**Transcript of video recording of 7th John Pearce Memorial Lecture, 12th October 2021, delivered by Lesley Riddoch**

**Pamela Gillies:**

Good evening everyone. My name is Pamela Gillies and I'm Principle and Vice Chancellor of Glasgow Caledonian University and I'm really delighted to welcome you all to the 7th annual John Pearce Memorial Lecture. At the outset I'd really like to say what an honor it is for this lecture to be in partnership with the New Lanark Trust, as part of the New Lanark 2021: A Living Legacy events during the year 21/22, and this is to celebrate the life of the cooperative and social enterprise pioneer Robert Owen.

Supporting, facilitating and researching social enterprise sits at the very heart of Glasgow Caledonian’s mission as the university for the common good. As a key part of this, our Yunus Research Center here at the university has developed -since its opening in 2010- into one of the leading international centers in social enterprise research and this has been down to the very hard work of many, many people. But it also requires inspiration and vision of the sort that we have taken from our now Emeritus Chancellor Muhammad Yunus and of course, John Pearce. Yunus and John could be thought of in many ways as modern-day incarnations of Robert Owen. As many of you will already know, John Pearce spent his working life developing creative community-led solutions to challenges facing urban and rural communities alike. Much of this work took place here in Scotland, but has had an international impact. Upon his retirement and just, sadly, prior to his passing, John donated his library and personal papers on social enterprise to Glasgow Caledonian Archive Center, a center with a strong reputation for hosting important collections with the social justice theme. For example, we host the Scottish Labour and Trade Union movement archives and also those of the Scottish anti-apartheid movement. John’s papers consist of materials built up over 40 years with a focus on community enterprise, worker cooperative development, and social accounting and audit for 3rd sector organisations.

This has provided the catalyst for the receipt of other very generous donations of material from the sector making up the Social Enterprise Collection (Scotland). This has all taken place under the oversight of our university archivist, Carol McCallum, working closely with Kirsty Menzies from the archive team and the Yunus Centre’s historian Dr Gillian Murray. It's an ongoing endeavor of preservation and cataloging which the team have kept going with funding from Community Business Scotland, the Medical Research Council, Scottish Government, and most recently -I'm pleased to say- the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Please do contact Carol and her team through the university web pages if you're interested in hearing more, or in donating resources to the Collection, which plays a major part in preserving Scotland modern-day legacy of socially purposeful enterprise.

And it's now my great pleasure to introduce our sparkling speaker for this year's John Pearce Memorial Lecture. Of course, to many she will require absolutely no introduction at all, Dr Lesley Riddoch has been an award-winning broadcaster and journalist for more than 30 years, focusing on politics, domestic policy and land reform. She was a member of the Isle of Eigg Trust that steered the islanders 1997 community buyout. She also set up Africa Woman, a charity training African women journalists online. Leslie gained her PhD in 2020 by comparing the hut and cabin traditions of Scotland and Norway. She won the Saltire Society Fletcher of Saltoun Award also in 2020 recognizing her role in shaping the cultural landscape of Scotland. She was also named independence campaigner of the year. Lately, she has written several books presented four films on Scotland, Nordic and Baltic neighbours, co-produces a weekly political podcast, and is director of the Nordic Horizons Policy Group. Much of this extraordinary experience will inform Leslie's talk tonight.

Leslie is challenging, insightful, always inspirational, and never anything but really interesting, so please join me in welcoming to the floor to present her lecture on: ‘Capable people, hopeless systems: Why do Scotland leaders still think big is beautiful? Dr Lesley Riddoch.

**Lesley Riddoch:**

Thank you very much. No pressure then! I'm delighted to be, I was going to say here tonight, but then where I'm being is in my kitchen quite evidently. It would have been lovely to have been in person with everybody and just to meet again, but you know that's not happening this year. That's fine and I hope we can manage to get some sort of engagement across the ether on the zoom, as many people have got very good at doing. It's a huge, huge, honor to be conducting a John Pearce Memorial Lecture. John was described as a social change design engineer, which is a great way of putting the many things he did. But he was an educator. He was an influencer. He worked in social enterprise. He pretty much set up the community business movement in Scotland, although he would be too modest to have claimed that entirely for himself. I'm a little different to all of that, because it's not so much community enterprise or social enterprise that's really steered my life, is probably the sort of preconditions that allow people to be able to move in and do something for themselves. In the course of all that, what's really struck me, especially as I've gone firth of the parish, is how much Scots are actually managing to do stuff despite their governments, despite their systems, despite the formal aspects of life, which, in every other country are shoring up the endeavors of local people and making it just far easier to do the stuff that can often take 10 years here.

So, what this lecture is really about, is this. I am just so tired of seeing this, of seeing capable, really capable, people struggling with hopeless systems and having the question marks constantly raised over their capacity by politicians, who talk a good game, but fundamentally keep systems in the most extraordinarily centralized and controlled ways. And I've spent, as I say, a lot of time going firth of the parish to try to get an idea of what would be normal at our latitude. I know that's a luxury that a lot of folk haven’t got, but ten years trotting around the Nordics, particularly, has just left me very aware that Scotland is weird. It's not that other countries are unusual, it's that we're very unusual. If we try to find solutions based only on examining our own experience here and sometimes feeling smugly that we're doing a little bit better than England at stuff, which is what currently constitutes success, we will get nowhere near recognising how much people are being held back by things we, not just could change, but must change, if we're to persuade people that democracy means anything. So this lecture will take a look at some of those things and we'll go decidedly firth of the parish at times, in fact fairly quickly.

First, I just wanted to look at what is going on in the background, because despite the fact that that nearly everyone in Scotland will say how much they admire communities, how much they support grassroots initiatives, there's a few defaults that just seem to be sitting in the back of everything. Small is a bit ropy. Local is a bit Alan Partridge, dreary. Cooperative is stuff that hippies do. Community is OK if all else fails. Social enterprise, ditto. Competitiveness is normal. Commercial-ness is normal. Big is very normal. That means we have really got a problem, because those are not the characteristic outlooks that support a vibrant society. And yet I would argue they're all present pretty much amongst the professional classes of Scotland.

I want to take us away a little bit and look at what would be different, because it strikes me that where you've got a belief that people can, generally speaking, run themselves, sort their own communities and fix things, you find systems that enable that. As Pamela was saying when she introduced me, I spent ten wonderful years on the PhD completely comparing Norway and Scotland. Yes, ostensibly about huts, but then actually their entire histories too. It's always nice to have a little prism to look through, because otherwise the glance can be so wide that it doesn't reveal as much as you'd hope it would do. So Norway, these are little islands that I kind of came across. They're in the Oslo Fjord, just 15 minutes by ferry from the center of Oslo; Some of the most valuable real estate in Europe now, as you’ll know if you've ever gone and bought pint. These are covered with little huts that were given to working- class, Norwegian, Oslo people in 1922, the same year that Carbeth began. Despite the vast rise in values in all the rest of it, they are still held and owned by those descendants.

This is what you tend to get, in a place where people the professionals and politicians trust people. You see widespread ownership. You see very devolved, self-governance. You see this kind of easy, relaxed enjoyment of huts, which have been handed down from generation to generation. You see these Norwegian flags everywhere because that's associated in people minds with the state that gave them that opportunity. You see people having tremendous, long summer holidays -for three months pretty much- dotting backwards and forwards to the mainland, and to work only when they have to. You see, people absolutely queuing up all the time to leave and to have freedom and an escape and some downtime, some recharging time, some time with their family. In winter these beautiful little wooden huts, they're still sitting there, ready for the next moment when everyone arrives on their boats.

There is the highest, not only the highest rate of hut ownership in the world in Norway per head of the population, they have the highest number of boats per head of the population too. In Scotland that would make you a very special, wealthy person in Norway that makes you average. That is speaking volumes about large things that have been done about equity within the Norwegian state and with all sorts of equalizing measures that were done economically, but that sits on a fundament and the fundament is that land is owned by tens of hundreds of thousands of Norwegians. It's a very fair, equitable system, and there's the expectation that should extend to absolutely everyone, not just an elite.

So that leaves us in a bit of a compare and contrast. It's perfectly true that during COVID where, I think, a lot of people hoped and still hope that the changes that were wrought during COVID, where we all became more dependent on one another, on friendship, on support, on community enterprise, on local networks. That somehow that would give us the jumpstart needed to realize that the centrally dominated commercial supermarket-ized ways we're living our lives, can be done differently. Yet it doesn't look as if the structures have actually changed very strongly at all. There were about a dozen huts built here at Falkland, in a couple of years around COVID, which is absolutely tremendous. The harsh truth, however, is that for many working class Scots, this is their hut, this is all they can have. These are the huts at the Cloch Lighthouse near Greenock. They are old shipping containers in the main; steel to withstand the vandalism they constantly suffer. As you can see, by the absolute seas edge so that, so at high tide they are almost completely engulfed. That's where we are. We're sitting right on the margins of our own country, because that's as good as it's going to get. And nobody owns their huts, they rent them. So you begin to see already there's just these different patterns, and no matter how many small efforts are made to try to change this situation, these overarching realities about land ownership simply aren't going to make it easy, so that's what I'm trying to ask here is, what's the rule and what's the exception?

Of course it’s great when you see new huts, but just look at the figures. Scotland has 500 huts. That's one hut per 8,437. Norway has more than half a million huts. That's one per 10 Norwegians, which roughly speaking works out as one per every family. So every family can get away -every weekend is a holiday. And how much good that does to everybody’s mental health, family building, all these kinds of things you have to experience to believe. That's the difficulty, we don't experience it enough. The other thing is what that good systems do for people, because what struck me in my travels around Norway is that really good fair systems, that presume that people are capable, will create lives for them where they're outdoors easily, where they have huts for their entire lives, and that actually returns resilience to people so that it's very visible. I saw these two older ladies when I was out and about in Hammerfest and they had just performed a very sort of elegant shimmy down a one in one slope on these slight little sledges. The woman, the taller woman, with the little red cheeks -that to me is resilience. That's what you're looking in the face there. Nobody sticking them inside just because there's snow down, because there's snow for kind of three or four months of the year. They have lived their lives outside and they negotiate it quite easily.

You also see, funnily enough, I found these postcards. In a in a society that has these real women, these gallus women that don't get stuck in a corner in their 80s and 90s, you discover art and culture that reflects it. I found this little series of postcards -which I love actually- you can see the gals are basically jigging about -looks like they've taken a few undergarments off in the process. There's a whole series of these postcards. This is a lovely one, because this is them out at the beginning of spring when the snow and the ice is melting. You see the swan in the background. Where would they be? Those gals, but out there enjoying the season. And that's why this matters so much, it's not some academic exercise about everyone being forced to live in a shed at weekends. It's that when you restore the connections with land and the outdoors to people, you start to trigger a resilience and their response which allows them to be the capable people they always were and it doesn't work if you keep land ownership the way it is in Scotland, which is absolutely beyond the means of almost everyone.

There's another thing which comes from that sort of resilience, and that easy access to the land, and it is that Norwegian kids just start their lives outdoors. As you can see from the one there that's just belting down the ice on his we shovel. This is an outdoor kindergarten and they're the normal default in in Norway. People are out, the kids are outdoors all the time. They're here feeding sheep. Can you imagine the health and safety people here looking at that? But this is actually proven -the academics can correct me if I'm wrong- that early exposure like this can often help people and kids’ immune systems. The policy difference that has been created by the Norwegian Government to make sure that there's equity at the base of everything, and certainly in ownership of land, works its way through to give these experiences that just create resilience from the get go. This is one another outdoor kindergarten that's the kids selling honey that they have collected and making hay.

By contrast, although I know there's a big push on now to try and learn from this and to try to have more Scottish children in outdoor setups, they're still cooped up by and large, and -key point- they're still going to school too early in the in the eyes of many experts. Let's just look at the average starting ages around the world, and it's absolutely extraordinary to see that only 12% of the countries in the world, start school at four or five as we do here in Scotland and Britain. The overwhelming majority of them are starting at six, and twice the number -of proportion that that's represented by the four or fives’- actually leave it till 7. So what's going on? Actually, what it turns out is that that 12% is mostly countries that were part of the British Empire. So there's one country that thinks it's OK to put kids to school at four and five, and it's the country that used the earliest Factory Acts to make it possible to have women sent into factories and that it needed to do something with their kids. And we haven't dusted down our thinking about that ever since.

This strikes me again as another case of children with tremendous capacity, particularly boys seem to suffer, from being forced into situations where they are having to kind of control motor functions they can hardly control at the age of four and five, and sit cooped up indoors. And then develop all sorts of difficulties, which I'm sure many folk watching will be more expert in than myself, which then spawns an industry of retrofitting the corrective measures to try to make them kind of equal citizens. Why don't we just question whether from the get go we have a hopeless system on this, where we are putting kids to school too early? I have not been able to engage any politician in any conversation about that, although I think actually the Lib Dems did champion it, sadly their grip on power, a little tenuous. I’m not being catty.

The other aspect of what capable people get, is they generally get to be self- governing and this one is really, hugely important and also completely unmentioned in political discourse. Here is what local government looks like in Norway. At least a part of it, because you can hardly fit the whole thing in. There are 422 local councils in Norway, which has much the same population as Scotland, with its whopping great 32, essentially, regional councils. And while we're at it, we -because we've got a little bit of competition starting 5 minutes ago with the Faroes, where I think there's a football match on tonight- if you look even at the Faroes, 18 little islands stuck in the North Atlantic between Shetland and Iceland, they have a population that hovers around 50,000. I'm trying to think what's small enough to throw at you for 50,000. They have 30 councils against the 32 for Scotland which is 5.3 million people. Those 30 councils are part of the reason the Faroes will give Scotland a fair game tonight, because each of those councils insists on having a football pitch. By the by, these are the people who are perky enough to challenge Google when it refused to put Google Street View on for Tórshavn the capital, because it said it was too small and insignificant. What the Faroese did, was a sheep-view campaign. They strapped cameras onto the sheep, and as they were wandering around the Faroes, they were giving incredible views of all the of all the vistas around the Faroes, shaming Google, who finally changed their minds. Tórshavn is on Google Street View, but the sheep-view campaign got that level -thirty million quids worth- of PR value and was seen by two billion people. Now that level of perkiness, challenge, up on your back feet, that all comes from a right sized-ness and sense of who you are and at the fundament of it sits these very tiny councils.

These are not unusual. If you think this is just a quirk of the Nordics, have a look at that. It's maybe hard to take in the numbers -try not to do that too much- but look at dear old Scotland. These are just median figures. So at the moment the average pop size of a council -a local council in Scotland- is 170,000 people, which is extraordinary. What you'll see there is, look at Germany -which is widely thought to be the real economic Dynamo of Europe- it has really small councils, which, ironically enough, were partly imposed upon Germany after the Second World War by British civil servants, who realised that having all power in a small number of hands created the kind of dangers to democracy that was evident through the rise of Hitler. They created this new, incredibly devolved system of government, handed the Germans a tremendous way to reinvigorate and revitalize their own society; came back to Britain, pulled up the drawbridge, and got the cucumber sandwiches out. So there's what we're saddled with, and there's no point blaming anybody else for this now. We could change this, you know.

Even just look at the square meters, the average physical size of a council in Germany, 15 square kilometers in Scotland 990. Look we're even larger than Norway and Sweden -enormous countries, for whom about 1/2 of their geography, sits in the Arctic -and we have larger local councils than that. I've not met anybody who can actually defend this at all, but I've not met anybody who thinks it's a priority to change. That's again where you begin to get this change that's happened in Scotland, because nature does arbore a vacuum. There's nothing at the kind of natural community scale in Scotland that’s formal, at least. So communities have taken up the slack and that leaves you this interesting difference that when you're in Norway and talk about community, you're talking about municipalities, which are formal, they're funded, their planned, they're a democratic structure. In Scotland, when you're talking about community, you might be talking about a community council, you're usually talking about volunteers who are doing informal, unfunded work, and that's fine, but it has many downsides now.

Communities can adapt to broken systems. This is Orkney, which has managed to look towards hydrogen, because it hasn't got a subsea connector, still -because of the broken system of privatized energy- to connect it to the mainland, meaning that its massive renewables potential can be translated into energy delivered to the grid.

So clever communities like the Orcadians have made a virtue of necessity and become extremely adept now at hydrogen, which they're using for fishing boats.

Garmony Hydro on Mull, which is a community hydro; again there was for a very short time grants for community hydro's, for community energy, and these guys got off their mark, crowdfunded, got the money just before, of course, the UK Government decided to change its mind and that hugely important way to pump prime local communities to then use for other projects evaporated again. That's what communities have to do in a broken set of systems. Keep on their toes. Stay nimble and stay on the case endlessly, which is a tremendously stressful way to have to be. Nonetheless, lots of people are doing it. I mean, I couldn't get on the screen at one go all the community trusts that are in Scotland. There are wadges of them and more being created all the time, because essentially this is the only game in town. If you want your community to succeed. Yet it's not without problems, because the possibilities of burnout are very high, and you spend your life endlessly making applications for problems and services that never go away. This is madness, because we have got essentially temporary and competitive funding structures for people who are doing services for their own community that that are nearly permanent fixtures. Within the context of the politics of Britain, that seems pretty normal. It's not normal, and it's not something that's really acceptable.

Capable people also run their own housing. There has been in Scotland, and Glasgow in particular has a great tradition of that. Here’s two back courts. The one with the kind of greyer brick, that's a tenement in Copenhagen. What you'll notice there is that because this is, as many of these tenements are, cooperatively owned severally by the folk are in that tenement, it’s kept a cap on prices during housing bubbles and it's also meant they slowly gather enough money to make repairs. The clever, clever thing they've done here is to retrofit a one person lift onto the back of the shaft where the windows are. This essentially means that older people, or people with mobility issues can live on any floor. So that thing of having to move flat when you change in life when you get a bit older, that doesn't happen there. That can be your flat for life, if you want it. It's a simple thing, but it gives you the eye to what difference there is with exactly the same style of housing when people are in charge of their destiny and can use their wit to be able to drive housing that works for them.

Many of you will know that West Whitlawburn did just this, and had a huge challenge when -way back in the 1980s- they heard that improvement cash from the then Glasgow Council was going to go to retrofit East Whitlawburn, because it was low rise and easier to fix. That presented them with a challenge, because basically they knew they were pretty well stuffed. Their tower blocks were, by that stage, showing lots of design flaws and producing lots of problems, lots of leaky drafty flats and dampness was starting. So what were they going to do? Well, they decided to take advantage -and boy was there a lot of holding noses at this point, because Phil Welch and Muriel Alcorn (who that both sadly not with us now), these two tremendous pioneers (Phil was a was a was a paid up member of the Communist Party, so actually having to take money from the Tory government of the time, you can imagine that was a struggle) -they decided that they would attempt what was, probably, Scotland’ first community buyout. Because it didn't happen on a Hebridean island, perhaps nobody really saw this. What they did was, they had a couple of goes at it, because they felt they needed to get around 70% buy in from locals and so they did. On the 19th of November 1989, they woke up as the proud owners of about 600 of the crappest flats in Europe; and if that's not a definition of courage I don't know what is.

Within them, when you spoke to them -as I did for *Blossom*, the book that I wrote in 2013- they all had enormous management experience. They were incredibly capable people. Phil ran, not one, but three junior football teams. I used to think junior football teams were just for kids, they're not, they’re for men, and these guys can be animals. He ran three of them. And had no management experience. He was a shop steward for practically 30 years in the Boilermakers Union, but had no management experience. Muriel Alcorn was a nurse. I mean there's no management and being a nurse is there?! The other two women who are at the core of that little group, that pushed through the buyout were shop assistants, who were lone shop assistants managing the demands of a difficult community on their own day in day out. Nae cavalry. Nae back up. Nae letters after their name. They had no formal management experience, but by gum, put those four together and West Whitlawburn was already louping.

They did lots of changes. It's there's not enough time to describe the common sense things that they were able to bring in, because they had a basic belief that if they could manage the place well, the capacity of the people was OK. The people were OK. They brought a lot of CCTV in. It might not be the way everyone wants to live, but it stopped drug dealing pretty quickly. They had a 24 hour jannie system. That meant that far, far fewer -practically no- older people were being admitted to hospital for unexplained emergencies, which happens elsewhere because there's fundamentally no home with people living on their own. There's a home for West Whitlawburn elderly, and because they have the capacity to push a buzzer and get a jannie up in the middle of the night for a cup of tea, if that's what they feel they need. So lots of things came together like that, and slowly West Whitlawburn gathered steam. They also had the wit to actually read the right to buy legislation, and discovered that a fully mutual housing cooperative, well the right to buy legislation didn't apply to it. So they became a fully mutual housing cooperative, and what is that? It is something which, on its board has not got professionals, has not even got bussed tenants from a neighboring scheme, It is your ain folk, and that again -this massive statement of confidence- that they could set their board up in such a way that the only people who could be on it were local tenants

Those local tenants were smart. They, immediately, were able to set up housing stock that was not bought at knocked down rates by the inhabitant. Since that gave them a little bit of a surplus, which has allowed them for the duration of their lifespan -about 30 years- to be building away all the time. Now that is kind of genius stuff, but it was not done by anyone wielding a clipboard or any kind of professional help. This was done by people who felt empowered to simply use their own brains and protect and become capable in their own communities. There is a tremendous irony in this. When I was there I was taken on a little tour of the East and you'll see immediately its lower rise and it has had quite a lot of work done on it, but you'll see here this furniture pickup spot. This to the folks in the West embodied everything wrong with the East, because there had been a problem getting a sofa out of a house. It sat against the wall for days maybe a week. The kids set fire to it that set off all the smoke detectors and people had to be evacuated from the flats before the Council came and picked it up. The bright idea in the East, from the Council, was to designate this bit -actually on the street- as a furniture pick up point. The bonus ball is that sofas aren't going to be left up against walls, they're going to be left in the middle of the street, and that's about as advanced a system as you could get in East Whitlawburn. In the West you just get the 24 hour jannies to say when they'll come to pick up whatever needs to be kept for the Council. They turn up, you have a cup of tea, they take stuff away, put it in a locked area, give it to the Council when it they turn up. End of problem. And here's the real kind of crusher, East Whitlawburn is now demolished. All that money spent on it and nobody actually wants to live there in the end. Despite the fact West Whitlawburn, has generally an 18 month waiting list and West Whitlawburn is one of the successful companies that's tendered for building homes on the site of the Old East Whitlawburn.

I had to explain that to Alex Salmond, when he was First minister. He hadn't heard of any of this. And, in a way, how could everybody have heard of everything, but these guys show you what's possible and yet that's not the model that housing employs at all right now. Right now, these small mutuals are all under pressure to merge. There has been mergers across the board throughout COVID in housing associations. Some of them are now run from England and nominally still Scottish. We've got far larger units than we ever had before. When community-led housing was a massive Scottish and Glaswegian success story that nobody even seems to know about, so this gars me greet. Really capable people struggling with difficult systems.

Finally-ish, capable people aren't sleeping on floors. I mean this situation with housing is the shame of Scotland, surely? It's bad in cities. It's appalling actually, in rural areas and there are folks sleeping on people's floors all over the islands and tourist hotspots tonight, because there is absolutely no land available. There is no housing available, although there is lots of hope amongst young ones. This lass was one of three young women on Skye, who had approached a second home owner and we're managing to live in her second home while she was caring for her husband in the Netherlands. As soon as that situation resolved itself, they were out and they left the island. They all had jobs, but there was not a chance that they were going to get any kind of accommodation on Skye. You could forget it. One reason is because there are so many Airbnbs’ -370 at the latest count. It might be the case that new legislation, which is voluntary and optional, is used to make Skye, a specially sensitive area, but since many councilors themselves have an Airbnb, will they actually enforce it? In any case, it was always difficult to find accommodation before the Airbnb phenomenon in areas that have only become more popular as time's gone on with, maddeningly even more opportunities, to have a really good livelihood, because of the never ending interest in Outlander and blinking Harry Potter. So it's madding, because there's huge capacity amongst people who could find it very, very hard to get going.

Some folk have tried very hard. Staffin on Skye, has spent a long time trying to get some new homes built and they finally succeeded. It's taken them a really, really long time, but they finally managed to build 7 new homes. It's taken them 21 years. From the beginning of the efforts to do that, this is beyond crazy and I appreciate people have to work within systems, but I don't have to pull my punches on this one. This is shameful and it's a totally malfunctioning proposition. There are other ways to work which other countries use, and in fact some islands really quite close by, like Eigg. This is the main point, because capable communities have control and it works the other way round.

When communities have control the capacity they have to run themselves, finds an expression. This is Eigg as was with Keith Schellenberg and one of his former homes; on the other side is Dean, whose sea kayaked over for the handover date party, which was one hell of a party, in June 1997 -never went back; met a lassie, has a bairn, and lives on Eigg. This is the way life was. Before the buyout, everyone had a diesel generator, polluting, expensive, noisy and some homemade attempts at solar panels. The buyout then came, which was a tremendous memorable day, and that really released so much energy to have new ideas; one of which was Eigg-tricity, an off grid system that takes hydro, solar and wind power to create a little off-grid system. Basically a heat pump system that works on Eigg and requires everybody to measure their energy use, so that if they go over the allotted amount for each house, which I think is 5 kilowatts, they actually trip the house. In six years, none's done it. This has really caused a lot of interest across the world, and there's constantly visitors to try and see how Eigg-tricity works.

Even more than that, is this miracle. This is a two bedroomed house for £40,000, all up. Now that's possible because, again, like the folk in West Whitlawburn, the Eigg folk just thought about the rules and realised that they could essentially give land for free to young people, particularly, to build homes and then require them, if they should ever sell that house on the open market, at that point, they would pay the full cost of the land back to the Isle of Egg Trust. Who'd do the whole thing all over again with someone else. Essentially what the Eiggachs have discovered is that they can defer the payment for land, not require it on the nose, and that's why the Eigg population has doubled and that's why there are self-builders all over Eigg, who are also managing to use native wood, because they've found that if they just make the beams a lot thicker, they can actually manage to use the wood that's right beside them.

They're learning incredible skills based on where they live. They've also planted 17,000 trees, determined to change the character of the island that was covered by some of those kind of Terry Wogan spruce fields that that had to be essentially weeded out. All of this has been done by locals who just saw the need and the desire to have their island be sustainable, not by any experts coming and telling them what to do. So I just think it's important for folks to know in life what's the rule on what's the exception.

It's always great when you see more exceptions creeping in, but it doesn't necessarily shift the rule very far. This is really the terrible truth about Scotland land ownership patterns. That's how many people owned 1000 acres or more in 1970. That's how many in 2012. That's fewer people. That's a greater concentration of land ownership. In fact, land ownership is more concentrated than in 1872. We're not making progress folks. We have the biggest land owners in the developed world and they are actually getting wealthier because the Scottish Government everything they try to do with targets, whether it's forestry or wind farms, that is actually bulking up the land ownership set. When you don't deal with an underlying structural problem like this, that robs capacity from people, you end up having to deal with them, because they own the substance of everything you need for the future.

Forests are shockingly in the same pattern and coming back to what was dear to John Pearce, his heart, which is the idea of cooperatives. It's not an open-toed sandaled strange thing to do in lots of countries around us. Finland must be the cooperative capital and it has tens of thousands of forest owners because, of the democratic share out of land; land there is forests. That meant all of these folk naturally worked together in cooperatives to try to export their wood pulp and basically produce all the newspaper print paper, in practically all Europe, from one or two huge cooperatives in Finland. There's a hugely different way to do things when you've got democratic ownership with tens of hundreds of thousands of owners, which here people would think was mind blowing; how can they organize themselves? You would hear them cry. The average Finnish forest owner has a really small land holding compared to the average Scottish one. And actually Finland has 100 times more private forest owners than Scotland, and that that really makes a difference.

It's also the case that lots of places are trying to re-wild Scotland. I chaired the 25th anniversary of the Borders Forest Trust just at the end of last week, and this is what they've managed to do with Cara Fran Glen beside Moffat, they've planted a million trees. It's been an uphill struggle the whole way because they are not the default. The default for forestry in Scotland is large, commercial, cellulose factories. Our climate doesn't need it. Our country doesn't need that. While it might need some, it doesn't need it to the extent we have. The shocking truth is that under the current custodianship of that mix of private land owners, only 1% of the borders has forest cover. The average across the EU is 38% forest cover. We are way, way, way off on lots of fronts. And of course it's great to see small changes happening and you have to think that when those small changes are happening, people start asking more questions and begin to realize there's a resistance. Their feet are getting stubbed constantly on something unmovable that that cannot be moved by them alone, and that I hope, is what really spurs people on to think that we have to get big system change, because otherwise we really do keep having the same old questions that just are extraordinary for a mature democracy to still have to ask.

We've got such capacity in Scotland, but we have to do something about our systems, otherwise I have a terrible fear that the capabilities and capacity of people will be realised in other countries and not our own, and that would be a tragedy beyond reckoning. Thank you.

**Gill Murray:**

Thank you Lesley. I'll give you resounding applause there. There's also spontaneous applause around the country and in Germany and California and other places people have been tuning in tonight. Thank you everyone for tuning in and I've had lots of comments already Lesley, from people really enjoying your talk, so thank you so much and for running through all your thoughts with us and we've got time for some questions. I have been keeping an eye on the Q&A function and the chat function, so, if you have a question to put to Lesley please type them in there and we'll go through them.

I'll go with a few that we've had already and had. One coming from Leslie. She was interested to know what your reflections on the hopes for Scotland’s Land Commission in reforming some of the practices you discussed?

**Lesley Riddoch:**

Yes. Andy Wightman, who's a good friend of mine, himself said that perhaps in the package of measures that came through with land reform when the Parliament was set up and then again in 2016, perhaps the most significant actually was the Land Commission because it has a brief to come up with ideas. I have little ticker thing where I get sent messages and when certain things appear in papers and at one point I was getting regular alarm bell type tickers coming from the *Daily Telegraph* with headlines of horror at the fact that the Scottish Land Commission was now conducting research into land value tax, begorrah -the idea of actually shifting our taxes to land. The brief they have, gives them the right, the duty, to go in and explore these kinds of ideas. The difficulty still is whether there's the political will behind it. To make any of the kind of shifts that they will bring forth all sorts of expertise and recommendations about. In the middle of all that, what you find are things like in the Borders, for example, and because there is now so much money going for forestry. It was the case, and I'm choosing my words carefully here, that the Duke of Buccleuch’s estate was essentially not renewing contracts, which had been renewed on an annual basis for up to 29 years, because they could realize more profits by turning those farms into forests. So that's a real tough one to see any daylight at the end of that, I mean, a huge fuss was created and people were roughly given some time to try to find somewhere else to live. The little people just get squeezed in this all the time and I never end hearing people ask me, why is the SNP so scared of real land reform? And I just don't have a good answer.

**Gillian Murray:**

Following up on that, Leslie says: another Scottish Government initiative is via the planning system and the proposed local place plans. What are Leslie’s thoughts about the potential for these processes to build the capabilities and capacities of local people?

**Lesley Riddoch:**

This I have a sort of allergic reaction, I'm afraid, to the kind of notion that the problem in life is that the little people capacities have not been trained up enough. I mean, it's extraordinary when there is a threat to something locally, how people begin to become absolute past masters at practically -they have to- every aspect of the complicated policy relating to it. Again, to come back to Andy [Wightman] the big problem about planning is the is the value that's captured within the blank planning process, which practically stops anybody being able to buy land at its ordinary value. So if you look at land; really remote land, or land that is currently a bog, or land that has got practically no real value as it stands today, it will still shift for sort of £100,000 because of its development value. We've never sorted that out. Andy Wightman tried to put an amendment through on the planning bill when it was working its way through Parliament, which -like every single other amendment he tried to put forward- was dismissed. We still have this awkward status quo, and yes, we can have planning -sorry, I'm just so weary of this. What will it take to just think that if we had proper democratic structures, you wouldn't have to keep setting up ad hoc combinations of people? Sometimes involved in housing, sometimes involved in land. You know there's things called local municipal councils, which seem to do the job pretty well elsewhere, but it's something that nobody will really invest any confidence in here.

**Gillian Murray:**

And related to that Lesley, we had a question from our Principal Pamela Gillies, which is simply, do we need independence to do this?

**Lesley Riddoch:**

Well, we I think we do, obviously. Mostly because we need to get to the stage where we had taken the plunge to become independent and decide that we could A: tackle these things ourselves. B: that we were able to make a fist of it as a country and go for it, we would have got the levels of confidence required to not take snash on these other issues. A lot of this requires at least the courage to say that things that have aye been, simply don't have to be this way anymore. Or it strikes me that we are in an endless Groundhog Day as things stand, where the main cleavage points of every election are the independence question. That's the main cleavage point. For example, it's why Andy [Wightman] is not an MSP anymore because he got squeezed out of the equation and moved to the highlands. As long as we're constantly in this ‘will we/ won’t we’ on independence, we don't make headway on any of these other domestic issues, even when we have devolved control over them.

I can write about these issues. No one reads them. I can see. No one reads them. I if I came up with a small snub to Nicola Sturgeon, or something about people. It's as if now we've been so dragged away from looking at the structural problems of how systems work. The press is full of click bait and eye catching headlines about personalities, 'cause they're easier to digest. They are the equivalent of the sweeties in our diet. You know we are not eating enough vegetables, people. I find when I go around and you want to really talk to people in local areas, all they want to speak about is how to get housing sorted out. I think there's a big mismatch between what is presented as the really important issues of the day and the stuff that people would like to talk about if they had any confidence at all that it wouldn't eat up ten years of their life in the effort. And it shouldn't have to.

**Gillian Murray:**

Well, actually I know plenty of people that read your journalism. Another set of questions that been coming through Lesley are on the different kind of mechanisms that we currently have for people. Margaret has been asking: Do you see a role for credit unions in empowering people? And there's been another question on cooperatives. Should there be more help for people to set up cooperatives in in Scotland? What are your thoughts on those kinds of approaches?

**Lesley Riddoch:**

I mean, cooperatives are a great way forward from credit unions also. I think the thing has been -I tried to take an account out in a credit union and I couldn't in my local credit union, because I earned too much and because I would quite like to have it work as a current account. The difficulty is because credit unions have arisen to fill a gap in the market where the commercial banking sector is not interested in someone, who hasn't basically got a secure job and isn't going to be a going concern. They're filling this gap in the market, but the way that credit unions work in Ireland -if you're going around Ireland and you're on a High Street, look for the most substantial building on the High Street with the kind of marble exterior and the pretty imposing façade, you're looking at the local credit union begorrah, because they are that woofy.

When you look at a lot of Norway and the low countries, the Sparbanken system is very similar. Ultra Local, essentially credit unions, which have worked that way and are literally town-sized banks. We have got a real curse of big as beautiful, which we've now accepted as a default and it's very, very recent. I mean, I remember the late, great Tom Johnston who was the fabulous Secretary of State who bought power to the glens by taking the kind of concerted effort to bring land owners together at the end of the Second World War and make them hand their land over for hydroelectricity -80 years after Norway. He started as a councilor in Kirkintilloch and was responsible for setting up the Kirkintilloch Savings Bank, which gave people who put money in half a percent more than they get anywhere else, and then lent it to the council at half percent less than the council would pay anyone else and created this virtuous circle of having a council that had enough cash to invest in all sorts of goods for Kirkintilloch, which is why Kirkintilloch had the first public baths beside the iron foundry that created all the red telephone boxes. It had a municipal goat herd. It had all sorts of small, is beautiful goods, that that were just part of the local money working its way right around that locality. Building societies, traditionally, are exactly the same, but we've lost that story. Now people feel reassured if they're with some monolithic large bank, even though those banks have skinned people.

That creates a really, really dangerous situation where you're sitting watching ads from banks that you know have been done for mis-selling. And you're taking your electricity from companies who you know have been done for mis-selling. And what does that do to confidence? It enthralls you more to these empty vessels, and yet you know that you don't feel very much confidence in them. I was at listening to George Monbiot recently, who said as we are approached more and more as consumers, we become more and more obedient and we actually have to stop allowing ourselves to be treated as consumers. We are citizens for all that her maj-ness is the top feudal superior. We are citizens and we need to withdraw obedience in a lot of these systems, because they don't work. I think I strayed off the point somewhat, but nonetheless.

**Gillian Murray:**

That was great, and actually ties in nicely with where I'd like to go with the next set of questions on our local governance. First Rachel asks: apart from the fact that inherited systems are difficult to shift, you know why does the Scottish Government prefer fewer, larger councils? And then if we could tie that in with Angus’, question: Can we have a genuine local democracy like the Nordic countries alongside the community sector that is grown up over the years, or do you think it's a case of one or the other?

**Lesley Riddoch:**

Yeah, that's a very good question. I'm not suggesting that we should be a carbon copy of any country that sits beside us, but simply that just having a look around you recalibrates your idea of normal. So we are way, way, way off beam on this issue, but it's not an easy thing to fix quickly and it's true that in the meantime, a lot of community effort has been created amongst people, who would very possibly not want to be councilors. I remember speaking to a great guy, whose name I'm suddenly forgetting in Ardnamurchan where Strontian school was basically built. The secondary school was really built by the community -maybe it was a primary. It was built in houses which once the primary can be taken over by the council -long story- will then revert to being three affordable houses for Ardnamurchan, which is a really clever thing to do. When I was talking to him about whether it would have been better if they'd been an ardent Ardnamurchan Council, would that make life easier? He said, well, possibly not really, because the parents put energy into the school. I mean, and literally, that one Strontian school. They wouldn't necessarily put the effort in two neighboring schools. My thought about that is, lordy, lordy, how about we have the same level of community engagement, but you're still dealing with Ardnamurchan Council? It doesn't really need to be an either or. The damaging thing that has become so normal, that it's fixed in us, is the belief that power is remote. That's the really, really most dangerous thing. When I look at the attitudes I see around the Nordic countries -of course, there's a lot of power that's held in central government- but an awful lot of power is not central. Look at what's happening right now. We're having a discussion about the Campbell oil field and whether it should get licenses or not. That decision will be made in Westminster, not even Edinburgh, and certainly not anywhere near the Northern Isles. Hop across the North Sea to Lofoten where there were similar discussions about whether to go for oil drilling around those islands, Lofoten, which around them, the seas hugely big for cod and all sorts of fish stock -I think 70% of the North Seas fish originate around somewhere around there, so really big problems if that goes wrong- the council said no. The end.

**Gill Murray:**

I'm just trying to succinctly get another few questions in before we close and wondering what's the best way to do that? We've actually got such many and varied questions, which I think is a testament to your talk and what how it sparked people interest Lesley. One question is around the size of organisations and obviously that was a big theme of your talk. Then we had a question about housing associations: Is there a role for the larger and housing associations, if they can become, you know more courageous and community facing in order to facilitate housing change? Maybe we could take that along with: What are the most important proposals to include next in the Land Reform Bill, so kind of housing and land?

**Lesley Riddoch:**

I do hasten to add, I'm not an expert in in in a housing I simply see what I see. I've no doubt there probably is argument for a variety of size and speed, and there's a spectrum in most things in life. There's not a spectrum in this. My worry is simply that the spectrum is diminishing all the time to simply be populated by a few large players in everything. In volume housebuilding, in social housing, in forestry -you name it- there are fewer and fewer players. Then actually in land owners, fewer players. At a recent event, someone was talking very passionately about the need to re-wild Scotland very urgently, because biodiversity is being lost dramatically. Pushed by me in my most diplomatic mode, he did actually say that it was easier to deal with one large billionaire landowner like Anders Poulsen, than a whole lot of small community owned bits of land. I had to practically bite the carpet, but I'm absolutely sure that that is the prevailing outlook, that it's just simpler. Simpler to just have the few large players around the place and that's a great way to work.

I'm not enough of an expert to say there's no role for a large housing association, but I can only see that by and large when there's been support -and this is a great proviso- because what often happens is that the small guys are working against type, against budgets, in the knowledge that they are weird and are essentially being urged to merge, so if they don't, they know that they're walking on the wild side- None of that is conducive to a sense of purpose and ownership, because you're constantly aware that the model is one you are defaulting from. When you're confronted with that and it's made very clear that the way your outlook, your instincts, your rootedness in your community -it all makes great sort of selling points on the front of some banner, but actually you're going up the down escalator- you need to be a really, really confident, courageous set of people to continue like that. That would be my thought there.

As far as land reform is concerned, we're at the stage now where, again, listening to what George Monbiot was saying about the climate as well, he doesn't want carbon taxes anymore. He wants wealth taxes. Looking at the energy situation, lots of people, including the head of overall energy, is saying don't put taxes on Ovo energy bills, put it onto wealth. The same sound is coming from everyone. Let's get progressive fair taxation in. It's a hopeless thing to say, coming back to Pamela's question, this is why you would need independence. Do you have a hope in hell of trying to get any of this on the road because you know Boris Johnson extraordinary -watch me language here- man, is today accused of presiding over the worst health failure in our history and will be elected again, whenever he chooses to hold another election. It's absolutely horrifying. We need to go for taxation and money; land value tax, as part of the promised reform of the council tax, which everyone has agreed, is a regressive tax and needs to go. That would be a pretty important one. There would be lots of other ones I would throw in because it's cocktails that work, the belief that there's one big bang is also sometimes a little bit of a dodgy one. I would absolutely not be placing the emphasis on communities to be braver than politicians, which is what the legislation currently requires, if you were going to, for example, accuse land owners of neglect, you'd need to be pretty blooming sure, you were going to get to the other side before you did that when that landowner is also your employer. We need some pretty radical stuff, but we need it across about seven or eight different mechanisms in a concerted way. I'm prepared to remain hopeful that the Land Commission will come up with some of those ideas. I think we need a new political party to be able to push it; all these kinds of ideas and I'm not sure we'll get that until we've got somewhere with independence -ba boom!

**Gill Murray:**

Thank you Lesley. I'm just having a last read through questions here and I think you have covered most of them even if we haven't been able to read out your questions directly, so thank you very much to everyone who has put a question tonight. Just as I hand over to Professor Donaldson to wrap up the evening, Cam himself had a question and it's one thing that kind of riles him up. When policy folks see what's working well, they often ask how can we scale this up? And he always thinks that it’s a totally wrong question to ask of something working well. Have you come across this yourself and what's your reaction to it?

**Lesley Riddoch:**

Yes, it's a very good point things. I'm sure there's been research done that suggests the ideal size for companies and everything was 140 people, 120? All sorts of dis-benefits creep in as soon as you start to become larger. I have a friend who was a very, very high up detective in the Met at one point. The Met is the largest police force in Europe -I think. It's the third largest property owner in London. Part of the difficulty is, the top has got no idea who that the staff are, it's a very, very big organization. There's lots of presumptions made that there's economies of scale, and we are so living with the downsides of all of that. Nobody has looked at the massive downsides of this idea of automatically scaling up: the loss of intimacy, the loss of contact, the loss of place within something, and the loss of a belief that if you let the next set of local people simply find their own feet, they would probably begin to emerge with some of those same, common sense solutions themselves. This idea that there can only be one wizard who will come in and seize the failing schools and turn them round; seize the failing areas and turn them around, it defies every bit of academic research. All sorts of different measurements of success in communities is generally, the more equal they are, the better they do, not the bigger the unit that tells them what to do. How can we be so different unless British exceptionalism, has become Scottish exceptionalism too?

**Gill Murray:**

What a brilliant point to end on. Thank you so much Lesley. We've had around 60 people join us tonight, so I think that's really great. Thanks to everyone for checking in, Lesley do you have any final comments yourself?

**Lesley Riddoch:**

No, I just I think it's great that you keep doing these lectures and I keep trying to fly the flag for just a different way of looking at how society works, because it fits in very well with the academic research that proves that.

**Gill Murray:**

That's a very nice message to hand over to Cam on, thank you everyone.

**Cam Donaldson:**

Thanks Gill, and it's my rather depressing role, to call the discussion to an end and in doing that I just want to take a few minutes to propose a few votes of thanks. First I would like to thank you, Dr Gillian Murray of Glasgow Caledonian Yunus Centre. Gill, works extremely hard every year, helping us think through who and what would constitute a great lecturer and lecture and this year has been a fantastic success in in that regard, as I'm sure you will all agree. As a historian, as the principle said, Gillian works closely with Carol McCallum and Kirsty Menzies at the University Archives Center to grow and to develop the Social Enterprise Collection (Scotland), of which the John Pearce Memorial Lectures themselves and John Pearce’s own papers are the fundamental building blocks. I would just like to remind people to contact the GCU Archive Centre if you have any material you think is relevant to the Collection. On the Archive Centre web pages, you can also find the Social Enterprise Archiving Toolkit, which was developed by the archive team using Scottish Government funding, and it's a free to use toolkit where you can learn more about what records to keep, how to organize them, and of course the benefits to your organization of having a well-kept archive.

Secondly, I would like to repeat what our principle Professor Pamela Gillies said by way of what an honor it is for this lecture to have been part of the series of events organized by the New Lanark Trust to celebrate the life of the cooperative and social enterprise pioneer Robert Owen, and we wish to Trust all the very best with the rest of that program for the rest of the year and into 2022.

Finally returning to our 7th John Pearce lecturer, Lesley, it has been inspirational and a privilege listening to you as one of Scotland great future thinkers and offering a vision for what a genuine collective, future and participatory democracy might look like. For so many reasons, your talk tonight has been timely. It's been uplifting, not only in general, but also more specifically in terms of the role that connectivity in in all its dimensions can play in moving forward from this critical juncture in global history and the role of cooperative and social enterprise approaches in that, offering the prospect of a better post-pandemic world as well as how to get there. I think your vision is one, from which we can all draw lessons, act upon and in that hopefully develop new and exciting partnerships moving forward. So once again, thank you so much and thanks to our insightful audience which inspired that a wonderful discussion after Leslie's presentation. To all of you, stay well, and we hope to see you for the 8th John Pearce Memorial Lecture next year. Thank you and goodnight.