning the economy in pursuit of fairer outcomes (rather than trying to address unequal growth later- RSA, 2017; Raworth 2017), has advocates across international, national and local spheres of policymaking (OECD, 2015; Samans et al., 2015; RSA, 2017; Public Health England 2021). This enthusiasm is understandable in the context of claims that achieving inclusive growth will: bring widespread prosperity while tackling economic exclusion (OECD 2015); *and* help reduce inequalities within and between different places (RSA, 2017). However, it is also a deeply contested and fuzzy idea, with contrasting views not only about how to achieve inclusive growth goals but also about what, precisely, these goals might be and which policy problems inclusive growth addresses (Lee, 2018). While some advocates have emphasised the potential to achieve stronger, more resilient economic *growth* through the inclusion of more people (OECD, 2015; Samans *et al.*, 2015), others have advocated more radical visions of inclusive (or wellbeing) economies, including versions that de-prioritise economic growth and focus, instead, on achieving fairer and more sustainable ways of living (e.g. Trebeck and Williams, 2019). A core rationale for the move away from growth as the central marker of economic success relates to the need to address environmental degradation and inequalities (Burch and McInroy 2018; Spash, 2020) and the idea that an economy can be designed to secure fairer, more sustainable outcomes without requiring economic growth (e.g. Raworth 2017; Trebeck and Williams, 2019).

The contestations around the role of economic growth means some prefer to use related terms and concepts, such as wellbeing economy (Hough-Stewart et al. 2019), foundational economy (Bentham et al. 2013; the Foundational Economy Collective 2020), community wealth building (CLES, 2019) and doughnut economics (Raworth, 2017). Although there are overlaps between these ideas (see, for example, Foundational Economy Collective 2020), there are different views regarding whether the shift to a more inclusive approach, whatever this looks like, can be achieved within the current system (in which economic growth is highly valued) or whether a more substantive change is required.

The aim of this paper is to examine how inclusive growth type ideas are being conceptualised and operationalised by policy actors working in the UK. We argue that inclusive growth policy agendas represent the classic policy situation that Fowler (2021) has recently described: an ambiguous policy idea gains traction by helping to produce consensus, those charged with implementation are then responsible for making decisions that shape the evolution of the idea in practice. Additionally, we argue an increasing recognition that social and economic inequalities are entwined in complex ways further contributes to the attractiveness of a seemingly complex idea (i.e. a logic appears to be at play that complex policy problems must reply complex solutions). However, we argue that the strongly metricised governance context of UK policy organisations (Hood and Piotrowska, 2021) makes the task of operationalising inclusive growth particularly challenging and that the process involves stabilising and substantially simplifying the idea to make it amenable to policy governance. Our empirical data centre on this process of operationalisation within

three policy organisations working at different levels of the UK policy landscape: the Scottish Government (a devolved national government); the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (a regional authority); and Sheffield City Council (a local authority). Although each has distinct populations, geographies and policy powers, all have signalled a desire to pursue 'inclusive growth/economy' ideas (e.g. Greater Manchester Combined Authority, 2017; Scottish Government, 2015; Sheffield City Partnership, 2018).

1.1 What do we mean by 'inclusive growth'?

Reflecting what we found in our case study policy settings, we use the term 'inclusive growth' expansively, to denote a broad family of ideas associated with attempts to change current approaches to economic policy in order to tackle intersecting social and economic inequalities, regardless of the framework or particular version of inclusive growth that they are associated with. This partly reflects the pragmatic and evolving way that policymakers have been engaging with these terms, as we discuss later. The common thread linking these ideas is the proposition that longstanding inequalities, whether between people or across different places, are not inevitable and that they can be reduced through changes to the way economic policy is approached. In effect, previous policy approaches to inequalities, which took a silo-based approach (e.g. with health policymakers taking responsibility for health inequalities, economic policymakers for economic inequalities, education policymakers for educational inequalities, housing policymakers for housing inequalities, etc) are increasingly being replaced by a recognition that these inequalities intersect and that economic inequalities are at the heart of this intersection. The idea is to move from a 'grow now, redistribute later' approach to tackling economic inequalities to instead promoting closer alignment between social and economic policymaking goals, strategies and mechanisms (RSA, 2017, pp. 8–9). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these ideas are being pitched as means of achieving economic recovery that also involves 'building back better' (e.g. Crisp and Waite, 2020).
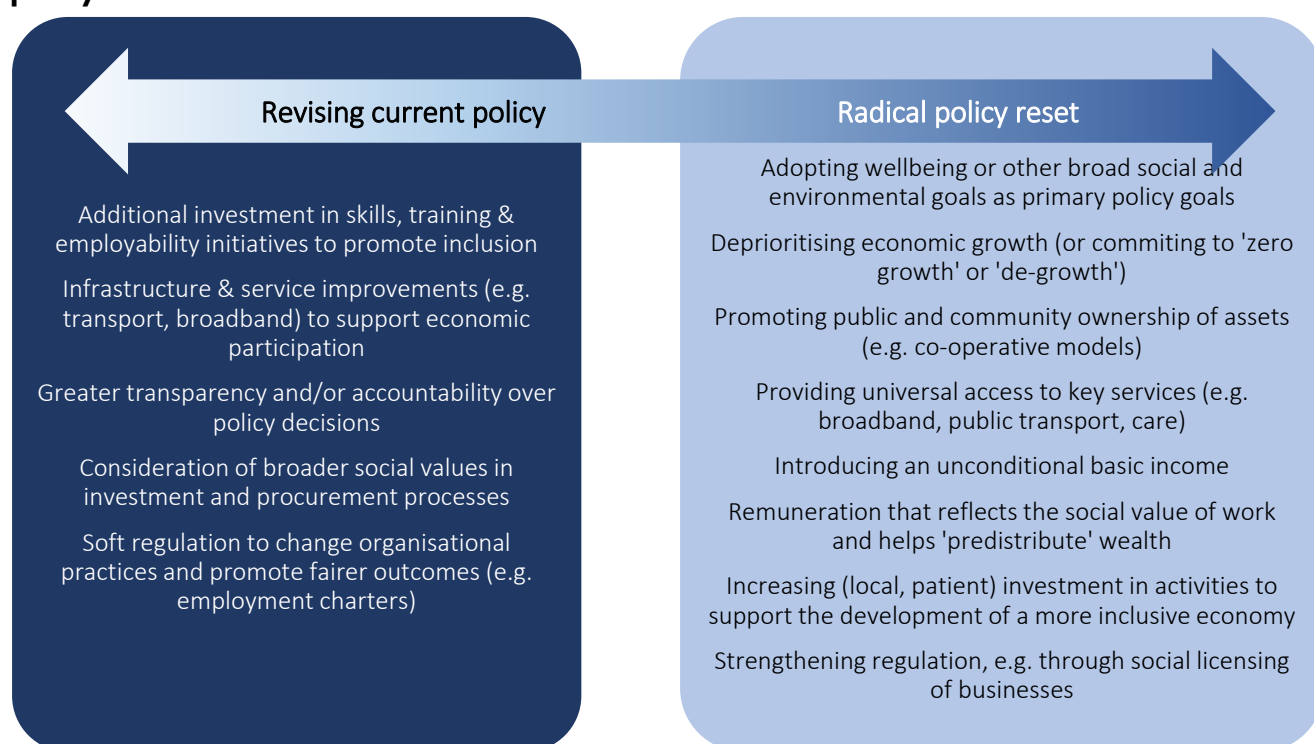
However, beyond these broad threads, there are important variations within the literature regarding the specificities of inclusive growth approaches (i.e. there exists an external pool of ideas to inform potential policy approaches – see Figure 1). While a full review of these variations is beyond the scope of this paper, we highlight some of the crucial differences and tensions via illustrative examples (see also Lupton and Hughes 2016).

First, although there is a common concern with tackling social and economic inequalities, different kinds of inequality have been emphasised by different authors. This ranges from a focus on regional disparities in income and productivity, labour market exclusion and unequal access to 'good jobs' and skills development (RSA, 2017); to a broader concern with the fairer distribution of income, wealth and resources, between or within places (RSA, 2017; CLES 2021) and across generations (Hough-Stewart et al. 2019).

