

# Supporting smart urban intermediation

learning and recommendations for  
the Scottish policy context from the  
Smart Urban Intermediaries project

Scottish supplement



**Smart Urban  
Intermediaries**

Connecting people.  
Changing communities.

# Supporting smart urban intermediation: learning and recommendations for the Scottish policy context from the Smart Urban Intermediaries project

Scottish Supplement

December 2019

---

## Authors and acknowledgments:

Dr James Henderson and Dr Oliver Escobar (University of Edinburgh) – as part of the wider Smart Urban Intermediaries research – in collaboration with the following SUIs and Cooperation Partners: Martin Avila (Kinning Park Complex); Pat Cassidy (Govan Workspace); Moya Crowley (Plantation Production); Susan Hanlin (Central Govan Action Plan); Ryan Davidson (Govan Housing Association); Jim McMillan (Sunny Govan Radio); Anne Philbrow (Urban Roots); Yvonne Reilly (Glasgow City Council, Community planning); David Allan (Scottish Community Development Centre); Andrew Magowan (Inspiring Scotland); Derek Rankine (SURF); and, Kaela Scott (Involve). Note: the final interpretation and responsibility for this Supplement remains with the two researchers.

**This report is based on the Smart Urban Intermediaries research project:**  
[www.smart-urban-intermediaries.com](http://www.smart-urban-intermediaries.com)

## Conducted by:

University of Birmingham  
University of Edinburgh  
Roskilde University  
Tilburg University  
The Danish Town Planning Institute (DPTI)

## The research was funded by:

Economic and Social Research Council  
(UK; ES/R002991/1)  
Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)  
Innovation Fund Denmark  
united in the Joint Programme Initiative Urban Europe  
[jpi-urbaneurope.eu](http://jpi-urbaneurope.eu)

## Design

Adam Cavill  
Communications and Engagement Team  
School of Social and Political Science  
University of Edinburgh

# Introduction

This **Scottish Supplement** builds from the learning across four European case-sites – Amsterdam, Birmingham, Copenhagen, Glasgow – as is considered and explored in:

- the Project Report: [\*Socially smart cities: making a difference in urban neighbourhoods\*](#)
- the Policy Briefing: [\*Social transformation in urban neighbourhoods\*](#)

The *Project Report* deepens understanding of the complex, socially-skilled roles of **Smart Urban Intermediaries or SUIs** working in urban neighbourhoods across partnerships, sectors, networks and communities of interest – so socially-smart – in order to bring together place-making, community-building and ‘people-making’ (person-centred working). SUIs align this practical know-how with their values and commitments in order to navigate opportunities and tensions on-the-ground and develop actions and strategies for local change and development.

The *Policy Briefing* – discussed below – highlights broad messages common to all the case-sites on how policy-makers and funders can build the capacity of SUIs to work for flexible, accountable and participative local governance (democratic innovation); collective cross-sector knowledge-sharing and innovation to meet social needs (social innovation); and, the local potential of infotech or digital infrastructure and information technology (technological innovation).

Below we illustrate the often unrecognised, crucial role that SUIs play in affecting change with local people in communities and places in innovative, committed ways. This is considered in the Scottish policy context and alongside aspirations for a more equitable society and the eradication of poverty.

## **Summary of key learning: we have identified five priority areas for building SUI capacity:**

- Locally-led SUI Networks to generate collaborations and support training and advocacy.
- SUIs as local champions for social justice – poverty, inequality, risks of gentrification.
- Locally-led initiatives to coordinate local digital, social and democratic innovations.
- Extending local democratic governance – SUIs as key resources to catalyse change.
- Cross-sector development of local funding and investment strategies.

