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Collective *Phronesis* ('Wisdom of the Multitude') as a Philosophical Tool for the Analysis of the British Community Power Movement

Abstract
This article explores the relationship between Aristotle's concept of collective phronesis and the British community power movement, arguing that Aristotelian virtue ethics offers a valuable framework for understanding community-led regeneration. Drawing on Kristján Kristjánsson's interpretation of Aristotle's Politics, it identifies four dimensions of collective practical wisdom—shared purpose, contextual sensitivity, emotional regulation, and collective prioritisation—and applies them to the analysis of community power. Three case studies from disadvantaged British communities illustrate how participatory deliberation enables residents to identify common priorities, strengthen social cohesion, and implement effective local initiatives. The article argues that these practices exemplify Aristotle's "wisdom of the multitude", showing how collective agency can promote both democratic participation and the pursuit of the common good in contemporary local governance.

Keywords
Aristotle, Community power, Virtue ethics, Participatory democracy

Introduction

Since the economic crisis of the late 2000s, the United Kingdom has been witnessing a significant increase in the recognition of the role of community groups. This growth has occurred in reaction to the progressive decline of the post-war welfare settlement. The state's role was to provide for the least well-off in society, viewed as passive recipients of social utility and benefits (Collier, 2018, p. 85). In the eyes of British mainstream elite, the 2008 financial crash exposed the unsustainability of this post-war settlement. In 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron introduced strict austerity measures to reduce public deficit. Accompanying these measures, however, was his Big Society Agenda, where community groups and civil society were expected to fill the void left by receding public services (Kruger, 2023, p. 23). The increasing im-

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portance given to community groups contributed to the development of a dynamic cluster of local and national organisations which we will bring under one umbrella term: the community power movement. This movement has sought to highlight through campaigning and research the work done on the ground by community members, often in the poorest areas of the country.

This political evolution has led to a reemergence of talk about the notions of 'community', 'common good' and 'collective virtues'. Some political and philosophical milieus have already explicitly linked this emerging political movement to Aristotelian thinking and virtue ethics[1]. These reflexions have contributed to bridging the gap between virtue ethics and the community power movement and would merit more discussion and research. This paper aims to contribute to these recent efforts by assessing not only the compatibility between Aristotle-influenced concepts and the community power movement but also examining the direct relationship between the latter and Aristotle's works, particularly the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 2014) and the *Politics* (Aristotle, 2017). One limitation of our argument lies in the challenge of applying theoretical insights from the Greek city-state – a highly peculiar political reality from 2400 years ago – to contemporary political developments in a vastly different context, which may invite accusations of anachronism. Nevertheless, we believe that revisiting the Aristotelian text directly allows to investigate the theoretical basis for the rapprochement between virtue ethics and the community power movement that we are witnessing and helps to justify these attempts conceptually.

Our first part will recall some general points about individual practical wisdom that Aristotle makes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, before turning to the more elusive notion of collective *phronesis* (alternatively: 'wisdom of the multitude'), which we will uncover from an analysis of the 'accumulation argument' in the *Politics*. We will use Kristjánsson's model

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[1] On the left-hand side of the political spectrum, we find those thinkers and actors associated with the Blue Labour movement (Pabst, 2015): John Milbank, Adrian Pabst (Milbank & Pabst, 2023), Jon Cruddas MP (Cruddas, 2021), or the Common Good Foundation led by Blue Labour's founder Maurice Glasman (https://www.bluelabour.org/). On the Conservative end of the spectrum, we can cite former Tory MPs Miriam Cates and Danny Kruger of the New Social Covenant Unit (Kruger, 2021), and policy think tanks like Onward (https://www.ukonward.com/). There are also some important organisations which do not seek any partisan affiliation, viz. the Local Trust (https://localtrust.org.uk/), New Local (https://www.newlocal.org.uk/), or the Create Streets Foundation (https://www.createstreetsfoundation.org.uk). We are grateful to Matt Leach, Maurice Glasman, and Sacha Bedding for their helpful comments on our idea of a possible convergence between British community power themes and Aristotelian ideas.

of both individual and collective *phronesis* to conduct the analysis of the Aristotelian text, with some considerations from the collective virtue ethics and collective intentionality literature. We will then introduce the main tenets of the community power approach and assess avenues of compatibility with Aristotle's 'accumulation argument'. Our third part will provide three empirical examples drawn from the British community power movement and undertake a discussion pointing out the convergences between Aristotle's collective *phronesis* and the community power approach.