Second, as Figure 1 illustrates, there exists a wide spectrum of ideas when it comes to operationalising an inclusive growth policy agenda, from revising current approaches to much more radical policy shifts.

Third, there are variations in the extent to which ideas in this space seek to address climate change and promote environmental sustainability. Many of those who link ideas about economic inclusivity to ideas about tackling climate change argue that growth must be deprioritised for environmental, sustainability reasons (Hough-Stewart et al. 2018; Raworth 2017), positioning their accounts firmly towards the right-hand side of Figure 1.

Figure 1: From policy revision to policy reset: a spectrum of inclusive growth policy ideas

Revising current policy	Radical policy reset
Additional investment in skills, training & employability initiatives to promote inclusion	Adopting wellbeing or other broad social and environmental goals as primary policy goals
Infrastructure & service improvements (e.g. transport, broadband) to support economic participation	Deprioritising economic growth (or commiting to 'zero growth' or 'de-growth')
Greater transparency and/or accountability over policy decisions	Promoting public and community ownership of assets (e.g. co-operative models)
Consideration of broader social values in investment and procurement processes	Providing universal access to key services (e.g. broadband, public transport, care)
Soft regulation to change organisational practices and promote fairer outcomes (e.g. employment charters)	Introducing an unconditional basic income
	Remuneration that reflects the social value of work and helps 'predistribute' wealth
	Increasing (local, patient) investment in activities to support the development of a more inclusive economy
	Strengthening regulation, e.g. through social licensing of businesses

Informed by: Hough-Stewart et al. (2019); OECD (2015); Lupton et al. (2019); Foundational Economy Collective (2020); Guinan et al. (2021); CLES (2021).

The extent of policy change implied by a commitment to inclusive growth is thus unclear. On the left-hand side of Figure 1, we see examples of policy changes that sit more comfortably within current economic structures, or which are already part of current agendas, albeit with scope to be more mainstream. On the right-hand side, we see policy ideas about 'inclusive growth' that involve much more radical and substantive policy change, including greater redistribution of wealth and control, and deprioritising economic growth as a policy goal. Achieving these more substantive policy changes is notoriously challenging, with many popular theories in policy studies focusing on understanding and explaining policy

inertia (e.g. Immergut 1998; Thelan, 1999). Yet, policy does change and, at least occasionally, this change is genuinely substantive (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Hall, 1993). Moreover, crises have been depicted as 'critical junctures' that can stimulate policy change (Hogan and Doyle, 2007) so it seems plausible that the current COVID-19 pandemic, the ensuing economic fallout (Handscomb et al., 2020), and the exacerbation of inequalities (Bambra et al 2021), may coalesce to provide an opportunity for substantive policy change. Indeed, multiple policy reports have recently positioned the current pandemic as such a moment in the UK and have promoted inclusive growth type ideas as central to achieving this shift (e.g. Greater Manchester Inequalities Commission, 2021; Public Health England, 2021; Walsh et al, 2020).

Within this context, our analysis suggests that inclusive growth ideas are attaining significant policy traction. We show how their 'chameleonic' (Smith, 2013) nature functions strategically, enabling policy organisations to develop supportive alliances across internal policy silos and, externally, with multiple stakeholders. Yet, our data also suggest that, as all three policy organisations attempt to operationalise the ambiguous goal(s) of inclusive growth in the context of metricised governance, they are encountering significant challenges. We conclude by considering whether complex systems modelling offers a way forward.

2. Methods

This paper draws on a larger programme of research (the SIPHER consortium) in which academic researchers are working with policy organisations to co-produce evidence that explicitly takes account of complex dynamics and interdependence between health, social, and economic priorities (www.sipher.ac.uk). Here, we are drawing on: (1) analysis of six policy documents and three political manifestos (between November 2019 and June 2021 – see Table 1); (2) ethnographic observations and informal conversations with staff working for each policy organisation (October 2019 and X 2022); and (3) 51 semi-structured interviews with individuals whose roles inform, or involve operationalising, organisational approaches to inclusive growth (between October 2019 and December 2020 – see Table 2). Ethical approval for this research were approved by the University of Strathclyde in October 2019 and our approach involved asking all interviewees to sign a consent form to signal their consent to participating in the research and to having the interview digitally recorded and transcribed.

We began by analysing how each policy organisation was conceptualising inclusive growth (or equivalent concepts) in formal (publicly available) policy documents. We analysed six documents (see Table 1) in NVivo 12, using the analytical approach set out below. The number of policy documents included in this analysis was more limited than we had initially anticipated, reflecting the fact each organisation is still developing its approach to inclusive growth. In Sheffield City Council, progress on a new economic strategy was stalled due to COVID-19 and, at the time of writing, this strategy remains in development. In GMCA, there was no overarching strategy or policy document that explicitly focussed on inclusive growth so the GMCA embedded researcher identified the documents considered to be

most relevant to the organisational approach to inclusive growth. For the Scottish Government, we initially analysed the two documents that were consistently referred to by interviewees as playing a core role in their approach to inclusive growth. We then supplemented this by a third document published in 2020, which was referred to in our second round of interviews and in our ethnographic work as playing an important role in shaping policy thinking in this area in the context of COVID-19.

Table 1: Policy documents articulating organisational approaches to 'inclusive growth'

Policy Organisation	Policy document(s)	Brief description	Publication date
Sheffield City Council	Inclusive Economy Framework	This framework was authored by Sheffield City Partnership[1] it is described as way of setting out how to deliver the ambition of building a 'more inclusive and sustainable Sheffield economy.' (Sheffield City Partnership, 2018: p.6)	2018
Greater Manchester Combined Authority	Our People, Our Place- The Greater Manchester Strategy	The strategy was written by all 10 councils, the Greater Manchester Mayor and Greater Manchester NHS, transport, policy and fire service organisations. It is described as a strategy to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to reach their potential.	2017
	Local Industrial Strategy	This strategy sets out the specific actions related to businesses and industry across Greater Manchester. It is co-authored between GMCA, the Local Enterprise Partnership and UK Government.	2019
Scottish Government	Scottish Government Economic Strategy	This was written by the Scottish Government to set out how they will deliver on the 'dual objectives of boosting competitiveness and tackling inequality' (Scottish Government, 2015: p.13)	2015
	Inclusive Growth Outcomes Framework	The framework was designed to define the specific outcomes related to the Scottish Government inclusive growth ambitions. It provides structure for the analysis of inclusive growth performance. This work sits within the Scottish Centre for Regional Inclusive Growth[2]	2019
	Economic Recovery Implementation Plan: Scottish Government response to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery	This document sets out the Scottish Government's response to the Economic Recovery report, *Towards a Robust, Resilient Wellbeing Economy for Scotland: Report of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery* (Advisory Group on Economic Recovery, 2020), which was commissioned in the context of the economic challenges posed by COVID-19.	2020

During the midst of our data analysis, elections took place that impacted on all three policy organisations (Scottish Parliament elections, Manchester Mayoral elections, and local council elections in Manchester and Sheffield). In order to understand whether and how successful parties and candidates were employing inclusive ideas, we undertook supplementary analysis of the following political manifestos:

- The Scottish National Party (SNP) manifesto: the SNP won the most seats in Scotland and so continue to be the main party of government. Although, having fallen one seat short of an overall majority they subsequently agreed a cooperation agreement with the Green Party (Scottish Government, 2021a), this agreement excluded key areas relating to economic policy and the wellbeing economy so we decided not to undertake any detailed analysis of the Green Party manifesto's approach to inclusive growth ideas;

- Andy Burnham's Labour & Cooperative Party Manifesto: Burnham was successfully re-elected as Mayor of the Greater Manchester area and so continues to lead GMCA.