## Summary of recommendations relating to key learning:

1. Resourcing locally-led SUI networks and empowering them in local decision-making.
2. Formally recognising in policy and resourcing SUIs as local champions for social justice.
3. Developing local SUI-led place-based pilots and research on: (i) community-led digital development and data-use for participation and well-being; (ii) tackling poverty via community ownership, income maximisation and local employment creation (demand-side).
4. Drawing on SUI expertise widely – including within public service management and political leadership.
5. Developing with SUIs (cross-sector) long-term funding strategies that prioritise deprived communities and wider anti-poverty work, including (i) piloting local investment in core funding of smaller community organisations; (ii) step-change in integrating social with economic and physical regeneration – including investing in new SUI capacity.

## Understanding the wider policy implications of the research in a Scottish context

The full [Policy Briefing](#) points to common challenges and trade-offs for SUIs in European urban contexts:

- the 'curse of success': more demand for their work because it is seen to be 'making a difference', yet severe resource constraints given fiscal austerity.
- funding demands for further innovation yet the need to sustain existing provision valued by communities.
- organisational challenges: funding insecurities; risks of burn-out; and the need for more community leaders (SUIs) and generational relay.
- navigating local landscapes: institutional barriers; political complexities; and communities rich in diversity.

It highlights, therefore, the broad need to build the roles and capacities of SUIs to sustain change:

- policy-makers: recognising the key role of SUIs and supporting the risk-taking and culture change necessary to build smart urban governance
- funders: providing a range of options focused on sustainability as well as innovation and on social and economic outcomes rather than narrow targets

The researchers have worked with local (Govan-based) SUIs and cooperation partners (CPs) from national intermediary organisations – see acknowledgements – to build local dialogue that investigates and supports smart urban practices in the Scottish context. We point to three key elements in understanding the work of SUIs within a Scottish policy context:

**SUIs working within different sectors:** the community sector of community-led, not-for-profit local organisations; the wider third sector of larger voluntary orgs and social enterprises; the public sector – often but not only in community planning, community development and regeneration; and, potentially in local decision-making *and* within the private sector (neither a focus in this project).

**SUIs as working across diverse activities:** community arts and participation; community radio and multi-media; community housing; community-led regeneration; community food, health and well-being; community ownership and enterprise; community hubs and centres; community-based learning, training and employability; community development and empowerment; education and early intervention; equalities and diversity; welfare and advocacy; local economic development; local and community politics; community planning; town (spatial) planning; public health planning ... and so on ... *this can't be an exhaustive list!*

**SUIs as relevant across Scottish policy-making:** given their work across boundaries through collaboration, participation and empowerment to prevent and address negative socio-economic outcomes (inequalities) SUIs are very relevant to place-making, community-building, person-centred working and public service reform: as per the [Christie Commission \(2011\)](#), [Scottish Government's \(community-led\) Regeneration Policy \(2011\)](#), the [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#), [the Place Principle \(2018\)](#) and the [Local Governance Review](#). Yet, this fails to do justice to the breadth of their activities across inclusive growth, sustainable development, health and well-being, education and learning, and inclusive communities (as per the Scottish Government's [National Performance Framework](#) and [2019-20 Policy Programme](#)). And so, to their potential to initiate complex local democratic, social and digital innovations concerned for social justice and local outcomes.

## Five priority areas for investing in SUIs in Scotland – and related recommendations

**1. Investing in locally-led SUI Networks:** both the SUI research process in Govan through Local Labs – and in the other European case-sites – and the existing [Govan Alliance for Action](#) are illustrating the potential of locally-led SUI Networks to generate reflective practice and learning and to advocate of change – and *make a difference in urban neighbourhoods*. Where SUIs can collaborate and coordinate action, they make a stronger impact.

### **We therefore recommend:**

- investment in locally-led SUI Networks (scale to be defined locally) and related facilitation and training budgets, and access to a range of relevant intermediary bodies, to develop local shared practices.
- formal empowerment of these Networks, e.g. in Concordats, to support the building and sustaining of relationships with relevant policy-makers (local-to-national).