I. What Is Collective *Phronesis*?[2]

The notion of 'collective *phronesis*' (or 'wisdom of the multitude') we are interested in was introduced by Kristján Kristjánsson in an article for the *Journal of Business Ethics* (Kristjánsson, 2022). In this paper, Kristjánsson proposes an original interpretation of the 'accumulation argument' of *Politics* III, 11 in terms of 'collective *phronesis*'. But before we can turn to this paper and to the *Politics*, it will be helpful to begin by recalling what Aristotle meant by individual *phronesis* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

a) Individual *phronesis*

In Aristotelian virtue ethics, practical wisdom, or *phronesis*, is the master individual virtue. Though technically an intellectual virtue, it is not a standalone one: it cannot be possessed without a high level of the moral virtues too. A practically wise person is also a courageous and a just one. Conversely, 'completed' (i.e., habituated or ethical, as opposed to natural) moral virtues require the intervention of *phronesis*: one cannot be fully courageous or just without a mature degree of *phronesis*, as is clear in the classical definition of *Nicomachean Ethics* II, 6:

> Virtue, then, is a deliberately choosing state, which is in a medial condition in relation to us, one defined by a reason *and the one by which a practically-wise person would define it* (Aristotle 2014, p. 28 [1106b35-1107a1], emphasis ours).

Contemporary scholarship insists on the unity of *phronesis*[3], though

[2] The themes of this first section were explored at greater length and in greater depth by Eckert (2024).

[3] The unitary aspect of *phronesis* is usually drawn from *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 13: 'at the same time that practical wisdom, *which is one state*, is present, [the virtues] will all

this virtue involves seemingly distinct capacities. These capacities are not discrete and separable: they point to the synergic work between perception, judgement, and action. Kristjánsson et al.'s version of the so-called 'Standard Aristotelian Model' of *phronesis* (Darnell et al., 2019; Kristjánsson et al., 2021) is useful to illustrate this synergy. It consists of (1) a *blueprint* component (having a general conception of the good life – Aristotle's *eudaimonia* –, of what it means to flourish), (2) a *sensitivity* aspect, i.e., the ability to read the ethically salient aspects of a situation, (3) an aspect of *emotional regulation* (= the capacity to channel and mobilise emotions in such a way that they are in line with reason), and (4) a *hierarchising* function: the capacity to weigh the different relevant aspects of moral dilemmas, to adjudicate between single virtues in a given situation. In short, a practically wise individual perceives, judges, and acts in an integrated, fluid, moral, and rational way.

This account is derived quite straightforwardly from *Nicomachean Ethics* VI – at least according to its authors[4]. But where things become interesting is in the domain of *collective* virtue. On this, Aristotle has comparatively little to say, even if he does sketch such an account, which

be present' [1145a1, emphasis mine]. We must add that there isn't any clear consensus in the literature as to the status of this unity. Some scholars (mostly affiliated with the Aretai Center on Virtues) favour a monistic account in which *phronesis* is taken to be the essence of the singular virtues, and the singular virtues manifestations of *phronesis*. See e.g., De Caro et al. (2021, 2024, 2025) for a neo-Aristotelian development of Jason Swartwood (2013)'s model of practical wisdom qua ethical expertise in this respect. Followers of Philippa Foot, like Michael Thompson (2022) and John Hacker Wright (2015, 2023, 2025) will usually extend G.E.M. Anscombe (2000)'s account of practical knowledge and take *phronesis* to be the stability of the understanding of what I'm doing in the light of my grasp of the good life proper to my species, i.e., the perfection of practical reason. And the Jubilee Centre of the University of Birmingham and associates (Darnell et al., 2019; Kristjánsson, 2022; Kristjánsson et al., 2021, 2023; Kristjánsson & Flowers, 2024; McLoughlin et al., 2025) will defend an integrative and developmental account of the unity of *phronesis*, according to which *phronesis* can be seen as meta-virtue, organising and mobilising the particular virtues (which are thus, according to them, capable of some sort of pre-phronetic existence, something the Aretai Center would deny). We do not take sides in this debate; we will simply use Kristjánsson et al.'s model out of convenience since it is the only individual *phronesis* model that has attempted to scale-up to collective *phronesis*. We would be happy to consider other options were they to emerge from the literature.

[4] See Darnell et al. (2019, pp. 113-16). Some scholars (De Caro et al., 2021, 2025) insist that this is a reinterpretation of Aristotle's concept rather than the most faithful rendering of the doctrine found in *NE VI*. We do not necessarily disagree with this assessment. However, we do not feel the urge to make a pronouncement on this, as our aim in this section is not to defend any particular account of individual phronesis but simply to get a grasp of what sort of individual base a collective phronesis could supervene on.

is found in *Politics* III, 11 and following, a passage now usually labelled as the 'accumulation argument'[5].

b) Collective virtue, The 'Accumulation Argument' of *Pol.* III, 11 and 'Collective *Phronesis*'.

The expression 'collective *phronesis*' was not used by Aristotle, but it was retrieved by Kristjánsson from the following passage, which is found at the start of the 'accumulation argument':

> For each individual among the many has a share of excellence and practical wisdom (μόριον ἔχειν ἀρετῆς καὶ φρονήσεως), and when they meet together, just as they become in a manner one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses (αἰσθήσεις), so too with regard to their character (ἤθη) and thought (διάνοιαν). (Aristotle, 2017, p. 75 [1281b3-7].)[6]

Kristjánsson's reading is interesting: he starts from the assumption that the virtue vocabulary (*aretēs, phronēseos, ēthē)* here used by Aristotle to describe the getting together of the many and its consequences is not merely metaphorical, but is an account of collective virtue, of virtue predicated at the level of the group rather than the individual. And we can add that this collective virtue is not of the Platonic sort: Aristotle seems to be describing a phenomenon occurring at the level of a community of average citizens, not of ruler-kings or ruler-kings-*cum*-inferior-people. In that sense, collective *phronesis* can be described as an emergent phenomenon (Kristjánsson, 2022, p. 45): as Aristotle has it, the collective virtue seems to be other and greater than the individual basic virtue of the average member of the group [*Pol.* 1283a40-42].

The literature on the accumulation argument of *Politics* III, 11 is already abundant[7] so we will just sum up the main claims Aristotle makes along the passage[8]. When background conditions are present, a 'certain kind of multitude' may exhibit some form of collective practical wisdom, i.e., the group *taken as a whole* may be shown to be better in thought, perception, and character than its members taken individually. This phenomenon is obviously not systematic: it does not apply to every random body of men, and it does not work if the community is composed of 'brutes' or 'utterly degraded individuals' [1281b16-22]. But if the community is composed of members interested in its flourish-

[5] The term is from Horn (2016, p. 94).
[6] From now on just '*Pol.*'.
[7] See e.g., Waldron (2005), Cammack (2013), Horn (2016), or Girard (2019).
[8] See Eckert (2024) for a detailed fleshing out of the argument.

ing, and if it manages to involve them in the decision-making process through widespread participation, then there is a chance that the decisions taken will be even better than the ones considered by excellent individuals [1281b35-8]. This is because when it comes to their common good, the users know better what they need than the expert: the master of the house is a better judge of how the house should be used than its builder [1282a17-23]. Collective practical wisdom is not for all that synonymous with absolute and unbridled democracy: Aristotle remains cautious about the reach of his argument, and duly insists that involving every member of the community in deliberation and policy-making does not mean shunning expertise and excellence [1282a35-38]. A last noteworthy aspect of collective *phronesis* is that if the conditions for the phenomenon are met, then the many, as a body, will be less prone to destructive passions and less corruptible than the few: emotions and passions will be channelled into constructive activity and an increased sense of unity [1286a31-5].

In contemporary collective virtue terminology (see e.g., Astola, 2022; Byerly & Byerly, 2016; Fricker, 2010), we would say that the collective *phronesis* sketched here fits within the 'in-between' territory of collective virtue: it is neither a 'summativist' account (in which the collective virtue is merely the adding and averaging of the individual tokens of virtue, as it is for instance in Plato) nor a 'collectivist' account (in which collective virtue is so strongly emergent that individual virtue becomes irrelevant, as it is arguably in Marx). And as Mandi Astola recalls in *Collective Virtues. A Response to Mandevillian Morality* (Astola, 2022, p. 85), we can usefully further distinguish between agent-based and eudaimonistic models of collective virtues. Agent-based accounts are upscaled versions of individual virtues: they try to establish what a group belief, a group character, a group trait or a group motivation could amount to from the combination of the beliefs, traits, characters, etc. of its members and are thus vulnerable to scepticism if these upscaled versions do not seem to make sense. But this is not necessary if one adopts a eudaimonistic model, which is more interested in objective elements of the good life than in collective psychological motivations. In the eudaimonistic model, a trait counts as virtuous if it intrinsically contributes to the good life of the group. We think a good common life is one which preserves what Edward and Robert Skidelsky (2012, p. 145 et seq.) called the basic goods for all citizens: security, health, autonomy, respect, harmony with nature, philia, and leisure. As regards the wide-ranging debate on the nature of collective intentionality and collective agency that should be supplemented with such a eudaimonistic model of collective virtue, we tend to lean towards the Searlean view that the ability to engage in we-intentions has to be taken as a 'biologically primitive phenomenon that

cannot be reduced to or eliminated in favour of something else' (Searle, 1995, p. 24), and hence that group agency is simply a primitive fact about our species. Collective intentionality, in our opinion, has to be taken on board as a basic capacity of human beings because we find it hard to see how it could ever be generated from individual intentionalities[9], as the summativist seems to imply. The bruteness of collective intentionality fits well with eudaimonistic emergent collective virtues. Collective *phronesis* will then be something like the excellence the group will manifest in its intentional seeking of its common good. It will be attributable to a group of individuals united in their we-intention, though this we-intention obviously will not have to be instanced in the same way in each individual thinking it in order to be real (otherwise we would be back with a summativist account)[10].

In his article, Kristjánsson argues that we can fit the content of Aristotle's argument within his fourfold model for individual *phronesis* so as to generate a picture of collective *phronesis*[11]; we will follow his example but not its details. To us, a community can be described as collectively practically wise if it manifests (1) some form of *blueprint* (having a community wide view of the good life, of what it means for the community to thrive/flourish); (2) some *sensitivity* function (identifying the community's priorities, accumulating all the different points of view); (3) some *emotional regulation* dimension (testifying of social harmony and trust, channelling discontent and violence through frequent meetings and deliberations); and (4) a process of coherent *hierarchisation* (devising coherent plans of action, carrying out concrete projects).

These 4 dimensions reflect and merge Aristotle's points and show some

[9] 'Why are so many philosophers convinced that collective intentionality must be reducible to individual intentionality? […] It has seemed, in short, that we have to choose between reductionism, on the one hand, or a super mind floating over individual minds, on the other. I want to claim, on the contrary, that the argument contains a fallacy and that the dilemma is a false one. It is indeed the case that all my mental life is inside my brain, and all your mental life is inside your brain, and so on for everybody else. But it does not follow from that that all my mental life must be expressed in the form of a singular noun phrase referring to me. The form that my collective intentionality can take is simply "we intend", "we are doing so-and-so", and the like. In such cases, I intend only as part of our intending. The intentionality that exists in each individual head has the form "we intend"' (Searle, 1995, pp. 25-26).

[10] 'No set of "I Consciousnesses", even supplemented with beliefs, adds up to a "We Consciousness". The crucial element in collective intentionality is a sense of doing (wanting, believing, etc.) something together, and the individual intentionality that each person has is derived from the collective intentionality that they share. Thus, to go back to the earlier example of the football game, I do indeed have a singular intention to block the defensive end, but I have that intention only as part of our collective intention to execute a pass play' (Searle, 1995, pp. 24-25).

[11] See Eckert (2024) for comparison with Kristjánsson's model and further details.

clear parallels with the characteristics of the individual concept we examined above, whilst not being reducible to them. But as many have noted before, Aristotle's account is pretty schematic and requires some filling in. A number of key terms have to be specified: 'a certain kind of multitude', 'background conditions', 'not utterly degraded', 'average men', 'interest in the common good'. This is where we diverge from Kristjánsson: following Narbonne's *Sagesse cumulative get idéal démocratique chez Aristote* (2020), we believe that the 'certain body of men' for which the argument holds is not necessarily a small community of excellent/virtuous leaders. We think there is reason to believe that the argument also holds for a community of ordinary people – an 'assembly of freemen', in Aristotelian terms. This is because though Aristotle remains cautious about his conclusions and usually favours an aristocratic model of collective deliberation in the *Politics*, some passages from Book III make it clear that he is also open to a community-wide form of decision-making, which issues in better actions that the ones considered by isolated wise individuals. For instance, in chapter 13, we read:

> All these considerations appear to show that none of the principles on which men claim to rule and to hold all other men in subjection to them are right. To those who claim to be masters of the government *on the ground of their excellence* or their wealth, the many might fairly answer that they themselves are often better and richer than the few—I do not say individually, but *collectively*. [*Pol.* 1283b28-32] (emphasis ours).

We think this important remark from Aristotle opens the way to some considerations from a seemingly different line of thought: community power. Despite the apparent distance between the two approaches, we contend that the practice of the community movement can shed some interesting and novel light on the 'certain kind of multitude' and background conditions of Aristotle's accumulation argument, at least as it is interpreted through the Kristjánssonian lens we have chosen.

II. What is community power?

a) Community power

The idea that power lies within communities is as old as politics itself. It could even be argued that the Athenian city-state was a sophisticated and institutionalised form of community power. To try to identify and characterise the different forms of community power throughout history would go beyond the remit of this paper. However, in today's context,

we can say that the community power movement shares one common belief: that 'communities have knowledge, skills and assets which mean they *themselves* are well placed to identify and respond to any challenges that they face, and to thrive' (Lent & Studdert, 2021, p. 8). At root, the community power movement stresses the salience of collective agency both as a means to achieve better collective welfare (better health, decline in loneliness, or even economic growth) and as an end in itself (as a way to better manage emerging needs and prospects). One key leader of the British community power movement, Matt Leach, CEO of a national based funder, stressed that the very building of intermediary institutions where people can meet and engage with one another was a goal in itself since it afforded the very space in which decisions as 'we' could be issued (M. Leach, personal communication, June 2, 2023). Collective deliberation and decision-making are an essential aspect of the development of collective agency for another key community power proponent: as Blue Labour thinker Maurice Glasman has it, the common good cannot really be imposed from the outside; it only emerges from the sustained interaction of the community with itself (M. Glasman, personal communication, June 10, 2023). A recurring theme in the community power movement is thus that collective agency is a valuable end in itself even before considering what sort of actions the community undertakes. We will see how this belief translates into action in the next section.

Community power advocates stress that their approach should be understood not merely as an end that communities aware of their own good should strive towards but also as an instrumentally valuable strategy from the perspective of external actors, such as the state. They argue that community groups possess an epistemological advantage over external actors, including experts (Aristotle's 'wise men'; in contemporary terms, public servants), when it comes to responding to local challenges and improving their area. To them, being a resident of a neighbourhood and a member of a community affords more accurate and context-sensitive knowledge of local conditions and problems. Another key tenet of the community power paradigm is the stronger interest communities have in the development of their area. As is often stated within the British community power movement, local communities have more 'skin in the game' (New Local, 2023), meaning they are more likely to be committed to local initiatives that benefit fellow community members and the neighbourhood as a whole than are non-community actors, however benevolent (Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, 2024).

b) Community power and collective *phronesis*

There have already been attempts at connecting community power

with Aristotelian ethical-political thought (e.g., Kruger, 2021). There are also examples in the other direction: Aristotelian philosophers finding application of their ideas in community power organising. MacIntyre's *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (2016) is a classic example. His account of collective deliberation in the Aristotelian vein is based on empirical examples of community organising. To MacIntyre, deliberation presupposes 'some large degree of agreement on the goods that are at stake in the decisions that have to be made, (…) a shared conception of how it is just to proceed' (2016, p. 178). To him, this is well exemplified in the struggle of the small Danish community of fishermen in Thorupstrand to defend their way of life. In this example, everybody's voice is counted, and we see an accumulation of the various situated points of view (local banks, fishing crews, families, unions, individuals) issuing in effective collective action. Each discrete part would be powerless as such but becomes potent as part of the community-wide deliberative process. To MacIntyre, their eventually successful resistance to the injunctions of both market and state to give up their characteristic way of fishing can only be explained in terms of this community organising. Just like Aristotle, MacIntyre does not think that this process arises automatically, and he stresses the crucial impact the 'qualities of mind and character in those who provided the community with leadership' made (2016, p. 180). But he does describe something akin to what we called collective *phronesis* in the previous paragraphs: a form of virtuous – effective – agency which is ascribable to the community as a whole and not just to its individual members, though it does not shun individual expertise and excellence.

To come back to the accumulation argument, we can notice that it does in fact lend itself pretty well to a community power interpretation. As mentioned earlier, a central tenet of this movement is that communities already possess some knowledge, skills and assets, but these need to be nurtured to be exploited. The potential is never automatically unlocked; it requires the community members to take matters into their own hands and develop some form of collective agency. This process does not emerge randomly but is usually kickstarted by community leaders and active groups within a community, who usually provide the material elements for the possibility to emerge, like a common meeting ground (Common Vision, & Local Trust, 2022, p. 11). But these groups cannot get lasting results unless they involve the whole community in the decision-making process. Like in Aristotle's Book III, collective actions and improvement are not just the result of the leaders getting together and imposing a course of action: it requires every member to take part in the elaboration of the plan and to feel empowered by it. When it comes to public services, the community power movement nicely parallels Aris-

totle's point about the 'users' being better judges of the 'house' than the 'builders': civil servants should be enablers and partners; they can provide the necessary material help, but they cannot *impose* improvement from the outside (Lent & Studdert, 2021, p. 14). Indeed, improvement can only come from the community itself. If we're talking about local impoverished communities within a modern nation-state, a mistake often made is to think that impoverishment is a result from the withdrawal of the state. While this is partly true, the community power movement aims to emphasise that the key factor in degradation is the disappearance of *agency*, both individual and collective, and that regaining it is the key to improvement. Agency can only be enabled, not trickled down or enforced. Community power organisers and theorists thus seem to provide an explanation for the transition of a group from a collection of 'utterly degraded of individuals' to the 'certain kind of multitude' to which Aristotle's accumulation argument would apply: the fostering of agency, through common deliberation.

In the following section, we will build on these parallels and analyse three examples of improvement within local communities. Treading in MacIntyre's footsteps, we will see that the community power 'down to earth' narrative of the events can also be cashed out in the more theoretical vocabulary of Aristotelian collective *phronesis.*

III. Examples of Collective *Phronesis* within the British Community Power Movement

The British community power movement we are investigating here, though rich in historical sources and predecessors, began in the mid early 2000s in reaction to the decline of the post-war welfare state (Lent & Studdert, 2021, pp. 12-14). We are not arguing that there was a significant increase in community groups during that period but that the recognition of their work grew, thanks to a cluster of local and national organisations (think tanks, charities, networks, local councils, political organisations, public service departments, and so on). In particular, the British community power movement gained momentum during David Cameron's premiership, marked by strict austerity measures that reduced the size of public services and the Big Society Agenda which sought to replace public services with civil society institutions and community organising. Initiatives emerging during the Big Society era – such as the National Lottery's Big Local programme, delivered by the Local Trust – remained active throughout the following decade and participated in a growing movement calling for a shift from centralised state interventions to more localised and ideally community-led projects.

As part of this research project, we focused on three community organisations in left-behind neighbourhoods (The Beacon Project in Falmouth, Ambition Laurence Weston in Bristol, and The Wharton Trust in Hartlepool), and interviewed two prominent public figures of the turn towards community politics: Matt Leach and Maurice Glasman, both mentioned earlier in this paper. For the sake of brevity, we will focus here on just these three examples of community betterment, but the reader should keep in mind that there are hundreds of them[12]. These examples are usually – rightly – analysed through the prism of community power. But we argue that it is also possible to wear the Aristotelian spectacles and notice that the four dimensions of collective *phronesis* work hand in hand once people from the place start to meet regularly and deliberate together. Let us have a look at the facts first.

a) Beacon estate, Falmouth, Cornwall

Our first example reaches some 30 years back, being one of the 'pathfinders' of the multi-agency partnership which is now trademark of the community power movement (Stuteley, 2002, p. S45). The Beacon Project was established in 1995 in a small destitute estate of Falmouth, Cornwall, in which health levels were alarmingly low. The intervention was decided on the ground that declining health in post-industrial areas is usually associated with low social capital, inequality, antisocial behaviour, and civic disengagement, and it thus required a holistic approach of the kind Putnam (Putnam, 2000/2020) forcefully argued. Meetings with representatives of health, education, social services, local government, and police issued in an action plan. But unlike most governmental intervention or other top-down approaches, the Beacon project was established on the premise of a large community involvement, which was early on identified as the key factor to stop the downward spiral (Stuteley, 2002, S44).

This is what the Beacon estate residents did: some key tenants were identified, and they were able to involve their peers through knock-on-the-door conversations and hand-delivered newsletters. Frequent meetings were organised, and more and more people attended them. This allowed the community to articulate and organise its concerns: frequent meetings were organised, and attendance ratcheted up. Those meetings could get stormy, but they quickly issued in an identification of the community's priorities: tackling crime, remedying poor housing and unemployment, and addressing the shortcomings of the government agencies supposed to deliver them (S44). The Partnership made successful bids

[12] For a compelling overview, see Pollard et al. (Pollard et al., 2021) and Create Streets Foundation (Create Streets Foundation, 2020)

for monies which resulted in the installation of affordable central heating in properties and in aesthetical improvement of the estate. Two former empty shops were also converted into the Beacon Community Resource Centre and the Beacon Care Centre, providing a range of services which were not easily available to residents before.

b) Ambition, Lawrence Weston, Bristol

Ambition Lawrence Weston is established in the most deprived neighbourhood in Bristol. Despite successive regeneration programmes, Lawrence Weston estate was one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the region and faced the decline of cherished local institutions and its high street (Create Streets Foundation, 2020, p. 72). In early 2010, community leaders decided to come together to regenerate the neighbourhood after they received a £1 million grant to be spent over 10 years from the Big Local programme. However, unlike previous regeneration plans, the very first step taken was to knock on every door and deliver a community-wide consultation to understand the priorities and aspirations of local residents.

From this consultation, the residents identified energy security and lack of community spaces as vital aspects of the common good of the community. Working together, they were able to construct a community-owned solar farm in 2016, generating a return of £25,000 a year. They have since then moved on to constructing the biggest onshore wind turbine in England, generating enough energy to power 3,500 homes and substantial economic revenues to invest back into the local economy. Despite administrative and legal complications, this project has finally seen the light of the day, and the wind turbine is now operational (Heap, 2023). These two constructions have substantially reduced fuel poverty in the neighbourhood and generated funding for further projects. As community organisers have it, 'our assets aren't capital; it's the community's influence on land use and on planning decisions' (Create Streets Foundation, 2020, p. 73).

Ambition Lawrence Weston then used the proceeds from its energy projects to reinvest in community activities and clubs and a construction skills academy. They have managed to build 3 new play parks, open new cycling routes, and revive a local carnival. They also established a structured deliberative process, which is reflected in the details of the projects they undertake. For example, new houses are not just built according to standardised blueprints: they are actively designed by the residents to meet their energy efficiency, space, and accessibility needs. The residents-written Community Development Plan and Community Economic Development Plan were extremely influential in the carrying out of these successful projects one after the other (Local Trust, 2020, p. 2).

c) Wharton Trust, Dyke House, Hartlepool

Our third example is also set in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country, Dyke House, in a typical British post-industrial town: Hartlepool. Like Ambition Lawrence Weston, the community benefitted from the Big Local funding programme and were awarded £1 million to spend over ten years. This was a rare opportunity to try to do something about Dyke House and so residents came together around the local Wharton Trust charity, which was entrusted to deliver the funding. 'We know that lots of well-meaning people have tried to help us; but all we really want is the tools and where necessary the resources to help ourselves', as the 2018-2020 Big Local Plan has it (Big Local Dyke House, 2020, p. 2). The ambition was to veer away from paternalism and seeing people as mere end-products of social policies and, instead, try to incite them to take action into their own hands. Indeed, according to community leader Sacha Bedding, just like in our previous examples, previous regeneration plans had always failed in the area because they had systematically overlooked the inclusion of local people's perception of what should be done (Bedding, personal communication, June 2, 2023). So, this time, the Wharton Trust decided to organise a community-wide consultation. This meant that the relationship between the agencies and the residents was positively altered: the residents' vision of their place was at last given credit, and their opinion placed on an equal footing with the agencies' more technical knowledge, without obviously disregarding it altogether.

As Bedding recalls, people do not usually move out of Dyke House, so everyone benefits from the improvement of the place. The only thing is to articulate and negotiate priorities, which is what the community consultation set out to do. The residents identified learning and skills development, employment, environment, and health as their top needs, and wrote down plans of actions. All these issues were tackled according to the tenets of community power organising: listening to people, not doing things they can do for themselves, reinforcing relationships, and encouraging residents to become part of the organising process (Big Local Dyke House, 2020, p. 4). And thanks to this new approach, unlike previous regeneration plans, the results followed suit: a community housing project was implemented to make cheaper houses available, a 'Make Dyke House Beautiful' campaign resulted in thousands of flowers and trees planted, investments in community businesses were effectuated, etc. (pp. 3-5). A 'Thousand Eyes' campaign was implemented to tackle antisocial behaviour and prevent crime.

Having a physical forum is hugely important for the residents, and Wharton Trust provided it with their Annexe building: in the past, lo-

cal residents too often felt like they were merely the end product of state policies which did not directly address their concerns. It also has the merit of yielding concrete results in the streets: having a space to express your anger or resentment in a codified way like in the meetings organised in the Annexe greatly reduces antisocial behaviour and other anarchical expressions of emotions and canalises them into effective actions. Having a way to meet external institutions and discuss policies on equal footing proved to be effective in reducing mutual distrust between residents and civil servants.

d) Discussion

Table 1 – Manifestation of collective *phronesis* in community groups

Aspect of collective *phronesis*	1. Blueprint	2. Sensitivity	3. Emotional regulation	4. Hierarchisation (instances of successful community-wide projects)
Beacon Estate	Improvement of place and strengthening of community ties.	Community consultation, enabling the community to articulate its concerns: crime, poor housing, unemployment, public agencies shortcomings.	Meetings would get stormy but channelled to identify community priorities	Successful bids for monies which resulted in the installation of affordable heating and aesthetical improvement of estate. Two empty shops were converted into community centres.
Ambition, Lawrence Weston	Improvement of place and strengthening of community ties.	Community consultation, enabling the community to articulate its concerns: energy security & lack of social infrastructure	Antisocial behaviour has increased comparatively slower than other neighbouring areas.	New social infrastructure – 3 new play parks, cycling routes, and a revived local carnival. New houses built around principles of energy efficiency. Renewable energy built to reduce energy costs.

Wharton Trust	Improvement of place and strengthening of community ties.	Community consultation, enabling the community to articulate its concerns: learning and skills development, employment, environment, and health.	Outburst of anger and argument in community consultations, but that would actually result in improvement of communities ties. 'Thousand Eyes' campaign against insecurity.	A community housing project was implemented to make cheaper houses available. Aesthetic improvement of the estate: thousands of flowers and trees planted. Investments in community businesses effectuated.

In Table 1, we point to the various compatibilities between Aristotle's collective *phronesis* and the examples of community power we have selected. Each of the community groups studied developed some form of blueprint, though maybe in a more rudimentary way than Aristotle's favoured city-states: their goals centred around improving the local area and strengthening community ties. This shift likely reflects the pluralism of contemporary British society, where shared goods are no longer bound by strong religious or ritualistic frameworks. Yet, this does not diminish the relevance of the blueprint dimension to the community power model. In fact, all three groups were generally clear with their overarching goals: aiming at securing something like Skidelsky & Skidelsky (2012)'s basic goods for their members. And that clarity of goal fuelled their motivation and engagement with their local initiatives. Mark Pepper, the leader of Lawrence Weston, emphasised that their collective determination to improve the neighbourhood was key to the success of their initiatives (Create Streets Foundation, 2020, p. 54).

This collective motivation was clearly demonstrated in the success of community consultations, which highlighted the 'sensitivity' aspect of collective *phronesis*. The blueprint was every time mediated by the specific priorities each group identified, always tailored to their local contexts, giving unique flesh to the accumulation argument. The residents' viewpoints were deeply rooted in their personal experiences and local environment, and by bringing these perspectives together through consultations, the communities were able to define precise, localised priorities. The fact that they then successfully achieved these goals suggests that their judgements were sound and their priorities well-chosen. In practice, the community power approach did seem to verify something akin to Aristotle's argument about the user being a better judge of the house than the builder.

Through collective engagement, these groups also addressed internal conflicts and antisocial behaviour, illustrating in an interesting way the 'emotional regulation function' of collective *phronesis*. Both Beacon Estate and Wharton Trust experienced turbulent consultation sessions. However, they managed to resolve these conflicts, channelling frustrations towards higher goods, such as the desire to improve their area. As Aristotle foresaw, the deliberative process itself led to more constructive relationships between neighbours and an increased sense of unity. Better collective engagement usually also means more trust in the streets: collective campaigns against anti-social behaviour like the Wharton Trust's 'Thousand Eyes' initiative become a concrete possibility.

The 'hierarchisation function' of collective *phronesis* was also evident in the initiatives undertaken by these community groups. After establishing their priorities, the communities successfully carried out various projects like renovating or building community centres and bolstering the local economy. These efforts showcased the synergy between widespread community involvement, attentiveness to local needs, and the ability to carry out projects to their term. Over time, as these groups gained experience, their capacity to initiate and execute projects improved, with community engagement deepening as more residents became invested in the success of these initiatives. This highlights a key principle of community power: people came to have more skin in the game; they felt more concerned about the well-being of their community as they understood that their individual well-being depended on it too.

In these examples, while it may be a stretch to assert that the communities have achieved a *phronetic* level (i.e., that they're thriving), we can clearly see how the four dimensions of collective *phronesis* – blueprint, sensitivity, emotional regulation, and hierarchisation – worked in tandem from the moment residents began meeting regularly and engaging earnestly in discussions about their priorities. Thus, we think we have illustrated the value of establishing parallels between Aristotelian arguments and the practices present in contemporary community power movements. We believe our work should encourage Aristotelian scholars to take a closer look at these movements: in line with the Stagirite's attention to the empirical sphere, they may find there some relevant actualisations of their own ideas, as MacIntyre illustrated. Conversely, our analysis suggests that local actors and stakeholders could benefit from Aristotle's insights regarding the normative and theoretical implications of their own practices: themes like the common good and the purpose of the community seem to naturally emerge from community organising.

In summary, while residents possess 'portions of virtue and practical wisdom', as Aristotle wisely noted, these insights must be nurtured for their potential to be fully realised. The community power approach ap-

pears to be an effective mechanism for this nurturing. This model seems to activate something akin to Aristotle's accumulation argument. Community power can then, to a reasonable extent, be viewed as an instantiation of his assertion that 'the salvation of the community is the common business of them all' [1277b29].

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