- The Labour Party manifesto in Sheffield: Although the Labour Party lost their majority in Sheffield City Council, they continued to have the largest number of councillors. In the context of No Overall Control, a Labour-Green Cooperative was agreed. However, the Green Party did not publish a manifesto for Sheffield Council elections in 2021, instead committing themselves to pursuing a set of policy proposals that they had previously put forward for consideration. Since these proposals do not have an inclusive growth focus, we opted not to undertake detailed analysis.

Given expansive focus of these documents, and the very wide variety of policy solutions proposed, we focused our coding of the political manifestos we included on the sections and proposals we felt were most relevant to conceptualisations of inclusive growth and/or to tackling inequalities.

Alongside this, we undertook an initial set of 37 interviews between October 2019 and February 2020 (Round One), undertaking a further 14 taking place between October 2020 and January 2021 (Round Two). Of these, 41 interviews were undertaken by the second CHO and 10 by KS. To supplement our analysis of these interview data, the lead author and second author both undertook short placements at GMCA and SCC (plans for a placement at the Scottish Government were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and so additional interviews were undertaken in this setting instead), during which time they compiled field-notes.

Table 2: Number of interviews per policy organisation

Policy Organisation	No. of round 1 interviewees (No. of people approached)	No. of round 2 interviewees (No. of people approached)	Policy Areas
Sheffield City Council	13 (14)	4 (5) 1 follow up, 3 new	Health
			Transport
Greater Manchester Combined Authority	8 (9)	4 (9) 3 follow up, 1 new	Employability and Skills
Scottish Government	16 (21)	6 (12) 3 follow up, 3 new	Planning
			Economic development
Total	37 (44)	14 (26)	
	51 (70) *interviews with 44 individuals (including 7 repeat interviews)*		

We employed a similar coding framework to analyse the policy documents, political manifestos and the interviews, informed by Bacchi's (2009) 'What is the problem represented to be?' approach, which asks six key questions in order to understand the way in which policies frame a particular 'problem'. This approach offers insights into the intentions of a policy (i.e. what it is trying to change) as well as the rationales and assumptions that are implicit within policy solutions (Bacchi, 2009). We supplemented our analytical framework by employing Critical Frame Analysis (Verloo, 2016), which focuses attention on 'diagnosis' and 'prognosis' of policy problems. Finally, we incorporated an inductive element to our coding, developing additional codes as we identified new themes. The lead researcher (the second author) coded all six policy documents and 51 interview transcripts using this thematic framework in NVivo12. A second researcher coded the three political manifestos. Two researchers cross-checked a sample of all coded documents and transcripts for consistency. To facilitate this process, the team held five meetings to address discrepancies and discuss emerging themes in relation to existing literature. We did not code our ethnographic notes but these insights informed our analysis and evolving understanding of the rapidly changing policy context.

There are some limitations to the methods used which, combined with contextual changes, are important to acknowledge. The interviews inevitably capture particular views at specific time-points and there have been significant social, economic and political changes since then in all three policy organisations. Although our ethnographic data offer insights into what has happened 'behind the scenes' since the interviews, in the context of working from home, these insights have been more limited than we would otherwise have hoped. During the midst of our data analysis, elections took place (May 2021) that impacted on all three

organisations and resulted in political changes to the Scottish Government and Sheffield City Council. Although our analysis predominantly focuses on the period before these elections, we supplemented this via analysis of political manifesto documents to try to understand whether and how successful parties and candidates were employing inclusive ideas.

3. Policy Context

The three policy organisations share a concern with addressing the significant economic and health inequalities that exist in their communities (Sheffield Joint Health and Wellbeing Board, 2019; Scottish Government, 2021b; UCL Institute of Health Equity, 2021) but vary in terms of population size, organisational history, levers of power and political leadership. Table 3 provides an overview of population size and key measures of the health inequalities and poverty that each organisation is contending with, while the rest of this section provides a brief outline of the organisational and policy context.

Table 3: Key health, poverty & inequality indicators in these policy organisations

Policy organisation	Population	Healthy life expectancy (years)	Inequality in healthy life expectancy	Poverty Rate
Scottish Government	5,466,000[1]	61.9 (F); 61.7 (M)[2]	21.5 (F); 25.1 (M)[3]	19% [4]
GMCA	2,780,000[5]	60.8 (F); 61.7 (M)[6]	25.8 (F); 27.6 (M)[7]	19.4%[8]
Sheffield City Council	589,214[9]	60.3 (F); 60.8 (M)[10]	24.8(F); 21.9 (M)[11]	20%[12]

[1] https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/population-estimates/mid-20/mid-year-pop-est-20-report.pdf
[2] https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/healthy-life-expectancy/17-19/healthy-life-expectancy-17-19-report.pdf
[3] https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/healthy-life-expectancy/17-19/healthy-life-expectancy-17-19-report.pdf
[4] https://data.gov.scot/poverty/
[5] https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/1580/key_facts_2017final.pdf
[6] https://www.gmtableau.nhs.uk/t/GMCA/views/GMSPriorityNine-May2021/Priority9Dashboard?:origin=card_share_link&:embed=y&:isGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y
[7] MSOA-level estimates (Greater Manchester Combined Authority, personal communication, 14 January 2022)
[8] https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/mui/igau/growthmonitor/GM-MSOA-poverty-briefing-note-2017.pdf
[9] https://sheffieldcc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=b02d84b6f61b471e81615ef95642c20a
[10]
https://www.sheffieldccg.nhs.uk/Downloads/About%20US/CCG%20Governing%20Body%20Papers/2016/6%20October%202016%20GBP/Item%2022k%20Director%20of%20Public%20Health%20report.pdf
[11]
https://www.sheffieldccg.nhs.uk/Downloads/About%20US/CCG%20Governing%20Body%20Papers/2016/6%20October%202016%20GBP/Item%2022k%20Director%20of%20Public%20Health%20report.pdf
[12] https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s17338/Tackling%20Poverty%20Strategy%202.pdf

Whilst Sheffield City Council is a long-standing local council, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and Scottish Government were established more recently (2011 and 1999 respectively). The Scottish Government, as a devolved national government, is able to pass legislation in a variety of policy areas including health and social services, the economy, housing, the environment, local government, and some aspects of social security and taxation. GMCA was created in 2011, helping to formalise a longstanding commitment to policy coordination between the ten local authorities in the area, including around economic development. In 2014, the so-called 'Devo Manc' deal was signed by then Chancellor George Osborne committing to the devolution of powers from Whitehall to GMCA (see Kenealy, 2016). Areas of responsibility include transport, planning, housing and policing. Sheffield City Council is a much older organisation but has only been responsible for public health since 2012, alongside housing, transport, adult education, children and families and local business strategy. Whilst the scope of Sheffield City Council's powers are largely limited to the local authority area, the organisation also has influence at the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA).

4. Findings

4.1. A desire for fundamental change without a (useable) roadmap

We identified a consensus across all three organisations that low productivity and high inequalities were the key problems inclusive growth should address. In identifying the causes of these problems, many interviewees pointed to 'traditional' economic policies and practices and argued that a fundamental shift was required. In the following extract, for example, the interviewee favourably contrasts an inclusive growth approach to 'trickle down' economic approaches:

> *"[A] traditional approach to improving economy has been 'oh it'll trickle down' and actually there would be an assumption at every level [now] that […] that won't automatically trickle down. You would have to actually shape what that industry and what that city and everything looks like"* (Interviewee 8, Oct 2019, Sheffield)

The idea that the "*nature and structure of the economy*" (Interviewee 21, Nov 2019, Greater Manchester) required change was widespread in all three organisations. A frequent concern was that a 'growth at any cost' approach had been taken, especially in response to the 2007-08 economic crash:

> *"We've certainly been through a period of time in the last 10 years where, following the crash, the economic crash in 2007-08, it felt like everything was just… growth at any cost, almost. It felt like there was a desire to just get back to growing and making sure the GDP was growing, making sure jobs were growing. But I think the understanding of where people fit, the role of people in that and how people should benefit, where people were at the centre of it [...] seemed to get lost a little bit…"* (Interviewee 10, Dec 2019, Sheffield)

The failure of the benefits of economic growth to reach those most in need was a common critique, with the economic approaches over the past few decades framed as having contributed to increasing inequalities. Interviewees were consistently clear that the inequitable distribution of economic benefits needed to be better addressed, "*if we're serious about attending to inclusive growth*" (Interviewee 21, Nov 2019, Manchester). They also consistently positioned inclusive growth approaches as a way to "*[close] that economic gap between the haves and the have nots in order to create a fairer society*" (Interviewee 35, Jan 2020, Scotland), and framed success in terms of seeing a "*reduction in … inequalities, both spatially and across population groups*" (Interviewee 19, Nov 2019, Manchester).