**2. Investing in SUIs as advocates or 'local champion' for social justice:** the local SUIs have diverse motivations – as with their European colleagues – but common to all is a commitment to social justice and *actually* making a difference on poverty and inequalities and so improving people's lives. Yet, they are well-aware, too, of the complexities of social change, for example: economic regeneration of low-income working-class communities carries serious risks of gentrification – marginalisation or displacement of

the existing residents – unless social justice remains central to local investments and plans. SUIs have highlighted local strategies that could – *if pursued smartly and at sufficient scale* – significantly reduce local poverty and inequalities:

- community asset ownership: buildings, land and culture to strengthen locally-led bodies.
- advocacy for income maximisation: with local people and integrated across local hubs.
- job creation relevant to local people: alongside employability SUIs are creating suitable local employment and related on-the-job-training e.g. [Operation Modulus](#), Jobs Match Group.

**We therefore recommend:**

- recognising and formally-supporting the role of SUIs and their Networks in championing and monitoring locally poverty, inequalities (social, health, economic) and risks of gentrification.
- investing in piloting scaled-up local SUI-led approaches to reducing poverty that integrate community asset ownership, income maximisation and suitable local employment creation.

**3. Investing in locally-coordinated development of digital, social and democratic innovations:**

internationally some *Smart Cities* have prioritised 'big data' development, e.g. Singapore; whilst others have focused on digital democracy and participation, e.g. Barcelona. Our research is highlighting SUI use of diverse digital and online opportunities for: multi-media e.g. radio, arts, film-making; online libraries – photos, music, educational resources; online community-based learning; welfare support and advocacy; project management – local data re. service-use; and, participation in governance and decision-making by residents and service-users.

There is clearly a very significant opportunity here for cross-SUI working with local residents and other partners to coordinate local digital (infotech), democratic and social innovation and build relevant local strategies. Smart cities need to harness and democratise ICT and bridge the current gap between 'tech entrepreneurs' and social innovators in order to create effective solutions to urban challenges and genuine community well-being. Until these connections are made, smart city strategies will have a people-shaped void at their centre.

**We therefore recommend:**

- investing in piloting through cross-SUI and sector approaches in various communities the scaling-up and coordinating of community-led digital development and data-use – including through Smart City and other digital funding and investment.
- using locally-led SUI Networks – and other community-led networks – to develop credible representation in all digital policy-making and create links with 'tech entrepreneurs'.

**4. Looking to the future: investing in democratic urban governance:** discussions with the local SUIs and CPs – and other current research, [What Works Scotland](#) – are illustrating the very real challenges for collaborative working (Christie Commission, 2011), that include:

- needing to reward shared partner contributions over individual impacts (attributions).
- institutional inertia: unless senior leaders and partners actively support local change-makers;

- ground-rules: shared local resources (commons) require dialogue and agreed practices;
- collaboration, advocacy or both: when to share responsibility and when to seek change?

These are inevitably problematic in times of public spending constraints and when there are imbalances of power between: larger institutions and smaller bodies; different communities; and within communities. There is no single, simple solution – these have to be worked out in ‘real time’. Approaches that seek to engage diverse stakeholders in deliberation, learning and decision-making about using resource – and learning from ‘failure’ – will be much better placed to understand the barriers, opportunities and alternatives. SUIs have vast experience (some have 20+ years) and offer a huge knowledge resource for developing open, flexible governance.

**We therefore recommend:**

- investing in local SUI Networks as sources of expertise, advice and mentoring in local governance for other services, institutions and communities – including at city-wide level and across Scotland;
- creating spaces for sustained dialogue between senior leaders (management, political) and SUIs, e.g. forums, action research, to learn together on an equal footing (‘horizontally’).

**5. Strategies for financial investment in SUIs and socially-smart urban regeneration:** our research with SUIs and CPs highlights three key current areas of funding and investment challenge:

- smaller community sector bodies lacking the stability *that long-term core funding brings*;
- resources for social regeneration that complement physical and economic regeneration;
- lack of SUIs, particularly in low-income communities, to support the scale of change needed.