In sum, many interviewees implied there was a need for substantive, even radical, policy change, potentially implying that policy activities would be focusing towards the right-hand side of Figure 1. Yet, it seemed much less clear *who* was responsible for achieving these changes or *how* inclusive growth goals were to be achieved. Complicating matters, inclusive growth was repeatedly described as all-encompassing:

> "*So I think inclusive growth cuts across everything really.*" (Interviewee 25, Nov 2019, Manchester)

> "*I think you would struggle to find an area that says our policy isn't about inclusive growth.*" (Interviewee 26, Jan 2020, Scotland)

In effect, there appeared to be few, if any, areas of policy beyond the scope of inclusive growth. Rather, it was framed as an overarching goal to which a host of other social and economic policies would contribute:

> "*[T]ackling poverty, improving standards of neighbourhoods and good quality homes, good quality jobs, good quality education system and skills and training which match the needs of the economy […] and of course tackling things like major health challenges, health inequalities, air pollution, that type of thing. They all feel like facets of something that would be part of an economic model that is about an inclusive economy.*" (Interviewee 10, Dec 2019, Sheffield)

However, none of the organisations yet seemed to have settled on exactly what each of these policy areas needed to be doing to help achieve inclusive growth ambitions. Given the spectrum of policy ideas put forward within the wider literature (see Figure 1), our data indicated that all three organisations were finding it relatively easy to achieve internal buy-in to inclusive growth as a policy goal. However, from analysis of documents and interviews, we could not identify any specific policy actions viewed as core to achieving inclusive growth. Moreover, efforts within a larger project (of which we are part) to co-produce inclusive growth systems maps with policy organisations (see www.sipher.ac.uk) initially resulted in maps that were so complex they were deemed hard to interpret, let alone use. In sum, despite clear organisational commitment to inclusive growth ideas, and a desire to find practical ways to achieve inclusive growth goals, all three organisations were struggling to develop a clear

'map' for achieving these ambitions. This left some interviewees asking questions about practical ways forward:

> *"what are we actually going to do about it? So we can all agree at a high level that we want the economy to be more inclusive, but practically what can we do to achieve that?"* (Interviewee 25, Nov 2019, Manchester)

This was not necessarily specific to the policy organisations. Rather, as highlighted in the following excerpt, the challenge of identifying actionable ways forward to achieve inclusive growth is a challenge internationally.

> *"[W]hat I see from what's happening in other parts of government and not just in the UK but internationally, even the OECD, we're all really struggling at that international level […] I think we're really good at the analysis and the evidence and articulating […] what the problem is and we might still not have a good definition, but we all know roughly what it means, but it's that policy and that impact and that action space that I think there's a lot less success in…"* (Interviewee 26, Jan 2020, Scotland)

Whilst such lack of clarity may be a reflection of early thinking and conceptualisation of inclusive growth, our ethnographic data suggest this uncertainty appeared to invite interest in alternative ideas. During our study period, we identified growing interest in the idea of 'wellbeing economies' in the Scottish Government and GMCA. Yet, rather than a wholesale shift away from inclusive growth towards wellbeing economies, our data suggest there is a layering of ideas, resulting in an uneasy co-existence and even greater malleability and uncertainty (see Table 4).

4.2 Soft power as a route to achieving change (within a traditional growth paradigm)

Partly as a consequence of a lack of institutional policy power over drivers of inclusive growth, routes to achieving inclusive growth ambitions often involved 'soft power' i.e. incentivising and facilitating other actors to change. Both our ethnography and interview data make clear that policy organisations often see themselves as leaders and influencers, rather than decision-makers or agents of change. This is further reflected in all of the policy documents and, in the case of GMCA and Sheffield City Council, is evident in decisions to co-author documents laying out region-wide (GMCA) and city-wide (Sheffield) inclusive growth type ambitions (HM Government, 2019, Sheffield City Partnership, 2018).

In all three organisations, 'anchor institutions' are emerging as a focus for 'soft power'. These are organisations understood as influential due to their size, status and purchasing power (e.g. local NHS bodies and universities):

> *"[T]here's the influencing and leadership role as well, around making sure that this is something that's then mirrored in other organisations […] like how we champion real living wage and those sorts of initiatives as well and then again that influence with other*

organisations in the city to try and, in a sense, close some of those inequality gaps."
(Interviewee 11, Dec 2019, Sheffield)

A key form of soft power involved encouraging 'good' employment. In Scotland and Sheffield, this meant using spending power (notably via procurement) to encourage more inclusive approaches to employment:

> *"[S]o that's about how we use our spending power as a government to diversify the workplace and in particular tackle the gender pay gap, improve investment in skills and training, tackle the zero hours contracts, improve voice in the workplace, so sort of union recognition."* (Interviewee 28, Jan 2020, Scotland)

> *"[A]nother example's procurement. So using our clout as a really big procurer […] And using that to, whether it's cleaning contracts or facilities management or whatever, making sure that they are employing people fairly and paying people a good wage."* (Interviewee 9, Dec 2019, Sheffield)

In Sheffield City Council, an interviewee used a specific example of a "big inward investment" that had created "something like 1,600 jobs":

> *"[W]e were able to work with them, because they wanted a little bit of public support, that was on condition that they really did invest in local labour and they're a living wage employer. They've taken whatever percent from the immediate local community. They've worked with our employment team to take long-term unemployed, people with difficulties."* (Interviewee 12, Dec 2019, Sheffield)

GMCA undertakes less direct purchasing (therefore procurement is a less viable means of exercising soft power) but the development of a *Good Employment Charter* was presented as another example of soft power aiming to encourage employers to improve employment practices:

> *"[I]t's about increasing productivity and it's about helping employers to unlock some of the potential productivity that they haven't accessed, but it's also about improving standards of work, improving quality of life, that kind of thing."* (Interviewee 17, Nov 2019, Manchester)

The above account is illustrative of the consistent way in which, despite critiques of traditional economic approaches (as outlined in 4.1), traditional measures of economic success (in this case, productivity) have been maintained and simply supplemented with efforts to improve broader social outcomes, such as the quality of work and life. Likewise, the following extract from the 2021 Scottish Government's Cooperation Agreement with the Scottish Green Party implies a similar reluctance to let go of traditional markers of economic success (the Scottish Green Party had campaigned on a manifesto urging a move away from 'endless economic growth – Scottish Green Party, 2021):

'While we share an ambition that Scotland should be a wellbeing economy that measures its success by reference to environmental and social objectives as well as economic objectives, **the role of Gross Domestic Product measurements, and economic principles related to concepts of sustainable growth and inclusive growth**, are excluded from this agreement.' (Point 5, Annex, Scottish Government, 2021a – bold font in original)

Hence, although interviewees' accounts of the problems that inclusive growth is intended to address implied a need for radical change, the limited mechanisms identified for achieving inclusive growth largely cluster at the left-hand side of Figure 1. This suggests a hope, for at least some in policy, that it will be possible to achieve ambitious social and economic outcomes via soft power and without disrupting traditional markers of economic success. However, this view was not consistently held and some participants noted that traditional economic growth may not be: (i) compatible with tackling inequalities or climate change; or (ii) realistic in the context of the economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (a point we return to in 4.4).

4.3 The strategic value of ambiguity

Given the perceived lack of direct policy power and resource, attracting sufficient support for inclusive growth ambitions was positioned as crucial for all three organisations. In this context, our data suggest the ambiguous nature of 'inclusive growth' is strategically useful since it can help create alliances. Overall, we identified five types of alliance that seemed important to the policy organisations we were studying: (i) public support (from local communities, especially voters); (ii) cross-government alliances (e.g. between organisational teams working on health, employment/labour market and the economy); (iii) ideational alliances (e.g. researchers, think tanks, international organisations working to promote and shape inclusive growth ideas); (iv) alliances to achieve change (potential implementers such as large, local employers); and (v) resourcing alliances (notably the UK Government). This section begins by demonstrating the consistent ambiguity surrounding inclusive growth ideas in each policy organisation (Table 4) and goes on to illustrate the importance of ambiguity for maintaining all five alliance types.

Table 4: The consistent ambiguity of inclusive growth terms

Preferred organisational term/definition	Illustrative extracts from interviews	Illustrative extracts from policy documents
In Sheffield City Council, our data suggest that 'inclusive economy' (rather than 'inclusive growth') was the preferred term but this	*"inclusive economy to me speaks to more things like equality of access, equality of benefit, equality of inclusion in a democratic sense and inclusion of understanding of the different parts of the system."*	The Inclusive Economy Framework (Sheffield City Partnership, 2018) uses terms 'inclusive growth' and 'inclusive economy' are used interchangeably, e.g. the following extract shows the former is used in much the same way as the latter is used elsewhere in the

was not defined consistently and other terms were in use.	Interviewee 15, Dec 2019, Sheffield *"someone else's understanding of inclusive growth might be more what I mentioned an inclusive economy is"* Interviewee 5, Oct 2019, Sheffield	document: 'Sheffield City Partnership Board, and all those working with us, are seeking a way of ensuring that sustainable and **inclusive growth** can benefit the city as a whole.' (Sheffield City Partnership, 2018: p.5)
There are no specific GMCA inclusive growth policy documents/strategies (despite organisational agreement it is a policy goal) and interviewees reported there was no agreed definition.	*"I don't think we have a common definition and understanding of what inclusive growth means and how we will achieve that."* Interviewee 24, Nov 2019, Manchester	Both 'inclusive growth' and 'inclusive economy' are used to describe the desired outcome of a range of policies and approaches within the Local Industrial Strategy (HM Government, 2019) and Greater Manchester Strategy (GMCA, 2017) but no GMCA document attempts to define these outcomes.
Across the Scottish Government, there was a consistent preference for the term inclusive growth in the first round of interviews and a consistent (albeit very broad) definition. In the second round of interviews, the focus appeared to be shifting to 'wellbeing economy,' often used similarly to inclusive growth).	*"I think it's about how we look to make economic growth something that is not just one number; it's how we spread it across the country both regionally and how it impacts in individual people."* Interviewee 30, Jan 2020, Scotland *"we're moving towards wellbeing economy, I would say now, but inclusive growth would probably be, or maybe inclusive economic growth is maybe a play on that…I think they're quite interchangeable."* Interviewee 37, Jan 2020, Scotland	In 2019, the Scottish Government defined inclusive growth as: '[G]rowth that combines increased prosperity with greater equity; that creates opportunities for all and distributes the dividends of increased prosperity fairly.' (Inclusive Growth Outcomes Framework 2019: 4) By 2020, the terminology seemed to have shifted to 'wellbeing economy' although the vision seemed similar, but with clearer reference to sustainability: 'a society that is thriving across economic, social and environmental dimensions and that delivers sustainable and inclusive growth for the people of Scotland' (Scottish Government, 2020)

Despite evident organisational differences in Table 4, interviewees within all three organisations identified definitional overlaps and suggested terms were interchangeable. Complicating matters further, some interviewees presented inclusive economy as an outcome of inclusive growth policies and, in one case, a set of values:

> *"I can see the link with inclusive economy. Because if you're going to have inclusive growth then you need to have an inclusive economy or one will deliver the other kind of thing."* (Interviewee 36, Jan 2020, Scotland)

> *"It [inclusive growth] is a judgment about the purpose of public policy and public services. It's a view about what we should be aiming at, which is political. And you know, difficult to almost. It's a values thing, I think."* (Interviewee 18, Nov 2019, Manchester)

Many interviewees presented this ambiguity as an asset. For example, one described inclusive growth as a *"feel good term"* which was *"low on specifics"*, noting that this *"might be part of its value"* (Interviewee 21, Nov 2019, Manchester). Expanding on this, the interviewee suggested that the term could be strategically adapted to appeal to *"a number of different audiences and without being actually very clear about what that does mean in terms of policy"*. Like others, this interviewee emphasised the strategic value of this malleability for bringing different types of policy audiences together. More unusually, this interviewee also suggested it could be useful in appealing to a range of social groups and, therefore, might help generate public alliances of support (in contrast, other interviewees seemed uncertain about the public appeal of the term inclusive growth).

Elsewhere in our data, interviewees referred to the value of inclusive growth/wellbeing economy for supporting links and conversations between different areas of policy (this seemed especially important for interviewees in the Scottish Government, perhaps reflecting the larger organisational scale). For example:

> *"The other aspect to why I like the wellbeing economy term is that I think there's an opportunity for me within my role and my colleagues' role within health to hijack that term. [Interviewee provides specific example of this in practice.] So […] it's a pleasure to see other colleagues across different non-health areas using the term, because it means that I can easily get access to an open door to try to influence their policies and interventions around this space."* (Interviewee 33, Dec 2020, Scotland)

Some interviewees also suggested there was a need to maintain and develop ideational alliances around inclusive growth – to appeal to (and perhaps avoid too much criticism from) academics and advocates pushing for inclusive growth type policies:

> *"There's things like inclusive growth units at the university been around for quite some time. There have been some very vocal, think tank is probably the wrong word, but organisations like the Centre for Local Economic Studies [CLES] have been really pushing. So there's been external academic [and] think tank impetus in this area."* (Interviewee 19, Nov 2019, Manchester)

What is notable about the range of organisations referenced by interviewees (across all three policy organisations) is that they cut across the spectrum of approaches to inclusive growth in Figure 1. For example, one think-tank cited by all three policy organisations was described as *"at the more radical end"* of the spectrum of Figure 1 but was positioned as

useful in "*pushing the debate along quite considerably*" (Interviewee 6, Oct 2019, Sheffield). Traditional economic bodies, such as the OECD and World Bank, were also cited as influential actors. Such ideational alliances were positioned as strategically useful for lending credibility and support to inclusive growth policy work:

> "*So I do think the credibility has come from that (academic research unit)… generally the experts and academics have started… there's been things like the RSA Commission, there's been a lot of movement around that agenda, and it's been building up and building up…there's been a bit of a swell of people who support inclusive growth, which is helpful.*" (Interviewee 22, Nov 2019, Manchester)

Perhaps reflecting this, both the Scottish Government and GMCA published a series of commissioned reports during our study period, in which some of these external actors were brought together to develop advisory reports on tackling inequalities and achieving economic recovery (Advisory Group on Economic Recovery, 2020; Independent Inequalities Commission, 2021; UCL Institute of Health Equity, 2021). Additionally, in July 2020, the Scottish Government appointed Neil McInroy as an official Community Wealth Building Adviser (McInroy formerly worked for the think tank CLES and both McInroy and CLES had been mentioned by interviewees, across policy organisations, as key external proponents of inclusive growth type ideas).

Similarly, our data suggest the ambiguity of inclusive growth can be useful in harnessing the 'soft power' described in section 4.2, enabling policy actors to frame inclusive growth in ways that seem most likely to appeal to those they are hoping will implement change. This is evident in the following extract:

> "*I would always defend business's right to go out and recruit the best people that they can […] and when you talk to them about some of their biggest risks, it's attrition. And actually investing in skills and training so that you mould the future workforce that you're looking for, a lot of employers are really, really switched onto […] The best outcomes are when actually they want to do it. And I think there is more of that going on than perhaps some people would think, but I can't compel them to and I wouldn't really want to try starting too much because I'm not sure that's our role.*" (Interviewee 12, Dec 2019, Sheffield)

The Scottish Government and GMCA also need to work with the range of political parties that make up local authorities. As such, there is a political dimension within implementation alliances, which make the chameleonic nature of inclusive growth especially useful.

Finally, our data suggest that the ambiguity of inclusive growth enabled policy organisations to leverage resources for this work. For example, interviewees in both SCC and GMCA cited the Local Industrial Strategies (LIS) as important documents that have to be agreed with the UK Government; a 'necessary condition… to draw down any future local growth funding being deployed through them' (HM Government, 2018: p.7). One interviewee, closely involved in the LIS development, reflected that GMCA *'fought quite hard over the language and the wording and what went in'* in an effort to appeal to the UK Government's

growth focused agenda, while reducing a perceived risk that the outcomes of the strategy would become "*more focused on growth, and just growth*" (Interviewee 22, 2019, Manchester). Once again, our data suggest that the ambiguity of inclusive growth proved strategically useful, providing devolved powers with space to shape their own policy goals whilst signalling alignment to the UK Government's agenda. Similar comments are evident in the Scottish data in relation to City Region Deals, which were positioned by several interviewees as a policy mechanism and source of investment for achieving inclusive growth but which needed to be agreed with the UK Government.

4.4 Unresolved tensions pose a threat

The previous section makes clear that the malleable, chameleonic qualities of inclusive growth are strategically useful to all three policy organisations. Yet, our data also suggest that the very same qualities bring significant challenges, notably constant, underlying tensions that threaten to disrupt fragile alliances. In Sheffield City Council, one of the core tensions – the importance (or not) of economic growth – was explicitly identified and discussed. Some interviewees here argued that growth is not central to an inclusive economy, and that it might not possible, or desirable, to achieve at local council level anyway. This seemed to have informed a terminological preference for 'inclusive economy':

> "*Sometimes growth is seen as a bit of a, not a dirty word, but it's potentially got negative connotations unless it's framed in a way that it's understood that everyone's benefiting as a result of the growth… So I think we're talking more about an inclusive economy where growth is important as a means to have a more prosperous economy and society where more people benefit.*" (Interviewee 7, Oct 2019, Sheffield)

Nevertheless, our data suggest a reluctance to be too overt about signalling a shift away from a primary focus on economic growth, with one interviewee noting ongoing political differences on this issue and another describing it as 'an entirely unsettled question' (prior to the May 2021 elections):

> "*The growth thing's a bit contested isn't it? […] I think you'll find different commentators sort of saying actually is growth what we're after here. And I'm not sure that's, well it's not settled, it's an entirely unsettled question, I think. In fact it probably has become less settled than it was. I think if we'd been having this conversation 10, 15 years ago we would have been talking almost exclusively about traditional economic growth. I think the debate is changing quite a bit. For me the more important word is the inclusive one, in many ways.*" (Interviewee 6, Oct 2019, Sheffield)

More recently, the economic impact of COVID-19 and substantial cuts to Sheffield City Council's budget raise further questions about whether economic growth is possible:

> "*Greg Fell [Director of Public Health] offered what he said was a 'blunt and honest' view from a local authority and highlighted the significant budget constraints faced by Sheffield City Council which places limitations on the extent of economic growth that can be*

expected" (adapted from ethnographic notes of Health Foundation presentation, November 2021)

Whilst tension around economic growth was less evident within GMCA and the Scottish Government, it was apparent when engaging with the broader ideational alliances framed as important for maintaining the credibility of this policy idea. For example, our ethnographic observations picked-up on tensions around the commitment to economic growth when staff from policy organisations were engaging with external actors promoting the idea that it ought to be deprioritised.

The potential for disintegrating coalitions of support seemed most acute in relation to tensions about income and/or wealth redistribution. For example one interviewee suggested that a key indicator of successful inclusive growth policies would be a reduction in pay differentials, but suggested that such a change to the *"status quo"* would be met with *"resistance, [...] particularly if that was a result of pay packets at the top being forced down"* (Interviewee 2, Oct 2019, Sheffield). Other interviewees expressed similar concerns, indicating that there was a lack of political appetite for policy changes to achieve meaningful income distribution. Hence, for at least some interviewees, policy actions listed in the right-hand side of Figure 1 were deemed risky to the fragile alliances regarded as necessary to achieve action. Therefore, policy attention fell to changes on the left-hand side of Figure 1, where achieving and sustaining widespread buy-in seemed more feasible. More recently, in the face of the economic crisis triggered by COVID-19 and Brexit, individuals in all three policy organisations have expressed concern that there may be pressure to return to a 'growth at all costs' approach to economic policy.

4.5 Malleability and metrics collide

In recent decades, quantification has emerged as a key technology of governance (Bandola-Gill, 2022), a trend Hoggett (1996, p. 22) calls 'measurement-fever'. Some observers argue that measurement, like malleability, can be a tool for de-politicisation (Lingard, 2011). This quantification trend was strongly evident in our data: our ethnographic notes (especially from the placements) are full of references to conversations and meetings around metrics, indicators and data dashboards, with one GMCA interviewee reflecting that '*data dashboards have become the new bible'* (interviewee 12, Nov 2020 Manchester).

In this context, it is unsurprising that all three organisations were exploring data and computer simulations as potential means of advancing their inclusive growth ambitions. Indeed part of the rationale for their engagement with the larger research project of which we are part was to strengthen their capacity for complex systems modelling for inclusive growth work. This required the three policy organisations to agree a set of indicators by which to track their progress in inclusive growth ambitions which, in turn, required a process of simplification and stabilisation to translate the chameleonic idea of inclusive growth into a manageable indicator set. While the metrics-focused context of key policy processes means that operationalising inclusive growth would likely always have required

such translation work at some point, this task was complicated by the fact that (to engage with the research project) all three organisations had to agree on which indicators to prioritise.

For all three organisations, we encountered pragmatic concerns around data availability (necessary for tracking progress) and the granularity of relevant data (necessary to model distributional affects). Beyond this, we identified a core tension between a desire to be ambitious (reflecting participants' accounts of the problems that inclusive growth should address) and a pressure to ensure that inclusive growth metrics would be useful and useable. Here, participants suggested that the closer the fit between inclusive growth indicators and existing policy indicators and interests, the more likely it was that they would achieve policy traction. For example, Scottish Government representatives were understandably keen to ensure that inclusive growth indicators mapped onto the existing 81 indicators linked to their National Performance Framework. In GMCA, there were concerns about how any new indicator set would fit with the existing indicators featuring in organisational data dashboards and, complicating matters further, a new set of Marmot Beacon Indicators emerging from the GMCA Marmot review (UCL Institute of Health Equity, 2021).

Two key tensions we identified during work to agree on inclusive growth indicators related to debates within the inclusive growth literature (see Introduction) and to the varying organisational definitions of inclusive growth and wellbeing economy (see Table 4). First, whether to incorporate traditional indicators of economic growth that do not contain information about inclusivity (e.g. Gross Domestic Product). Second, whether to include indicators relating to environmental sustainability. There were no easy ways to manage these tensions and multiple iterations of indicator sets were drafted and discussed during a six-month consultation period, with informal discussions continuing beyond this. Early iterations of the indicators that addressed pragmatic issues, such as data availability and achieving a manageable set of indicators, resulted in disappointment from some participants in Sheffield City Council, who felt the indicators did not seem 'radical enough' (ethnographic notes, 26th March 2021). Our interpretation of these concerns is that, by focusing on indicators that mapped to existing data, there was a sense that the indicators were doing less well in reflecting the dimensions of inclusive growth deemed to involve news ways of policy thinking. This concern, noted by several participants, mirrors previous accounts of the way in which historical policy efforts to reduce inequalities were pulled 'downstream' by the choice of metrics (Blackman et al, 2009).

The way in which metrics serve to stabilise evolving policy ideas was also sometimes actively resisted. In Scotland, for example, the following interviewee described plans to allow different local areas to employ different inclusive growth indicators, which would trade-off local specificity against cross-area comparability:

> *"we've always said when you're looking at inclusive growth in a specific context that area has to decide what else it wants to add in, because different areas will have a better idea of what matters to them in terms of inclusive growth"* (Interviewee 23, January 2020, Scotland)

At the national level, as the focus in Scotland shifted from inclusive growth to wellbeing economy, there was evident dissatisfaction that the final set of indicators did not reflect the growing interest in environmental sustainability. Interesting, having agreed a set of inclusive growth indicators for the SIPHER consortium to use, the Scottish Government subsequently published a Wellbeing Economy Monitor (Scottish Government, 2022a) which presents a broader set of indicators, further highlighting the difficulty of stabilising and simplifying inclusive growth / wellbeing economy ideas via the kinds of metrics increasingly deemed necessary for policy governance (Bandola-Gill, 2022).

Additionally, we identified some concern that employing the chosen inclusive growth indicators in modelling would privilege one vision of inclusive growth over others, posing risks for some alliances discussed in section 4.3. In ethnographic data, for example, we identified some concern that large employers and/or anchor institutions might not be comfortable with chosen metrics. An interviewee from Sheffield City Council also noted that there was the potential for trade-offs between different communities to become more visible, which might prove politically risky in a context of '*really extreme inequalities*' within the city (Interviewee 5, Oct 2020, Sheffield).

Despite these difficulties, at the time of writing, all three policy organisations had agreed a common set of inclusive growth indicators for the SIPHER project to use and were progressing with efforts to develop complex systems modelling for inclusive growth (albeit while also continuing to evolve their conceptualisation of, and approaches to measuring, inclusive growth). The evident hope seems to be that the complex and dynamic nature of this new approach to policy modelling will allow for an approach to inclusive growth that combines the persuasive power of metrics with the strategic value of malleable ideas.

5. Concluding Discussion

In the UK, recurrent attempts to overcome the limitations of policy silos have recently stimulated increasing interest in complex systems approaches to policymaking (Government Office for Science, 2022; Scottish Government, 2022b). The idea, is that complex social problems require complex systems responses. In this paper, we have focused on the way policy recognition of the complex links connecting social and economic inequalities have contributed to a growing interest in inclusive growth. However, as we demonstrate, inclusive growth is not only complex but contested and chameleonic. Various definitions of inclusive growth gloss over the potential trade-off between tackling inequality and achieving growth (Lee, 2018), with some accounts suggesting that growth in the economy will support improved health, environmental and social outcomes (and vice versa) (RSA, 2017). The idea that trade-offs can be avoided is highly seductive; few would openly argue against a policy

goal of simultaneously achieving economic success, greater social equality and more sustainable environmental outcomes. It is therefore unsurprising that inclusive growth has gained significant policy traction. Yet, these 'win-win' promises belie the choices that policy organisations *must* make in deciding how to achieve this goal and how to track and assess their progress along the way.

Our analysis suggests that, in policy settings, the malleability and fuzziness of inclusive growth type ideas is strategically useful as it helps expand policy appeal in ways that facilitate supportive alliances. In effect, 'inclusive growth' is employed as a chameleonic idea, with malleability being core to its success (Smith, 2013; Godzieswki, 2020). Chameleonic ideas share some similarities with McLennan's (2004) notion of 'vehicular' ideas – they are imbued with an 'ineliminable vagueness and 'mobility'' that allows them to transform as they move between actors and across contexts (McLennan, 2004, p.485). Ideas that might be regarded as 'radical' by some are able to travel into policy because they also incorporate dimensions that fit with existing policy trajectories; these different dimensions can be strategically (de)prioritised, depending on the audience. As such, these ideas can attract widespread support by appearing to enable consensus (Smith, 2013).

Yet, coalition building in itself does not achieve policy change and our analysis suggests the very qualities that have enabled inclusive growth to attract policy support leave policymakers facing major operational challenges (just as Fowler, 2021, attests). As we demonstrated in the final part of the results, these difficulties are exacerbated in the context of a governance paradigm that prioritises metrics and measurement (Hood and Piotrowska, 2021). As policy organisations attempt to agree how to track and appraise their inclusive growth work via sets of indicators (e.g. Scottish Government, 2022a), the malleability and fluidity of the idea is inevitably diminished. These decisions serve to institutionalise, and make public, a particular vision of inclusive growth and, in so doing, risks rupturing the range of supportive alliances that chameleonic ideas help attract.

As each policy organisation begins to settle on particular sets of inclusive growth indicators, future research might usefully examine whether/how this helps or hinders policy work to operationalise inclusive growth ideas. Working with academic researchers, these three policy organisations are currently developing data infrastructures to enable complex systems decision-support modelling that will support their inclusive growth decision-making. In contrast to more commonly used policy modelling approaches, the aim is to allow for greater complexity and dynamism, taking account of spatial and temporal dynamics and interdependencies between actions and outcomes in different parts of the policy system. Most optimistically, this new approach to modelling and decision-support could help bridge policy silos by taking account of the priorities of different policy sectors and identifying suites of policies that can exploit synergies and minimise trade-offs. Least optimistically, these efforts could prove so contentious they fracture the alliances that have developed. Between these two options, lie a wide range of possibilities and, given the contrasting organisational and policy contexts with which the three organisations are contending, it would be surprising if each navigated the same path.

References

Advisory Group on Economic Recovery (2020) Towards a Robust, Resilient Wellbeing Economy for Scotland: Report of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery. Scottish Government. *Retrieved from:* https://www.gov.scot/publications/towards-robust-resilient-wellbeing-economy-scotland-report-advisory-group-economic-recovery/

Bacchi, C. (2009) Analysing Policy, Australia: Pearson Higher Education

Bambra, C. Lynch, J. &Smith, K.E. (2021) The Unequal Pandemic: COVID-19 and health inequalities. Bristol: Policy Press.

Bandola-Gill, J. (2022) Statistical entrepreneurs: the political work of infrastructuring the SDG indicators, *Policy and Society*, https://doi.org/10.1093/polsoc/puac013

Baumgartner, F. and Jones, B. (1993) Agendas and instability in American politics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bentham, J., Bowman, A., Ertürk, I., Folkman, P., Froud, J., Johal, S., Law, J., Leaver, A., Moran, M. & Williams, K. (2013) Manifesto for the Foundational Economy. Working Paper 131. Manchester: CRESC.

Blackman, T., Elliott, E., Greene, A., Harrington, B., Hunter, D., Marks, L., McKee, L., Smith, K.E. & Williams, G. (2009) Tackling Health Inequalities in Post-Devolution Britain: Do targets matter? Public Administration, 87, 762-778

Burch, D. & McInroy, N. (2018) We need an Inclusive Economy not Inclusive Growth. Policy provocation. CLES. *Retrieved from:* https://cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Policy-Provocation_We-need-an-inclusive-economy-not-inclusive-growth_191218.pdf

CLES (2019) Community Wealth Building 2019: theory, practice and next steps. Manchester: CLES. *Retrieved from:* https://cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/CWB2019FINAL-web.pdf

CLES (2021) Rescue, recover, reform: a framework for new local economic practice in the era of Covid-19. Manchester: CLES. *Retrieved from:* https://cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Rescue-recover-reform-FINAL.pdf

Crisp, R., & Waite, D. (2020) Inclusive growth under a COVID-19 recovery. *Retrieved from:* https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/inclusive-growth-COVID19-recovery.pdf

Declaration of the Paris Conference. (2008) Declaration of the Paris Conference, April 18-19, 2008. *Retrieved from:* https://degrowth.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Declaration-Degrowth-Paris-2008.pdf

Fowler, L. (2021) How to implement policy: Coping with ambiguity and uncertainty. Public Administration, 99,581-597.

GMCA (2017) Our People, Our Place: The Greater Manchester Strategy. *Retrieved from:* https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/1084/greater_manchester_summary___full_version.pdf

Godzieswki, C. (2020) 'Health in All Policies' at EU Level: A Critical Analysis. PhD thesis, University of Sheffield.

Government Office for Science (2022) *Introduction to Systems Thinking for Civil Servants: Driving Improved Outcomes in Complex Situations*. Guidance published May 2022:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1079880/GO-Science_Introduction_to_Systems_Thinking_2022v1.0.pdf

Guinan, J., Leibowitz, J., McInroy, N. and McKinley, S. (2021) Owning the future: After Covid-19, a new era of community wealth building. Democracy Collaborative and CLES. Available at: https://cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Owning-the-future-FINAL.pdf

Hall, P. (1993) Policy Paradigms, social learning, and the stat: the case of economic policymaking in Britain. Comparative Politics 25, 275- 296.

Handscomb, K., Leslie, J., Pacitti, C., Tomlinson, D. and Smith, J. (2020) Analysis of the economy and public finances ahead of the 2020 Spending Review. London: Resolution Foundation, p. 31.

Health and Wellbeing Board, (2019) Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. *Retrieved from:* https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/dam/sheffield/docs/public-health/health-wellbeing/Joint%20Health%20%20Wellbeing%20Strategy%202019-24.pdf

HM Government, 2019. Greater Manchester Local Industrial Strategy. *Retrieved from:* https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/2132/gm-local-industrial-strategy-web.pdf

HM Government, 2018. Local Industrial Strategies: Policy Prospectus. *Retrieved from:* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/744544/local-industrial-strategies-policy-prospectus.pdf

Hogan, J. and Doyle, D. (2007) The Importance of Ideas: An A Priori Critical Juncture Framework, Canadian Journal of Political Science 40, 4, 883–910.

Hoggett, P. (1996) New modes of control in the public service. Public administration, 74, 1, 9-32.

Hood, C. and Piotrowska, B.M. (2021) Who loves input controls? What happened to "outputs not inputs" in UK Public Financial Management, and why? Public Administration,1-15.

Hough-Stewart, L., Trebeck, K. and Sommer, C. (2019) What is a wellbeing economy? Different ways to understand the vision of an economy that serves people and planet. WEAll Ideas: Little Summaries of Big Issues. Wellbeing Economy Alliance. *Retrieved from:* https://wellbeingeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/A-WE-Is-WEAll-Ideas-Little-Summaries-of-Big-Issues-4-Dec-2019.pdf

Immergut, E.M. (1998) 'The theoretical core of the new institutionalism', Politics and Society 26, 5-34.

Independent Inequalities Commission (2021) The Next Level: Good Lives for All in Greater Manchester. *Retrieved from:* https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/4337/gmca_independent-inequalities-commission_v15.pdf

Keating, M, 2010, The government of Scotland, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

Kenealy, D. (2016). A Tale of One City: The Devo Manc Deal and its Implications for English Devolution, The Political Quarterly, 87(4), pp. 572-581.

Lee, N. (2018) 'Inclusive Growth in cities: a sympathetic critique', Regional Studies 53, 424-434.

Lingard, B. (2011). Policy as numbers: ac/counting for educational research. Australian Education Research. 38: 355-382

Lupton, R. and Hughes, C. (2016) Achieving Inclusive Growth in Greater Manchester: what can be done? Manchester: Inclusive Growth Analysis Unit, University of Manchester.

Lupton, R., Hughes, C., MacDougall, A., Goldwyn-Simpkins, H. and Hjelmskog, A. (2019) Inclusive Growth in Greater Manchester 2020 and beyond: taking stock and looking forward. Final report. Manchester: Inclusive Growth Analysis Unit, University of Manchester.

McLennan, G. (2004) Travelling with vehicular ideas the case of the third way. Economy and Society 33, 4, 484- 499.

OECD (2015) All on Board: making inclusive growth happen. Paris: OECD Publishing. *Retrieved from:* https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/all-on-board_9789264218512-en

Public Health England (2021) Inclusive and sustainable economies: leaving no-one behind. London: Public Health England.

Raworth, K. (2017) Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st Century Economist. New York: Random House

RSA (2017) Inclusive Growth Commission: Making our economy work for everyone - RSA. Final report. London: Inclusive Growth Commission, RSA. *Retrieved from:* https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/final-report-of-the-inclusive-growth-commission

Samans et al. (2015) The Inclusive Growth and Development Report, World Economic Forum Geneva. *Retrieved from:* http://www.peprobe.com/pe-content/uploads/2016/01/WEF_Forum_IncGrwth.pdf

Scottish Centre for Regional Inclusive Growth. (2019) Inclusive Growth Outcomes Framework. *Retrieved from:* https://www.inclusivegrowth.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/414813_SCT1119483414-001_Inclusive-Growth-Outcomes-Framework_P3.pdf

Scottish Green Party (2021) Scottish Greens Manifesto. *Retrieved from:* https://greens.scot/sites/default/files/ScottishGreens_2021Manifesto_Full_web_version.pdf

Scottish Government (2022a) *The Wellbeing Economy Monitor*. Published online June 2022: https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2022/06/wellbeing-economy-monitor/documents/wellbeing-economy-monitor/wellbeing-economy-monitor/govscot%3Adocument/wellbeing-economy-monitor.pdf

Scottish Government (2022b) *Child poverty system map*. URL: https://www.gov.scot/publications/child-poverty-system-map/

Scottish Government (2021a) Cooperation Agreement between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Green Party Parliamentary Group. *Retrieved from:* https://www.gov.scot/publications/cooperation-agreement-between-scottish-government-scottish-green-party-parliamentary-group/pages/2/

Scottish Government (2021b) Health Inequalities Statistics. *Retrieved from:* https://www.gov.scot/news/health-inequalities-statistics-released-6/#:~:text=Healthy%20life%20expectancy%20for%20females,currently%20at%20its%20lowest%20point.

Scottish Government (2020) Economic Recovery Implementation Plan: Scottish Government response to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery. Scottish Government. *Retrieved from:* https://www.gov.scot/publications/economic-recovery-implementation-plan-scottish-government-response-to-the-advisory-group-on-economic-recovery/pages/3/

Scottish Government. (2015) Scotland's Economic Strategy. *Retrieved from:* https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-economic-strategy/

Sheffield City Partnership, (2018). Inclusive Economy Framework. *Retrieved from:* https://www.sheffieldcitypartnership.org/inclusive-economy

Sheffield Joint Health and Wellbeing Partnership (2019) Joint Health Wellbeing Strategy 2019-24. NHS Sheffield Clinical Commissioning Group and Sheffield City Council. *Retrieved from:* https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/dam/sheffield/docs/public-health/health-wellbeing/Joint%20Health%20%20Wellbeing%20Strategy%202019-24.pdf

Smith, K.E. (2013) Beyond Evidence Based Policy in Public Health: The interplay of Ideas. Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire

Spash, C.L. (2020) 'The economy' as if people mattered: revisiting critiques of economic growth in a time of crisis, Globalizations, 18, 1187-1104

The Foundational Economy Collective (2020) The Foundational Approach. *Retrieved from:* https://foundationaleconomycom.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/fe-approach-2020.pdf

Thelan, K. (1999) 'Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics' Annual Review of Political Science 2, 369–404

Trebeck, K. and Williams, J. (2019) The Economics of Arrival: Ideas for a grown-up economy. Bristol: Policy Press.

UCL Institute of Health Equity (2021) Build Back Fairer in Greater Manchester: Health Equity and Dignified Lives. London: UCL Institute for Health Equity. *Retrieved from:* https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/build-back-fairer-in-greater-manchester-health-equity-and-dignified-lives/build-back-fairer-in-greater-manchester-main-report.pdf

Verloo, M. (2016) 'Mainstreaming gender equality in Europe: A critical frame analysis approach', Επιθεώρηση Κοινωνικών Ερευνών 117, 11-34.

Walsh, D., Lowther, M., McCartney, G. and Reid, K. (2020) Policy recommendations for population health: progress and challenges, Glasgow Centre for Population Health & Public Health Scotland. *Retrieved from:* https://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/7878/Policy_recommendations_for_population_health-progress_and_challenges.pdf