SUIs and their organisations are resourced in varied ways, e.g. employed by state, grant funding, service level agreements, trading activity, social capital. So potential strategies are varied, too, and can include reducing bureaucracy; asset transfer; public procurement; community benefits and planning gain; long-term ‘relational commissioning’; national matching-funding for local funding; and local investment funds. This points to the need for complex local and national strategy development with local SUI Networks – and *urgently* – through deliberative and action-orientated approaches that can catalyse change across partners.

**We therefore recommend:**

- piloting of local strategy development on *long-term core-funding* for community bodies via cross-stakeholder deliberation and action research – including use of local investment funds.
- longer-term local funding strategy development with locally-led SUI Networks and key partners – public sector, funders, policy-makers – to catalyse socially-smart urban practice and invest in new SUIs and social regeneration.

# Supporting smart urban intermediation: learning and recommendations for the Scottish policy context from the Smart Urban Intermediaries project

Scottish Supplement

December 2019

For more information:

[www.smart-urban-intermediaries.com](http://www.smart-urban-intermediaries.com)

 @Smart\_Urb\_I

Catherine Durose

 [c.durose@bham.ac.uk](mailto:c.durose@bham.ac.uk)

Oliver Escobar

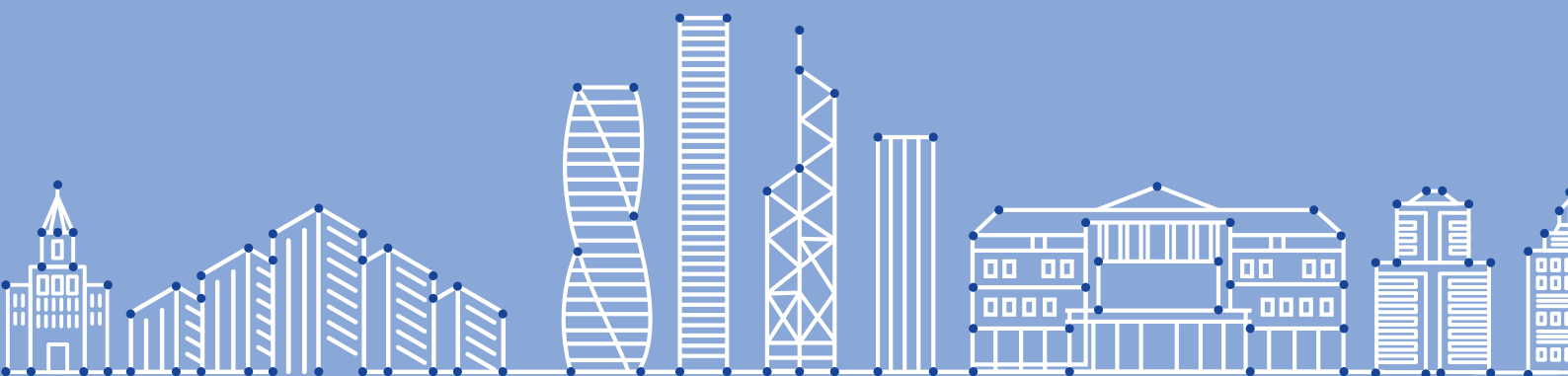
 [oliver.escobar@ed.ac.uk](mailto:oliver.escobar@ed.ac.uk)

Merlijn van Hulst

 [m.j.vanhulst@uvt.nl](mailto:m.j.vanhulst@uvt.nl)

Annika Agger

 [aagger@ruc.dk](mailto:aagger@ruc.dk)



Project no. 693443

 Innovation Fund Denmark

TILBURG  UNIVERSITY



Economic and Social Research Council

Project no. ES/R002991/1

URBAN  EUROPE



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM



 Roskilde University



THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH