

The role of community development in the modernising local government agenda, with specific reference to the local democratic deficit

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Submitted for PhD

Declaration

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of the university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'M' and 'S'.

Matthew Scott
October 2011

Resubmitted with minor amendments December 2012

Acknowledgements

The genesis of my research lies in my work as a Community Development Worker between 1999 and 2008. I am indebted to the support, advice and guidance of a great many colleagues and peers who enabled me to reflect critically on my practice. I have been especially privileged to have worked with a wide range of individuals and community groups during this time, whose passion and commitment has been nothing short of inspirational.

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Finally, whilst overwhelmed with encouragement, the work is my own and any faults that appear are entirely my responsibility.

Matthew Scott

October 2011¹

¹ Resubmitted with minor amendments December 2012

Abstract

This thesis examines the interplay between community development and local government modernisation as practised in three neighbouring London Boroughs in the East and South East of London. By using qualitative approaches to research the field, including ethnography and semi-structured interviews with a range of statutory and community practitioners, the research seeks to examine a variety of stakeholder perspectives.

'Community development' in its UK context over recent decades has, as a distinct process, skill set and discipline, attempted to realise the potential of regeneration programmes and address the democratic deficit found in local government. It therefore reflected many of the main concerns of New Labour modernisation policies, appearing to be well placed to make a strong contribution to ameliorating social ills.

There is recognition in this research that whilst government policy demonstrably changed some local structures, the corollary of actual community empowerment cannot be guaranteed or assumed. Through the testimony of local politicians, councillors, activists, managers and Community Development Workers the research examines the extent to which the principles and practice of community development were able to support modernisation as a programme of social reform and the wider factors that shaped the efficacy and transmission of policy.

The reflexivity of the researcher as a community development practitioner with twenty years experience adds a deep and especially close engagement with the material. The researcher as a practitioner passionately wants to know 'what works' in relation to a shifting, often contradictory field of policy. By using ethnographic methods

this research examines the concrete experiences and spaces in which community development and modernising reforms take place.

List of Abbreviations²

ABCD	Asset-based community development
CD	Community development
CDF	Community Development Foundation
CDFI	Community Development Finance Institution
CDJ	Community Development Journal
CDP	Community Development Project
CDW	Community Development Worker
CDX	Community Development Exchange
CEN	Community Empowerment Network
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
CVS	Council for Voluntary Service
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DETR	Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions
FCDL	Federation for Community Development Learning
GOL	Government Office for London
IMD	Indices of multiple deprivation
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LGA	Local Government Association
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
MLGA	Modernising local government agenda
NDC	New Deal for Communities
NRA	Neighbourhood Renewal Agenda
NDPB	Non-Departmental Public Body
NLGN	New Local Government Network
NOS	National Occupational Standards (for CD)
NPM	New Public Management
NRU	Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
NSNR	National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
OTS	Office for the Third Sector
OCS	Office for Civil Society
QUANGO	Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisation
SCP	Single Community Programme
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SRB	Single Regeneration Budget
UK	United Kingdom
VCS	Voluntary and community sector

² Both CD and MLGA are used as abbreviations throughout since they appear most frequently whereas all others are given in full and as an abbreviation when employed for the first time in a particular section

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Chapter 1: introduction

When I started CD work in the early 1990s I found it hard to understand why past efforts at community renewal had not yielded better results. I was puzzled by the bureaucracy of regeneration programmes and the tortuous rituals that had to be observed in order to release money. There was the anger of those who were still living the battles of many years ago, a rage that flared up whenever a new approach was tried, triggered by the fear of another perceived betrayal. More often there was resignation from both local people and officers, that events would have to run their course, and that the best that could be hoped for were small-scale changes. It seemed strange to me that so much time, energy and money could consistently achieve so little. There were inspirational people, centuries of combined collective experience and great insight, but when interventions worked well it tended to be at the margins and never as a normal occurrence flowing from a mainstream intervention.

Over the years I did some detective work. It was a mystery I worried away at. As a CDW I stuck at it where many left the profession at the first opportunity, moving into something that more closely resembled a career. For some, perhaps, this was the only lesson of CD – it was something you moved on from if you were free to do so. The questions I was asking myself daily revolved around the fundamentals of public policy, with its partial and incomplete interventions to arrest and ameliorate poverty. I saw that it wasn't working, and the more I looked into it, the more convinced I became that the stated aims of many social reform programmes, enacted locally, were virtually

guaranteed not to happen. This conclusion was mirrored in the comments made by New Labour in its first term of government:

The wide gap between poor neighbourhoods and the rest results from a complex combination of factors. Some of the factors are social and economic changes that have affected many countries. When these combine they can create a complex and fast-moving vicious cycle. But, over several decades, the policies and actions of central and local Government have not been good enough at tackling these issues; and sometimes they have been part of the problem.

(Neighbourhood Renewal Unit: National Strategy Action Plan: A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal, 2001, 17)

The truism that insanity is ‘doing the same things and expecting different results’, often attributed to Einstein³ suggests the value of a new approach. The idea that something that isn’t working needs new thinking spurred me on. The more I reflected on my own practice of CD as a process of change the more I came to appreciate the necessity of discomfort around ‘things not working’. As a CDW myself, I understand that it is the job of the worker, to the extent that they are able, to hold the tensions, to facilitate a space where people can think and act differently (Batten, T.R with Batten, M, 1967, in Craig, Mayo, Pople, Shaw & Taylor, 2011, 33-43; Banks, S & Orton, A, 2007, 97-113).

³ The current consensus is that the quote came from the author Rita Mae Brown in her book *Sudden Death* (Brown, R.M, 1983, 68): "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results". The quote is often attributed to Albert Einstein but there is no evidence to suggest that he made this statement.

On one level it might appear contradictory to see the value in ‘things not working’ but it does prompt a different kind of conversation than might otherwise occur, and on that basis new ideas can be seeded and take hold. In this regard, I have been inspired by the work of Paulo Freire, who saw in this kind of dialogue an act of creation, a naming of the world which could be enlivened by ‘problem-posing’. Freire, like no other thinker or activist, has shown that passive submission to imposed knowledge, for example an external plan for one’s neighbourhood, dehumanises the individual and retards the development of communities. In contrast, asking questions epitomises the essence of consciousness and reflects the unfinished character of human beings, who are always in a process of becoming. Freire argued that change could only be achieved by working with people in this way, affirming others as equals and constantly exploring and creating a new and liberating means of organisation (Freire, 1972, 60-65).

New Labour’s 2001 National Strategy Action Plan (A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal) acknowledged that government had been, ‘part of the problem’ (NRU, 2001, 17) and the New Deal for Communities (NDC) guidance went further: *“Plans imposed on a community, that are not developed with them and do not win their support, won’t deliver lasting change”* (DETR, 2000, 9).

Whilst government guidance acknowledged the futility of imposing plans, ‘on a community’ (ibid), I was anxious to examine how modernisation would proceed in its goal of delivering, ‘lasting change’ (ibid), and found in the literature of CD a commitment and tradition for doing so (Ledwith, 2005, 75). One of the outcomes we might expect from research would be that, through an original contribution to knowledge, there would be an improvement in public policy making and practice; so that government guidance

would no longer be required to acknowledge that for, '*several decades, the policies and actions of central and local Government have not been good enough*' (NRU, 2001, 17).

I felt that a deeper understanding of residents' perspectives, the dilemmas faced by local officers, and the creativity of community workers in opening up problems as opportunities, could all lead to better policy results. However research is not just about a simple feedback loop where the learning from experience is unproblematically fed in (Robson, 2003). The puzzles and problems that are encountered have been identified as being far more durable (Alcock, P & Scott, D, 2005; Hoggett 1997; Banks, S, Butcher, H, Henderson, P & Robertson, J, 2003).

I developed several early working hypothesises. Firstly that local party political history and the institutional culture of a particular council, built up over many years, had a decisive influence. The radical community work literature confirmed the primacy of politics (Craig, G, Derricourt, N, & Loney, M, 1982; Cockburn, C, 1977; London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979). Secondly I believed that the unequal relationship between central and local government could disrupt the smooth transmission of policy and saw evidence of this in the literature on local government (Rao, 2000; Stewart, 2003; Jenkins, 2004). Thirdly, I hypothesised that because the voluntary and community sector (VCS) was usually represented and spoken for by paid professional and second-tier council-funded groups rather than from the grassroots, that this was also problematic in grounding reform in the locality. I noticed that this also appeared in some of the literature on the VCS (Chanan, 1992; Davis Smith, J, Rochester, C & Hedley, 1995). Finally I surmised that unless these deeper structural conundrums were factored in, the cycle of policy failure was likely to repeat itself,

regardless of the learning that took place elsewhere. This risk was a perennial theme of the literature (Loney, 1983; Craig & Mayo, 1995; Taylor, 2000; Diamond, 2004).

Before UK programmes of regeneration had recognisably begun, problems of conflicting interests amongst authorities overseeing community change programmes were familiar to American government initiatives under President Johnson and the 'War on Poverty'. These conflicts of interest provided classic dilemmas for would-be reform that have hovered over government programmes ever since. The researchers Marris and Rein noted the divided loyalties within bureaucracies, which accommodated gradual change but were prone to obstruct the, 'radicalism of the poor' (Marris & Rein, 1972, 218). Saul Alinsky, writing at a similar time on American social change, argued that this obstruction was tacitly sanctioned by a wider democratic constituency, not only of formal elected representatives, but also by the majority of 'haves' in wider society, a constituency of richer people who did not want change from below to impede their own status (Alinsky, 1972, 99). When it comes to implementing policy this is like driving with the brakes on.

Marris and Rein concluded that, 'any practical achievement of reform depends on the pragmatic and entrepreneurial skills with which the range of strategies are brought to bear at each opportunity' (Marris & Rein, 1972, 295). They conceded that their conclusion was 'indeterminate, appealing at once to an aggressive advocacy and reasonable compromise' but 'that perhaps is the nature of life' and inevitably made for 'slowness of reform' (ibid). Marris and Rein believed that community action had 'change(d) the way problems were perceived' and though it 'largely failed in the short run' in the longer term it 'profoundly influenced ... conceptions of democracy' and may

have been 'vindicated after all' (ibid). This was the case even when competing loyalties caused reform programmes to slow down or be halted altogether.

Although the issue of vested interest was articulated in the late 1960s the problem has not gone away, as evidenced by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's (NRU) admission that government was at times, 'part of the problem'(NRU, 2001, 17).

Research that illuminates the practice and dynamics of social reform and which is able to go beyond the narrowly prescribed parameters of the specific policy intervention to look at the wider cultural and political determinants, can help to interrupt what might otherwise be a viciously circular pattern: the futility of always doing the same things and getting the same results. I became fascinated by the structural barriers to reform repeated in the literature of recent times and came to agree with Marris and Rein that the issue was, 'more profound even than poverty' (Marris & Rein, 1972, 272), and it brought into question, 'the viability of democracy itself' (ibid).

The motif of democracy was central to the New Labour MLGA and hence to my own research question. At the beginning of the research I felt that CD had great potential to work alongside the MLGA to address the local democratic deficit. However my observation was that CD suffered from a relative lack of status and priority which confined it to a compartmentalised and minor social policy role from which it struggled to break free. This issue was picked up in the CD Challenge, which noted that, '(t)he role of community development is often overlooked at the higher levels of policy'(DCLG, 2006, 4), and that 'CD's own ethos of stressing its role in providing background support rather than leadership reinforces this low profile' (ibid).

I was interested to see how CD could engage more effectively and visibly in policy, specifically the MLGA. The interviewees with whom I engaged, all worked in

flagship modernising areas and were all able to explain in great detail how CD and the MLGA came together, and how the processes of both formal and informal democratisation grew out of this encounter. Over the course of thirty interviews each one transcribed verbatim, I found an extraordinarily revealing depth of experience and concerns, which the research enabled me to hold, reflect and analyse. My own research question facilitated the unpacking of a range of barriers encountered, from which it was possible to discern the level of change interviewees regarded as possible. I started from the basis that CD as a profession, a skills set and process seemed uniquely well placed to capitalise on the radical intent signalled by a new government as framed by the MLGA. My interviewees then gave me a reality check.

In December 1997 the setting up of the Social Exclusion Unit followed by 18 Policy Action Teams (1998-2000), signalled a frank admission that past practice had failed and needed overhauling. Once in government New Labour drew a line under the past and set out its proposals to empower local communities (Rao, 2000; Stewart, 2003; Wallace, 2010). After my own puzzling first impressions of community work it was encouraging to see both funding and policy move firmly behind an apparent endorsement of issues that CD was about – social justice, participation, equalities, learning and co-operation. As a CDW employed to realise the Neighbourhood Renewal Agenda (2000), itself derived from the extensive multi-disciplinary research by the 18 Policy Action Teams (1998-2000), I had a central role in its implementation. During this time I turned my personal queries into a formal research question rooted in my own times, and set out my proposals for researching this across three neighbouring London boroughs, including the one I was working in. I still found it hard to understand why an apparently well-intentioned government agenda did not immediately connect up with

local energies. Were the same problems happening elsewhere and what could be deduced from comparative research that looked at areas of similar size, location and demography?

In her book, 'Public Policy in the Community', Marilyn Taylor lists three possible responses to contemporary community approaches⁴: optimism, pessimism and pragmatism. I started optimistically; bewildered and disbelieving of the unnecessary complexity of obstacles that appeared to be in the way of my first forays into community work. I developed both 'pessimism of the intellect' and 'optimism of the will'⁵ as a practitioner, when further experience showed me the persistence of these obstacles and led me to continue to question why they were there. This has enabled me to be ultimately more convinced of the need for and value of CD at the end of my research than before. I believe that CD, because of its principled and radical roots, is the most congruent means to transcend the many impasses that crop up in the course of the puzzling array of recycled policy initiatives. This research charts the ebb and flow of my own and others tempered optimism and not infrequent pessimism and concludes with a summary of the challenges revealed by the research material.

⁴ Taylor, M, 2003, 12-15: Public Policy in the Community. Palgrave MacMillan

⁵ 'I'm a pessimist because of intelligence but also an optimist due to will'. Letter from Prison 19 December 1929 by Antonio Gramsci

An explanation of the order of the chapters

In this chapter I have introduced the research question and briefly set out my own views and a summary of previous research. The second chapter reviews the literature on English local government, CD and democratisation in order to locate the main debates that pertain to the subject matter. Within the context of New Labour modernisation it is possible to see the resurgence of themes and arguments that have been widely addressed and written about under previous frameworks and government administrations. The rationale and theoretical underpinnings of the research methods are described in chapter three, with particular reference to ethnographic practice and its emancipatory potential. The research methods are therefore not only effective in delivering data but also congruent with the subject matter. The role and practice of CD is covered in the fourth chapter in order to establish both what CD is and how it might be expected to contribute to wider reform. The rich and contested history of CD, (Twelvetrees, 1991; Craig, Popple, Shaw, 2008; Craig, Mayo, Popple, Shaw, Taylor, 2011; Ledwith, 2011), along with its catalytic and interstitial role requires a special appreciation in order to ground the testimony of interviewees. Chapter five gives an overview of each of the three study areas, detailing shared geography, demography and political leadership.

Chapters six, seven and eight examine the research findings which are organised around recurrent themes. Chapter six locates the role played by policy making and participation as described by local policy actors and interviewees with an active engagement in CD, the MLGA and wider democratisation. Chapter seven examines the theme of power as reflected on by interviewees. Chapter eight concludes the findings chapters with an examination of the tropes of community, identity and mutual respect, as

they were understood by interviewees to impact on their lives and practice. Chapter nine covers a brief comparison of findings across the study areas. This is followed by the final chapter, chapter ten, which builds on the research findings to describe the conclusions that are drawn from the research.

Chapter two:

literature review

Contents:

1. Introduction

- The research question
- The argument

2. Policy: government at a distance

- Governmentality
- Pluralism and the mixed economy of welfare
- Democracy

3. Power: local government and the state

- The central / local relationship
- Modernisation and NPM

4. Community: CD and civil society

- Community skills and tactics
- Community deficit
- Radical community work

5. Holding the tensions / ways forward

- Theoretical framework
- Structural change, contagious ideas

Introduction

The research question

The aim of this chapter is to situate the research question within a selected body of literature. By engaging closely with an established body of literature on local government and CD, the research question is tested by considering previously known arguments. New territory distinctive to my research is also signalled and gaps in previous knowledge are identified. The research explores the role of CD across three case study areas, in relation to the New Labour MLGA and there is a distinct and often separate set of literature for both CD and local government.

The argument

The ideal types of local government, CD, and the sites where they are conjoined and contested are more permeable (Stewart, 2000; Stoker, 2000; Stoker & Wilson, 2004) than was once described by traditional constitutionalists (Dicey, 1965). Local government has been both, hollowed out (Rhodes, 1994) and increasingly transmitted through fragile relays, where it is one of many network actors. This 'hollowing out' has occurred to such an extent that Leach & Percy-Smith, describe the terms of debate as shifting decisively 'from Local Government to Local Governance' (2001, 1).

Likewise CD spans many local public and voluntary and community sector (VCS) spaces. In practice it has often operated as a statutory intervention (from above) rather than being initiated from within local communities (Rose, 1996). CD is often framed by a managerialist discourse (Cockburn, 1977, 102), from the same stable as local government modernisation, rather than being external to social planning and genuinely emerging from local people (Gibson, 1996). However the literature on local government

and CD, whilst related, are usually separate, with books tending to tackle either one subject or the other, but rarely joining both together. I have organised the sections of this chapter by starting with the central and then local state and ending with CD and an exploration of local community. There are three main sections that unpack the existing literature:

- Policy making: government at a distance
- Power: local government and the state
- Community: CD and civil society

In the first section the central state is examined through the theme of policy making as it is transmitted from central to local government. The revision of policy assumptions concerning the welfare state led to the establishment of quasi markets in place of traditional service provision by the state (le Grand and Bartlett, 1993, 10). This was instigated by a neoliberal ideological ascendancy, present in both Thatcherite and New Labour governments (Jenkins, 2006) which led to policy being made, increasingly, by government at a distance (Rose, 1990).

The predominance of the state examined in the middle section, where the theme of power is used to introduce and explain the way local government is enshrined by central government (Rao, 2000; Wilson & Game, 2006) and managed by a range of central inspection regimes (Massey, & Pyper, 2005; Seddon, 2008). The final section examines the literature on tactical and skills-based approaches to community (Twelvetrees, 2002; Miller, 2008), including radical community work (Jones & Mayo, 1975; Craig, Derricourt, & Loney, 1982) and critiques of community deficits (Diamond, 2004; Craig, 2007). A fuller explanation of CD, which covers the skills, processes, literature and organisational background features in chapter four.

Policy: Government at a distance; governmentality and partnerships

The very idea of the state has lost currency in recent years (Rose, 1998). Liberal government has always sought to govern at a distance, inculcating autonomous and responsible civic behaviours (J S Mill, 1998). With the collapse of state socialism and rise of free market liberal individualism this tendency to relocate responsibilities from the state to the citizen has increased (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Giddens, 1998).

Governmentality

Foucault's creation of the term governmentality (1979a) which he terms the conduct of conduct, whereby behaviour is shaped to achieve certain ends, through variable and multiple circuits of power, has inspired new thinking (Rose, 1996; Dean, 1999; Miller & Rose, 2008). The literature on governmentality and the governmentalisation of the state and its diffusion is used as a means of understanding contemporary local governance. Clearly the state still exists, but more conventional ways of analysing power and politics, as a social contract with binary oppositions, cannot capture the recent reshaping of local governance. Instead the state deploys a range of technologies that connect up calculations and strategies to spatially scattered points, in ways that are tenuous and reversible but which enable it to thrive amidst a new constellation of relationships of power (Foucault, 1977, 1979a).

There are benign and malign interpretations of this new dispensation. Giddens (1998) and Miller and Rose (2008) see the opportunity for governable spaces to make new kinds of experience possible, to deepen and update civic interactions. Giddens (1994) felt that generative politics had a positive potential to reinvent governance and democratise democracy, opening up instead of closing down civic spaces. Globalisation

placed irresistible pressures on economies to deregulate (Giddens, 1999), which the state could only adapt to, rather than seek to control. Under these circumstances modernisation of government, whilst the state could no longer dictate to the market, it could redistribute possibilities to enterprising citizens. Yet without a countervailing force, Keane (1988, 15) argued that 'civil society becomes a permanent thorn in the side of political power', public goals become 'empty slogans' (ibid). Rose (1996) has questioned whether, in fact, a sociopathic and authoritarian era has arrived – the death of the social, where civic and civil society has collapsed into a zone of government intervention and where government governs, 'though community' (ibid, 333).

Under New Labour local government was reconfigured, increasingly around partnerships (Bailey with Barker & MacDonald, 2003), and consequently partnership working flourished as new means of practical governance. This led to the privileging of the term local governance over local government (Stoker, 1998, 2004; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2000). Governance at the local level is characterised by a complex range of local players, each possessing and sharing power, as result of the 'hollowing out' of the state (Rhodes, 1994). The central state set policy and exerted control, increasingly at a distance; no longer content to fund the local authority directly but instead made funding conditional on a plethora of partnerships (Diamond & Liddle, 2005). Although partnership, like community, may be associated with a comforting, warm place (Bauman, 2000, 1), its superficiality, in particular its lack of independent legal status, was problematic (Hoggett, 1997; Russell, 2001). The local authority typically became both the accountable body and lead organisation of most partnerships, with the result that many partnerships, by closely following local authority procedures, became council meetings in everything but name (Scott, 2010). Under its Neighbourhood Renewal

Agenda New Labour premised partnerships between local government and the local community on an assumed equality of standing⁶ that was impractical given the differences that existed amongst partners. For example, a voluntary sector representative, no matter how diligent, did not have access to the same level of support as the leader of the council, or Chief Executives of local statutory agencies (Anastacio, Gidley, Hart, Keith, Mayo & Kowarzik, 2000, 29). Taylor and Mayo in Balloch & Taylor (2001) described a tendency towards increasing inequality and settling back into traditional roles. Behind the language of partnership working there was a flow of myriad competitions, where role, accountability and fitness for purpose were subtly contested, albeit in a minor key and where fundamental inequalities and deep-seated imbalances became ever more entrenched (Wallace, 2010).

Pluralism and the mixed economy of welfare

One of the outstanding critiques of pluralism was famously articulated by Elmer Eric Schattschneider along class lines, namely that the, 'flaw in pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent' (Schattschneider, 1960, 35). Benington, writing in Lees and Smith (1975), uses this critique to describe a process, based on the Community Development Projects (CDP) that seemed to be progressive but failed to deliver. Failure was inevitable since vested social interests (primarily central and local government) would always resist change and the opening up of any perceived and actual locus of power. On the basis of this many community development workers concluded that pluralism did not work, or worked as a Trojan

⁶ The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plan 2001 insisted that Local Strategic Partnerships would be an 'equal partnership' of different sectors and partners, without reference to the variances in income, staffing and ethos. Alinsky counterposed that, 'a free and open society is an ongoing conflict, interrupted periodically by compromise' (1972, 53) and advocated that the organiser 'to manoeuvre and bait the establishment' (ibid, 100).

horse. Sue Kenny's research (2002) updates the concern of CDWs that the fusion of third way politics, social capital, social entrepreneurship, capacity and community building, linked to Giddens's discourse (1998) of, deserving poor generated, new Trojans enmeshed in a welfare state industry framework.

Two certainties exist amidst the tensions and dilemmas experienced by workers on the ground; firstly that a number of groups, principles, agencies and state(s) coexist and share power (Diamond & Liddle, 2005), and that they recognise more than one ultimate principle (Popple, 1995; Gilchrist, 2003). Secondly, that the social interventions to alleviate poverty, which has included CD and New Labour modernisation, are conditioned by the background paradigm of welfare, which itself, has changed significantly in recent years from universal provision to a market framework (Mayo, 1994).

In 1990, Taylor, Craig and Mayo reviewed twenty five years of the Community Development Journal (CDJ) with some pessimism, when considering the fortunes of CD (Taylor, 2003). The background of that time, informed by ideas of trickle-down economic benefit, the non-existence of society and exhortation of self-reliance, seemed to undercut the earlier keenly contested opportunities that consensus pluralism had briefly offered. Clearly the decline of the welfare state, superseded by a more mixed economy model of welfare, decisively changed the terms in which pluralism operated. Community participation was recast in terms of cost saving (Craig & Mayo, 1993) as social provision became privatised. And yet new opportunities were to arise as the voluntary and community sector, following the rise of communitarian thought (Atkinson, 1994; Wallace, 2010), found itself written into more and more government policy documents, partnership bids and local governance boards (Taylor, 2003), in addition to

securing contracts. Community and notions of social capital (Putnum, 2000), were seen as building trust and off-setting harmful social dislocation. In a runaway world (Giddens, 1999), a strong globalised economy needed a new welfare market, where local people could exert more control and autonomy.

Social change had been, to a greater or lesser extent, attached to a principle of redistribution (of power and money between social classes) but this idea was now superseded. Gary Craig and Marj Mayo noted that a new discourse of empowerment came with the logic that the, 'empowerment of the powerless could be achieved within the existing social order without any significant negative effects on the power of the powerful' (Craig & Mayo, 1995, 5). In this way the pluralist equation of power began to shift. Local communities could increasingly negotiate with other local partners, if not on equal terms, then with significant leverage to consolidate an independent role. The tendency of domination by larger institutions remained (Diamond, 2004; Scott, 2010), but with the call for community renewed, voluntary and community groups and private sector partners quickly moved from loose partnership affiliations into the direct delivery of services and the transmission of governance structures locally (Russell, 2001).

Democratisation and deficit

Margaret Ledwith described democracy as a, 'system of self-government where people affected by decisions are part of the decision-making process' (1997, 5), and thus CDWs were 'facilitators of empowerment and democratic participation' (ibid). The coming together of the MLGA with local communities can be seen as a vital democratic event. This intersection of local communities with modernisation policy required that

local participation was sought (NRU, 2000, 2001), in order for decision making to be modernised (DETR, 1998). Whilst the point is often missed, due to the low prestige of local government⁷ and CD⁸ as professions, the work of CDWs and council officer are the defining connection between the central and local state, and between the state(s) and its people, as Ledwith underlined in the passages at the beginning of this section.

New Labour modernisation recognised the growing local democratic deficit (DETR, 1998) but was largely unable to set an effective policy framework (Stoker, 2004, 2; Sennett in Buofino & Mulgan, 2006, vi). Rather than being transformational, the implementation directed by New Labour (NRU, 2001; DCLG, 2006) became more associated with the bureaucracy of traditional state stewardship. By 2000 Jim Chandler writes of more participation but less democracy engendered by local government reform. He suggested that democratic participation was not intended as a means to increase the accountability of local people in decision-making processes but as a streamlining of administration, and a tool of regulation with which to address issues of social cohesion. The local and national democratic deficit had deteriorated (Bentley, 2001, 3) and hence jeopardised the primary New Labour focus on improvements in services, which became undermined by a deeper social malaise (Jenkins, 2007). Local election turnouts in England are traditionally low, but in the years leading up to the millennium dipped to unprecedented lows, frequently of between 30-40% (Stewart, 2003, 35-37). When asked, hardly anyone knew who their local councillors were. This disconnect is a global western phenomenon and Nirmala Rao concluded that New Labour's renewal of democracy was a, 'distant and uncertain prospect' (Rao, 2000, 195), requiring a, 'sustained reconstruction of political life' (ibid).

⁷ Wilson & Game, 2006, 5: 'There is a modish view, widely found, unfortunately, among political commentators, that local government is boring and that the world of local government is narrow, uniform and dull'.

⁸ Ledwith (1997, 5): 'But community work as a profession has done itself no favours'.

Benjamin Barber (1984) championed the ability of strong participatory democracy to challenge what he terms thin democracy, whereby the politics of elites predominate, thus offering an alternative to instrumental, representative, liberal democracy. John Keane (2008) identified a cycle of democracy over three thousand years, from an assembly to representative form that was now morphing once again, to a monitory style. The strong participatory style evident in Greece and Mesopotamia, of assemblies and popular debate, was superseded by representative forms of democracy, typically found in European and American government. Elected representatives were now increasingly held to account (monitored) by pressure groups, who often led policy making. In previous works (1988) Keane saw civil society as a countervailing force, and in this way it was able to defend democracy which was otherwise prone to become an, 'arrogant orthodoxy' (1988, 240).

New Labour's conflation of modernisation with democratic renewal has been frequently attacked by some commentators as wholly rhetorical and aspirational (Hall, 1998). Martin Mowbray described a 'cynical and frugal' approach (2005, 263) by politicians. Fremeneux (2005) warned that community is not a term for use as an unequivocal slogan of redemption, which served to underline that in fact this is exactly how community had been deployed by government. Time and again what was preferred by local government writers and community development specialists, was a serious engagement with democracy. Stoker (2004, 75-81) characterised New Labour's approach as premised on a deep-seated distrust and fatalism – that local people and service providers cannot be trusted to enact change themselves. He noted the tendency to use unsettling tactics of disharmony and unpredictability to destabilise perceived blockages to local performance, without embedding substantive structures to bind

people together and build over the longer term. Stoker wanted New Labour to abandon its, 'Yes, but' approach (2004, 219) and unequivocally commit to localism. Mowbray put the case for whole hearted socio-economic reform then, in the next sentence, writes that, 'cows might fly' (2005: 264).

Fung and Wright (2003, 4) argued that it was possible to work with the grain of neo-liberal governance in order to change it from within by using transformative democratic strategies. Gaventa (2004), in an advisory role to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), drawing on Fung and Wright, presented citizen involvement in neighbourhood renewal and governance as dense, messy but also increasingly reciprocal and non hierarchical. Gaventa urged government to strengthen the community voice by, 'working both sides of the equation' (2004, 26). Fung and Wright (2003), although choosing their examples from America, India and Brazil, embraced a contemporary pragmatism to deepen democracy where it is found, and not as it might ideally come to be fashioned. They used innovative models, including participatory budgeting, neighbourhood governance councils, conservation panels and Panchayat reforms to ground progressive institutional reforms. The separating out of specific functionary administrative reforms from a social justice agenda can appear less threatening, noting the conflict of interest that the state has between retaining power and giving it away, whilst achieving the end of advancing democratic practice.

Projects like neighbourhood management (SEU PAT report 4) and directly elected Mayors (DETR, 1998) can be seen in this tradition of cautious functionary reform (Stoker, 2004), whereby structural pilots are tested and often passed over or perennially reinvented. Cockburn (1977, 139-141) described neighbourhood councils in the London Borough of Lambeth in the 1970s which addressed the same issues of engagement and

used similar terminology as later New Labour neighbourhood programmes. This recycling of such ideas is intensely problematic. Writing on New Labour's latest reconstruction of neighbourhood management Taylor warned that:

If Neighbourhood Management is to achieve sustainable change, it needs to learn from what has and hasn't worked. Public sectors need to be changed from top to bottom if communities are to be given real power and responsibility to take action. This means a long-term perspective is essential. Otherwise Neighbourhood Management will depend on a few champions. It will not be embedded in new governance.

Tackling exclusion at local level: (Taylor, 2000, 2)

By reminding policy makers that previous initiatives had failed, Taylor illustrates the low expectations that bedevil many reforms. Even the MLGA, with its battery of administrative changes (Rao, 2000; Stewart, 2003; Stoker, 2004) might be expected to fail on this reading, unless there was a really serious minded democratic engagement. The discomfort that Marilyn Taylor (2000) described as essential is mirrored by Rose (1999, 13), who has described the need for an untimely attitude to our present time in order to benefit a time to come. Henri Lefebvre noted that, 'life lags behind what is possible' (1947, 230); faced with the enormity of the state, Lefebvre described how the individual became like a shadow, beset by political fictions which sanctioned selfish behaviour. Whilst this became the main feature of capitalist society, he argued that new forms of community could be established. This was because, at the level of everyday

life there existed an, 'uncontrolled society' (ibid, 248) that continually generated new forms of community.

At the interstices where the government of the day seeks to engage its citizens, the literature of both local government reformers and CD researchers would seem to concur with Lefebvre's sense of, 'incredible backwardness' (ibid, 230), even if they disagree with his brand of critical Marxism. The literature on democratisation suggests both a need and an opportunity for revivifying democratic practice. By researching contemporary modernisation, in terms of its own administrative stewardship and its assertions of the potential for transformational change, it is possible to examine how substantive such claims have been. The democratic concepts and practice which were deeply attached to the MLGA and CD practice add a deeper socio-political dimension to reform that closely relates to the literature on CD. The research seeks to discover the extent to which CD has played a contributory role in the realisation of the goal of deeper democratisation.

Power: local government and the state

Central / local relationship

The Widdicombe Commission on Local Government (1986) was a precursor to one of many Local Government Acts over the last 40 years which have defined and often curtailed the room for manoeuvre for local government actors. In one memorable passage Widdicombe stated that local government had no right to exist⁹. Under the

⁹ 'It would be wrong to assume that constitutional convention amounts to or derives from any natural right for local government to exist. It is a convention based on, and subject to, the contribution that local government can bring to good government. It follows from this that there is no validity in the assertion that local authorities have a 'local

(unwritten) British constitution, Parliament is sovereign (Dicey, 1965, 39). Local government exists because central government created it. This locus of absolute control is tempered by practical considerations. The central state has to delegate administrative tasks (Wilson & Game, 2006, 54), but the degree of autonomy from the centre is far less than in many comparative countries, for example across Europe, Scandinavia (Tomaney in Stoker & Wilson, 2004, 167) and the U.S.A (Dicey, 1965, 138-182).

This has prompted two strands of literature: one which tracks and records the latest government White Papers and programmes of local reform in a neutral fashion (Rao, 2000; Byrne, 2000; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001); another which is prepared to campaign for a change in the central / local relationship, shifting power down to local government (Stewart, 2000; Stoker, 2004; Jenkins, 2004; Wilson & Game, 2006). Stoker and Wilson have their own series of publications on local government related issues – *Government Beyond the Centre* – which makes the case not only for the study of local government but also for actively promoting greater local governmental autonomy. Such persistent special pleading is not dissimilar to the work of the Local Government Association (LGA) and New Local Government Network (NLGN). Both these organisations publish briefings for local authorities but take a less historical perspective.

Simon Jenkins, a columnist for the *Guardian* and *Sunday Times*, is one of a rare breed of journalists actively attentive to the local state (Davies, 2008, 79). As a Conservative Party supporter his interest and support is also unusual given the centre left, generally Labour sympathies of local government advocates. Jenkins chaired the Commission of Local Democracy (1995) and has retained an insider perspective on

mandate' by which they derive their authority from their electorate placing them above the law'. (*The Widdicombe Enquiry*, 1986, 46).

government which has become increasingly scathing of the use of the Westminster model by New Labour (2006). He makes notes that this model combined with a more authoritarian style from the centre, spreading across all government has, in regard to local government, not transformed local democracy or services but has been ad hoc, prone to unachievable target setting and therefore has been demoralising. Jenkins has published his own solution – Big Bang Localism (2004), which outlined a bold approach of massive and immediate devolution of power from central to local government. This took its inspiration from the big bang which transformed the City of London into one of the foremost centres of world finance (alongside New York) in the late 1980s. Jenkins argued for the same radical shock to the system in order to breathe much needed life into to a failing and dismal apparatus.

Of the Government Beyond the Centre writers, Stewart (2000, 2003) is arguably the most outspoken of local government defenders and his advice to central government is that it curtails what he perceived to be excessive interference (2003, 162).

Community leadership is presented as natural local government terrain and Stewart castigated Westminster for the decline in local democracy (2003, 257) which would be transformed if the central / local relationship were more equal and more respectful (2000, 96). He recorded the misplaced sense of superiority of Whitehall civil servants, leading to an assumption of 'inspectorial superiority' (2003, 225) amidst extremely limited knowledge of the local (ibid). Stewart is in the vanguard of a powerfully felt resentment of central command and control (2003, 221), which he counters by seeking a reform of the central / local relationship (2003, 246). He regarded the inability of central government to rectify this imbalance as a striking failure of modernisation. Stewart also championed reform of local government finance (2003, 226). In his view real power

came with financial freedoms and the ability to generate revenue through local taxation, and went on to make the argument that local government had a greater claim to accountability to the public than central government (2003, 225).

A plethora of issues are contested within the central / local relationship; among them, the extent to which elections give a democratic mandate and who has authority to speak for whom? Who holds the purse strings? Who taxes and who spends? And finally, who rules? Wilson and Game identify the power of general competence (2006, 26-28) as a defining issue – historically local authorities don't have one. With this subordinate status *ultra vires* judgements hover over councils, most memorably in the 1980s when municipal socialism moved beyond tightly prescribed powers (Sampson, 1982, 202-205; Wainwright, 2003, 6). The disciplines of New Public Management Theory (Massey and Pyper, 2005) were developed in the 1980s and intensified under New Labour, becoming a growth industry for consultants (Craig, D, 2008); private sector orthodoxy made a virtue out of competitive and private as opposed to collective and public practice.

Modernisation and new public management (NPM)

Modernisation was a defining aspect of the New Labour project. In 1998 Blair¹⁰ challenged local government to embrace reform. His message was 'more aggressive' (Wilson & Game, 2006, 141) than many previous policy statements from central government. If unable or unwilling to change, he indicated that government would look to other partners to take on their role. The DETR paper from the same year

¹⁰ 'Leading the Way: A new vision for local government. *London: Institute for Public Policy Research*, (1998, 22).

(Modernising Local Government: In Touch with the People), set out a framework around three headline goals of improving services, enhancing community leadership and democratic renewal. The 2001 White Paper: Strong Local Leadership: Quality Public Services (DTLR, 2001) delivered new powers of wellbeing to councils but these were little used and did not amount to a sea change in the central / local relationship (Stewart, 2003; Wilson & Game, 2006). They did, however, indicate a central modernising tactic, which was to offer limited incentives to achieve stated policy goals. Stoker (2004, 74) characterised New Labour's modernisation approach as having the following elements: control freaks, partners and bookies. He settled on the analogy of bookies (2004, 76), because of the government's presentation of modernisation as a series of enticing prizes, which were designed to generate uncertainty through a bidding culture. This was followed by audit and the use of deliberately unsettling tactics such as referendums, in order to break local elites who were thought to be obstructive.

The mixed messages of modernisation have truncated into far narrower managerial disciplines (Massey & Pyper, 2005) in daily practice. If the embedding of a new rigorous democracy has been elusive (Rao, 1999), modernisation has been both rationalistic and distrustful (Stoker, 2004). New public management (NPM) constantly refined surveillance of the local state and under New Labour Stewart (2004) argued that NPM has been surpassed by recent governance arrangements. But whilst the Best Value regime diminished from April 2008 and local strategic partnerships and local area agreements were granted an enhanced role, a culture of audit redolent of NPM lingered on, stubbornly displacing the new reflexive governance of partnership working. A battery of performance indicators and targets, scrutinised by central government, came to define the New Labour years (Seddon, 2008, Blond, 2010).

Cockburn (1977, 8) charted the rise of early forms of public sector managerialism from 1950s and 1960s corporate industrial practice in America and then Britain.

Cockburn located a decisive change around, '1969 or 1970' (ibid: 18) where the state sought to be more engaged with local communities and sought new planning processes that borrowed from corporate management. Cockburn argued that this worked against the collective local democratic decision-making of councillor committees (ibid, 39), to the advantage of senior council officers, who took on more concentrated *de facto* powers.

The Thatcher government continued this trend of managerialism as part of a fight against socialism (Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001, 67). The town halls, along with the unions and universities were not, 'one of us' (Young, 1989), and their relative demise was closely intertwined with a new national settlement and a break with the consensus years (Sampson, 1982, 32-55). This was to be an unfinished revolution as Gould (1998) termed the New Labour project, and modernisation became the means to make the party electable by not only accepting the Thatcher reforms but often extending them. In this way Gould and New Labour came to judge the tabloid accusations of political correctness and intimidation as true. Jenkins (2006) reinforced this appropriation of Thatcherite ideology and coined the term Blatcherism, arguing that Blair, and also Brown, fully adopted Thatcher's centralising and distrustful political instincts, and in fact took them much further than Thatcher dared (ibid, 255-256).

Despite its deeply embedded hegemonic status, managerialism as a private sector-inspired science of administrative control has been criticised for being highly flawed. Massey and Pyper (2005) reviewed NPM even-handedly, noting the positives of greater transparency, accountability and some evidence of better local service performance. On the negative side, they noted that this covert restructuring of the state,

through continual central audit, lends itself to gross bureaucracy and lack of deep accountability. The waves of modernisation visited on local government left officers disillusioned (Seddon, 2008), as their role became downgraded. Massey and Pyper argued that the messiness of public life required more active consent from local government officers, not 'grudging acceptance mired in apathy' (2005, 178). They concluded that modernisation, as it had been driven by NPM, would fail if it was simply imposed on to local government. As a parting shot they protested against the increased rationalisation of efficiency and formalised social control as a 'McDonaldisation' (ibid) of the public sector.

Community: CD and civil society

Introduction

The trope of community and its related literature is here organised around three sections, thus limiting what would otherwise prove to be an extremely broad field to areas directly related to CD, the MLGA and local democratisation. Firstly, an engagement with the literature on skills and tactics is considered, including work written on the agency and activity of local policy actors. Secondly, the literature on 'community deficit' and its negative portrayals of local community, which often pathologise local people living in poorer areas, and set up specific types of policy intervention that run counter to CD principles, is reviewed. The third section considers one of the most extensive forms of CD literature: radical community work, which reveals both rich political and theoretical writings and sharply contrasts with other literatures, notably

skills-based and community deficit ones. Further coverage of CD is undertaken in chapter four in order to give a fuller account of CD principles and practice.

Community skills and tactics

The different values and models of CD are actively contested (Poppo, 1995; Gilchrist, 2004; Ledwith, 2005; Craig, 2010). However whilst appreciating these fissiparous tendencies, we can also think of CD as a toolbox with a range of skills, knowledges and tactics, all of which are continually challenged, and in the process of being reassessed. The CD profession has generally had a low profile (DCLG, 2006), strangely at odds with its catalytic role in local democracy and renewal (Ledwith, 1997). An examination of the literature on its skills and tactics usefully ground the potential of CD for social change, including contemporary government programmes of reform such as the MLGA. This is continued in chapter four, which moves on from the literature review (chapter two) and research methods (chapter four) to describe the application of CD.

Community education was powerfully shaped by the work of Paulo Freire (1972) which sought to overcome a poisonous pedagogy that imposed a certain kind of knowledge - the banking concept of education (ibid, 53) - with one that was created through heightened social and collective awareness by an open process of dialogue and questioning. This approach spread across the world and inspired development workers to work alongside their community. Local people led the process at every step, in stark contrast to top down reforms, which Freire termed, 'false charity' (ibid, 27). The principles of community-led change have remained in community work but are, 'increasingly hijacked for... more coercive use' (Mayo, 1994, 50).

The CD profession's delicate position between the social blocks of community and state (Craig, 1989) generates possibilities and paradoxes that risk misappropriation (Gilchrist, 2003) under more managerial and technocratic strands of professionalisation. A recurrent cry goes out that argues that unless the profession can present itself in concrete ways familiar to public servants it will not be effective (Twelvetrees, 2002, 179; Miller, 2008, xiii; Chanan & Miller, 2010, 3-4). The DCLG paper entitled 'the Community Development Challenge' (2006) made six recommendations that strongly alluded to this, calling for: a more consistent definition, improved evidence base, more strategic approach, better management systems and delivery, and improved training. Essentially the analysis suggested a need for improved performance and raised capacity. Likewise the Community Development Foundation's (CDF) ABCD¹¹ handbook (2000) and the National Occupational Standards for Community Development (Lifelong Learning UK, 2009) stress a range of skills and processes that formalise the work, albeit in a sanitised fashion, somewhat aloof from the conflicts and politics of local communities (Kenny, 2002; FCDL, 2010).

If professionals within the CD movement and government have sought to make CD 'fit for purpose', the question stubbornly remains – whose purpose is served? Tension exists between those who adopt a radical activist approach that challenges, as opposed to those prepared to work within the system (Craig, 1989). In practice both approaches are required, as was recognised by the 'in and against' activist workers (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979), who typically had jobs within the local and national state, therefore working on weekdays, whilst seeking to overthrow their employer on evenings and weekends (ibid, 5). What challenges the community

¹¹ In this instance the acronym 'ABCD' stands for A Better Community Development (as distinct from asset-based CD)

worker is not the issue of compromise, which is perhaps a requirement for personal survival and development (Twelvetrees, 2002, 181-188), but rather how a balance of competing ethical dilemmas are settled (Hoggett, Mayo & Miller, 2009). This messy, conflicted and often unrecognised process mirrors wider democratic dilemmas of resource allocation (Taylor, 2003, 230).

The potential exists for CDWs to fulfil an ambiguous yet catalytic role, with a foot in the camps of both the community and the state (Banks & Orton, 2007). Given the need for change it has been argued that workers cannot be wholly committed to any sector or grouping (Ledwith, 1997, 55) because this could tend to reinforce oppressive parochialism. The skills outlined in the national occupational standards for community development or the ABCD guide by CDF, are in the public domain. Any organisation can use them and increasingly housing associations and health trusts that generally have access to greater resources than community groups, are able to support aspects of their work by following CD practice.

The ambiguity behind the CD role points to many possible outcomes. In 2004 almost 50% of all community development workers employed were in the statutory sector (Glen, Henderson, Humm, Meszaros, Gaffney, 2004). Yet within the public sector lines of accountability generally preclude campaigning behaviours (Twelvetrees, 2002, 156). Under these circumstances CD could not claim to be an independent community resource. Even when CDWs work in the voluntary or community sectors, the secure funding and favours from the local state generate a built-in self-censorship for many (Anastacio, J, Gidley, B, Hart, L, Keith, M, Mayo, M & Kowarzik, U, 2000, 27). From this ambiguous and constrained terrain, CDWs have to carefully consider their room for manoeuvre (Diamond & Nelson, 1993). Marilyn Taylor (2003, 12-14) outlines three

possible ways of approaching community strategies; optimism, pessimism or pragmatism, with the latter privileged (ibid, 225), on the basis of its ability to seize opportunities to build a movement for change.

Community deficit

CD and its associated literature have had a range of ideological motivations covering the political spectrum (Gilchrist, 2003). Community deficit is both a technocratic and a moral discourse, which points to both capacity building and correcting community pathology (Diamond, 2004). The analysis of community deficit describes a residuum that is both sick and deficient and that can be corrected by a certain kind of imagined 'community' heralded by communitarianism writings. Neo-liberal thought has theorised on the existence of a moral underclass or undeserving poor (Murray, 1990) who no longer live in absolute poverty, but who do not have access to consumer luxuries. These thinkers argued that such people needed to be forced to lead better lives through means-tested benefits, workfare and 'tough love'.

Although CD has been associated with urban renewal its roots can be traced to colonial interventions in the post 1945 era (Mayo, in Lees and Smith, 1975) and (Taylor, 2003). Both as a mechanism of soft power, and an exhortation to 'self help', the implied and explicitly stated deficiency reinforced stigma as much as it liberated the individual from the misery of being poor, because to be poor was one's own fault. Dramatic social fragmentation amidst relative market buoyancy, led to worries of complete social breakdown. A new community discourse - communitarianism – became a mainstream concept as community became prescribed to the poor. Etzioni (1997) amongst others¹²

¹² Michael Sandel, Alastair MacIntyre, Robert Bellah, Michael Walzer, Willima Galston, Mary-Ann Glendon - as listed in *The Common Sense of Community*, Demos (Atkinson, D, 1994).

saw solutions not in terms of higher taxes but in arguments based on community as a mythic custodian of traditional values, at risk in a fast changing world. Communities of interest and of place were recast as an ethical field, ripe for political objectification and instrumentalisation (Rose, 1999).

Atkinson (1994), in an influential pamphlet, made the link between failed UK regeneration schemes and the need for the common sense of community, in order to reconnect people with place. He made the argument that the very nature and organisation of urban life had become the problem. At its boldest the argument asserted that the choice is not between welfare state and privatisation but a more grounded community. Osborne and Gaebler's (1992) reduction and redirection of government roles, that they 'steer not row', paved the way for Atkinson to make the case for the third sector, in effect a newly discovered voluntary and community sector, as an imaginative way of relating to communities. The popularisation of another new term, social entrepreneur (Leadbetter, 1997) – someone who worked in the not-for-profit sector generating community capital through business strategies, indicated the potential of hybrid approaches across sectors. More significantly it generated a belief that the deficit in modern community could be rebuilt from the bottom up, inspired not by a language of socialism but of ennobled independent initiative.

The communitarian literature is problematic on many levels, most obviously because 'community' can be insular, phobic and hostile to minority and progressive interests. The uncritical valorisation of community has been heavily criticised by a range of thinkers. Zygmunt Bauman wrote of, 'carnival-like communities' (Bauman, 2007, 111) that performed exclusion rituals (Bauman, 2000, 98 – 99) to consolidate group identity and Sennett who detected, 'fratricidal rhythms' (1974, 300-301) at the heart of

community life, due to an impossible and imagined wholeness, that constantly generated conflict. The communitarian discourse is cast as defensive, simplistic and unachievable.

Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) have shown that many forms of behaviour that are commonly assumed to be traditional have been recently invented. Whilst ersatz community may be benign, Sennett terms the 'we' of community, 'the dangerous pronoun' (1998, chapter 8), and the warning is well made. The potential for negative *gemeinschaft* (Tonnies, 1955) proved prophetic as the term community came to be used as an ideological vehicle of convenience in some of the darker historical undercurrents of the twentieth century. As a result community has been treated with some suspicion by political philosophers, whereby notions of negative *gemeinschaft* were countered by 'negative liberty' (Berlin, 1969; Gray, 2000), which placed constraints on the amount of freedom that is possible within liberal democracy. Given the experience of atavistic community behaviours, government is seen as a necessary means of ordering incommensurable demands and may explain the background of institutional caution that comes in its wake (Butler, 1995, 138-139).

Radical community work

Radical community work as it was articulated in the 1970s, whilst never a dominant strand of the wider community development movement was nevertheless influential and embraced strategies of resistance, protest and conflict. The community organising principles of Saul Alinsky (1972) provided an early example of broad based organising that mobilised large and often disparate communities, by campaigns run as pseudo-military operations, openly focusing on an 'enemy' to be polarised and targeted (ibid, 100). Twelvetrees defined the radical community work movement by its 'class

conflict analysis and explicit socialist or Marxist commitment to change' (2002, 141). He noted that it was not so easy to find in practice after 1990 (ibid, xi). This was tied to the rise and fall of social movements, including trade unions, feminist, anti- racist and gay rights activism, as well as the peace movement which sustained an infrastructure for activism and militancy, which radical community development workers could draw sustenance from (Bryant, 1974; Craig, Derricourt & Loney, 1982; Ledwith, 2005).

Radical community work can thus be presented as an anachronism, as Twelvetrees implies, but to do so would be to miss the sharpness of its analysis around the uses of power, which however unfashionable, is highly significant. Of the thirteen chapters of Marilyn Taylor's book *Public Policy in the Community* (2003), four of them have the word power in them and it is arguably the guiding theme of CD work. Taylor's stated position in the book is one of pragmatic change, as opposed to radical community work, but what is implicit is the centrality of notions of power. Hence the implications of the arguments of radical community work go beyond narrow ideological compartmentalisation. The community worker should have knowledge of the inner working of the system, typically of government policy and practice. They share and embed this understanding as a tool to unlock opportunities, resources and power for those traditionally excluded from deploying it (Gilchrist, 2004, 69-70). Whereas the institutional norm is for power to be jealously guarded, the community worker, in particular the radical community worker, reverses its flow and typical operation.

An older radical critique of welfare (Coates & Silburne, 1970), as an instrument of capitalism which suppressed and exploited the working class attacked a welfare-oriented state that, post Thatcher, no longer existed. However the arguments made by the New Left, even though they were superseded by the New Right, are instructive for

their tactics, which worked on many levels. The London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group (1979) sought to break capitalist relations of production by both direct and indirect means. Using the ideas of Foucault and Gramsci (ibid, 56) they saw a sum of interconnecting, fragmented social relations that worked dynamically to retain hegemonic relations but could also generate sites of resistance. CD therefore came to be about numerous and multiform struggles that disrupted the reproduction of state power, creating instead independent and alternative structures that were no longer characterised by oppressive relations by virtue of being beyond capitalist control and its dialectic of class exploitation.

Both before and after the hugely influential publication of *In and Against the State* some of those involved with the Home Office Community Development Projects (CDP) began to produce evaluations and reports. These often rejected the proposed definition of community given by their sponsors and sited the problem not in terms of fecklessness but of capitalism. Loney (1983) subtitled his study of the CDP, 'a study of government incompetence' and berated civil service timidity and obstruction. Rather than collaborating, he saw community as working 'against government' from grass roots action, if such interventions were to do anything other than 'gild the ghetto' (CDP Inter-project Editorial Team, 1977). Likewise Benington, writing in Lees and Smith (1975, chapter 19) described a scale of CD models, from consensus, to pluralism, to structural or class conflict, arguing that with the latter model it was not possible to tackle poverty without fundamental redistribution of power.

As already suggested (chapter one), the idea of a fundamental conflict of interest was identified in the seminal work of Marris and Rein's *Dilemmas of Social Reform* (1972). Their analysis of the US War on Poverty revealed incompatibilities at the heart

of reform, noting that 'structural weaknesses work(ed) against the interests of the poor above all' (ibid, 279) and that 'the most militant advocacy of poor people's rights... had more influence on institutions and won more substantial benefits than any other' (ibid, 267). The same government that sought change had a vested interest in status quo relations of dominance.

Evaluators of the UK CDP noted similar competing interests (CDP Inter-project Editorial Team, 1977). Change was permitted up to a point by government, but when it broke out of social planning models and threatened to organise alternative models of participation, as a direct challenge to imbalances in democratic and bureaucratic systems (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979), civil servants and ministers soon lost patience and interest (Loney, 1983).

Smith, in his book co-edited with Lees (Lees and Smith, 1975, chapter 20) termed this approach as, 'experimental social administration' whereby the CDP could generate information for the central and local state. This research role was deemed rational and uncontroversial at the outset. But CD saw its role as changing society, not simply reporting back on poverty and this led to the assertion of basic democratic ideals, which inevitably led to conflict (Greve, 1973). The relevance of this literature to latter day modernisation is summed up by Taylor's warning of the danger that the term community becomes a, 'spray on solution to cover the faultlines of economic decline and social fragmentation' (2003, 2). In drawing a clear line of difference, radical community work guards against the forms of co-optation and incorporation that, in the words of Marris and Rein: 'undermine the very viability of democracy itself' (1972, 272).

Conclusion: holding the tensions

Theoretical framework

The literature pertaining to the research question gives rise to a wide range of theorists and theoretical frameworks. Within the literature review and in the following chapter (research methods) I have clearly privileged some theorists over others. In particular this is evident in theoretical approaches to power, where it is evident that Freirean critical pedagogy is preferred over other understandings of power including Foucault's theory of discourse, power / knowledge and governmentality.

Traditional CD approaches to power were deployed in the research because these were considered to lend themselves most appropriately to the research material. In addition to Freirean pedagogy which has long been associated with CD (Ledwith, 2005; Craig, Mayo, Popple, Shaw & Taylor, 2011), other understandings commonly used by CD writers, including the work of Lukes' radical approach to power (2005) and a threefold model of CD with consensus-based, pluralist and conflict permutations (Popple, 1995), were brought to bear on the research. The work of Foucault has not established itself centrally in the wider CD literature although its influence can be traced in a minor or secondary capacity in texts (London and Edinburgh Weekend Return, Group, 1979; Taylor, 2003).

In addition to using the central or traditional descriptions of power within the CD literature, the choice of methods (chapter three) also determined the theoretical framework which was used. My ethnographic approach relied on interviewees' own experience and words, where the fit with Friere's dialogic action was especially useful. In contrast, more sophisticated and theoretical positions had little purchase and lacked resonance in conversations, because the majority of interviewees did not understand it,

as I was to discover in conversations prior to my interviews when I tested Foucaultian ideas in particular, with colleagues and practitioners. Having read widely around the work of Foucault (1977, 1979a, 1979n, 1980) and those influenced by him (Rose, 1990, 1996, 1999; Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004, 2009), I was initially keen to explore this analysis because of the potential for insight that it might bring to bear on the research material. The layered operations of power described by these writers corresponded to New Labour's ambiguous discourse of empowerment and development, in particular the MLGA, which was deployed whilst simultaneously being radically undermined from within government due to inherent conflicts of interest (Marris & Rein, 1972). I concluded, on the basis of both the efficacy of using an ethnographic approach, where it was important that language and concepts did not go over people's heads, and also on the basis of the central research question, that the theoretical framework I needed was less about the sociology of power (Foucault et al) and more directly focused on people's lived experiences.

I have nonetheless retained references to more theory-led writers, notably Nikolas Rose, whose focus on governmentality is brought to bear throughout the research, but this is not done in an abstract, sophisticated way so much as tied to actual instances cited by interviewees.

Structural change, contagious ideas

On a visit to London in 2006, the Venezuelan leader, Hugo Chavez, gave a memorable soundbite to the press, reminiscent of politics in the 1970s and 1980s; he said, 'I am a socialist. I will infect you' (Steele & Campbell, 2006). Bold redistributive

policies were not out of fashion in South America, but elsewhere western governments had inoculated themselves against socialist contagion. Likewise CD is itself identified with social democracy in the core values and definitions given to it, notwithstanding its fundamentally contested tradition. This insistence on social change by CD is itself something I regard as an inspiring and contagious idea, and one that found itself re-imagined within a wider political economy of social ideas and policy implementation, including a re-orientation around a skills rather than a social justice agenda. On this basis I believe it is possible to view CD, democracy, modernisation and corporatism as competing memes, positioning themselves in hegemonic relation to each other. Each idea both complements, but also acts in competition with elements of the others. My research will uncover the relative fortunes of each individually and also as a social whole.

Many commentators argue that without bold structural change, political pledges to reinvigorate local democracy (Barber, 1984; Jenkins, 2004) or substantially reduce poverty (Ledwith, 1997, 31; Craig, 1998) are destined to fail. The postponement of structural change can be understood in two ways; a genuine dilemma of government having to balance rights and responsibilities (Gray, 2000). Or perhaps it was a case of clinging to power (Loney, 1983). Jessop (2002) noted the recent change from Keynesian welfare to Schumpeterian workfare as the latest attempt to reconcile market generated contradictions, one that is unlikely to prove permanent. He cited Offe's paradox that capitalism cannot live either with, or without, the welfare state. This generates an ongoing tense relationship between the market, civil society and the state. King and Stoker (1996) made the case for rethinking local democracy based on increased levels of participation, and a commitment to valuing local democracy in itself.

They sensed the political ground shifting to New Labour and judged the moment opportune to make the case for bringing local government up to date. The central / local relationship is cast as an anachronism in the information age. On these and on other grounds it is pertinent to ask, as both the literature and my research interviewees frequently did, what has been achieved? What has changed?

Historically, social movements and popular uprisings have successfully contested established power, ranging from the English Civil War, the Chartists and Suffragettes, as stated by Hazel Blears¹³ in the DCLG Communities in Control publication (DCLG, 2008, iii). The displacement of post war collectivism to corporatism seemed to mark the 'death of the social' but may in fact have opened up new vistas for social action. The work of Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004, 2009) described a resurgence of militancy, moving from class identification to multiple struggles by the, 'poors' (ibid, 2004, 129), and the multitude (ibid, 2004) by new acts of resistance, to reclaim a commonwealth (ibid, 2009).

A truly reflexive society understands that dissent protects democracy. The tension that comes with CD, between merging with the state and organising against the state as political activists (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979), is one that ensures the role is never finally resolved, and also points to the fact that CD is one of the defining professions of our time (Gilchrist, 2004, 11). Marilyn Taylor (2003, 230-231) argued that whilst the opportunity for compromise is hardwired into the culture of western liberal democracy and civic society, the reality is of perpetually muddled and dynamic processes that require greater participation from the most marginalised, in order to open up new public space, aided and abetted by community workers. In this

¹³ 'Our history is punctuated by great struggles for democracy, from the soldiers who debated with generals at Putney during the English Civil War... from the families who gathered at St Peter's Field in Manchester to demand parliamentary reform, to the Chartists who marched in their thousands at Kersal Moor in Salford, from the women who chained themselves to railings and went to prison to win the vote' (DCLG, 2008, iii).

way society and state interact, and generate compromises that may not fully satisfy but allow principles and new ideas to become embedded and advance into the mainstream.

The existing literature on CD, local government modernisation and local democracy has appreciated issues of tension, contradiction, messiness and opportunity more often in relative isolation to one another. The literature and arguments chosen for my research, seek a dynamic combination of views that, to date, have not been developed in the wider literature.

Chapter three:

research methods

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Introduction

As already outlined in chapter one, the role of CD in raising local democratic engagement, as framed by the New Labour MLGA, has been both a theoretical fascination and a professional preoccupation in my daily job, as a CDW. My research and its methods grew out of this practical engagement. My experience of community work has meant that I have first-hand knowledge of many of the situations and issues that come with the CD and MLGA territory. I have a fervent interest in learning more about solutions to the dilemmas and failings of both CD and MLGA interventions and this is the prime motivation that drives my research. In recent years I have increasingly come to value my professional experiences as an important resource and this is central to the research undertaken here.

CD, as it merged with the MLGA, created a rare overview of the workings of local community, its local authority and layered partnerships. This overview was usually far broader and wide ranging than the more specific and compartmentalised way in which other professionals operated. My CD role has meant I have worked with people at all levels, from grass roots communities to leaders of local authorities, and with national charities and government departments. The instability inherent in CD work means much of its potential benefit and learning is often lost due to a rapid turnover in CDWs and a failure to commission robust evaluation and research (Ledwith, 2005, 75), due to the lack of status of the profession. My starting point was the drive to explore what contribution CD could make towards the modernisation of local government and its democratic deficit. This research, through its methods, sets out to discover, based on a series of semi-structured interviews across three study areas, what the nature of this contribution is.

The researcher's stance – from radical community work to the well-connected community

In addition to the conflict of interest and dilemmas of special tensions inherent in CD and modernisation, I am aware of my own ideological and argumentative baggage. It is good practice to state these up front¹⁴ but also to note, in my own case, how they have changed as a result of my engagement with the research. As a practitioner I identify with a tradition of radical community work, prevalent in some of the community development projects of the 1970s and constantly revisited in contemporary debates about the practice and role of community development. The willingness to adopt activist techniques and conflict models in pursuit of a redistribution of economic and social goods, and the creation of alternative spaces based on participative democracy, are part of this strategy and tactic. Whilst not a Marxist per se, I drew from the 'In and Against' (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979) analysis and a generic Socialist and 'Social Left' leaning predominated in my outlook at the start of my research.

I was open to being influenced by what I observed, which led me to believe that a purely radical stance, as it is traditionally understood, was insufficient to unlock significant change. The power of networks, as articulated by Gilchrist (2004), allowed me to reflect beyond the critical and oppositional radical model on the one hand, and conformist and co-opted consensus or pluralist models, on the other. I found in the model of a networked approach to CD, a means of going beyond the binary cancelling out of the former models, towards something that allowed more creative room for manoeuvre. My further reflections on the work of Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004, 2009),

¹⁴ 'The ethnographer can guard against the more obvious biases... by making them explicit' (Fetterman, 1998, 23.)

on the role of the multitude as an endlessly decentralised and emerging force, similarly allowed me to maintain a commitment to radical, even revolutionary change. I explain my preferred model of CD, as it has been formed by my findings, in more detail at the end of my research. It is mentioned in outline here because of the importance of being objective and open about the ideas and beliefs that the researcher carries with them into the field.

Harding (1998) defines standpoint as an objective position in social relations because social relations produce our understanding of who we are. There are many orientations to CD work that span the political spectrum¹⁵. I have acknowledged this by stating clearly, my preference for the model of radical CD (subsequently modified as already explained), rather than pluralist and consensus models (Popple, 1995). This standpoint is closely tied to my personal and professional politics. I am aware that there are inescapable tensions that arise from both the personal and professional aspects of fieldwork and understand that this requires particular reflexivity on the part of the researcher. The reflexivity of ethnographic research methods therefore make it possible to have both a definite standpoint and to be able to maintain a necessary degree of objectivity and distance.

Outline of the chapter

The chapter begins with a grounding of the research question within the wider context of contemporary quantitative and qualitative debates that have polarised research methods. The notion of an objective scientific approach, encapsulated by positivism, is challenged in favour of both a qualitative and emancipatory form of social

¹⁵ If any particular strand were ascendant it would be more towards the centre left ground. Radical community work is not mainstream or representative of the community development movement

research. The work of Roy Bhaskar (1989, 1997, 1998) is introduced as a powerful theoretical vision that transforms existing dichotomies between quantitative and qualitative approaches and facilitates a role for human agency and emancipation. Participatory and emancipatory research practices are then outlined in order to demonstrate the potential for research in CD to work within a participatory paradigm (Ledwith, 1997).

The next section introduces the main research method of the interviews and the way in which the research strategy was able to hold what are described as 'special tensions' inherent in the field work and subject matter. The role of interviews is then covered as a central research method, including an explanation of the practice and value of interviewing as a means to generate research material. The experience of interviewing, the role of the study areas from which the interviews were drawn, the range of interviewee backgrounds and secondary material drawn upon are described.

The chapter then focuses on ethnographic practice and includes both a theoretical appreciation of ethnography and sections on ethics and standpoint, where my own reflexivity is demonstrated. Finally, the concluding section summarises the research strategy, theoretical underpinnings and methods.

Quantitative / qualitative debates

To be (I hope) uncharacteristically rude, if you have not yet appreciated that positivism as a basis for social research is a god that failed then either you haven't done sufficient reading, or you are impervious to evidence.

(Robson, 2003)

Positivism is dead. By now it has gone off and is beginning to smell.

(Byrne, 1998)

Positivism can be understood as a school of thought that sees reality as being the sum of sense impressions, equating social sciences with natural sciences and deploying deductive logic and quantitative research methods. The belief that it is possible and desirable to transfer the assumptions and methods of natural science to social science is especially challenging to the art of ethnography. For Feyerabend (1975) science was essentially an anarchistic enterprise, which could not be coherently theorised and was dangerous because it subverted our freedom to choose what we believe. He went on to argue that, 'given any rule, however 'fundamental' or 'necessary' for science, there are always circumstances when it is advisable not only to ignore the rule, but to adopt its opposite' (1975, 25). Whether or not this should be taken literally is not clear but it does demonstrate one view about the vulnerability of science as orthodoxy.

Whilst knowledge may have been straightforward and unproblematic at one time for positivists, these claims of exclusive knowledge have been undermined. Rather than reality being out there, individual interpretation, subjectivity and action are seen to

impact decisively. Science itself is a social activity, albeit a reification and atomisation of facts (May, in Hobbs & May, 1993, 70-73). It presupposes closed systems of micro events where people are passive receptors of given facts. If real social behaviour is like this, then transformational and emancipatory projects are impossible (Hustedde & King, 2002, 340). However, if we entertain even the possibility of the illusory nature of objectivity and standardisation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, 5), these projects of reform reappear, alongside the opportunity to use and value wider experience (Hall & Hall, 1996; May, 2001; Robson, 2003; Gray, 2004), including subaltern voices and countervailing social movements. Instead of empty objects to fill with facts we have people as partners and experts (Bhaskar, 1989).

Whilst the potential exists for postmodernism to drift into a radical relativism that excludes the possibility of human agency, 'real world research' (Robson, 2003; Gray, 2004) and 'critical realism' (Bhaskar, 1989, 1997, 1998) do not follow this line. They simply recast the debate around quantitative / qualitative research as a false dichotomy. The supposed purity of science has long been exposed and what has arisen is more a hybridity of approaches across a spectrum of, 'cultures of enquiry' (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998). Likewise (May, in Carter & New, 2004) writes of the social sciences as being as much about interpretation as falsification, engendering a *realpolitik* of scholastic reasoning whereby the, 'science of the probable contributes to making the possible come into being'. In the next section I look at Bhaskar's thought, which goes beyond qualitative / quantitative antagonisms and in so doing, opens up new ground, as the basis for my research.

Roy Bhaskar - a transformational model of social activity

As for society itself, it is not, as the positivists would have it, a mass of separable events and sequences. Nor is it constituted.., by the momentary meanings that we attach to our physiological states. Rather it is a complex and causally efficacious whole – a totality, whose concept must be constructed in theory, and which is being continually transformed in practice.

Bhaskar (1989, 87)

Bhaskar can be understood to transform positivism but also to move beyond a range of established and influential thinkers, beyond the work of Durkheim (reification), Weber (voluntarism) and Berger (illicit identification). Rather than an illicit identification, where individuals continually create society, Bhaskar sees an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions that individuals reproduce or transform. Society both pre-exists individuals but also ceases to continue without human action.

Table 3:1 Thinkers, models and theories

THINKER	MODEL	THEORY
Weber	Voluntarism	Society determines individual human behaviour
Durkheim	Reification	Individual human behaviour determines society
Berger	Illicit identification	Society forms the individuals who create it in a continuous dialectic
Bhaskar	Critical realism	Society is not created by individuals although it is reproduced and transformed by them

For Bhaskar, duality of praxis is all; society is both ever present and continually reproduced. People do not create society, it pre-exists, but it is also an articulated ensemble of tendencies and powers that exist only as long as they are exercised, and are exercised through human intentionality. Critical realism can be seen as combining three things; science and the subject, a dynamic model of human agency and the case for socialism / emancipation. What is now possible is a means of doing research that simultaneously criticises what it studies, acting as a corrective to false understandings, but also provides an impetus for social change.

Bhaskar seeks to build a movement for socialism, 'in which socialism wins cultural-intellectual hegemony, so that it becomes the enlightened common sense of our age' (1989, 1). He attacks the hiding of reality by dogma; human beings and social forms are always emerging and in this the possibility of emancipation can be found. Emancipation depends on the transformation of structures, which arise from the conscious praxis of social agents, which in turn depend on explanatory conscious theory. His theory goes further than most activists or indeed social scientists can easily follow and is greatly simplified here. As a researcher what I want from his theory is the potential of keeping space 'open' to realise radical and equitable change. I use ethnography as a method and means for social commentary and change, supplemented with critical realism which plants itself on positivism's ground and ambitiously 'underlabours' (ibid, 2) for science as a, 'necessary but insufficient agency of human emancipation' (ibid, 191).

Participatory and emancipatory research

As stated in the introduction, research in CD has traditionally been grounded in a paradigm, an approach that is described as participatory, collaborative or emancipatory action (Ledwith, 2005). The difference between participatory and emancipatory has been one of degree, with emancipation having a more pronounced radical and ideological commitment to social change. Participatory research, especially research geared around taking of action (hence action based research), uses a systematic and iterative method of planning, taking action, observation, evaluation (including self-evaluation) and critical reflection, prior to planning the next cycle (McNiff, 1988). This method is premised on collaboration which explores and develops ideas in order to take action, using principled approach to social change (Burns, 2007). It seeks to be both a democratic and non coercive process by and for those to be helped (Wadsworth, 1998). This is in contrast to expert interventions that extract information away from subjects. Participatory research stimulates reflective learning and may be seen as the antithesis of consultancy, which has a clear timeline of initiation and exit, where the agenda is set in advance and the outcomes are predictable (ibid). Instead the emphasis is placed on the unexpected, and the process is reliant on the creativity and reflexivity of those involved (Lees, in Lees & Smith, 1975, 61; May, in Hobbs & May, 1993, 76-78; Holland & Blackburn, 1998, 2).

Emancipatory research sharpens the political nature of participatory research, seeking to liberate people from oppressive social structures (Ledwith, 2005, 78). Even if the goal of emancipatory research is unrealisable in the present or immediate future, Bentz and Shapiro (1998, 153) described a critical tradition (Adorno, 1974) which believed that human emancipation served as the basis of critical analysis of the status

quo. Whilst the notion of emancipatory research is not a modern development (Humphries, Mertens & Truman, 2000, 3) new perspectives have made significant inroads, challenging traditional positivist approaches and articulating subaltern concerns. Feminist, anti-racist and disability rights projects have all made use of an emancipatory research paradigm. The, 'social model of disability' (Oliver, 1990) for example, identifies barriers within society as the major issue, not medically-defined bodily differences. Emancipatory research therefore starts from a model that locates the problem from within society and the way it is organised to exclude marginal voices. It resists messages from forms of research that seek to pathologise or blame the victims by abandoning any claim to objectivity (Priestly, in Barnes and Mercer, 1997). Research is done only when it is useful to those without power, using a variety of methods including strong participation from the marginalised group itself, whose voice is heard to be asserting rights throughout.

This emancipatory approach lends dignity and control to people whose lives often suffer from overbearing professional interventions. A self-critical, reflexive approach can go alongside one that is enabling. The empowering aspiration of CD resonates with the empowerment agenda of emancipatory projects (Ledwith, 2005, 1; Gilchrist & Rauf, 2006, 12). For this reason I am keen to make the link between this approach and my research methodology. Whilst my research needs to be measured in its claims about what it can achieve, a desire for change features strongly, and goes well beyond institutional 'modernisation'. An emancipatory framework can be seen to run throughout my research, analogous to the owning of a radical community work standpoint (Mayo, in Bailey & Brake, 1975).

The transformative and humanistic vision of Freire's pedagogy, whereby social change is wrested from oppressive social forces, continues to be an inspirational model of emancipation (Ledwith, 1997, 66). It strongly lends itself to ethnographic interpretation, because it develops reflexivity and dialogue. The giving of voice to those who are not heard fulfils the government's inclusion agenda. However, Freire condemns false charity from above (1972, 27). For him what is critical is working with those without power, ensuring people control their own development at every moment, rather than social engineering which manipulates outcomes that are set in advance by social elites. He draws a useful boundary between deep change, as opposed to more ephemeral and superficial efforts, and his work is echoed in Bhaskar's transformational model (1989, 178). Finally, Freire's insistence on breaking with instruction from above (1972, 138) has a strong correlation with the tension CD inhabits when it meets with the MLGA. The methods I have chosen work with and reflect, rather than deny, this contested and contradictory space.

Special tensions

Researching of CD's interaction with modernisation is not straightforward. It is immediately beset by a number of challenging questions: can power ever be given? Is it in the interests of the state to enable reform? Is 'community' a coherent identity that can be organised around? Is it possible to trust local people or politicians? These are special tensions that are not resolved, that linger as a backdrop to every interview conversation and which require a special flexibility and sensitivity. By using an appropriate method, in this case of semi-structured interviews, it is possible to honour

the existence of these tensions without being either overwhelmed by them or seeking to grasp solutions that may prove elusive.

The following six examples, which were central themes in chapter two, are listed below to illustrate special tensions that were recurrent features of this research and which the interview methodology was able to hold:

1. **The central / local relationship:** The relationship between central and local government in England is heavily weighted towards central government, and yet most policy is implemented locally
2. **The divided loyalties of bureaucrats:** bureaucracies seek to both drive programmes of reform, and simultaneously restrain the change engendered by them when they encroach on the status of those who already have power in society, to whom officers are directly accountable
3. **In and against the state:** many radical community workers are both employed by the state and yet regard the state as a site of structural oppressions that must be challenged
4. **In and outside the community:** to promote change, the CDW must create both solidarity with the community and also critical distance, in order to avoid collusive behaviour, for example when it is necessary to challenge discrimination
5. **Regeneration through the wrong end of the telescope¹⁶:** regeneration programmes, and by extension any government agenda, begin as an

¹⁶ “The community exists first; the development scheme is an intervention in it. From local residents’ point of view, therefore, the question would be how to get the development scheme to be involved in the community. However, development schemes are mostly devised from the outside in rather than from the inside out, so the question of involvement initially presents itself from the perspective of intervention”

intervention into a community. Community-led work is organised from within the community and the initiative belongs with local people, who generate their own agenda

6. **The contested definition of community development:** one interpretation of CD is that it can only work in compliance with the state, as a consensus or pluralist model. Another is a radical tradition that stresses the need for critical engagement that challenges state hegemony

Nurturing and holding tensions as a bridge to deeper understanding

The examples of special tensions covered in the last section all require research methods that can facilitate and support an understanding of complex, layered relationships, and a holding of the tensions between them. Each of these tensions requires research methods that can nurture a sense of uncertainty, in order to build knowledge. Writing on the philosophical, ethical and political issues in qualitative research, Katharine Gaskin insists, 'we have to find the knack of spanning the spectrum' (Alcock & Scott (ed), 2005, 43). The space created by an open-ended dialogue or a semi-structured interview has the potential to cover this spectrum of tensions, to hold a wide variety of ideas and experience and for this reason has a special purchase on the research question.

Interviews as research method

30 interviews across 3 study areas

The building blocks of my research are thirty interviews, each around an hour long, with a range of practitioners, from council leaders to local activists. The central research method is thus one of interviews across study areas. The three studies I chose cover a shared geographical area across East and South East London. The London Borough of Lewisham shares a border with the London Borough of Greenwich, which is itself bordered by both the London Boroughs of Lewisham and Newham. The interviews were supplemented by my own deep ethnographic engagement in the field, as a worker at a local, regional and national level, which entailed both an interaction with and observation of partnerships, forums, seminars and other interactive spaces where the worlds of CD and modernisation came together.

The interviews focused on meeting with individuals in a one-to-one setting and building a semi-structured conversation that covered certain bases, including:

- instances of local CD work
- local manifestations of modernisation
- examples of partnerships between CD and the MLGA
- issues arising from the above, including barriers and innovations
- personal reflections on the working environment
- recommendations for change and ways forward

Interviews

My research was gathered primarily by interviewing a range of local statutory and VCS officers, CDWs, community activists and local politicians (both councillors and

leaders of councils). Interview methods allow a wide range of structural possibilities, ranging from a highly formal, pre-planned and rigid set of questions, to a much more spontaneous and informal spectrum of styles. This reflects the traditional range of quantifiable versus qualitative approaches (Hall & Hall, 1996); May, 2001; Alcock & Scott, 2005). I have taken a middle road with this research by choosing to use an in-depth semi-structured interview style which generates both flexibility for improvisation and pursuit of meaningful tangents (Gray, 2004, 225). I used a core set of questions for all interviewees (May, 2001, 123) which covered the following:

- Experience of the MLGA and local democratic process
- Impact of CD on the above
- Concrete examples of the inter-relationship of CD and the MLGA, including local democracy in action
- Make or break factors in achieving change, as framed by the MLGA and CD interventions
- Ways forward and room for manoeuvre

Semi-structured interviews as research strategy

Semi-structured interview questions are open ended to elicit an unforced response, to allow the natural opening up of content, which can arise spontaneously from the questions (Hall & Hall, 1996, 157-158). The questions act as prompts to stimulate conversation with the interviewee. There is a necessary degree of guiding to the themes of the research by the interviewer (ibid), hence the semi-structured flow of my five key questions. Within this frame there is plenty of room for the interviewee to weave their own story (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, 166). Rather than a linear approach

(Ellis, in Alcock & Scott, 2005, 27-28), over the course of an hour-long interview, each question / prompt is introduced in twelve minute intervals, the discussion can move back and forth over all, or several of these bases.

The interview as process and praxis

The interview has a beginning, middle and an end, not only chronologically over the course of an hour but also in terms of process. I came to see this as both a structural dialectic and a more interpersonal rhythm (Fetterman, 1998, 16-30). The dialectic approach invited people to take a threefold step: the formal presentation of the modernising local government proposition and the role of CD therein; the tensions and contradictions of existing practice; the ways in which things could work better.

Table 3:2 The interview as dialectical problem solving

Thesis	What exists?	Current situation or status quo
Antithesis	What is being missed?	Critique
Synthesis	What can be done?	Solution

When I carried out the interviews my reflection was that their semi-structured character lent itself to a dialectical approach that not only facilitated critical thinking but moved from problem to solution. In this way I came to see it as a form of praxis (Freire, 1972, 69) that created the possibility to discuss what transformational and emancipatory change had occurred, or might arise in the future. Given that, as already explained, my research has a commitment to social change, the methods to some degree reflect this. In the course of an hour, not only is the subject matter covered but an opportunity to

reflect on the conditions and possibility for progressive change arises. I cannot claim that my research is strongly emancipatory because I did not work side by side with my interviewees in a research process on a longer term basis, nor was my commitment to share in the achievement of specific social outcomes. It did, however, follow in the tradition of participative community research (Hall and Hall, 1996; Robson, 2003; Gray, 2004).

The principal aim was to elicit material from interviews, with which to understand and interpret how CD had contributed to the MLGA, with special attention to its democratising aims. The semi-structured interviews took place within a broader context that had the potential to be transformative because it was strongly rooted in a tradition of praxis, whereby the interviewees speak their own truth, and are invited to ask critical questions. This critical questioning and the responses to it generated insights, even solutions that (for many of those interviewed) offered some respite from an oppressive or seemingly hopeless reality. This has been a very finite, fragile and superficial transformation, as opposed to the way in which Freirean dialogic action might be expected to work (Ledwith, 1997), over considerable time, and with great preparation and effort. But the semi-structured interview can create an authentic space and generates new possibilities based on an equal encounter (Payne & Payne, 2004, 130-134). The researcher's agenda is not only to extract data but to create a meaningful, supportive and enriching encounter (Hall & Hall, 1996, 171-176).

The second part of the interview process which complements the loose forward movement of dialectic, is the interpersonal rhythm that arises and can be consciously deployed as part of the research strategy (May, 2001, 127). I knew a flexible approach that allowed interviewees to shape and own their experience was necessary and that

this would authenticate and legitimate the research. I also knew it was important to start and end well. The mundane first question that sought to spell out how my interviewee came to experience the research question gave it a vital grounding. Their expertise and identity was immediately established, by them. The final question which looked at ways forward played to an innate problem-solving inclination that I discerned in my interactions with individuals. In the course of any open-ended debate or conversation I was convinced that people wanted to first problematise and then explore solutions for whatever topic arose. This began with the interviewees' initial roles and experience as background to their comments and culminated with their conclusions, the ways forward they believed were possible, based on what their experience had led them to believe.

Reflections on interviewing

The rapidity with which some interviewees were able to knit together ideas and key points demonstrated the inclination for some people to be highly creative and eclectic in how they chose to analyse and amalgamate experiences. On occasion some interviewees covered many or all of the five question topics within the first ten minutes of the interview (before going back to explore them in more depth). It was frequently the case that fragmentary elements of policy and experience were deftly reconstituted and given new meaning by the interviewee. They wove their own mental and causal maps that explained, from start to finish, why certain things had happened and what needed to be done to improve upon them.

For example, several council officers commented that the MLGA had been impaired because it was subject to continual change and amendments by central government, which made it hard to implement, and led to confusion and cynicism. The

solution was for consistency and longer timeframes. It was possible to articulate problems and their solutions in a matter of seconds but then spend much longer in spelling out both context and implications. The context highlighted the relevance of CD and MLGA in working situations and helped to concretise what might otherwise appear highly abstract. Silverman (1997) has argued that interviews have become increasingly common in our daily (western) lives, giving rise to an, interview society with its technology of the confessional. This conditioned familiarity with the aims and methods of interviewing greatly facilitates access to, and the delivery of, data beneath the radar of more formal and institutional mechanisms, and for obtaining and mining information, in the form of views, anecdotes and vignettes.

I not only recorded but also transcribed each interview, writing out every word spoken, no matter how incidental. In doing so I came to appreciate the freeze framing of the words spoken and how issues and experiences that at the time I had felt were off the point, suddenly presented themselves with new meaning. I came to appreciate just how much was going on in the rapid exchange of words that required not only careful listening at the time, but could also reveal layers of meaning only when played back several times.

I remember interviewing a council officer who did not know their way around the MLGA, even though it was within their operational remit. Likewise CD had no meaning for them. In my letter introducing my research (Hall & Hall, 1996, 59), I had sent summaries of both CD and the MLGA along with the confidentiality agreement, but most people did not read them in depth. Before each interview I also briefly went over the background to the research again, and did so in the case of this particular council officer. We were in the heart of the council, the nerve centre of borough partnerships and

community engagement, and it seemed that questions about CD and the MLGA were almost entirely redundant.

Having asked my first two questions prompting the interviewee's experience of the MLGA as it impacted locally and how CD connected to it, we were both beginning to flounder. Their working life appeared to be about following council directives within a particular part of the council, with little reference to wider concerns. We quickly regrouped by describing what actually happened in the borough. This covered the same policy ground, albeit understood on the terms of the officer. The same questions were answered once they were translated, but answered in a way that underlined the distance between what was supposed to be a transformative policy and was in fact the mundane stewardship of the local state, wired into its own imperatives. At the time I was focused on getting the interview underway. The fact that the MLGA and CD meant next to nothing to an officer in a pivotal partnership role was itself an important research finding but now I needed to know what filled this vacuum. There was an important inside story to be told about how council leadership and CD operated on their own terms. In my own mind I'd written off the first few minutes as a false start, so much dead air, but listening to the recording of the interview I realised a great deal was being communicated at the very beginning. The story simply began in an abrupt and unexpected way.

Over the course of interviewing, and especially in transcribing, I came to appreciate how orality moves the focus from participation and observation, to actual words, how they are spoken, and the generation of knowledge by skilful listening. The innate storytelling woven into conversation is a powerful means of connecting with humanity as process of endless understanding, as Arendt (1958) and Bourdieu (1993) have shown. Whilst this might sound grandiose it is something I experienced regularly

in some of the most routine everyday descriptions covered by interviewees. The grind of local government and community interaction does not command headlines, but within these local interstitial spaces a plethora of living narrative bubbles up and was made accessible in the interviews.

My experience of interviewing brought home to me how well the semi-structured interview process works, both in delivering research material and also as a process of praxis, a space of critical questioning and shared reflection on action. At the start of my thirty interviews (December 2007), I was confident that it was necessary to create plenty of room for people to explore their own experience, which in itself would be dynamic and insightful. By April 2009, at the completion of the interviews I felt vindicated in my choice of method, and convinced that I had accessed an important human and political story.

I found it poignant how valiantly people battled against great challenges and how little they were ordinarily able to share, how little they were listened to, and how that came to affect them. They shut down. They reined in their ambitions or, more usually on the community side they became enmeshed in continual low-level conflict. The interviews seemed to have had a therapeutic value, without being remotely to do with therapy. As people this is what we do, we open up and share, we structure experiences and work through problems together, usually without imposing a version of truth but more sensitively, waiting for something to feel right, to come into focus, as the words wash over us. The problem-solving discourse that flows down from institutions, in this case the MLGA as a means to revivify the democratic deficit, works in a different way; the words are not ours. They never become so, although reflexively they have a stickiness that becomes embedded and recognisable as institutionalised behaviour. In

its better moments CD not only speaks truth to power, but in strengthening the voice of local communities it can transform an often sterile policy debate and practice.

On a simple level the interviews were there to generate data. But the subject matter was ideological – the MLGA was not value neutral. Likewise CD's commitment to collective action and social justice is ideological, and builds from subaltern and countervailing knowledge. In the words of Margaret Ledwith, 'community work is about the active participation of people in their own transformation. Anything less is condescending, it is in danger of being culturally invasive' (1997, 13).

Study areas

Three local sites of investigation (case studies) were chosen to ground my research – the London Boroughs of Greenwich, Lewisham and Newham – which are covered in more detail in chapter five. Each area shared active partnerships, local government reform and community development approaches, alongside similar demographics, shared boundaries, local histories and political cultures. These common characteristics were vital in enabling comparisons and contrasts to be drawn from the experiences and outcomes of the research. In particular, they were useful in order to examine whether MLGA policy and CD interventions had occurred as a result of very specific circumstances or whether indicative of, or caused by, wider factors.

The London boroughs as study areas were single units, in a formal administrative sense, located in a physical place, made up of groups of people, typically around 250,000 per borough. They were also highly complex social entities with strong socio-economic, political and demographic similarities, and key differences that marked out their respective identities. Underneath the imposed uniformity designated by borough

boundaries and the status brought by that title, the study areas enabled a 'powerful means of exploring situations where there is uncertainty or ambiguity about phenomena or events (Gray, 2004, 9). The contested nature of CD, (Poppo, 1995, 4; Mayo, 2000, 92) and the emergent nature of community as the outcome of interactions within networks (Gilchrist, 2004, 90), makes for an uncertain and often ambiguous practice ideally suited to the use of case studies. Verschuren (2003) highlighted the applicability of qualitative approaches, including participatory approaches and Dockery (Truman, Mertens and Humphries, 2000, 102-109) illustrated how the use of case studies can facilitate a critical participatory research process that strengthened social bonds, and has the potential to impact directly on poverty (ibid, 109). Yin (1994) has argued that some criticism of case studies is valid since it has sometimes led to dangerous generalisations being drawn from data that is approximate. However he also acknowledges the importance of the researcher's skill and the value of researcher reflexivity in the conducting of case studies, which can offset these potential disadvantages and enhance their value.

The case for and against absolute anonymity of the study areas

The decision to name the study areas, the London boroughs of Greenwich, Lewisham and Newham, was made for several reasons. The research was grounded in a local area, South and East London, with a distinct history and shared culture. To make the boroughs wholly anonymous risked an unnecessary flattening of contextual richness. On the other hand there was an awareness that the research could unduly rebound on the reputation of those involved, (as covered in this chapter) which led to interviewees being made anonymous, as well as the specific borough they worked in.

Whilst this did not extend to the names of the three boroughs, at no point were boroughs pointed out singularly, with the exception of CPA scores (chapter nine), which are in the public domain. Direct comparisons were felt to be unhelpful (chapter nine) and great care was taken to avoid any judgement on individual boroughs, hence all single borough identities were concealed in the research and in particular in interviewee quotes.

I have considered the possibility that even though individual boroughs are not discerned that overall positive and negative attributions could become associated with the study areas. However I felt complete anonymity was unduly limiting and flew in the face of many similar studies, where the study areas were clearly set out (Cockburn, 1977; Wallace, 2010; Dillon & Fanning, 2011). Finally my own profile was never hidden. I was known as a CDW in Lewisham, but also active across all study areas and since 2008 have had a national CD and VCS profile. My research, by association, would inevitably be tied in the minds of those who knew me and who came in contact with me, with the areas I was known to have worked in.

Analysing the data: drawing up comparative categories

Although the interview is the primary research method, analysis and development of hypotheses does not stop with interviewing. Silverman (in Seale, 2004) argues that case studies, limited to a set of interactions, allow the researcher to examine how particular actions (sayings and doings) are embedded in patterns of social organisation. We can compare and contrast, and in so doing, build theories. Theoretical sampling, saturation and constant comparison are all tools available to the researcher who uses case studies¹⁷. The method of constant comparison follows an order: coding of data

¹⁷ These tools were developed by the grounded theory of Glasner and Strauss (1967) as a reaction against a positivist verificationist approach (Seale, 2004).

into categories, integration of categories, an exhaustion of theory building resulting in the writing of theory. I used this pattern without elaborate coding by covering the basics of emerging (open) analytic themes, their interconnections and subsidiary properties.

I began with a schedule of 30 individual interviews, ten for each of the three case study areas. The interviews were recorded and, when transcribed, consisted of a total of 271,066 words. I summarised on average 14 key points for each interview, which amounted to 421 key points across all interviews. I then clustered these into 18 categories which linked the data to the research question. There is a clear cluster of themes that cluster around the role of the local and central state, around modernisation, democratisation, CD and intermediary stakeholders and bodies, local roles and relationships and historical tropes as shown in the table below. Even the relatively infrequent themes towards the bottom of the table were signalled by interviewees as important local structures, issues or moments that had a strong relevance to their interpretation of the research questions. The case was powerfully made by several interviewees for the educative tradition of CD, for example, that had once been firmly embedded across the study areas, but was now in decline:

Table 3:3 Interview themes

	Themes	No of key points	%
1.	Central / local relationship (central government / local government)	49	12%
2.	The political economy and culture of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)	49	12%
3.	Community Development (CD)	48	11%
4.	Councillors and the role of scrutiny	46	11%
5.	Council officers & their relationship with VCS	43	10%

6.	The democratic deficit and the principles and practice of democracy	36	9%
7.	The office of Mayor (directly elected)	23	5%
8.	Post war UK history, including the legacy of Thatcherism	21	5%
9.	The Modernising Local Government agenda (MLGA)	19	5%
10.	The Neighbourhood Renewal Agenda with specific reference to Community Empowerment Networks (CENs) and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs)	17	4%
11.	Community activists	16	4%
12.	VCS accountability, leadership and dependency	14	3%
13.	Local assemblies	9	2%
14.	Political compromises made by local leaders	8	2%
15.	Council community engagement	7	2%
16.	Council view of activists	6	1%
17.	Government Office for London (GOL)	5	1%
18.	The educational tradition of CD	5	1%
	Total	421	100%

When it came to writing up my research findings I distilled these 18 categories into 7 topics.

- The experience of being a CDW
- The meaning of the modernisation of local government as it is transmitted locally
- The long decline of community organisation (and the rise of the voluntary sector as sub contractor)
- What it means to be political: the role of party and grassroots activism
- The role of council officers: public servants, private power brokers

- Council engagement structures; managed democracy through invited spaces
- The role of central government and the wider motif of democracy

These topics related to the research because they mirrored the key components of the research question, namely of CD, the MLGA and democratisation. The VCS, activism and role of council officers are revealed to be critical containers of CD and local policy making. The role of CD, for example, was frequently reinterpreted as 'what it felt like to be a CDW'. The role of council officers often became a focus for the relative degree of power that senior or junior officers could deploy relative to the community, or council leadership. Thus the research was guided by interviewees' own accounts of shared interpretations of experience, for example the difficulty of the VCS in holding both council contracts and a critical advocacy role, or the role of local political parties in local policy agenda setting.

The range of interviewees

I had a clear idea who I wanted to target and how I would go about it, because I had working contact with a broad range of local practitioners. I wanted to get an accurate cross section of all those involved in both community development work and the implementation of the modernising local government agenda. This meant including everyone from unpaid activists to the head of the council and those in-between such as councillors, heads of service and so forth. My targeted selection of interviewees therefore included:

- Local backbench councillors
- Elected leaders of the council
- Elected cabinet members

- Heads of service and directorates within the council
- Local strategic partnership officers
- Community and statutory CDWs
- Statutory officers with an engagement / modernisation role
- Community representatives on key partnership boards
- Local activists
- VCS staff from second tier (borough-wide) organisations
- Resident chairs from local community forums and interagency meetings
- Community leaders from communities of interest, for example based on ethnicity and identity
- Tenant, resident & leaseholder activists

The list is indicative of the range of professional and community backgrounds most often found at the local council and community level. A mix of environments and professions were included to ensure a proportionate coverage, in particular between statutory and voluntary / community sectors, and within each sector, a mix of (implied or real) status and role.

Range of interviewees by study area

Care was taken to both preserve the anonymity of interviewees and ensure, as far as possible, an even spread of roles and sectors. Whilst anonymity was essential in enabling interviewees to participate fully and safely, as covered elsewhere in this chapter, there was a risk that it also took away some of the potential richness of the interview. The inability of the reader to know who was speaking might lead to a de-contextualizing of the material. Ultimately the necessity of preserving confidentiality

trumped this concern. The open discussions were successful in delivering an abundance of research material precisely because they were secure, safe spaces, protected and honoured by signed confidentiality agreements. It would not have been possible to secure the same quality and amount of information without this safeguard because of the certain impact it would have on the positions of those interviewed. On-the-record criticism of one’s working environment would invariably have negative consequences for the individual and at times also for organisations.

Having given a list of the roles covered in the previous section, it is possible to give an indication of the distribution of those roles across each of the study areas, covering each of the ten interviews which took place. Not infrequently those interviewed spoke from different standpoints, for example as an activist and as a council officer. For that reason the instances of overlapping roles are indicated at the bottom of the table.

Table 3:4 Interviewee role as located by individual borough

Role	Greenwich	Lewisham	Newham
Activist	2	3	3
Back bench councillor	1	2	0 ¹⁸
CDW & CD and Youth Worker	3	2	3
Council officer, including LSP officer	3	4	2
Leader, former Leader, Mayor, Cabinet Member or former Cabinet Member / Deputy Leader	3	2	3

¹⁸ Councillors in more senior positions all spoke of their backbench experience

VCS worker	2	1	3
Number of overlapping roles	4	4	4
Total number of interviews	10	10	10

It is also possible to detail gender and ethnicity of interviewees by borough.

Table 3:5 Gender and ethnicity of interviewees as located by individual borough¹⁹

	Greenwich	Lewisham	Newham
(Gender) female	2	6	5
(Gender) male	8	4	5
Ethnicity – BME	2	2	2

Range of secondary material

In addition to the interviews I also sought out secondary source material on the work of local partnerships and community projects, which was readily available in local libraries, council websites and community resource centres. These helped me prepare for the interviews and gave useful empirical information. The information which I sought to make comparative studies across the study areas included:

- Papers from relevant Council committees – scrutiny committees, Mayor and Cabinet etc.

¹⁹ It is important to note the possibility of transgender as it is frequently missed in relation to constructions of gender and also to note that no formal monitoring of either gender or ethnicity were undertaken so what is recorded is based on personal observation. Whilst overall male, non BME interviewees are most frequently present this is not typical of the study area demographics however it does approximate to what is found at more senior levels of power within local institutions.

- Audit Commission and related reports on council performance
- Local council magazines delivered to households
- Local council community events, people's days etc
- Local strategic partnership minutes of meetings
- Local area agreement targets and strategies
- CD and related engagement strategies
- Local activist campaigns, including local press coverage
- Local election turn outs and voter profile / demographics
- VCS umbrella organisations and related capacity building strategies including ChangeUp
- Minutes and AGM records from local community forums and interagency meetings
- Details of local council for racial equality meetings
- Minutes of tenant strategy group meetings and related forums

These secondary source materials are readily available and provided a useful resource for contextualising and evaluating information drawn from the interviews.

A final word on the study areas

Because social reality most often equates to a structured mess, it has been argued (May, in Carter & New, 2004) that case areas are crucial in bringing focus to research, situating interviewees together within a shared space, as reflexive beings amidst a blur of variables (Gray, 2004, 124). The emergent properties and powers of people, positions and groups, and of the various sorts of social relations, from fleeting

interactions to enduring institutions, all exercise a reciprocal influence on one another (Gilchrist, 2005, 86-90). These properties can be held within the conceptual model of a study area enabling a number of methods to be used, from interviews, ethnography, participant observation and tracking of formal meetings and policy documents, drawing knowledge(s) and understandings together (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, 36-49; Hall & Hall, 1996, 196).

Interviewing as ethnography

My research method is itself an ethnographic practice. My claim is not that my research is strongly ethnographic, because whilst I did work with many of those interviewed, this was always at some distance. However my research has strong ethnographic resonance as located in the following senses:

- **Interview:** the interview enabled me to participate (momentarily) in people's lives and to draw deeply from their lived experience
- **Shared access to the field:** as a practitioner I worked in one of the three study areas and had immediate access to, and engagement with, the field
- **Shared commitment to change:** as a practitioner I shared with those I interviewed a commitment to social change, and my research seeks to generate understandings for ways forward that will further enable this outcome

The ethnographic interview

Interviewing as a social process, 'a conversation with a purpose' (Sydney and Beatrice Webb, 1932), has tremendous value for ethnography²⁰. During the interviews I momentarily entered into the interviewees' lives, so the research has an ethnographic content, in that it participates in people's lives. I had some prior working relationship with two thirds of those interviewed²¹; notably all of those working in the London Borough of Lewisham, where I was working as CDW between 1999 and 2008. I also had contact with several officers in the London Boroughs of Greenwich and Newham due to my participation in pan-London support networks. However even with those interviewees known to me in a working context, none were part of my own organisation. We were not co-working on a daily basis, sharing in each other's working practice, although sometimes we worked together as partners involved in multi-sector activity. There was an organisational working distance between myself and those interviewed. The working alongside that is so much a feature of ethnographic participant observation was not my primary research strategy; it happened but was complementary and incidental to the main research strategy – that of the (semi-structured) interview.

Ethnography underpinned by a shared access to the field

My professional long-standing role as CDW, allowed ample opportunity for participant observation and ethnographic practice, due to an accrual of experience, contacts and networks both locally in South East and East London, and nationally. This

²⁰ *At its broadest 'ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture' (Fetterman, 1989). More particularly it is a 'set of methods which in its most characteristic form... involves the ethnographer participating overtly or covertly in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on issues that are the focus of research' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, quoted in Searle, 2004).*

²¹ I had some prior working relationship with 20 of the 30 interviewees

experience extended beyond the community and voluntary sector and included a practitioner's knowledge of local and national government as part of a web of new governance relations. My own professional experience is integral and presented as an asset that is fully incorporated into the research, and the access (*Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, 54-79*) that came with it is fully utilised alongside an appreciation of its ethical considerations (Gray, 2004, 58-62; Gaskin, in Alcock & Scott, 2005, 35-43).

The opportunity for participant observation afforded to me, included the following:

- Attendance and interaction at formal partnership meetings
- Observation of conferences and seminars
- Involvement / observation of steering groups and forums
- Participation in evaluations and training
- Consistent, in-depth relationships with individuals from agencies and community organisations.

Whilst my observation was more directly accessed in one of the three study areas, the experience accrued from the one, should be understood to be applicable and readily transferable to the others, and in practice this proved to be the case.

The shared commitment to social change as ethnographic praxis

By virtue of their roles, whether as unpaid volunteers or via more formal job description all those interviewed were implicated in the practice of CD and / or the MLGA. Many had dedicated the majority of their lives to a deeper democratic engagement, to working with local communities or delivering public services. The dedication of so many of those I interviewed, from all sectors, to what was often a punishing and remorseless battle against the multiple evils of entrenched social

deprivation and political marginalisation, was frequently exemplary. Those generous enough to give up an hour of their time to be interviewed by me, also routinely worked long hours in service to their communities.

Because I was previously known to many of my interviewees, and even when not known, the fact that my working experience as a CDW was part of my calling card. It was always clear that the research was founded on a desire to understand and facilitate change. The semi-structured interview process itself acted as a space for praxis and for reflection amidst a world of intense local action. The themes covered inevitably wove back into the daily concerns of those interviewed, as a way of answering a question in the most immediate sense. Interviewees would often say, for example, that they had just come from a meeting where a particular topic relating to CD or the MLGA had been discussed. The interviews were therefore often encounters between people (myself and the interviewee) who shared immediate working experiences, understood and worked to the same policy frameworks and were signed up to the same values and principles.

The commonality of goals and social solidarity that may arise as a consequence of similar world views is double edged, since it presents real dangers as well as gains (Ellis, in Alcock & Scott, 2005, 24-31). Most obviously, the close proximity of this ethnographic territory presents an ethical responsibility to do no harm by ensuring knowledge and information that is shared is used appropriately and constructively, and ensure the material is not used to jeopardise or undermine either the individual concerned or those who stand to be implicated in the wake of what might be a damaging disclosure (Payne & Payne, 2004, 68-69). Likewise with the rapport engendered in interviews, the empathy of shared endeavour and sensitivity to subliminal clues, come

real issues of boundaries, neutrality, status and dilemmas of closeness (Ledwith, in Alcock & Scott, 2005, 32-34), all explored under the sections on ethical considerations.

Ethics

I am conscious of both my formal and informal responsibilities, which span a range of considerations from the possibility of causing harm to others, to matters of courtesy (Fetterman, 1998; May, 2001; Gray, 2004). Information given in a certain context can be presented in a way that is damaging to an individual, organisation or institution. To guard against this I have paid close attention to issues of anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent by using consent forms for interviews and fully explaining the research question, my own motivations and argumentative orientation to interviewees. In making and maintaining contact with interviewees I was conscious of a host of informal obligations, 'governing how people are supposed to act within the particular web of social affiliations' (LeCompte, Schensul, Weeks & Singer, 1999). This was helped by having an understanding, based on my prior experience in the field, of the etiquette required, which included respect for the values and norms of the community or institution where the research was undertaken, reciprocity of ideas and resources, and showing respect for different approaches and beliefs. This enabled me to be especially attentive to courtesies and maintain a high level of politeness in my interactions with interviewees, for the additional reason, as Gilbert (1993) notes, that it has the benefit of gaining access to the field.

Reflexivity and ethics

Reflexivity in its broadest meaning refers to the capacity of the researcher to reflect upon their actions and values during research. Reflexivity enables the researcher to work with, and integrate, bias stemming from their values, and thus facilitates an understanding of the implications of personally held beliefs on research (Stanley & Wise, in Seale 2004, 20). There are many strategies to enhance reflexivity, including the keeping of journals and diaries detailing reflexive accounts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, 163-165), noticing one's hunches, theoretical biases, areas of comfort and discomfort and moment to moment observations (ibid, 285). For many years I have kept a work journal detailing my thoughts, which I find useful as an aid to make visible what I feel or observe, as a means of reflection and action. I have found that what I write about are snap shots at precise moments in time that are useful to look back on because of the subtle changes that arise over time, and which are hard to capture without close self-examination. In the case of this research I kept my own research diary as a continuation of my reflexive CD practice (Hall & Hall, 1996, 42). In this way rigorous self-reflection about one's own impact on the field, as well as how one's preferences and concerns affect the course and outcomes of research, can become disciplined (LeCompte, Schensul, Weeks, Singer, 1999).

Reflexivity has two wider aspects that go beyond disciplining of the researcher's subjectivity: the reflexive practitioner (Schön, 1983), and Freirean 'critical reflection'. Both central and local governments across the world have seen debates on their role that move away from command and control to more nuanced orchestration (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992), fitting in with a networked society (Gilchrist, 2000) and range of actors, partners and shared governance arrangements (Rhodes, 1994).

Reflexivity can easily be appropriated by the powerful. Dean described how government 'seeks to shape conduct by working through desires, aspirations, interests and belief for definite but shifting ends' (1999, 11). If government is also identified as the primary site for structural oppressions, reflexivity of this order, as elided with governmentality, is clearly problematic. Alternatively Freire's theories of cultural action are dependent on reflection and dialogue by the oppressed, in order to first name, then change the world. As a method of praxis this continues to have huge impact on community work as a tool for transformational change.

Fieldwork at home

No researcher can be fully identified with their study, so following rules, norms, boundaries and appropriate behaviours is an important part of ethnography (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). However I also feel that there is a risk in, 'overdetermining fieldwork' (Amit, 2000) by closing down learning opportunities through too rigid a compartmentalisation between the personal and the professional. I have felt challenged by ethnography to find an appropriate balance rather than attempt to finally resolve what constitutes an inescapable dilemma: the work life balance and the necessary boundary setting between the two. The messy, qualitative nature of participant observation is inherently unstable and shifting. The movement between multiple roles, rather than lapsing into biography, implies choices in continually recasting appropriate as well as permeable boundaries. Home and belonging are intensely problematic and need to be recognised in the context of this research, where the researcher both lives and works in the field. The advantages of my experience and access needed to be tempered by a caution in projecting the self (myself), and moving

too easily between multiple roles. Home is both political and emotional (Knowles in Amit, 2000). If in the past fieldwork has been a more distanced, even exotic experience, research can now draw on the nearness of this political and emotional world.

Conclusion

My research strategy deployed semi-structured interviews as the methodological underpinning of my research project, alongside rigorous self-reflexivity. My standpoint of radical community work is owned, as is the proximity to the research itself – the practitioner as researcher. I have detailed a table that summarises the methods, theorisation and influences used in this research, to try and present my approach to both the specific methods chosen and overarching research strategy.

Table 3:6 Research strategy and methods

METHOD (what)	APPLICATION (how)
Overarching research strategy	<i>Interviews (semi structured)</i> <i>Ethnography / real world research</i>
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Interviews</i> - <i>Study areas</i> - <i>Participant observation drawing on access to the field</i>
Researcher standpoint	<i>Radical community work</i>
Research rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Reflexivity</i> - <i>Ethics (commitment to)</i>
Philosophical research underpinnings	<i>Critical Realism (Roy Bhaskar)</i>
Theoretical construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Freire (dialogic action, praxis and conscientisation)</i>
Political orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Emancipatory Research Project</i> - <i>Social Left</i>

Both CD and the MLGA are premised on, and behave as if the idea that progress is possible and therefore transformational and progressive methodologies may be applicable to them. The limitations on positivist methods can be bridged by critical ethnography and real world enquiry (Robson, 2003), which has an emancipatory potential.

I have stressed my motivation, responsibilities and standpoint as a positive resource. For Lincoln and Guba (1985), the primary data are the interpretations by the observer of what is going on around him. The observer is the research instrument. Objectivity can be achieved through participation, as long as there is a heightened sensitivity to the problem of subjectivity, and the need for justification for one's claims.

I have been keen to apply an interpretative approach to social research that recognises that social science can only offer interpretations of the social and that individual judgement and insight are part of any inquiry. There can be no strict separation of the observer from the observed. Highly formalised and formulaic rationalist approaches that valorise technicalities and detachment are resisted as methods in this study. Rather than emphasising the scientific approach to social enquiry, which from my perspective is a dubious article of faith for a social researcher, my interpretative and reflexive practice is based on a conviction that researching the social is a practice of understanding situated meaning.

It is possible to know both empirically and theoretically, a great deal about CD and its interface with the contemporary democratic deficit, yet somehow miss the point that it is an evolving human interaction. My methods and approach seek to unlock the flows of meaning from a contested, complex and contradictory field. They do not settle

on a single answer, but taken as a whole are designed to point to both possibilities for change and a competent overview of CD during the era of New Labour's MLGA.

Chapter four:

CD toolbox and tensions

Contents

- Introduction
- History
- Definition
- Three models of CD – consensus, pluralism and conflict
- Asset based CD, networks and locations of CD work
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Introduction

CD is a distinct skill set, profession and intervention with a rich socio-political and philosophical underpinning. It is also, by its very nature, a strongly contested term reflecting different understandings, practices and politics (Mayo, in Bailey & Brake, 1975; Thomas, 1983; Pople, 1995; Shaw & Martin, 2000; Craig, 2010). This chapter covers a history of mixed success and widely varying political affiliation, a never to be finally settled set of definitions and models, influential reports and CD framework documents,

key national CD organisations and finally a summary of the creative tensions and ambiguities that underpin CD.

History

CD has occurred throughout history; where there have been programmes and actions to create a more just society and improve people's lives there has been some form of CD. Robert Owen set up new communities in New Lanark, Oneida and elsewhere in America in the nineteenth century, in an effort to create an alternative to the grinding misery of factory life. However it was not until the 1970s that contemporary CD in the UK became established in the form that it is now known and with which the research deals with. This form can be traced back to three eras (Popple, 1995): the benevolent paternalism of the Victorian and Edwardian era, the collective community action of the Labour movement in the late 19th and early 20th century, and the growing role of state action and rise of new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Gilchrist (2004, 13-14) identifies three related traditions: informal self help and solidarity, mutual aid and finally, philanthropy and voluntary action as underpinning CD. These strands are clearly intertwined in the historical trajectory of CD in the UK. Shaw and Martin make an explicit link with citizenship and democracy, describing how CD fulfils a role that is the 'essence of democracy' (2000, 412) and which is pivotal in re-making vital connections.

The benevolent paternalism of the Victorian and early 20th century era was often mixed with vested interests, particularly with work in the colonies, and evangelism. In the colonies developmental work in education, transport and health reflected a concern with the growing demands of independence, the risk of communism and the ability to

bring the indigenous population in line with British cultural norms (Mayo, in Bailey and Brake, 1975, 129). Colonial domination is a chastening example of the labile nature of CD, the way in which what may appear as a progressive intervention can instead bolster up reactionary and nationalist self interest. In the colonies CD was a means to an end, namely to rule as a foreign power. By supporting local communities it was possible to inculcate behaviours and social norms that generated both goodwill and compliance. That a seemingly liberating practice which emphasises equality could begin as a subtle tool of colonial oppression often startles CD practitioners who are more used to contemporary models (Cockburn, 1977, 119). However it underscores the point that CD is a deeply ambiguous process, pulled in contradictory directions.

Whilst the Colonial Office and missionaries became the main channel for CD overseas, the Anglican Church and the universities acted as the main channels of CD in Britain (Cockburn, 1977, 111). Canon Samuel Barnett, one of the founder members of the Charity Organisations Society, established the first Settlement, Toynbee Hall, in East London in 1894. It was named after Arnold Toynbee, an Oxford undergraduate, who with his colleagues spent his summer vacation in Whitechapel to study poverty. Barnett's vision was to go beyond philanthropy and make knowledge widely available to all social classes. However, whilst the Settlement movement aimed to enable the rich to gain, 'a greater understanding of the poor and their problems by living among them' (Johnson, 1981, 27), its most obvious feature was as an outside intervention, 'gains were made for local people, not by them' (Craig, 1989, 4).

The collective community action of the Glasgow rent strikes (1915) and militancy of the suffragettes marked a growing class and gender consciousness which grew between the wars, notably with the brief electoral success of a Labour government and

the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. In the immediate post war era a range of community projects and infrastructure was developed often around social work, including community schools and colleges, community centres and a growth in the number of movements including co-operatives, the Workers' Educational Association, Friendly Societies and Trade Unions.

In the post war period Ledwith (2005, 9) traced the influence of North American and Canadian community work practice on the UK, leading to neighbourhood and interagency work which grew in coherence, strongly linked to educational and social work practice. The Younghusband Report (1959) located community work as a key part of social work, and almost a decade later this was reinforced by the Seebohm Committee and Report (1968). At the same time the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Report (1968) went further and began to sketch out more recognisably contemporary territory: the improvement of services, interagency co-ordination, influencing policy and planning²². In this way CD gradually became applied to community work that was based in local neighbourhoods following a post 1945 social democratic consensus (Pople, 1995, 13) whereby the war engineered a 'new attitude to social policy' (ibid).

Radical CD came of age in the 1970s (Mayo, in Craig, Pople, & Shaw, 2008, 21-23) and 1980s (Loney, 1983), encapsulated in such works as *The Local State* (Cockburne, 1977) and *In and Against the State* (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980). It was further exemplified in the critiques of government generated from the Home Office-funded Community Development Projects (CDPs), notably *Gilding the Ghetto*, by the CDP Inter-project editorial team (1977). Radical CD fixed on a structural critique of the state as the source of oppression (Benington, in Lees & Smith, 1975, 186)

²² All of which recur to varying degrees in both the New Labour Modernisation of Local Government agenda and 2010 Localism Bill

and found itself deeply compromised by state-funded interventions. On the one hand CDWs were often employed by the local state, as its eyes and ears, to diffuse conflict by offering some form of participation (Cockburn, 1977, 93). On the other hand, they sought social outcomes that overturned state hegemony by revolutionary means (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980). At its height radical CD defined a generation of CDWs and its rise was coterminous with union and wider social movement struggle. As the New Right gained greater control in the 1980s (Ledwith, 2005, 12), the momentum of radical CD declined, although there have been consistent calls for a return to its principles (Craig, Derricourt, & Loney, 1982; Ledwith, 2007).

Even when radical CD was at its height, the wider CD movement was split between adherents of a radical alternative and those who supported a pluralist agenda (Twelvetrees, 2002, xi; Ledwith, 2005, 12). The work of Twelvetrees (2002) and Miller & Ahmad (1997) was critical of using CD to challenge the state. According to their approach CD complemented the state and they argued that it was entirely legitimate for the state to direct and instruct CDWs. This managerial strand has continued with the work of Chanan and Miller (2010) which has disparaged the dogmatism and exclusiveness of many CD leaders.

The 1980s saw a decline in the role of CD (Taylor, 2003, 8; Mayo, in Craig, Pople & Shaw, 2008, 22) and a rise in neoliberal free market orthodoxy which viewed public sector workers with suspicion, as more like knaves than knights (le Grand, 2003, x). A mixed economy of social care grew up as part of a breaking with the Post War social democratic consensus. Instead of state services provided through a single bureaucracy, provision became competitive as providers bid to take on services as part of a quasi market (ibid, 3). The Community Care Act (1990) enabled community

organisations and groups, together with private agencies, to obtain contracts from local authorities to provide services.

Despite a Thatcherite emphasis on 'extreme individualism' (Blond, 2010, 126), by 1983 there were approximately 5,000 CD practitioners compared with around 1,000 in the early 1970s (Pople, 1995, 26). The role was described as a 'palliative when substantial resources needed to overcome injustices were not forthcoming' (ibid). Throughout the 1990s a communitarian vision increasingly influenced social policy (Atkinson, 1994; Robson, 2000; Wallace, 2010). This led to an increased commitment to community involvement in regeneration and a growing awareness that services needed to be provided on an area basis leading to an area based approach, started by the Conservative government and substantially strengthened by New Labour (Taylor, 2003). Whilst CD found a reinvigorated role within this ideological framework of an arms-length or market state many commentators were concerned that CD risked a dilution of its values by becoming incorporated within a reactionary government agenda (Ledwith, 1997; Craig, 1998; Robson, 2000).

New Labour continued much of the neoliberal orthodoxy, expanding on the number of government backed community interventions, as part of its Neighbourhood Renewal framework (2000). The CD profession saw a rise in the number of CDWs employed to service these new initiatives as community became an inseparable part of government policy and language (Craig, Mayo, Pople, Shaw & Taylor, 2010, 16), attached to a range of words including empowerment, involvement, engagement and participation, culminating in a Community Empowerment White Paper (DCLG, 2008).

The Community Development Challenge sought to be a, 'fresh, penetrating and... challenging approach' (DCLG, 2006, 2) in bringing CD up to date with, 'national policies

in the twenty first century' (DCLG, 2006, 7). However other community interventions increasingly found government favour such as community capacity building, social enterprise and more recently, community organising, especially in London, in part due to its successful adoption by President Obama in mobilising voters in the US 2008 presidential elections.

Definition

There are a range of competing definitions of CD which use words as ciphers for political intent. If the intent is for a managerial intervention that does nothing to threaten the interests of the powers-that-be, the emphasis is on capacity deficits, outcomes and skills as techniques. If the state is seen as inherently oppressive, and a root cause of inequality, then the language explicitly reflects that view, hence words like social justice, equality, poverty, power and democracy predominate.

Definitions also locate agency, identifying the actors who can make change happen. Sometimes it is only individuals who are seen as the agents of change, and it is they who are urged to act, to engage in self help. From another ideological perspective, action is seen as collective, not to gain solely personal power but with the intent to redistribute power away from existing elites.

The four CD definitions chosen below come from CD leadership organisations in England, including a collaborative attempt which involved DCLG. Whilst there is considerable commonality of language there is also a more challenging vocabulary that has profound implications for the practice of CD.

Table 4:1 Four recent definitions of CD

Organisation, publication and date	Definition	Descriptive key words
The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG): The CD Challenge, November 2006	CD is a set of values and practices which plays a special role in overcoming poverty and disadvantage, knitting society together at the grass roots and deepening democracy.	Grass roots, democracy, poverty
Community Development Exchange (CDX) information sheet. What is CD c.2007	CD is an occupation (both paid and unpaid) which aims to build active and influential communities based on justice, equality and mutual respect.	Justice, equality
Federation for Community Development Learning (FCDL) summary of the 2009 CD National Occupational Standards	CD is a long-term value-based process which aims to address imbalances in power and bring about change founded on social justice, equality and inclusion.	Social justice, equality, imbalances in power
Community Development Foundation (CDF) definition on CDF website 2011	CD('s) purpose is to help groups and networks of people to take joint action on matters that concern them for the public good, and enable them to influence the decisions that affect their lives.	Joint action, networks, influence decisions

These definitions cover similar but not identical ground. ‘Justice’, ‘equality’ and ‘imbalances in power’ are emotive words that are not part of government sponsored terminology (Dorling, 2010). Justice implies the existence of injustice. Likewise to valorise equality is to be sensitive to pervasive inequality (Ledwith, 1997, 31). For these reasons, the neoliberal lexicon has favoured more nuanced language (Rose, 1996), where the onus for responsibility shifts from the structural inequality endemic in a certain form of political economy located in the state, to individual and managerial solutions (Fremeneaux, 2005). Hence the CDF definition talks of ‘joint action’ but not ‘collective

action', the aim of being able to influence the decisions but not to set the agenda. The status of CDF, until April 2011, as a Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB), in effect a hybrid or arms length governmental body, also known as a quango (quasi autonomous non-governmental organisation) might explain the reticence to articulate a more assertive definition (Craig, 2010).

An initial review of the definitions of CD may suggest that differences, where they exist, are superficial. For example, the DCLG definition of CD seeks to overcome 'poverty' when it could equally have chosen the language of inclusion / exclusion, also its focus on 'grassroots' and 'deepening democracy' could be interpreted as signalling radical intent. This can be tested by categorising definitions of CD in three ways; firstly the presence or absence of social justice terminology, secondly a name-checking of social justice terminology but without a commitment to take clear action to redress an oppressive state of affairs; thirdly, a realisation that social problems are structural, rooted in political and economic determinants, and overcome primarily by collective action which forces change from below. In this regard the DCLG definition covers the first two tests, invoking social justice terminology but the exhortation to 'knit society together' (DCLG, 2006, 13) falls short of the third test, which identifies social problems as structural and remedied by forced change from below.

The FCDL definition (2009) inhabits this third category: it describes imbalances of power that need to be addressed. Likewise the second paragraph from the CDX information sheet (2007) spells out in greater detail how CD work is done in order to: 'challenge oppression and tackle inequalities. It involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and people in positions of power', (CDX website). The aim CDX advanced is a clear challenge to people who preside over positions of power that

generate oppression and inequalities. The CDX statement goes on to appeal to a win / win for all: 'so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives' (CDX website). An initial assertion of social conflict is followed by a pluralist outcome, and this is achieved by a degree of challenge directed upon power holders. In contrast the CDF CD definition does not articulate a structural analysis of power that will be tackled by collective action. The purpose is to help groups and networks of people to take joint action for the public good. There is no acknowledgement of power inequalities that might have created such outcomes in the first place.

Three models of CD – consensus, pluralism and conflict

In addition to the contested definitions, CD can also be categorised according to a range of models (Rothman, in Cox, Erlich, Rothman & Tropman, 1970; Popple, 1995; Twelvetrees, 2002). The ideological roots of CD have been perennially contested (Mayo, in Craig, Popple & Shaw, 2008, 13-14). However John Bennington, in his essay on the Community Development Project (CDP) in Coventry (Lees and Smith, ed. 1975, 182-187), provided a useful simplification. Building on Schattschneider's metaphorically constructed critique of a, 'flaw in pluralist heaven'²³ (1960, 35), Bennington lists three models, based on consensus, pluralism and conflict.

²³ "The flaw in pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent" Elmer Eric Schattschneider – *The Semi-Sovereign People*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston (1960, 35)

Table 4:2 Models of CD

Model	Social problems are caused and also solved by:	Central tactic
Consensus	Failures of co-ordination and communication (malfunctions) which can be cured by adjustments within existing operating systems	Debate
Pluralism	Problems arise from 'imbalances' in the democratic and bureaucratic systems which can be addressed by participation and representation of certain interests in the political process. The assumption is that the rules are fair	Bargaining and negotiation
Conflict	Social problems arise from a fundamental conflict of interests between groups or classes in society and are addressed by a focus on inequalities and a redistribution of power	Organisation and raising of consciousness

The CDPs came to be dominated by a radical conflict approach that consistently moved the focus from individual pathologies (the feckless poor) or benign system failure, to pinning the failure on the predisposition of capitalism to exploit, and to generate inequality (Cockburn, 1977, 126). The London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group (1979), itself aligned to a conflict model, concluded 'there is no way that society can be transformed through institutions that have been developed precisely to take away our power' (ibid, 130). Even were government to be brought down, the London Edinburgh

Weekend Return Group did not believe that a socialist government would arise. This would only happen when socialist practice was embedded widely across society (ibid, 132). Until that time CDWs and other public sector workers needed to adopt an in and against tactic. It was exactly this approach that the pluralist and consensus approaches lambasted as nihilistic, counterproductive and dishonest (Thomas, 1983; Miller & Ahmad, 1997; Twelvetrees, 2002).

The threefold typology of consensus, pluralism and conflict sets a valuable foundation that has been taken up by other writers. Margaret Ledwith called for a return to radical CD noting that:

CD has become distracted from its commitment to social justice by allowing its radical agenda to be diluted by more reactionary theories that lead to ameliorative rather than transformative approaches to practice.

(Ledwith, 2005, 28)

In the same vein Robson writes that:

(R)adical language has been incorporated ... as part of a more moderate approach to social and political change ... (supporting) not so much an acceptance of a new and revolutionary idea as much as a desire to draw such ideas closer to the breast of the dominant democratic order.

(Robson, 2000, 13)

The spectrum of models, between consensus and conflict, is fraught with accusation, each side claiming the other cannot work. Even the model of pluralism which might be expected to seek to claim the middle ground by acknowledging partial truths from both conflict and consensus standpoints is parodied by Schattschneider (1960). The radical model engages dialectically with the other models. It attacks their propositions as a means to propel its own ideological formation. This process of dialectical development is reflected by Freire (1972, 17) in his exposition of conscientisation. It is important to remember Freire’s humanitarian vision that sought to liberate both oppressor and oppressed (ibid, 162) unlike the vision of ‘anger, resistance and the making of socialism’ (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979, 130) although both approaches stress the importance of consciousness as a means to transform oppression. According to Freire the oppressed travel through three stages: magical, naive and critical thinking (1972, 46-51), with the latter yielding transformative possibilities. The similarity to Benington’s model (1975) is incorporated in the following table.

Table 4:3 Freirean stages of conscientisation

Freire’s threefold level of conscientisation	Attributes	CD Model
Magical thinking	Passive and unquestioning, often based on fatalism; no inquiry into injustices	Consensus
Naive thinking	A degree of insight into nature of individual problems but connections are not made with structural oppression	Pluralism

Critical thinking	Connections are made with structures of society which discriminate and negatively shape people's lives	Conflict
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Asset-based CD, networks and locations of CD work

In addition to the contested definitions and models of CD there are several other related categories of CD which are covered in this research in order to ground the wider contemporary CD approach in the UK. As part of a growing interest in economic development and social enterprise (Leadbeater, 1997) premised on structural failure and the ability to reform the market within a neoliberal ideological framework, the combination of asset development with CD has impacted on community change policies (Taylor, 2003, 18).

Asset-based CD (ABCD) has sought to build on already existing strengths in communities to secure sustainable development. Its founders, John Kretzmann and John McKnight, set up the ABCD Institute in the early 1990s at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. The ABCD model has had a minor role in the UK, where it has been inaccurately associated with economic development, asset transfer of actual buildings, community development finance institutions (CDFIs) and social enterprise, rather than as a process in its own right. The ABCD process includes a capacity inventory and process of dialogue with residents, in order to ensure that ownership and initiation begins with local people (Ketzman & McKnight, 1993). In the UK the membership of community asset-based organisations has been peripheral to the national CD movement, with respective memberships branded separately and with minimal collaborative working. Thus whilst both New Labour (CLG, 2007) and the

Conservative Liberal coalition government (DCLG, 2011) have indicated an interest in asset-based approaches to community capacity building, CD principles and practice have not played a significant role. The CD Challenge noted that asset building was 'not viable or appropriate for the great majority of community groups, whose role is primarily mutual aid and representing community interests' (DCLG, 2006, 33).

The rise of complexity theory alongside the fragmentation of conceptual building blocks such as class, the state and community, as a consequence of post-structuralism, hybridity and postmodernism (Bauman, 2000), has seen the rise of network theory as an apt metaphor for CD. Alison Gilchrist (2000, 2003, 2004) has significantly redefined CD as, 'the purpose of CD is simply to support and shape formal and informal networking in order to facilitate the emergence of effective and empowering collective action' (Gilchrist, 2004, 95). CD is elided with the building and releasing of social capital for collective benefit. The nebulous role of the CDW is a positive asset, since they are, 'everywhere and nowhere' (Miller and Bryant, 1990, 323). This accords with the notion of emergence, and working on the edge of chaos (Gilchrist, 2004, 90), as valorised by complexity theory.

Whilst hard-edged interventions struggle to incentivise and build networks of trust (Ormerod, 2010), the informality of CD is vital in negotiating differences, (Gilchrist & Rauf, 2006, 12), widening horizons, processing information, managing diversity and conflict and networking the networks. The network-building role of CDWs was prioritised in the DCLG, CD Challenge (2006, 37) but more recently the debate has centred on behaviour modification (Ormerod, 2010), including the nudge model and other variations which run counter to the CD tradition of collective action.

Finally CD can be modelled on the basis of where it is housed. Popple (1995, 56)

lists several models of practice that include and go alongside CD:

- Community care
- Community organisation
- Social or community planning
- Community education
- Community action
- Feminist community work
- Black and anti-racist community work

The list illustrates that whilst CD is a generic term, as a profession it is often anchored to a particular setting. For example working in a Primary Care Trust would place the focus on community care, whereas working in a Council for Voluntary Service may put the onus on organisational development, developing links across other agencies and focusing on policy, typically in support of a local strategic partnership (LSP).

The latter two models (feminist community work and Black and anti racist community work) arose from a critique of the radical conflict model, which moved the focus from narrowly defined class oppression to a greater awareness of racism and sexism (Ledwith, 2005). The writing of bell hooks in McLaren & Leonard (1993, 146-154), described a, blind spot around questions of gender in the work of Freire, whilst noting the conceptual tools that Freire provides which facilitated her analysis of her own oppression as a Black American woman; a critical inquiry that likewise critiqued white feminist analysis.

Although not featured in this list, Twelvetrees (2002, 122-128) also cites community economic development as a distinct category manifested by community enterprise and development trusts. In all these examples nuances of place and activity reflect the variety and range of CD. However my main point of reference in describing CD is the initial threefold typology of consensus, pluralism and conflict models. My own view as both a researcher and CD practitioner is strongly influenced by Friere's description of radical praxis as, 'the practice of freedom' (1972, 61). From which it follows that the relevant differentiation of CD is not organisational, work based or managerial description. It is instead the cleavage between models, between CD as an arm of the state and a tool for social control, and CD in the tradition of radical community work, as a critical, transformative social force. Both interpretations are deeply involved with the state, whether as a co-opted agent or critically reflexive practitioner, prompting Waddington to conclude that, 'the future destiny of community work, like its present and its past, will be inextricably bound up with that of the state' (Waddington, 1979, 224).

National CD organisations

CD is frequently described as movement. At a national level several leadership organisations exist to support CD and enable this movement. There are three main CD charities: Community Development Exchange (CDX), the Federation of Community Development Learning (FCDL) and the Community Development Foundation (CDF). The Community Development Regions Network (CDRN) provides important regional connectivity across nine English regions and the Community Development Journal (CDJ) adds a critical international perspective. CDF was set up in 1969, and the

Standing Conference for Community Development (SCCD) was formed in the late 80s and splitting into two bodies – FCDL and CDX.

Table 4:4 National CD bodies

Name of national CD body	Dates of operation
Association of Community Workers (ACW) emerged from the National Institute of Social Work	1970 – dissolved in 2007
Young Volunteer Force Foundation (YVFF), the YVFF became the Community Projects Foundation, now Community Development Foundation (CDF).	1968 / 1969
FCWTG (Federation of Community Work Training Group) (FCWTG) now Federation of Community Development Learning (FCDL)	1977 / 1990
Standing Conference for Community Development (SCCD) now Community Development Exchange (CDX)	1987 SCCD founded 2003 CDX founded
Community Development Regional Network (CDRN)	c.1980
Community Development Journal	1965

National Occupational Standards

The CD NOS were updated in 2009 and published by Lifelong Learning UK (2009). The NOS outline the skills, values and processes required for effective and appropriate CD practice. There are several levels of detail, beginning with an agreed definition of CD as ‘a long-term value based process which aims to address imbalances in power and bring about change founded on social justice, equality and inclusion’

(Lifelong Learning UK, 2009, 4). This CD process is then underpinned by a set of five values on which all practice is based:

- Equality and anti-discrimination
- Social justice
- Collective action
- Community empowerment
- Working and learning together.

The NOS then proceed to structure practice around seven key areas which provide the framework on which knowledge and practice is evaluated:

1. Understand and practice CD
2. Understand and engage with communities
3. Take a CD approach to group work and collective action
4. Promote and support CD approach to collaborative and cross-sector working
5. Support community learning from shared experiences
6. Provide CD support to organisations
7. Manage and develop CD practice

There are a further twenty-five standards which are attached to individual key areas. For example, standard eighteen, 'facilitate community learning for social and political development' (Lifelong Learning UK, 2009, 69) is placed under key area five, which is entitled, as above, 'support community learning from shared experiences'.

The CD NOS represent a comprehensive description of the skills and expertise that CD offers. A recent CDF survey (Sender, Carlisle, Hatamian, & Bowles, 2010) recorded that 29% of all CD managers used all seven key areas, indicating the practical and embedded nature of the standards. It also revealed that public agencies were more likely to use a range of standards than VCS organisations, an issue that has fuelled debates around professionalization (FCDL, 2010).

Conclusion

The tools that CD offers should be understood as an ideological construct where definitions necessarily shift, updated by frameworks, panels and campaigns aimed at different audiences and political constituencies (Craig, 2007; Shaw, 2008). There is no simple definition of CD or single activity but instead a wide ranging set of understandings and practice (Popple, 1995). It is precisely this range of competing definitions and perspectives, along with debates about theory that have come to epitomise CD (Mayo, in Craig, Popple & Shaw, 2008, 15-18). The contested nature of community as a concept has invariably contributed to the dilemmas of CD practice (Banks, Butcher, Henderson & Robertson, 2003, 9-20).

This constant critical re-evaluation and disagreement provides both a richness and vitality but also potential area of weakness because CD may appear disunited and more easily dispensed with by funders looking for more direct interventions (Miller & Ahmad, 1997; CD Challenge, 2006). However the lesson drawn by the CDJ's fortieth anniversary publication (Mayo, in Craig, Popple & Shaw 2008, 25-26) was that it was the ability of CD to set long term goals and practice strategic thinking, as evidenced by the reflexivity of CD debates that would enable CDWs to contribute to social justice.

Chapter five:

the three study areas

Local Authorities as study areas – commonalities and variables

Introduction: taking a wrong turn

Anthony takes a wrong turn at a roundabout and finds himself heading towards Deptford, which is one of those places – there are many – in London which you know exist but have never visited... This part of South London is choked and haphazard. Gasworks, bus station, towering council blocks, disordered streets which go nowhere, soiled parks, hole-in-the-corner minicab offices, boarded up churches, abandoned seamen's missions, flaking houses, mean shops and quantities of metal work: road barriers and signs and bus shelters and railings. It's a landscape that makes him uneasy. It's overloaded, but it seems to have no purpose.

Justin Cartwright – In Every Face I Meet (1995, 145).

The above dystopic description from a contemporary author captures how the study areas might appear to a certain class of person, from the outside. We could substitute the voice of the author for a home countries civil servant, a business man or stock broker from beyond the M25 or more leafy parts of West or North London. To those with money, power and choices South East and East London is *terra incognita*. When it can't be avoided it is overwhelming; it is rough.

To an external and privileged gaze the boroughs of Greenwich, Lewisham and Newham look something like this – disordered, purposeless. But to those who live and work there, each 'towering council block' and 'disordered street' has a history and meaning that are purposeful and distinct. Before I started living and working in London I saw it in much the same way. It is easy to be intimidated by the scale of what is going on and seal oneself off. The transience and turnover of population foster a sense of rootlessness, one quarter of Newham's population changes every year. But what is often missed is the equally strong local anchoring of communities, manifest in the role of councillors, the interaction with the town hall and work of volunteers running community groups in every corner of the borough. Working in this part of London as a CDW I discovered a highly complex network of community, local government and political interactions that defined and led what happened within the arbitrary boundaries of borough, ward and neighbourhood.

At the start of the Neighbourhood Renewal Agenda (NRA), Greenwich, Lewisham and Newham easily made the top 88 most deprived areas across England. None suffered the most extreme levels of poverty found in Hackney, Tower Hamlets and elsewhere outside the capital, in parts of Liverpool and Manchester for example, but

relative to most of London and England they stood out as priority areas. This meant Greenwich, Lewisham and Newham would always be in the vanguard of the latest government thinking and policy implementation. The fact that they were all Labour-controlled councils and that there was a Labour government added an even greater adhesion of practice and politics.

The chapter is organised in the following way:

- The London context
- Shared geography, demography and politics
- Political affiliation: Members of Parliament (MPs)
- Political affiliation: councillors
- Conclusion

The London context

The London boroughs of Greenwich, Lewisham and Newham are part of the nation's largest conurbation. They are 3 of the 32 boroughs plus the City of London which make up the administrative area of Greater London. Inner London comprises twelve of these boroughs plus the City of London; outer London the remaining twenty. Of the three studies only Lewisham is an inner London borough though the distinction may have little significance beyond a technical demarcation. The sharing of the Thames Gateway identity, which stretches from Westferry in Tower Hamlets to the Isle of Sheppey, has greater meaning due to its designation as a national priority for urban regeneration. Likewise the planning for the 2012 Olympics has had a profound impact on Newham and to a lesser extent Greenwich.

Greenwich and Newham can both claim to have iconic sites. Greenwich's Royal Observatory and meridian lines, advertised to the many foreign visitors as 'the place where time began', and the Millennium Dome give the borough instant global recognition. The 2012 Olympics does the same for Newham, triggering similar swathes of development, placing them on the world map. Lewisham has nothing that would occupy comparative interest, though Deptford has a wealth of local history, as home to diarists John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys and where Christopher Marlowe was murdered. All three boroughs exist in the shadow of Canary Wharf, in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Greenwich, Lewisham and Newham hug the edges of this financial powerhouse and yet in most respects are worlds apart. There has been little or no trickle down from global finance to some London's least upwardly mobile boroughs.

The sense of being an East or a South East Londoner is a potent identity, formerly of the docks, but now increasingly as being cut adrift from the more affluent outer London Boroughs. Greenwich, Lewisham and Newham share the same administrative construction. All arose from the 1963 Local Government Act, which came into effect in April 1965. The two tier system that resulted created the Greater London Council with 32 new councils and the City of London. Although the GLC was abolished in 1985, the formation of the GLA saw a sharing of powers following the Greater London Authority Act in 1999. Whilst the pan London dimension is important, the focus for most councillors, officers and CDWs is local, rarely extending beyond the borough boundary, often staying at a ward or estate level. The current shape of the study areas arise from 1965. This was the crucial moment in which boundaries were drawn. Greenwich merged with the metropolitan boroughs of Greenwich and Woolwich (with the exception of North Woolwich) which became part of the London Borough of Newham. Lewisham

arose as an amalgamation of the former Metropolitan Borough of Lewisham and the Metropolitan Borough of Deptford. Newham was formed by the merger of the Essex county borough of East Ham and the county borough of West Ham, with North Woolwich also joining, from the previous Metropolitan Borough of Woolwich, and a small area west of the River Roding which had previously been part of the Municipal Borough of Barking.

Newham was an entirely new name whereas Lewisham and Greenwich were recognisable as areas if not as centres. Lewisham's town hall, based in Catford is a modern metallic building, sited to accommodate the boundary changes, in stark contrast to Deptford Town Hall with its antiquated and elaborate celebration of maritime history. The new political bases served to underline the arbitrariness at the heart of the construction of the new London boroughs. Names for city zones were needed but they lacked much appeal to residents, who came to identify ever more strongly as living within given neighbourhoods, housing estates or town centres clustered within wider borough boundaries. Most of the time the borough is a political and administrative intrusion into the life of the community; the council tax that must be paid, the councillors most people struggle to name.

Greenwich, Lewisham and Newham are made up of 17, 18 and 20 wards respectively which usually equate more closely to local self descriptions of place. As well as its global fame, London at the micro level is often described as a collection of villages. Whilst this is a planner's euphemism, the scale is accurate. The ward as large village, with around 12,000 or 13,000 people, gets closer to what is meant by a local sense of place, frequently aligned to postcode.

Shared geography, demography and politics

As London boroughs, we might expect Greenwich, Lewisham and Newham to share a similar size and population numbers and there is a strong correlation as sourced from data provided by the boroughs themselves.

Table 5:1 Study area size, population and density

Name of Borough	Size	Population	Population density – persons per hectare
Greenwich	47.35 square kilometres 18.28 square miles	222,900	45.28
Lewisham	35.15 square kilometres 13.57 square miles	261,600	70.81
Newham	36.22 square kilometres 13.98 square miles	249,000	68

There is closer proximity of size and population between Lewisham and Newham than either has with Greenwich, which is a larger and less populous borough. However this difference is one of degree rather than anything more substantial. Mortality rates are closely aligned, reflecting rates of poverty. Newham, as the poorest borough, reports earlier death, though the difference between the boroughs is a matter of months rather than years.

Table 5:2 Study area mortality rates

Variable / commonality	London Borough of Greenwich	London Borough of Lewisham	London Borough of Newham
Life expectancy Male	75	75.7	74.9
Life expectancy Female	80.7	80.3	78.8

With regard to ethnicity and religion, differences are more marked.

Table 5:3 Study area ethnicity profile

Variable / commonality	London Borough of Greenwich	London Borough of Lewisham	London Borough of Newham
Ethnicity % (White)	74.2	66	34.2
Ethnicity % (Asian)	6.8	3	35.8
Ethnicity % (Black)	11.1	26	24.9
Ethnicity % (Other)	7.9	5	3.9

The racial profile of Newham has a far more even spread between the White, Asian and Black ethnic groupings, whereas Greenwich and Lewisham have a predominantly White population. The waves of immigration to London since the Second World War, from Windrush to more recent migrations from Central and West Africa, and from Eastern Europe, mean that census figures are not accurate. The snap-shot is a partial one, shaping general demography but lacking precision and sensitivity to thousands of highly transient and often extralegal groups, including students, travellers and Romaine as well as frequently demonised asylum seekers. The Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) percentage of population has risen across London, where typically one in four Londoners is from a BME background and this is broadly reflected by Greenwich,

whereas Lewisham now approaches 40% and in Newham the idea of a Black minority has been superseded altogether. However within the catchall BME label, there are literally worlds of difference. Lewisham has the highest percentage of people from the Caribbean in London, and yet in comparison with Greenwich and Newham a very low Asian population. With increasing hybridity and mixed relationships the very notion of distinct ethnic identity as a measureable variable becomes questionable.

Religious affiliation shows a strong identification with Christianity across the boroughs supported by a strong Black evangelical church movement that has bucked the trend of declining church attendance outside London. Newham also has a comparatively high number of people of Muslim affiliation, one in four compared with less than one in twenty found in Greenwich and Lewisham.

Table 5:4 Study area religious affiliation

Religious affiliation	London Borough of Greenwich	London Borough of Lewisham	London Borough of Newham
Religion % (Christian)	61.5	61.25	46.8
Religion % (Muslim)	4.3	4.6	24.3
Religion % (Hindu)	2	1.7	6.9
Religion % (Sikh)	2.9	0.2	2.8
Religion % (Buddhist)	1	1	0.7
Religion % (Jewish)	0.2	0.2	0.2
Religion % (Other)	9.3	0.4	0.3
Religion % (No religion)	19.2	20.4	9

Political affiliation: Members of Parliament (MPs)

The Labour Party has dominated all elections in the study areas and hence run the town halls. All study areas have a traditional Labour culture, including 9 out of 9 MPs. The extensive list of Labour MPs elected from the study areas illustrates a consistent political affiliation in contrast to most of the south of England, which typically returns Conservative politicians. In party political terms each area is a relatively safe Labour seat, unlikely to change hands at election time, as evidenced in the tables below which cover each of the three study areas. The instances of when Conservative, SDP and Liberal candidates have been returned have usually been for a far shorter duration, typically a single term of office, before returning to Labour.

Table 5:5 Parliamentary constituencies covering the London Borough of Greenwich

MP	Party	Represented	Date
Bill Hamling	Labour	Woolwich West	1964-1975
Richard Marsh	Labour	Greenwich	1959-1971
Christopher Mayhew	Labour	Woolwich East	1951 by-election – 1974
Peter Bottomley	Conservative	Woolwich West	1975 by-election – 1983 (constituency abolished)
Guy Barnett	Labour	Greenwich	1971 by-election – 1987
Christopher Mayhew	Liberal	Woolwich East	Feb 1974-Oct 1974

Peter Bottomley	Conservative	Eltham (new constituency created in 1983 previously Woolwich West)	1983-1997
Rosie Barnes	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	Greenwich	1987 by-election - 1992
John Cartwright	Labour ²⁴	Woolwich East	Oct 1974 – 1981
John Cartwright	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	Woolwich East	1981-1983
Clive Efford	Labour	Eltham	1997 to present time
John Cartwright	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	Woolwich (new constituency created in 1983 previously Woolwich East)	1983-1992
John Austin-Walker	Labour	Greenwich	1992-1997
Nick Raynsford	Labour	Greenwich	1992 -1997
Nick Raynsford	Labour	Greenwich & Woolwich (enlarged constituency)	1997 to present time
John Austin (formerly John Austin-Walker)	Labour	Erith & Thamesmead (formerly Woolwich, Erith & Crayford constituencies)	1997-2010
Teresa Pearce	Labour	Erith & Thamesmead	2010 to present time

²⁴ In 1981 John Cartwright defected to the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and was to continue in that capacity from 1983-1992 as MP for Woolwich

Table 5:6 Parliamentary constituencies covering the London Borough of Lewisham

MP	Party	Represented	Date
Christopher Chataway	Conservative	Lewisham North	1964-66
James Dickens	Labour	Lewisham West	1966-70
Jim Dowd	Labour	Lewisham West	1992 to present
John Selwyn Gummer	Conservative	Lewisham West	1970-74 (Feb)
Carol Johnson	Labour	Lewisham South	1964-74 (Feb)
Patrick McNair-Wilson	Conservative	Lewisham West	1964-66
John Maples	Conservative	Lewisham West	1983-92
Roland Moyle	Labour	Lewisham North Lewisham East	1966-74 (Feb) Feb 1974-79
Colin Moynihan	Conservative	Lewisham East	1983-92
Bridget Prentice	Labour	Lewisham West	1992 to present
Christopher Price	Labour	Lewisham West	Feb 1974-79
Joan Ruddock	Labour	Lewisham Deptford	1987 to present
John Silkin	Labour	Deptford Lewisham Deptford	1964-74 (Feb) Feb 1974-1987

Table 5:7 Parliamentary constituencies covering the London Borough of Newham

MP	Party	Represented	Date
Arthur Lewis	Labour	West Ham North	1950-Feb 1974
Arthur Lewis	Labour	Newham North West (constituency)	Feb 1974-1983

		created in Feb 1974)	
Tony Banks	Labour	Newham North West	1983-1997
Tony Banks	Labour	West Ham (constituency created in 1997 by merging Newham North West & Newham South)	1997-2005
Lyn Brown	Labour	West Ham	2005 to present time
Reg Prentice	Labour	East Ham North	1957-1974
Reg Prentice	Labour ²⁵	Newham North East (constituency created in February 1974)	Feb 1974-1977
Reg Prentice	Conservative	Newham North East	1977-1979
Ron Teighton	Labour	Newham North East	1979-1994
Stephen Timms	Labour	Newham North East	1994 by-election - 1997
Stephen Timms	Labour	East Ham (constituency created in 1997)	1997 to present time
Sir F E Jones	Labour	West Ham South	1950 – February 1974
Elwyn Jones	Labour	West Ham South	1974 – 1974 by-election
Nigel Spearing	Labour	West Ham South	1974 by-election – 1997 (constituency abolished)

²⁵ Reg Prentice MP switched parties in 1977 from Labour to Conservative

Political affiliation: councillors

There is an in-built Labour majority at a local ward level across all study areas. A similar pattern to the MP tenure arises, though with distinct differences in the make-up of leading opposition parties. The Conservative Party is the clear party of opposition in Greenwich, whereas the Liberal Democrats fulfil this role in Lewisham whilst in Newham, neither of these two parties, Liberal Democrat nor Conservative, have a single seat and instead the Respect Party and Christian Peoples Party share what opposition role remains. In terms of the political culture of the town hall these party variations are crucial in understanding the way in which government policy is delivered. The Respect Party in Newham have had an inordinate influence on both local and national political debate, relative to its size. Whereas in Lewisham the success of six Green candidates was due to, in part, a local campaign to save a swimming pool, which had the effect of altering the balance of power for the first time in 32 years (from Labour to no overall control) between 2006 and 2010, after which the borough returned to Labour control once more.

Table 5:8 Local council elections 2006

Variable / commonality	London Borough of Greenwich	London Borough of Lewisham	London Borough of Newham
Number of wards	17	18	20
Number of councillors	51	54	60
Majority / Controlling Political Party	Labour	No overall control	Labour
Labour Party councillors	36	26	54
Conservative Party councillors	13	2	0
Liberal Democrat	2	17	0

councillors			
Green councillors	0	6	0
Socialist councillors	0	2	0
Respect councillors	0	0	3
Christian People's Alliance councillors	0	0	3

Table 5:9 Local council elections 2010

Variable / commonality	London Borough of Greenwich	London Borough of Lewisham	London Borough of Newham
Number of wards	17	18	20
Number of councillors	51	54	60
Majority / Controlling Political Party	Labour	Labour	Labour
Labour Party councillors	40	39	60
Conservative Party councillors	11	2	0
Liberal Democrat councillors	0	12	0
Green councillors	0	1	0
Socialist councillors	0	0	0
Respect councillors	0	0	0
Christian People's Alliance councillors	0	0	0

The final table records the single party domination of MPs and council leadership. Of nine MPs all are Labour, of three council leaders, once again all are Labour. The leadership of each local council is especially mono-cultural, of the three leaders all are white men of a similar age.

Table 5:10 Single party dominance of MPs and council leadership

Variable / commonality	London Borough of Greenwich	London Borough of Lewisham	London Borough of Newham
MPs	X3 Labour	X3 Labour	X3 Labour
Governance Structure	Leader & Cabinet	Directly Elected Mayor & Cabinet	Directly Elected Mayor & Cabinet
Leader – name, gender, ethnicity, political affiliation	Cllr Roberts White, male, Labour	Sir Steve Bullock White, male, Labour	Sir Robin Wales White, male, Labour

Conclusion

The study areas share a great deal in common. As near neighbours, sharing borough boundaries and access to the Thames, they occupy a pivotal location in the nation’s capital city, albeit outside the Westminster and City of London square mile. Among the closest similarities are those of demography, poverty and politics. Demographically each borough has a diverse, multi racial population, in contrast to most parts of England. There are significant variations of ethnicity across all three boroughs and also in terms of the overall ratio of citizens identified as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) to those described as White. In addition to ethnicity, the identity of faith and religious affiliation is also highly diverse, and has significant variations in types of faith groups across each borough. For each borough their growing diversity is a central fact and embraced by local agencies in the outward presentation of their work.

Each study area shares extremely high levels of deprivation. Although this is more acute in Newham, on a national level all three of the study areas are in the upper most indices of deprivation, and this is mirrored in the high mortality rates of each borough. These disproportionate levels of poverty make each area a recipient for high levels of government spending, both on local services and regeneration programmes.

The role of the local state is more interventionist than in wealthier areas because of the overwhelming need. Traditionally such interventions have been associated not only with big government but in England, Scotland and Wales with the Labour Party. For this reason it is not surprising that each study area is steeped in Labour Party history and control. The consistent return of Labour MPs and councillors often led to the perception among some interviewees of a one party state. Certainly the predominance of a single party had a profound bearing on local policy making and the wider feel of the boroughs in terms of institutional and political culture. The existence of a Labour government in Westminster, after 18 years of Conservative Party leadership, gave an added dimension to local party rule. The shared Labour affiliation at local and national level made for a sympathetic policy environment where each borough jockeyed to become exemplars of best practice. The loyalty and enthusiasm for Labour policy is demonstrated in adoption of a directly elected mayor in two of the three study areas, in marked contrast to the overwhelming majority of local councils.

Each borough had its own distinctiveness which interviewees frequently characterised as an amalgamation of the personal style of the elected leaders, and behind them, both the operations of the local party machine and corporate style of the council. These became embedded in a form of folklore, repeated in conversations and updated by local events. The usual description was of an overall authoritarian personality commonly associated with notions of a real or imagined one party state. Whilst many similarities emerged in the course of the research, there were also variations which arose, and these are covered at the end of the findings chapters.

Chapter six

Findings: policy making & participation

Introduction

The New Labour MLGA heralded not only a new policy framework, but also a different emphasis on how policy would be enacted locally, combined with new forms of community participation. Policy was made by central government and enshrined in law. It was written up in a succession of green and white papers, followed by copious government guidance. In addition to central directives, new spaces for participation in local policy making were opened up for both local government and residents as part of the modernising agenda. These emphasised empowerment and localism.

Policy making and participation, as framed by the New Labour MLGA, drew inspiration from the Third Way (Giddens, 1998). It was underpinned by a new active welfare settlement, where citizens would be self-directed, seeking to work first rather than acting as recipients of welfare benefits (Levitas, 2005). Policy would activate local people and communities, who had been enabled by new forms of shared governance, including the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and Neighbourhood Management

models. VCS representatives were invited into these spaces (Cornwall, 2002) by central and local government and took part in discussions around neighbourhood priorities and resource allocation, as well as grass-roots delivery.

Whilst the opportunity to participate directly in local policy came to the fore, via shared governance and delivery arrangements, the meaning and depth of this participation and its supposed integration into active policy is open to many interpretations. In her ladder of participation, Arnstein (1969) famously identified eight rungs, from manipulation to citizen control, with intermediate degrees of tokenism. Likewise the quality and type of partnerships, as vehicles of shared governance, are variable. They vary from tokenistic partnerships that function in a limited and superficial way, often solely because they are a mandatory requirement to secure funding, to partnerships that have the potential to embrace a 'participatory' ethos that genuinely shapes policy. These high achieving partnerships are often autonomous in style, in contrast to the traditional command and control approach of public sector management (Taylor, 2003, 118).

All of the interviewees who feature within the research were either centrally involved in delivering policy, principally the New Labour MLGA and Community Empowerment agenda, or on the receiving end of policy implementation. They have lived the local experience of policy making and participation. Their testimony is based upon having inhabited and interacted in these new spaces, and span the hierarchies and subsets of the council and VCS sectors.

The chapter is organised around five themes:

- The MLGA

- Third sector modernisation
- The democratic deficit
- The post war Settlement and legacy of Thatcherism
- Policy making, participation and compromise

The first three themes are based upon current New Labour modernisation policy. The penultimate theme provides a recent historical backdrop, which interviewees frequently referred to. Finally, the theme of compromise, in relation to policy making and participation, arose as an endpoint for several interviewees and relates to rationalisations in response to dilemmas that they had faced.

The modernising local government agenda (MLGA): policy making and participation

Nirmala Rao wrote that New Labour introduced the ‘most radical reconstruction of local government decision making since... the nineteenth century’ (2000, 179 f.) but also noted that ‘despite the government having taken statutory powers to enforce change... it has little chance of determining the choices made’ (ibid).

The most obvious choice is whether to have a directly elected mayor, or a leader. However, below this level, there have been many other innovations that not only changed the council’s role, including the role of councillors, but also enabled other sectors, agencies and local people to participate in decision making. Initially, national trends indicated that councillors abjured reform and endorsed the traditional committee

system, with Labour councillors warmer towards the cabinet model than councillors from other parties. One former councillor spoke warmly of what the MLGA had done for his role:

Well I think that this agenda has actually started putting councillors back where they should be in so many ways, which is a good [thing]. Not only just at the heart of policy making, but also at the heart of their community as community representatives. I think it's an empowering agenda for... members.

As a direct consequence of New Labour modernisation, councillors were at the heart of both policy making and community. The MLGA empowered them to participate within the council and community. It was a corrective and empowering measure, which returned them to where the former councillor felt 'they should be'. In his mind, the council was an outlier of the MLGA; he went on to say:

I think the word modernising (was) always a slightly overused word. It just meant change. I don't think we used it much in the council. It was regarded as a very Blairite sort of word. Nothing wrong with that, but my experience of working was actually the nuts and bolts... We were in the midst of, you know, we were almost the pilot... We were the ones who had an Executive Mayor... so it was a fait accompli.

The picture presented by the ex-councillor is of a council so in tune with government vision that it was possibly the most outstanding national example of

modernisation, the pilot par excellence. The decision to choose an Executive Mayor, still a comparatively rare feature of local government, exemplified this. In addition, the absorption of modernisation at the every level meant the agenda was truly embedded, as a 'fait accompli', not just a 'Blairite' slogan or cliché. The ex-councillor noted that not all his colleagues felt the same way, however and explained why there might be collegiate disagreement:

I think you get a left / right split, or you get modernisers and dinosaur tendencies you know? I don't think that's exclusive to Labour. I think in other councils and parties you've got councillors who have been sitting there twenty years – who say this is the way we've always done it, why can't we just do it this way?

The former councillor noted that there were councillors who dissented from modernising orthodoxy and instead, preferred to participate, and make policy the 'way [they've] always done it' and were disparaged as exhibiting 'dinosaur tendencies'. This split was routine for 'councils and parties' and reflects both a left / right ideological spectrum, but also suggests that the opponents of modernisation are stuck in the habits of from years ago. The apparent radicalism so highly prized by many of his colleagues on the left of the party is illusory, in his view. They are the ones who are reactionary 'dinosaur[s]'.

A backbench councillor from another borough, who was also a member of his local Labour Party, which had long-standing control of its local council, explained that the MLGA had actually led to reduced participation in policy making for the majority of councillors:

There's a big gap between the cabinet, between backbench councillors and between councillors and wider party members and the community... I think the issue there has been purely in terms of local politics... The local leadership... used it as an opportunity, in my view, to further centralise [what were] already centralised powers. So effectively, real decision making is made by a handful of people. We've got a system, I'd say in reality, a kind of Soviet style system with complete centralisation.

The backbench councillor identified centralisation as the issue that adversely affected participation in policy making. In particular, the local politics provided a climate in which the local leadership was able to use the MLGA as an opportunity to achieve 'complete centralisation'. Policy making, to be understood as real decision making, was already centralised, but was now to become ever more firmly the preserve of a 'handful of people'. The widening gap amongst groups of potential policy makers arose at several layers, according to the backbencher, 'between the cabinet, between backbench councillors and between councillors and wider party members and the community'. Participation in decision making was seen to have become bracketed off, rather than shared across the various levels of local political elite. Leaving the community as a residuum, from which they are also increasingly detached.

Unlike the stereotypical 'dinosaur', this backbench councillor had initially welcomed modernisation:

I think, in principle, the modernising agenda is something I agreed with. Although, there were some issues that were around at the start. In terms of the government framework, overall initially I didn't have too much of an issue with it.

However, somehow, the positive aspects had become lost in translation, according to the backbench councillor. It had:

Very limited currency to be quite honest, because it's a very traditional area and lots of members have been resistant, sceptical or not engaged with the modernisation agenda... It's been good in some ways, in that it streamlined decision making. That's the positive bit of it. But the negative bit of it is that it's completely centralised the power structures even more than it was previously.

Unlike the previous account by the ex-councillor, this backbench councillor felt that modernisation was not embedded and that the partial gains of clearer decision making that aided policy making were undercut by ever more centralisation of power. The backbench councillor argued that this was because the area and its local politics and leadership were 'traditional'. As a result policy making and participation were markedly curtailed ('centralised'). Worse still, the MLGA had, unwittingly or otherwise, facilitated a 'Soviet style system', because it had been captured by a small group of people, according to this view. At the local level modernisation was equated to extreme centralisation and the wider traditional political culture was mostly disengaged.

Both accounts, from an ex-councillor and a backbench councillor identified local party politics as having a fractious and undermining influence on the MLGA. On the one

hand, modernisation had transcended reactionary forces. On the other, it was a prisoner of them. The political trade to which both councillors belong, frequently inspired feelings of loyalty to the party leadership. Hence, pride at its achievement ('we were the pilot'), or disdain at what a 'Soviet' regime has done to modernisation. Other accounts were able to test aspects of these two perspectives, in particular the extent to which the MLGA was embedded in council operations, or had 'very little currency'.

One CDW, who worked for a large VCS organisation that delivered a range of partnership funded projects, drew a distinction between the formal government agenda of modernisation and grassroots participation in policy:

There seems to be a huge gap between what the government is saying is their agenda and then what we're actually delivering in a grass roots way is not getting any funding. So I find that bizarre, to say the least. So I have to say my experience has been very bad, very negative.

The divergence ('huge gap') between policy making and participation, in terms of rhetorical commitments and what was actual delivery, is hard to reconcile. The struggle between 'what the government is saying', with the struggle to get support ('funding'), leading to a 'very negative' experience.

A CDW from another study area gave two perspectives that mirrored similar concerns. The first was as a council employee and the second was as a local activist:

OK, as a... worker, a lot of rhetoric. As a council manager, lots of 'this is what we're going to do' and very little action. And very little impact upon my own work

roles. In terms as a community activist, again very little, because, again, I think it is all rhetoric.

The roles of council manager and community activist led the council manager to one overall conclusion: the MLGA is purely 'rhetoric' and devoid of action. The manager was instructed, from within the council – 'this is what we're going to do' – but their own work continued largely unaffected. Policy making and participation were the same as they had been before modernisation, based on their extensive local working experience. The intention to shake up the status quo by updating existing arrangements was judged from within the council and wider community, to have been subsumed into the settled habits of existing operations.

A senior council officer, working in the youth service, commented in a similar vein, that modernisation was something officers were rarely conscious of in their day-to-day council operations:

It's not really a term that has much purchase. I still see it as the latest phase of what I think of as the new managerialism... What it does is focus [upon]... the transmission belts and the processes of the provision of services and as a way of... masking or hiding the move to the marketisation of all state services at whatever level.

The senior council officer saw modernisation as lacking relevance and meaning – a policy that did not have 'much purchase'. The reason for the failure of the MLGA to gain traction was that it is actually about something else altogether, in their opinion. The

term was deployed as simple misdirection, a way of 'masking or hiding'. The focus was on 'transmission belts' and the detail of a particular form and process of overseeing service delivery rather than a broader vision. Rather than modernisation, he argued that the MLGA was really about managerialism and 'marketisation of all state services'. These latter two agendas (managerialism and marketisation) limited participation in policy making, as the officer went on to explain:

I believe the modernisation agenda is the antipathy of democratic agendas... the processes of democratic accountability, democratic representation and openness through all of those... managerial regimes were stripped out. So, for instance, the quangos don't have to have open and public meetings, the minutes and the notes of their business does not have to be in the public domain, they use more and more the notion of business and market confidentiality to withhold information.

The senior council officer discerned a retrenchment in defensive 'business and market' practice that worked against public participation in policy making. Hence, there was a decline in democracy, and 'accountability' and 'openness' in particular. This was evidenced by the use of commercial confidentiality, in order to prevent public meetings and their minutes being made public. Access to public meetings and their records are basic components of community engagement, which led the officer to conclude that they were 'stripped out' by the modernisation of 'managerial regimes'. In turn, this was interpreted by the senior council officer as the 'antipathy of democratic agendas'.

One community activist, who had spent many years fighting for a different version of development in their borough, similarly described modernisation as cover for something else:

The modernisation as it's been intended in the past ten years meant many times privatisation... The issue is to get away from the equation: modernising is privatising.

In order to explore modernisation, the first task is to disentangle it from privatisation. The activist's experience over the previous decade was of participating in privatisation policy.

Another activist from a different borough, who similarly campaigned for a community inspired vision of development, explained why privatisation worked against public participation in policy making:

If you say modernisation, how do we view modernisation? And that is one of the chief platforms of this Mayor - then we [say] 'no thank you to modernisation'. If you look at it in terms of regeneration, which is a euphemism for exactly the so-called modernisation, which is basically to rip up the community, then there's something fundamentally wrong with this... If you see modernisation as making your community and making your environment a more healthy, more aesthetically pleasing environment, a place where there is better equality and more community, no one will oppose this modernisation. But we see this modernisation and regeneration and... redevelopment as detrimental to our community. So in

that sense we... don't call that modernisation. We [see] that as a regressive step and not a progressive step.

According to the activist previously quoted, the community found it hard to engage with modernisation, because its meaning was misleading and really meant 'redevelopment', which often threatened to 'rip up the community'. The activist felt that the policy was 'detrimental' to the local community, and as a result participation in policy making became a countervailing endeavour, where it became necessary to oppose policy and say, 'no thank you'. If the MLGA were not hijacked by the 'platforms of the Mayor', thereby becoming a creature of large scale redevelopment programmes, but instead led to better community outcomes, such as a 'more healthy, aesthetically pleasing environment', with 'better equality', then it would be seen as 'progressive' by the activist. As it was, they viewed the MLGA was a step backwards. Even the term was empty, 'we... don't call that modernisation'.

A former leader, who had led many regeneration and redevelopment programmes, echoed the concern that the MLGA had not enabled community engagement in policy making:

I think in its best efforts in terms of the modernisation agenda, government tried to set a framework of where, you know, community led, community involved, community led schemes should be a norm... But... if we were really honest, it still isn't fully developed. We didn't make much inroads in terms of CD work... as much as we should have.

According to the former leader the reason why the MLGA was not ‘fully developed’ policy was because of the lack of community participation in policy making. There was a paucity of engagement that was community led. The former leader felt that community participation was not a mainstream practice and that greater use of CD would have helped, but required being more candid about shortcomings. Having led the council for several years he had an appreciation of the pressurised environment faced by officers and members, which made it difficult for them to be self critical. However he argued that a deeper level of honesty was required as a precursor to utilising CD, to achieve greater levels of participation. Whilst the previous deficits of engagement and the value of CD are recognised by this former leader, the unfinished business of both CD and MLGA remained more of a distant aspiration than a practical reality with regard to future policy making practice.

Third sector modernisation: policy making and participation

The October 2006 Local Government White Paper (Strong and Prosperous Communities), which was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), directed councils to support a, ‘strong and healthy local VCS’ (DCLG 2006, Annex G, paragraph 12) and ensure, ‘fair, sustainable, stable funding for the Third Sector’ (ibid, paragraph 14).

The third sector was a central part of the Third Way and New Labour modernisation policy. It was to be transformed from the complex amalgam of charitable

motivations that once led it to be described as a baggy monster²⁶. The third sector was to be clearly placed in a partnership and service delivery role. As a result, it underwent its own modernisation.

All interviewees pointed out that the local third sector, along with partners such as councils and VCS groups, had an opportunity to engage in third sector modernisation, its policy framework creation and policy formation. Whilst there was widespread agreement about the importance of the sector in securing progressive goals, opinion was divided on whether policy and practice were fit for purpose. One particular council officer, working as a manager in charge of VCS grant aid, commissioning and partnership work with the sector, questioned the efficacy of modernising the VCS:

I do believe in community empowerment and the voluntary sector is part of that. The voluntary sector needs to be careful... because their vested interest is even closer and tighter, because they're always running after the money in competition with community.

In the wake of third sector modernisation, this council officer argued that the sector needed to be especially vigilant, to be 'careful', because whilst it could participate in council-led community empowerment (as framed by the Local Government Act, DCLG 2006 and Community Empowerment White Paper, DCLG 2007) the vested interest of the sector may become more acute. The third sector modernisation policy may constrict the sector. The voluntary sector environment had become 'closer and tighter', leading to

²⁶Kendall, J. and Knapp, M.R.J. (1994, 66-95) *A loose and baggy monster: boundaries, definitions and typologies*. In: Hedley, Rodney and Davis Smith, Justin, eds. *Introduction to the Voluntary Sector*. Routledge, London

'competition', rather than collaboration, with the wider community sector and in particular, with community groups (Community Sector Coalition, 2010). Rather than being seen as a community champion, an honest broker and enabler, the VCS was criticised by the council officer for always 'running after the money'. The risk was that third sector modernisation accentuated VCS divisions, rather than enhanced its role in facilitating wider community participation in policy making (Scott, 2010).

With regard to the tendency to 'run after the money', a council youth worker noticed that in her recent dealings with the sector, in particular the pursuit of regeneration funding, *'the VCS operated more like their caricature of the local authority'*. The criticisms and 'caricature' frequently levelled at the council by the VCS, no longer held force, it was argued, because of the way the sector was prepared to behave to advance its interests, which thereby undermined its integrity. Due to third sector modernisation policy, she concluded that: *'I don't believe the sector has come to terms with what it is or where it's reached'*.

According to this council officer viewpoint the sector had changed to such an extent that it had not been able to 'come to terms' with the effects of modernisation. Rather than making policy and participating purposefully, it was adrift and lacking a principled identity, able to anchor itself to immutable values that define itself.

A backbench councillor reinforced the view of a VCS in decline:

Voluntary action is not doing what it's supposed to do, it's in a mess... it's completely disunited, I would say... [In the past] they would come and argue [for a] share of the cake [and] they more or less got it. It is not happening now.

Despite the increasing focus upon policy, which purported to help create a thriving third sector, the sector was in fact 'in a mess'. It was argued that this was manifested by the sector being 'completely disunited'. In a previous era, by virtue of being more united, it had secured its 'share of the cake'. In a more competitive era, this share, as articulated by the council VCS officer in charge of grant aid to the sector, had become more about individual organisations pursuing money than presenting a united VCS front. This was corroborated by the councillor who observed that the VCS failed to command the same presence in the borough as it had once done in former years. In spite of third sector modernisation, he said, 'it's not happening now'.

A council LSP officer, who had worked closely with the VCS at the LSP table and in delivering neighbourhood development, explained what they had learnt in relation to the sector's participation:

You then have community people who almost become gatekeepers and almost become the bloody problem, yeah? Because they get so much into it... [T]hey're not quite the statutory sector... but they're not quite the residents, you know and in that bit in the middle and then they become a club of their own.

Third sector modernisation, which had propelled the sector into partnerships and service delivery, served to foster an unhealthy insularity, in which its behaviour and values changed in ways that were a 'bloody problem'. In the course of becoming more central to public service delivery and partnership working, in tune with both the MLGA and third sector modernisation policies, the VCS was observed to be less participative in policy making terms. Rather than opening up policy making, it was acting as a

'gatekeeper'. The interstitial space, 'that bit in the middle' which is 'not quite the statutory sector', nor the local community ('residents'), allowed a freedom to manoeuvre that could have conceivably engendered greater levels of participation. However, in the officer's mind, it was closing down space for other partners because it was used defensively to 'set up a club of their own'.

One community activist spoke of the distance that had grown up in recent years, between the policy making professional voluntary sector organisations and the wider VCS:

Well, the professionalised voluntary sector [are] basically a lot of people, a lot of organisations [who] have sold their soul. And they are just cut price public servants, employing people who don't have the pension rights... [They] don't have the freedoms that charities used to have. And far too many organisations that portray themselves as voluntary sector, [who] portray themselves as caring bodies, are in fact just cut price public services, which are, you know, at the end of the day, not actually achieving a great deal apart from savings for the government.

Rather than occupying a space between residents and statutory agencies, acting as a self interested clique, as the LSP officer had identified, this activist felt that the sector had been 'professionalised' by third sector modernisation and were now 'cut price public servants'. It was argued that modernisation had brought the sector closer to government, but at a grave cost to themselves. Not only were they seen as having 'sold their souls', but their workforce lacked equivalent pay and conditions, such as no

pension rights. The only reason government was elevating a part of the VCS was to save money. There was no evidence of their 'achieving a great deal' beyond 'savings for government'. The community activist felt that the wider ethos of the VCS, as a 'caring' organisation, was being traded on. However, the kind of progressive social change that might flow from wider engagement in local policy making was not manifesting itself, in their opinion. The activist went onto to add poignantly:

I think the heart has been ripped out. I think there are a huge amount of organisations that 10 to 12 years ago were charities, nowadays are charities in name only. You know, they are state controlled. What they do, how they do it is controlled by central or local government.

Third sector modernisation policy corresponded to this time frame of, '10 to 12 years' where, according to this view, charities had become 'state controlled' and largely fictional entities, or 'charities in name only'. Modernisation, as the dominant policy of this time, had sought to bring the sector closer to the government's ways of thinking. At the same time, 'the heart has been ripped out' of the VCS, due to it being increasingly 'controlled by... government'. On this reading, third sector modernisation has an isomorphic and enervating effect. It was taking over and was stifling the sector.

Another activist, in a different borough, echoed the LSP officer's view of an exclusive 'club' that had arisen in parts of the VCS:

With the voluntary sector you get the 'outs', the people who are out-ed, who are not in the fold and who are hated, who are despised and detested... And then

you get the other group of toadies who are so up the arse, that it's hard to distinguish them from the arse itself. These people are timid, they cannot speak objectively. They become the agents of the council's policies and you can't call them community groups, they don't speak for the community at all. And so there's where we've got in [our borough].

Third sector modernisation had taken place at a time of increased polarisation within the VCS, described here by the activist as those 'who are hated', who were outside the fold, juxtaposed with those who were timid council 'agents', who were not objective and had no wider legitimacy – 'they don't speak for the community'. The council divided the sector by deciding who was 'in', whilst the VCS groups who gain council approbation, disappeared inside the operations of the council and become so compromised, 'up the arse', that it was 'hard to distinguish them' from the council. They became obnoxious propagandists, who not only towed the council line, but have been entirely captured and incorporated, who actively disseminated 'the council's policies'.

The council grants officer, introduced previously under this section, observed the VCS 'chasing the money', described this incorporation as *"the third sector actually nowadays seems to be part of the public services"*. This impression of the VCS as part of the 'public services' sector was similar, if not identical, to the activists view of the sector as 'hard to distinguish' from the council. The changes driven by modernisation appeared to cross a threshold, so that the sector's agenda was coterminous with the public sector. The council grants officer described how central government had altered the relationship that the council had with the sector, by way of a cash nexus, on the basis of money and how it was disbursed:

There is more control I'd say... For example, with the voluntary sector we're forced, or local authorities are being forced, down the commissioning route... With the Office for the Third Sector there [are] certain ways they want people to operate, you know, so they are actually trying to close down a lot of the creativity and innovation.

Central government, with its own VCS department, the Office for the Third Sector exerted 'more control', it 'forced' councils to distribute VCS funding according to certain norms ('the commissioning route'). This prescribed the way to work, in a way that inhibited the creative flair of the VCS and its funding relationship with the council. The forced nature of third sector modernisation 'close[d] down' VCS innovation, impairing wider participation in policy making and narrowing the scope of VCS activity (Kenny, 2002; Mowbray, 2005; Lawler & Nicholls, 2006; NCIA, 2011b).

This constriction prompted one councillor, who worked closely with the VCS, to speak of the imperative for the VCS to have greater ambition than simply being part of public services:

I think there's got to be a development of independent institutions and a more community-focused culture, which I don't think is going to happen in the short term. It's questionable in the medium or even long term.

Under the policy framework of third sector modernisation, this councillor's insistence that, 'there's got to be a development of independent institutions', placed the

VCS in a contradictory position. This is because the general direction of travel was in the opposite direction, as testified by previous officers, activists and by the pessimism of the councillor himself, who felt it isn't, 'going to happen'. The short time frame refers to immediate modernisation policy, where development of independence was automatically ruled out. However the long term likelihood of a more autonomous policy making role, was highly doubtful because of the deep changes made to the sector. The councillor's argument for a more 'community focused culture' suggested that, under modernisation, a different kind of culture had prevailed, geared towards the public and private realms. This need to refocus community 'culture' also addressed the concerns noted by previous community activists, one of whom stated that the reconstructed third sector, 'don't speak for the community at all'.

A VCS CD worker, based within a leading voluntary sector organisation, gave a more positive account of the possibilities that existed under the 'ChangeUp' programme to go beyond a narrow service delivery focus:

People tend to think about the support that we do for organisations as being more about capacity building... But on the capacity building front, actually there's some really good work happening... What we focused on is community development organisations... and I think we're quite chuffed about that, because I think that's going to be something that will go somewhere.

The ChangeUp government programme for VCS infrastructure bodies was the most significant funding for local support and development for many years. It can also be understood as the pinnacle of the government's third sector modernisation policy. It

required a lead VCS agency, typically a Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) to lead a set of support activities designed to raise the capacity of the sector to be contract ready. Each local ChangeUp plan would have around a dozen themes, ranging from improved IT, to work on equalities. All would work closely with the local council. The VCS CD worker who was 'chuffed' about his local ChangeUp programme, had been able to turn what was primarily capacity building to enable the provision of quality public services, into something for community development organisations, who had a far wider set of activities and typically stronger connections with local people. The VCS worker explained how this had come about:

It's partly because the council's been very poor in engaging with it frankly... Yes, there's been stuff around what you might call the professionalization of the voluntary sector... I'm less troubled about that, because I think what's useful about that, is not so much being able to demonstrate being accountable to funders, but... being accountable to your users. People need to be better organised than some of the groups I've been involved with in the past... One of the things that's been really important about ChangeUp has been about thinking about the voluntary community sector as a community almost, like a self-contained community, if you like.

The council's 'poor' engagement with ChangeUp, a leading feature of third sector modernisation policy, inadvertently allowed the VCS to become more unified, as a 'self-contained community'. Descriptions previous interviewees (councillors, council officers and activists) of a disunited sector were overcome, in the mind of this VCS worker, by

the opportunity for new ways of thinking. In his mind the dangers of professionalization driving the sector away from its core values, needed to be balanced by failures to be 'organised' and 'accountable' to local people in the community. A VCS that was more skilled through third sector modernisation was able to deliver better CD, be more independent and fulfil its *raison d'être*.

The same worker argued that modernisation and the ChangeUp programme, even when working with CD organisations and informed by CD principles, at some point led to an unavoidable choice about the degree of change those involved in ChangeUp were prepared to sanction as a consequence of modernisation:

I think commissioning is... a part of that, I mean you're turning organisations who provide a service to the people that they work with, the communities that they work with, into people who provide a service for the council, and there's a different relationship isn't it... 80% of the organisations we work with here are the small organisations. What you'll get is those larger organisations and those commissioning people over time will have to make a choice about where they stand. They're either going to reaffirm their independence, they are going to remember the thing about trying to maintain their separation from the local state, or they'll become like housing associations, sort of semi-statutory organisations.

In the view of the VCS CD worker, ChangeUp's focus on 'commissioning' council services, 'over time' inevitably turned VCS organisations into 'semi-statutory organisations'. Most of the groups working with the ChangeUp programme were small. Therefore, by definition, they were without significant council contracts, but their

environment was being changed by larger organisations and commissioners who defined VCS policy making and resource allocation. According to the VCS worker these 'commissioning people' had an opportunity to enable the VCS to engage in third sector modernisation in a way that 'reaffirm(ed) their independence', but it required a proactive 'choice' based on principles ('where they stand'), rather than operational considerations about what it means to 'provide [a] service'. Unless a special effort was made, the VCS would be unable to 'maintain their separation from the local state'.

For this worker third sector modernisation entailed a 'different relationship' between VCS groups, the council and local communities, which was viewed with concern by previous interviewees. These included the councillor who wanted to see the 'development of independent institutions', as distinct from the 'semi-statutory' status of newly franchised VCS groups, who risked becoming like 'housing associations', as predicted by the VCS officer, who worked on the ChangeUp programme.

In another study area, a council officer who was involved in a Sure Start and Neighbourhood Management programme in one of London's most deprived wards, spoke of a long-standing failure of VCS infrastructure, including ChangeUp, to make a difference:

You know they say oh we've got four hundred, five hundred voluntary sector organisations, yeah well that includes local [groups]... that can't even meet... The reality is in this part of the world we have no infrastructure to even apply to try and do anything. There's no encouragement to try and build up true and strong partnerships with anybody... It isn't going to change the way we are and it's not

going to make our kids want to be, to give them the skills to be able to have a choice in life and that, to me, is what we should be doing.

The involvement of community groups in third sector modernisation and its related policy making, to encourage and develop infrastructure, skills and partnerships, is entirely absent according to this interviewee. For them, the fact that official bodies could speak of the existence of 'five hundred voluntary sector organisations' across the borough, as proof of a substantive VCS presence, was undercut by the local reality. In this instance, a priority neighbourhood, as identified by the LSP, was unable to 'even apply to try and do anything'. Third sector modernisation had not reached local groups, who lacked even the basic resources to meet up as a prerequisite to 'build[ing] up true and strong partnerships with anybody'. The lack of involvement in policy making guarantees that the overall situation of impoverishment 'isn't going to change', the council officer concluded.

The improvement in quality and effectiveness of wider infrastructural support to local VCS groups was a central goal of third sector modernisation. The council officer working on neighbourhood management and Sure Start described a lack of outreach into the most deprived communities by this policy. In the same borough, the experience of a community activist who was prepared to travel to the offices of the lead infrastructure body, in order to access support, met with this response:

What's the name, Voluntary Action? What were they? OK, I've been to them many times... I didn't understand what the purpose is really... I had to deal with [them] because I needed to get the funding for my thing. That's the thing, to get

the funding I needed an association, that's a Catch 22... You can't get anything as an individual, yeah, so how do you get funding to start up something? So I had to contact [them]... [they didn't] answer emails.

Engagement with third sector modernisation policy making and access to the support it entailed meant this community activist had to contact the lead VCS agency to access funding. The activist did not understand the purpose of the lead agency (which under the third sector modernisation agenda would be to provide appropriate, timely and accessible organisational support and engage the wider VCS volunteers and groups in policy making). On this occasion the engagement required having to make a special effort to contact and visit that agency on 'many' occasions. Whilst the larger VCS organisations were funded by ChangeUp and related third sector modernisation policy, to address the skills deficit, this activist described the experience of a similar lack of skills being demonstrated by the same organisations, when it came to their own engagement with the groups they sought to work with and elaborated on this failing:

They had public meetings, organised professionally and people arrive because there is thirst in the area for something to happen. There is stuff from the police and all the right people making the right noises and what is missing at the end is anything... to do... There is all the talk, but there's nothing happening... So you have this association which is promoted by the council, essentially, because it's community involvement... The thing is run in the most professional way, but it brings no result, because at the end of these meetings there are cakes [laughs], there is a buffet table. You know, OK, now what do we do, you understand?

Event management skills were strongly in evidence at public meetings to enable engagement in local policy making. The meeting was 'run in the most professional way' and the 'right noises' were made, but the engagement did not lead to action. This form of community involvement, which was 'promoted by the council' through its VCS intermediaries, 'brings no result', in the activists view. The actual policy making that takes place was minimal, because there was no articulation of future actions and no one was tasked to do anything. The most vivid memory of engagement the activist was left with was purely dietary, around the buffet table.

The democratic deficit

The 1998 White Paper (Modern Local Government: In touch with the People), delivered both a 'fundamental critique (Rao, 2001, 1) and sought a 'democratisation of democracy' (ibid). However whilst the White Paper argued that whilst 'modernisation [was] the means, democratic renewal the end' (ibid, 195), it was 'too easy to conflate' (ibid) the two, with the result that democratising democracy became a 'distant and uncertain prospect' (ibid).

The engagement of communities was fundamental to the democratising ambitions of MLGA policy and this was a shared notional common ground with CD practitioners and theorists. Both New Labour and CDWs could sign up to a system of self government, where people affected by decisions were part of the decision-making process. For this group, CD was well placed as a process by which to facilitate democratic participation (Ledwith, 1997, 5).

It is worth analysing how the decision making process was managed. If policy led to reproducing social structures that perpetuated inequality and poverty through ideological consent, this was a barrier to participation in the democratic process (ibid, 113). There is a requirement for a critical debate about what kind of democracy is being aimed at, in addition to an acknowledgement that democracy is ideologically contested. There also needs to be a means to explore and generate deeper ownership and understandings. Otherwise, the concern was that the MLGA would become tokenistic and placatory. A youth and community worker explained the problems that arose from setting out a framework for participating in democratisation:

You can't organise people to modernise in a sense of a democratic process, right? And I think, for me, the Labour government has lost it, in the sense that it's tried to create a formula on how people can participate and I don't think there's a formula. I think it's about early education and about the issue around where does your politics lie? Not in the political party arena, but in the person, in the sense that if you're in a broad educational process (that) encourages discussions, encourages this open debate and also encourages the process of having debate, right? Then your politics are developed and your future politics are developed, in the sense of democracy... In terms of its implementation, to me it's the opposite of democracy.

According to this interviewee, democracy, as driven by a policy 'formula', in which people were expected to participate, could not work, because democracy requires a long term 'educational process', through which people participate by exploring their values,

which in turn develops their 'future politics'. The 'process of having a debate', leaves it open to each person to choose their path of development, as distinct from a government formula (modernisation) whose implementation is the 'opposite of democracy'.

The policy around local democratization and addressing democratic deficits was tackled by interviewees in two broad ways. Firstly, as the act and frequency of voting, secondly, as an ethos and practice that people continually strive to actualise. The first functional description is easier to pin down. Leaders of councils had clear views as to why local voter turnout was declining and how it could be addressed. Their focus was on a single act that was undertaken once every four years at the ballot box, which confirmed their mandate and determined whether they continued in their current roles. By contrast, CDWs tended to focus on the space between elections, on time spent working with communities, exploring the connections between formal and informal democratic practice.

One leader explained just how difficult it was to get people to vote: 'We've just had a by-election, we went to every house five times and 22% voted. People forget... People vote if they choose to vote.' The reality of choice, of choosing not to vote, led him to express the matter bluntly: 'You've got a chance to vote. Choose to use it or not. It's your choice; if you choose not to use it, tough.'

On this reading, the democratic deficit required a simple personal 'choice'. It was a matter for individuals and if this worked against their longer term interest, that was 'tough' on them and seemingly not a matter for anyone else to engage with. In fact New Labour policy sought to boost voting levels and this was a key part of the MLGA, but one that the interviewee appeared to have little time for.

Two of the leaders were willing to contemplate compulsory voting. The leader who had spelt out the current reality as being 'use it or lose it' had this to say: 'There's an argument that says we should have compulsory voting, that would help. Then I suspect 'none of the above' would win.'

Given that the problem was a matter of individual choice, rather than wider government policy, 'compulsory voting' would solve the matter of low turnouts. Even then, the suspicion was of a continuing element of personal dysfunction. The choice to vote is exercised negatively for 'none of the above'. His colleague from another borough echoed a support for compulsory voting, alongside the creation of more financially independent local authorities:

I think the issue of funding, if local authorities were able to raise their own funding then I think people are far more likely to vote, but my own view is voting should be compulsory anyway. I think in terms of the Blairite rights and responsibilities, I think that's the ultimate responsibility in a democracy, even if you spoil your ballot paper, I think you should (have) a requirement in a democracy to vote.

If the MLGA engaged in the central / local relationship in a way that tackled funding the leader argued that this would incentivise people, who would be 'far more likely to vote' because the council would be more relevant to their lives. Their choice of voting locally would impact more directly on where local money was spent, rather than the democratic deficit that arose from central government controlling from afar.

The other democratic deficit lay with the pathology of individuals who shirked their responsibility to vote. The second policy intervention advocated to remedy the local

democratic deficit was to make voting a legal requirement. Effective policy making implicated both central government and individuals in having to make changes in their engagement with local government.

The council leader who experienced the disappointment of saturating a local area as part of by election campaign, to little effect, felt the media had a part to play in boosting engagement in democratisation:

If I could have the front page of every national newspaper for a month, I could get voting rates up at the local election, OK. I could get them certainly up to the levels of national elections.

The replacement of sensational and lurid front page stories that predominate many national newspapers with local council news, would engage people in the business of the council and this would 'get voting rates up'. Participation in policy making by local people would be transformed by media messaging, in ways undreamt of by other forms of community engagement by the council, according to this view.

Another leader saw the democratic deficit as a long term historical trend, a fact that policy makers 'can't get away from' by simply focusing on voter turnout:

There's a strand which is about voting systems and numbers and turnouts ... which get to be a bit of a turn off after a while, but you can't get away from the fact that turnouts are low and have consistently been low. This can be misrepresent[ed]... which is unhelpful. The relationship between the turnout at local, regional and national level appears to be relatively stable... [C]rudely

speaking, general election turnouts [are] usually always about twice what the turnout was for a local election, so the drop for local elections... was accompanied by a drop in general elections... But there's this desperate pursuit to find some ways to get people to vote... which is why... that's not the end of the story. That's why there has to be a different strand about getting people involved in other ways.

Modernisation policy making that was focused on 'systems and numbers' risked misrepresenting democratic participation, which was, in fact, 'relatively stable'. The 'desperate pursuit' by policy makers to engage local government and local partners in getting people to vote was 'unhelpful', in his view, because it was based on a misunderstanding of what was going on. It was also too narrow, 'not the (whole) story', and efforts would be better focused on 'getting people involved in other ways'.

It is a feature of all the leaders' comments that they do not speak of the local authority as being, in any way, culpable for the local democratic deficit. They often identified a simple way of fixing turnouts, which was to make voting compulsory; access to national media being another unlikely option. Otherwise, the leaders' comments did not appear to recognise the modernisation rationale for democratisation, or endorse the forms of active policy making and participation envisaged by its framework.

One community activist argued that low voter turnout made their council leadership's claim to have a democratic mandate highly questionable and argued for much greater urgency in pursuing the democratisation of their local authority:

They really capitalise on this thing that they were voted in, you know. 'We are not voted, representative', bam! 'We don't represent our community because we are

not voted, elected', whatever. Well, that's one of the biggest flaws in democracy that is killing local politics at the minute. It's absolutely, this democracy deficit has got to be dealt with and handled. And part of the reason is those so-called elected members, they have not got any, in terms of accountability, it's not tight enough. In terms of having a vested interest, I, we are campaigning to save [a local facility] because we have got a vested interest in it. We have got people who work and live there... I do not believe it is in their interests to remedy... the democracy deficit. I don't think it is in their interests at all. I tell you, if you tried to tighten that gap, you would see, first of all you'd see the quality of some of the candidates who were standing would, I think, be more honest, reasonable and I think fairer than some of the idiots we got now. I really think so.

The engagement of activists in their community, including campaigning, as part of the exercise of local democratic rights and neighbourhood renewal that is a feature of the MLGA, was in the activist's view, a practice delegitimized by local elected politicians (the 'so-called elected members'). The argument that was used was that only those who are voted for, in local elections, were representative. However, the activist refused to accept the absoluteness of this proposition of representation, as the sole domain of elected politicians, because it was 'killing local politics' and nullifying wider community engagement in policy making. The accusation that activists had got a 'vested interest' was countered by the accusation that local politicians also acted negatively, by 'really capitalis[ing] on being voted in' as a reductive argument that closed off debate and protected their own interest: 'I do not believe it is in their interests to remedy... the democracy deficit'. The current democratic system needed to 'dealt with', to be

reformed, because it was 'not tight enough' and did not exert sufficient accountability on those elected.

This idea that modernisation and reform might be needed, due to doubts and qualifications about the local mandate generated by turnout at local elections, was firmly rebutted by one council leader, however:

We are the community's expression and I would argue we are local and we are the locality and if you don't like that, stand for election. And so I would put a very strong argument: no, sorry... we are the locality, we are the representatives of the people... and we believe in democracy.

On this basis any policy that sought to democratise local government by expanding and diversifying the expression of the community and the locality would be rejected: 'no sorry'. By standing for election, the council and its leaders had secured this role exclusively for themselves. They did this because they 'believe in democracy' and took the necessary steps and acted on the only means to be representatives. They stood for election. Any wider engagement in local policy making, around the democratising strands of the MLGA by other partners, was severely curtailed if not ruled out altogether. Unlike the modernisation of services, the local democratic deficit was severely limited in what it was understood to mean and to whom it applied.

It was evident that the issue of democratic legitimacy was well rehearsed by both leaders and activists. The claim to be the 'locality' was made by one council leader, but the community activist who wanted to 'remedy the democratic deficit' also made the case for being embedded in their local area:

We have no qualms about it, because we are here to stay. The leader of the council isn't. We have voted him in and if we are strong enough and this is a democracy. He is not practising democratic values. We are, and we will kick him out. And we are certain to do so at the next, at the next time round. And we're here forever, what he's trying to do is remain forever. We want to change that, because we have got to live here... That is why, in terms of true democracy and true democratic values, we have got that moral and democratic right to get rid of him... [W]e have got the voting power, the democratic power to vote him out and we have told him.

For this community activist the strength of the connection to the locality was made in terms of length of residency: 'we are here to stay' and 'we ... live here'. In contrast, the council leadership was not 'here forever'. It was contingent on 'democratic values' being practised between elections. Local people were seen as the custodians of 'moral and democratic right[s]'. The activist argued that the leader forfeited these rights and powers when democratic values were not in evidence and his time in power became self-perpetuating: 'he is trying to... remain forever'. The democratic process had become discredited and required his removal, which could only take place by fulfilling the promise to 'kick him out' at the next election.

The antagonisms that frequently underlay the experience of some local communities in their interactions with their elected representatives (and vice versa), raise questions about the viability of the modernising democracy project. To establish a new leader and cabinet or mayoral system does not necessarily entail a sea change in

wider democratic practices of engagement. One council manager, who had worked with her local authority for many years, explained that: 'There is nothing this council does that would convince me that they believe in community democracy.'

Years of experience observing the council's actions, what it 'does' rather than what it says, led to her conclusion that there was no will to involve the 'community' in policy making around democratisation. It would not happen because the council did not 'believe in' the form of democracy which is accountable to, and engages with, the community. This is close to saying it did not believe in democracy at all, as it is popularly understood. Another council manager, with a community and youth work background, spelt out the council's commitment to managed democracy:

Debates about democratic engagement, democratic processes, even under their new guise, about double devolution, the new localism are not predicated on electoral or open democratic engagement. They are about managed democracy. I think the ideology and the main thrust of local service provision is done on the basis of the market and I think that the basis of the market is... profoundly undemocratic... [There is] an undeclared prejudice, a taken for granted assumption that through involvement, through participation, through democratic engagement... you will get better services. It's a flawed concept.

This council manager's experience told them that what really drove the MLGA was not democratisation, whether as electoral or open democratic engagement. The 'ideology' of the 'market' which drove local service provision was the overriding concern and this determined what form of democracy was permissible. Since the mechanisms of

the market were argued to be 'profoundly undemocratic', the only possible form of democracy that was permissible was one that was subordinate to the further advancement of the marketisation of public services. Hence, the council wanted 'managed democracy' because it assumed that through democratic engagement you will get better services. Whereas, from a community and youth work background, the value the manager placed on democracy was as an end in itself, not a function of the market.

A cabinet member argued that most people wanted a different sort of world. Rather than engaging with policy making, their busy lives meant there was little appetite for democratic debate, only a keen desire for basic standards of service:

Most people go to work. They have hard lives. They're not that bothered. What they want is the basic services dealt with... We survey and question people quite a lot and that's how we find out what people truly want... People want to feel good about their area. People want to feel good about how they're living. We can't do everything, but we can try and maintain clean streets and try and maintain a safer neighbourhood. We can try to look to change areas through regeneration... If you're going to do a huge amount of regeneration, you have to consult and consult and consult and all the planning authorities insist on that anyway... [The] vast majority of people, unless you tell them, the only time you get things, it's the negatives... The problem is with dealing with those things is that you get the NIMBY²⁷ stuff where it's, it's just those small groups of activist people who would want to come along and say 'I represent the community' and... by giving themselves those tags seem to think that they're, you know, but they don't represent the community.

²⁷ NIMBY – Not In My Back Yard

From this perspective, democracy was managed with the consent of most local people who work and 'have hard lives'. It was possible to know 'what people truly want' by marketing techniques such as surveys. Residents wanted to 'feel good about their area', which was equated to 'clean streets' and 'safer neighbourhoods', but did not entail any active engagement with policy making. Where possible, the council tried to meet these sampled needs in an unobtrusive way. When there was an obligation to consult, this interrupted the smooth running of the lives of both council staff and their residents, because of planning rules and regulations the response was inevitably 'negative'. Participation exercises in local policy making, like regeneration consultations, seemed to invite negatives, that clearly did not make 'people feel good', and only happened because a higher authority 'insists'. Activists, who identified strongly with their community, who want to participate in policy, were a 'problem' according to the cabinet member because they took a narrow view and falsely claimed to represent the community. Inevitably, small groups would often reflect local concerns rather than bigger borough-wide or macro community policy which the council handled. The inability to find a *modus vivendi* led to a very distanced and managerial democratic stewardship.

A council leader reinforced this style of engagement as follows:

I think far too much is predicated on 'you mustn't watch 'Eastenders', you must come out to meetings and do other things'. I think we should say to people, 'you have a life to live, lots of fun things to do and things to do together'... We have really good and effective ways of consulting people... We've now established a survey... where we're asking... do they feel they can change council policy?

The imperative that, 'you must come out to meetings and do things', reminiscent of community activists and the traditions of democracy (Keane, 2009), is perceived as getting in the way of residents having 'fun' and even as superfluous, because there were better ways to engage people in policy making, according to this council leader's viewpoint. In Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969), consultation is located near the middle, between informing and placation. It did not engender citizen control, delegated power or partnership (ibid) and therefore did not enable active participation in policy making. The way to change council policy was ascertained by survey, where data is weighed and measured and policy is set accordingly.

A council LSP officer who had overseen local elections, in addition to supporting a range of council surveys and resident engagement forums that used new technologies, felt that efforts to update local democracy had not actually worked:

The whole idea of changing the way in which elections are organised, to encourage more participation, now I think this one is the one that has probably flopped, in my opinion, the most. I have been involved. I'm a presiding officer. I've also been involved in consultation... on changing the way in which we do elections and sort of trying things out like voting, using telephones and stuff like that... A lot of the time, what I've realised is that changing the way in which elections are organised isn't actually going to encourage people to vote. What's going to encourage people to vote is actually having interesting discussions and debates that will engage people.

The policy of tackling the local democratic deficit, by seeking to increase voter turnout by consultation on the ways elections are organised, has 'flopped', in this LSP officer's view. This was because it was not sufficiently participative. Her conviction was that people would not be encouraged by organisational fixes. 'Interesting discussions and debates' that opened up local policy making, were essential in order to 'encourage people to vote'. This view was at variance with the previous observations made by local politicians. However, it was validated by empirical evidence, on the basis of the council's own research and engagement, as detailed by the quoted council officer's work as 'presiding officer' and as leading council consultation.

The notion that local people are not responsive to more participative engagement in policy making is debateable. It is possible that the greater distance established by 'managed democracy', with its preference for 'surveys' rather than 'debates', may worsen existing democracy deficits. This is because people are removed from a shared democratic encounter, where ideas are explored and developed as shared policy, rather than being the exclusive preserve of one organisation, invariably the council.

One CDW argued that democracy could not be done at a distance from the community, but must be exercised as a 'basic human right'. Non-engagement in local policy making was an affront to the sacrifices made to secure and maintain the vote:

To have a democratic voice, a community voice, it's a basic human right. And I will always say justice, equity, to have an opportunity to have your say, is a basic human right. That's what we fought for in the war and men are losing their lives for in Iraq and Afghanistan and if that is not the reason then we ought to be shot ourselves.

Only by actively participating in local democracy, asserting a community voice, could justice and equity be achieved. It was argued that it was a fundamental human right gained by the ultimate human cost, that came before all else, including service delivery and managerial considerations. In the mind of this CDW, the barrier to local democracy was local party politics. She argued that the only way of influencing policy making was to take part on the same terms:

To put up candidates in the political structure... [T]o become ward councillors on an independent community democracy ticket and if we could get ten of them across the borough we would be equal with [an opposition party]. I still think that is the only way we will ever get a voice in this borough, and they have to listen, and we could actually potentially try to influence not only policy, but culture and attitude.

The political structure created 'culture and attitude', from which policy followed. Party politics only recognised equal or equivalent party numbers, at elections, because of the nature of the structure. It was this alone that dictated that the council would 'have to listen' and only then could policy begin to be influenced. The democratic deficit was a product of culture and attitude generated by politics. Therefore, any modernisation and democratisation had to begin from this understanding and be willing to challenge, rather than conform to existing arrangements.

However, democracy felt an elusive goal at all levels. As leader of a political party that was virtually guaranteed control of the council, one leader complained about

the lack of democracy he experienced in his dealings with central government policy makers:

If you're a civil servant or a bureaucrat, it doesn't take much to design a process that makes damn sure that actually there ain't no democratic decision making involved in it, it just rolls on.

If, at its centre, democratisation policy is seen to 'just roll on', bereft of 'democratic decision-making', then policy implementation, even by those who have a local monopoly on it, becomes a sterile exercise. The MLGA promised great changes, including a transformation of local democracy, but the argument made here is that it was often a non-starter. In various bureaucratic ways, the design of policy by civil servants and the closed world of the political establishment they inhabited was the barrier to its own policy transmission. It was the culture of central government and the assumptions of 'inspectorial infallibility' (Stewart, 2003, 210) that prompted a degree of scorn towards central government.

The post war settlement and the legacy of Thatcherism

The ways in which interviewees described their attitudes to engagement in policy making, frequently referred to the past. In particular, to the post war settlement and to the rupture of the consensus years, broadly from 1945 to 1975, which led to Thatcherism. An understanding of the past was a way of explaining the present and

predicting the future. The social solidarity that arose in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, was contrasted with the individualism of the neoliberal orthodoxy that replaced it, which saw an increasingly limited role for the state and where Margaret Thatcher famously felt able to say, "there is no such thing as society"²⁸.

There is widespread acceptance that there has been both a post war political consensus, which ended in the mid 1970s, and a new neoliberal settlement (Craig & Mayo, 1995; Giddens, 1998; Wainwright, 2003; Blond, 2011) which followed. A retired CDW presented a highly polarised socio-political picture of an initial ascendancy of socialist ideas, followed by Thatcherism, which had a legacy that continued to the present time. The CDW described this trajectory through a highly personalised account. Its relevance for CD and the MLGA was that the former era was predicated on a greater commitment to state funded welfare and hence to many, though by no means all, was resonant of more egalitarian principles associated with community and youth work:

There's no choice. You fall into those camps [Socialist or Conservative] to ensure those people from birth have an equal right to be educated, to make decisions and to take part in the process. You do not allow society to be divided. And yet most of our political employment and agendas come from those that went to Private School.

Policy making could not escape these camps. The choice was either to thoroughly open up democracy and decisions, 'from birth' through 'equal ... educat[ion]', or allow a divided society shaped by privilege, where policy and decision making was

²⁸ Interview for *Woman's Own Magazine*, September 23, 1987:

done by those who 'went to Private School'. The CDW argued that New Labour policy had reached an accommodation with the latter set of beliefs:

Whereas before, the belief of the country was socialism, where you provided some essentials: work, education and housing; three basic elements. We don't provide those anymore and therefore, we still blame people for not taking up opportunities.

Modernisation recalibrated policy on the basis of a move away from a belief in socialism (Giddens, 1998), where the state provided essentials, including work, education and housing, as outlined by the CDW. It was now government policy to place the burden of responsibility on individuals (Rose, 1999) who had to take up opportunities. This was in contrast to the state guaranteeing basic essentials as a matter of entitlement (Levitas, 2005). Rather than seeking to reach out and provide for people, there was a tendency, according to the CDW, to stigmatise and blame individuals if they, rather than government, failed to respond.

In contrast to the present times, one retired councillor recalled the former willingness of government to intervene in people's lives:

My father came back from the War determined that things were going to be different, and he'd grown up in a sense with, you know, through slums. And he came back and he had a young family and he was absolutely determined it would be different. And I think there was an absolute sense of an essential approach to life at that point in time.

Within living memory, it had been possible to have an absolute belief and determination that policy would make things different from the impoverishment (slums) that existed a few years before. There was a sense of the possibilities for working class advancement, but which, according to one community activist was now lost:

The decline in political consciousness is a national thing and it's been going on for thirty years. And it's reached, at its most desperate, I mean in very poor areas where it's needed the most, because political consciousness and collective action is a first line defence of your standard of living, that's gone. Anything can happen to these people now. I mean look, the working class has been broken one way or another.

Policy that addressed a specific working class interest, that engendered a political awareness and projected it outwards into 'collective action', rather than individualism, in the judgement of this activist, had gone. With its decline, came a heightened vulnerability for people living in 'very poor areas', because the class ties that had mobilised communities and lifted them out of poverty, had been deliberately 'broken'. The post war determination to make things different, had been replaced over the last 'thirty years' with an abandonment of the same groups of people, to whom 'anything [could now] happen'. This rupture of working class identity, that enabled participation and social advancement, was something the activist saw as central to New Labour policy. It occurred as the party moved away from its own class roots (Butler, 1995) and

was reflected in its policy towards communities. The activist had this to say about the Labour Party:

They see someone with a cloth cap on and go, 'eugh! BNP!' Literally. And they're very distrustful if they saw, you know, ten working class people standing together, they would not believe it and they would want to break it. And they have. They've broken it and of course once that's broken. This sort of solidarity's very important for maintaining communities. It has a direct impact on the ability of a community to survive. Now we've got an underclass, broken up. No political consciousness and there's a lot of consequences of breaking up working class political consciousness they haven't even thought of at the time... The Labour Party has been at the centre of it. So it's been at the core of breaking working class culture and community... The Labour Party – it's a traitorous Party.

The activist traces the genealogy of modernisation policy to the deliberate breaking of 'working class culture and community', which is at the centre of what defines the current Labour Party. The class solidarity that had enabled a 'community to survive' was distrusted, reviled and under attack, without a consideration of the harmful 'consequences' of this displacement. The 'breaking up' of 'working class political consciousness' meant a new 'underclass' emerged that was disengaged because it lacked the consciousness of itself as a political and social actor. In contrast, to the immediate post war years, New Labour's modernisation was seen as a 'traitorous' act that betrayed the Labour Party's working class origins.

The memory of how the Labour Party's social policy had traditionally embedded itself in the lives of working class communities across London, was attested to by the retired councillor whose father, on returning from the war, sought to lift his young family out of the slums he had grown up in:

I mean, I, you know, half of my ward would have voted for a Labour candidate if they were a dog, you know, because of the Herbert Morrison thing. You know, 'I'll build the Labour vote into London', and it worked very, very well. Even in my living memory, many people, I had two big estates in my ward, you know. They were built in the 1930s. People who had lived in appalling slums in London moved in to what you and I would now perhaps class as substandard accommodation. But to them they had a garden, they had a bathroom, you know and the Labour Council did that and that trend went through it for generations.

There was a time when working class identity and self interest was deliberately engineered into policy, rather than being broken up. For the retired councillor, providing the essentials such as housing was something the 'Labour Council did' and built its vote on. For the first time working class people's lives changed. From 'appalling slums', they now had amenities that were hitherto unheard of, such as a garden and bathroom. Electoral and social policy success was underpinned by local political action within the community. The retired councillor opined:

It only ever worked in the Labour Party with street captains. Remember when the Labour Party was at its height, it had street captains you know? There was a

Labour Party member on every street who was a street captain, who collected the subs, or and you had a voice straight in to local government and maybe eventually that's how you organised society.

The memory of working class communities having a policy voice directly into local government, on a street by street basis gave rise the argument that it had been possible for society to be organised from the community upwards, because there was a cohesive class identity and a Labour Party willing to respond and organise itself on that basis. Politics, class, and community were fused together by 'street captains', who enabled ever greater levels of public participation in policy making. When comparing his political party then and now, the former councillor took a more critical view of New Labour than the immediate post war era of Attlee:

I suppose my criticism of New Labour is [it] became a technical exercise rather than an inspirational vision. So it was 'you'll do this' and 'you'll do that', because it's a measured society and it's all about measurement and money and you can't trust me: good measurements translates into money and you'll play the game properly, then you know you'll all be alright. The vision wasn't there, the sense of... reminding ourselves about actually society does matter and there is something called society.

Rather than being able to trust individuals, New Labour became distrustful. The councillor saw the Party place its faith in 'measurement and money' rather than street captains. 'Technical exercises' trumped a vision of society. Unlike the era of post war

reconstruction, he felt that modernisation policy lacked 'inspiration', a 'vision' that might bring people together, reminding them that society and social policy 'does matter'.

A council LSP officer agreed with the view that policy and politics had become less distinctive:

People lament the days when you knew what Labour stood for and what Conservatives stood for... Things are so similar now and the world is different. People are more comfortable and happy with their lot, so they're not so exercised about voting as they did when I was growing up. And there were social issues around race and great big social issues around miners and great big social issues and people came out and voted because you were polarised. You identified with this, with that.

Policy was 'similar' across the main political parties which was lamentable because, around the time of the beginning of Thatcherism, issues were far more polarised, with the result that people engaged with policy and voted. For greater levels of participation in policy making, Labour and Conservatives needed to be different, but under modernisation policy this was not the case, as argued by the LSP officer. Hence New Labour would struggle to address the local democratic deficit. Policy implementation was stymied by the political trend towards uniformity that grew out of the Thatcher era.

One council leader felt there was in fact a clear difference between his party and the Conservatives but that the timescales required for addressing the policy implications of Thatcherism were far longer than many appreciated:

Doesn't take a long time to clean a street, to change the way you clean a street, (but) changing people takes an enormous amount of time. And if you look at housing policy for example, since Thatcher sold council housing because she then didn't give us the money to reinvest in council housing, which would have been perfect, and then been a great policy, instead of then giving tax breaks to her mates. Over 25 years that has destroyed large sections of our community. And it took 25 years for Thatcher to destroy the community effectively. Well it will take us the same amount to [re]build it. It's not a short term job.

The cycles of time involved appear to be generational. In this analysis, the leader argues that his party is attempting a policy realignment, a departure from a neoliberal era initiated by Thatcherism, but that it would take 'years'. The removal of housing receipts that could have been used for reinvestment was one example of a policy of privatisation that 'destroyed large sections of community'. However, one CDW was not so sure the Labour Party had made a definitive break with the past:

I think everything's blander now... When I was younger, you were always campaigning and you had all kinds of organisations. But I have to say, I think Margaret Thatcher's responsible for a lot of this too: 'There's no such thing as society'²⁹, you know... She changed the ethos really drastically and I'm not sure we got it back... [with] New Labour.

²⁹ Ibid

According to the CDW the ethos to participate in policy making, through involvement in 'all kinds of organisations' and a willingness to campaign 'changed... drastically' by Thatcherism. The refusal to accept the construct of society had diminished the excitement and energy that informed local democratic and community processes. Within this increasingly bland policy landscape, it seemed doubtful that New Labour's modernisation agenda could restore the previous ethos, as opposed to working within its ideological parameters.

Policy making, participation and compromise

The significance of politics frequently featured in interviewees' comments on the implementation of the MLGA. As a corollary to this insight, a range of political skills were highly valued in policy making and participation. One particular subjective and contentious skill was the ability and willingness to compromise, in order to achieve limited goals. Such compromises appeared to fall into two broad camps: those that were either viewed as an act of pragmatic maturity which served the greater good, or as cynical betrayals and careerism. Participation in policy making depended on the former model, which sought to be an honest broker, in fashioning policy to local circumstances. However, in what sometimes felt like an increasingly bland policy environment, a retired community and youth worker spoke of the willingness of politicians to change their views over time, as a political *cliché*:

One has to start at the beginning of the circle don't you... You've come into politics as a left winger. Have you come in as a left winger, or have you come in because you think 'if I adopt left wing attitudes I can get elected?' Very few of them pin their views to any masts. They may belong to a movement, they may follow a movement, or they may say they support some parts of people like Tony Benn's statement. They never pin themselves to it, because in the modern world of politics you're dead [if you do that].

In this way compromise was hard-wired into the political trajectory of local policy makers who have 'come into politics'. The novice left winger uses movements opportunistically for a finite time and purposefully, in order to establish their credentials. However, commitment to policy issues or community movements is never established. The retired community and youth worker castigated the local political class because their views were rarely 'pin[ned] to any masts', so the longevity of support, that a previous councillor remembered in connection with the London Labour Party of the immediate post war era, was not possible in the modern world of politics.

In contrast, a cabinet member, who also fixated on Tony Benn as an anomaly in the general drift to the centre and to the right of politics, argued the importance of the journey travelled:

I've always said there's only a few politicians like Benn who get more left wing as they get older. Most people become slightly more right wing, or rational, or whatever, pragmatic, or well I certainly come from a very left wing background and remember those days fondly... I think that it's better that way. I think it's

better that I've had that background. I sort of did think I would go hoarse before I made any change. Now I've made a few changes. At least I can help a few people. It's not, I'm not changing the world, but I'm changing what I can. Or I'm improving what I can and that is, that's important... Protesting, those were the days you know. It's all exciting. It was fun. It was comradeship. There was, all my friends were there you know. That was the way it was.

In order to influence policy making, to make a 'few changes' and 'help a few people', this cabinet member argued that it was important to put one's 'left wing background' to one side and become 'slightly more right wing, or rational, or... pragmatic', to be willing to compromise. He argued that utopian protesting against policy, in order to 'chang[e] the world', risked being entirely voiceless, literally going 'hoarse'. It was a necessary but purely transitional part of the journey. However, what was important, was to see it for what it was, 'fun', 'comradeship', but unlikely to make 'change'. In order to be effective, 'improving what I can', there was no choice but to work within the constraints of existing policy frameworks. The cabinet member explained that a willingness to compromise meant taking on board a broader vision:

People being interested and passionate and that's great. Most people in a sense come into politics with that, having a bit of that background you know... being angry about something... But look, most people do come through being active in one or two issues. They've found out the only way to get anything done, you need to deal with the whole picture and if you get a few things done in your political career, you've done well.

According to the cabinet member the successful policy maker, moved from a narrow passionate political engagement with policy, typically 'active in one or two issues', to a broader, more measured, approach that took in the 'whole picture'. The 'only way to get anything done', was to change oneself. One's initial tendency was to be angry and to deal with politics and policy in its entirety, however this 'whole picture' could not be simplified and attempts to influence were likely to lead to incremental rather than wholesale change. The expectation and ambition of the cabinet member was therefore that policy success would always be modest and the best that could be expected was to get a 'few things done'. Modernisation was part of this complex and demanding arena and required a more measured democratic maturity. The cabinet member substantiated this by saying:

You may be able to win an intellectual argument, but are you winning the democratic argument? That's ultimately, that is one of those crosses that we all have to bear. But that, if you get a bunch of people saying this is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong. It's wrong for who?

This statement is not entirely clear but does communicate the cabinet member's conviction that democratic realities transcend seemingly rational intellectual arguments and suggests that policy making is frequently counter intuitive. What is plausible intellectually may not necessarily be grounded in actual realities. It is not clear what these realities are, but the implication is that they are known only to the elected politician, who is burdened by the obligation to check that policy is in tune with this

bigger picture, which others, in their haste to win individual arguments, cannot see. By way of example, the cabinet member explained how politicians bring necessary closure:

Activism is OK, but sometimes with the wider picture you don't understand... I'm totally against war, but what happened about the Second World War, if you get an evil you have to oppose it. Now take it down a few levels... It can be like the roads... We need that road to service a whole load of other things. This will bring in jobs, it will create economies, things like that and OK we don't all like it. Maybe disturbing a nice patch of garden, people can argue that that's the right thing, you know, that's your balance. Ultimately, that's where I believe the democratically elected person is better to take that decision.

Whether local highways and planning issues are commensurable with a manichean view of world war two, 'of evil [that] you have to oppose', or a rhetorical ploy, is debatable. However, it is clearly the case, as the cabinet member attests, that the local democratic mandate exists to weigh up conflicting and contradictory interests, which, by themselves, are unlikely to be resolved. In an ultimate sense, only the 'democratically elected person' can 'take that decision' (i.e. resolve the impasses frequently thrown up by the local democratic process). However, what remains unspoken is the extent to which the cabinet member and his colleagues are prepared to engage in processes of participation in local policy making. The tone suggests that community engagement generates only irresolvable special pleading that is incapable of taking a strategic overview.

The set of statements made in this section underline that in the study areas, unlike in many other parts of the country such as the home counties, the political beliefs and backgrounds of CDWs, officers and politicians were often similar. They are often, in fact, broadly from the centre and left wing. Yet the irony was that superficial proximity could often yield even sharper policy divisions, as both grappled for the moral high ground. The retired youth and community worker who berated the opportunism of politicians, who entered politics as left wingers, only to advance an internal rather than a community agenda, argued that young people paid an especially heavy price for this double standard:

So, therefore, when people come in and say 'I was a young activist', they can get away with it later in life, by saying 'yeah, but I was young and all youngsters are rebellious', right? But when the argument falls, when we have young people on the streets rebelling, they're criminals. When we have political and cabinet members rebelling, they're bright young men going through a process... When you get a group of young people who have not got political aspirations and they're not well organised in the sense of a career, they're a problem. For me, we have a problem with what I call the social agenda, when politicians play the game and that's what we're living in.

The retired youth and community worker notes the juxtaposition of the youthful rebelliousness of political and cabinet members, with 'young people on the streets' is illustrative of the unquestioning social agenda that validates one group as 'going through a process', whilst vilifying the other as a problem. The compromises the former make in

later life, to 'play the game' in order to make effective policy decisions are of a different order. Both groups cease to be 'young' and 'rebellious', but only one is criminalised and excluded from a 'well organised... career'.

To the extent that policy makers are seen as inhabiting an insular world, policy making and participation, as it is practised, can easily appear to be about membership of a privileged group of insiders. The MLGA and in particular, its democratisation strand, was premised on a reform of existing practice and broadening of engagement, outwards into the community. The existence of pressures and tensions that counteracted this, driving policy making inwards, were clearly evidenced by interviewees. It follows that a fuller appreciation of these forces, including the behavioural norms shaped by culture and politics, are a prerequisite in grounding effective policy making and enabling it to have the best chance of successful engagement and implementation.

Chapter seven:

Findings: power

The salience of power as a key theme

Introduction

This chapter will look at the recurrent theme of power, in particular, the structures of power, relationships and restrictions that are placed on local democracy. The testimony of those interviewed speaks to the limited room for manoeuvre amidst daily spaces that shape genuine democratic participation. Centuries of combined experience represented by the testimony of the interviewees portray deep insider knowledge of the circuits of local power. Behind the gloss of institutional and corporate public relations, people sometimes learned to read between the lines, to think critically about their experiences, and to interrogate manifestations of power, however obscure, irrespective of the relative size of that circle of power. They asked the critical strategic and tactical questions: who has power? How did they come by it? How might those who hold power be held to account? Did power flow upward to small groups of elites or downwards into the community? Or when not responding to these big questions, interviewees recalled their coping strategies for situations that bore down upon them - the pressures they usually shouldered alone. Revelations about this quieter individual struggle constitute

equally important testimony because, as Freire wrote, the world can be changed by speaking one true word (1972, 68). In this way, the culture of silence is broken and a path to praxis is made possible.

There were several topics that arose from the interviews that underscored the ubiquity of power and functioned as a conversational threshold that triggered particularly acute comments. I have ordered these topics accordingly as:

- The central / local relationship
- The role of Councillors and of scrutiny
- The role of Directly Elected Mayors
- The community empowerment network (CEN) and local strategic partnership (LSP)
- Local assemblies
- Government Office for London (GOL)
- Conclusion

These topics indicate the structure among power relationships - the role of central and local government and of how power is inscribed in roles, as councillor or mayor. They also indicate perceptions on how it is mediated by institutions and partnerships via Government Office for London and the local strategic partnership and where it exists as a temporary outpost: a local assembly. In each area interviewees distilled their

experience, either as key players in the MLGA or as CD practitioners, and not infrequently as individuals who were bridging both these worlds.

The central / local government relationship

Across a wide cross-section of interviewees, the structure of power distribution was seen as critical and, in particular, the prescribed relationship between central and local government. However, there were few enthusiasts for the dry constitutional details that define the official relationship between central and local government. Rather, the interest was in addressing a perceived imbalance in power, which was thought to be weighted heavily in favour of the centre, to the detriment of both local government and local democracy. No one felt that central government needed greater powers or that local government should be correspondingly weaker. Indeed, the whole point of cross-party support for localism was that central government itself was arguing that local government and local democracy needed to become a more powerful force. The MLGA is premised on an empowered local people, enabled by structural innovations, including modifications to the role of local councillors and council leaders. For this reason, Directly Elected Mayors were created, in tandem with a rejection of the old committee system in favour of a more streamlined cabinet approach; backbench councillors were invited to a new role in scrutinizing proceedings.

By so frequently focusing on the central / local relationship, interviewees were questioning the fundamental viability of the MLGA. At its most blunt, their analysis concluded that nothing had changed, or could change, unless far greater power was devolved away from the centre - and that this was the last outcome that was likely to happen because central government had a vested interest in keeping things as they

were. In effect, the MLGA, they thought, was a one-way equation. It employed superficially radical language, claiming to advocate for an expansion of local democracy. However, in practice any possibility of change was nullified because there was scant understanding of local conditions, an inability to trust both local people and local officials, and a steely grip that monopolised control.

This message is a key finding of the research and one that was shared from top to bottom, from the leaders, the council officers, to the grassroots activists, with each set of frustrations tied to the particular impact or interface concerning central government. The implication was that not only was something lacking from the central / local relationship but also that the terrain was inherently treacherous.

Leaders sometimes complained of a lack of respect from the centre. Officers bemoaned a lack of clarity and the perennial problem of moving goalposts, whereas activists who took up local issues were often unable to make progress on them because of a lack of access to real power holders. The logic of community empowerment, of localism and by extension, modernisation of local government, was for the centre to give up power and for local politicians and residents to take it on and thereby exercise greater control over their community.

An alternative narrative emerged from the interviews, whereby power, as transmitted and monopolised from the centre, was always and only about cognitive dissonance. About how the government had claimed to cede a good measure of power, whilst in other ways it was ensuring that power remained shored up safely within Whitehall and Westminster. And because concentrations of power are almost always corrupting, the ability to dissemble can become reflexive. Time and again, interviewees

struggled to connect the rhetoric with what they knew to be a daily reality. Their reflections on the dilemmas they faced in consequence were voiced in many ways, but all shared a concern about how to negotiate power from above - of being told what to do, of having to comply or adapt, all the while knowing that the situation was contradictory. A longstanding youth and community worker articulated her personal sense of affront:

You can't just suddenly out of the blue become a power structured, centralistic organisation and then they say to people, we're going to give you democracy: Not on! Not on!

The problem with a one-sided central / local relationship is precisely that, 'out of the blue', a 'central organisation' dictates direction, generating resistance. The youth and community worker goes on to say:

In terms of how it's affected me, it's actually had what I presume to be the opposite effect of what the government wanted. But maybe it's had the right effect because I don't want to take part in it, you know, because it doesn't allow me to ask the questions before I'm told what the formula is. The formula is clear, the process is clear so therefore I haven't got any form of ownership in that. If anything now I've been taken out of the free speech, democratic society where I could say what I want, within reason, into a much more carefully thought out future development. So for me, I'm not really into it, I'm not into it at all.

Another council officer, working on the government Sure Start and Neighbourhood Management programmes reinforced the sense of exceptionalism:

At the end of the day, their demand for the community to be joined up and thinking about how you work with partnerships, they don't even do it themselves. And that was always my criticism about working in partnership, we used to get told all the time, in a multi agency way you work in partnership with people yet you look to the government agencies, they don't work in partnership. So you can't, this isn't workable as it stands at the moment. I don't know what is workable, I haven't got the answer to it all because but I know what damn well does work and I know what damn well doesn't work.

Working from the authoritative top table that is the local strategic partnership (LSP), tasked with joining up local policies and joint agency working with public, private and voluntary sectors, a council employed LSP manager said:

When I see government guidance and documents from government, because now nothing comes from government that doesn't have at the bottom of it 'engage the community' it can't happen without the community, duh, duh, duh, community, blah, blah, blah. Now I sometimes wonder do they actually know what they're

talking about and I'm not being facetious or silly but I'm just sort of thinking ... is the government (being) very clear?

The LSP officer was in her post to execute policy, but found that the blanket prescription from the centre was unhelpful, if not impossible, to deliver. It was a no-win situation: not only was it not the kind of community she might have recognised, as a local resident, but also, as a local government officer, she had found that the diktat that must be followed was not even clear. To delve further into the issue of the rights and wrongs of the central / local relationship invites questions above an officer's pay grade. However, whilst an officer might have to follow orders, somehow, in channelling the direction laid down from the centre, council leaders had more space to contest matters. They, after all, have stood for election and set overall council policy, albeit whilst remaining in a subordinate position to central government, which holds the purse strings and ultimate legal sanction of parliamentary sovereignty.

In the interviews, all of the leaders saw shortcomings in the central / local relationship. One leader was particularly categorical about matters:

My own view is that national government shouldn't really get involved in working out the structures of local government. I would have thought they would have had better things to do really.

When asked about the then recent Empowerment White Paper (2008), which framed community empowerment as the main role of local authorities, the same leader had this to say:

Leaders of empowerment, yes, I think we always thought we were anyway.

Because ... we're often the only people in the room with a mandate but when you see the White Paper came out ... it doesn't appear to be a consistent message from government.

Comment on inconsistency and managerial indecision was a familiar refrain, corroborated by another leader, who said:

I think the problem with central is that it doesn't know what it wants to do. Central is in some difficulty generally. The thing about local is, local is where services join up, I have to say it's the only place where they join up... Central government can't join up. It's absolutely impossible... where central government, I think, gets into trouble, (is when) central government then decides it's going to control by looking at the minutiae and it will try to regulate the beJesus out of things. It tries to regulate everything.

A number of the comments that were made repeatedly may seem contradictory: central government was seen as not sufficiently directive about 'what it wants,' and yet

as being too controlling. Echoing the LSP officer's³⁰ plea for clarity, the same leader who complained about over regulation, in the same breath, went on to say: *'What central government does not do is say very explicitly: this is what we want, here are our targets, here's five or six things we want, now deliver that please'*.

By the third term of the New Labour Government, LSPs had a choice of 198 targets to choose from as part of their Local Area Agreement, whereas, amidst the blizzard of performance measurement, the leader said that a roster of just 'five or six things' was preferable. Perhaps it wouldn't have mattered so much if councils had felt respected, but another leader from a third London Borough reported that he had heard from senior government moguls: *'Who just, in unguarded moments, just reveal that basically councils are a waste of space.'*

Whilst there are the polar issues of a lack of clarity versus excessive interference, what is more corrosive is when the more powerful partner (central government) displays a fundamental lack of respect (Stewart, 2003). With a monopoly on power comes the license to disparage, which would in other conditions be far harder to sustain. This visceral disregard was felt acutely by some in local government, as evidenced by their dealings with civil servants as well as politicians. Politicians may come and go, but in the words of the leader, who was told his life's work was a 'waste of space,' it was a rerun of a famous 1980s television satire:

I blame the civil service for a lot of this because they just kind of, if ever there was a television programme that encapsulated the truth, it was 'Yes Minister'. They

³⁰ The leader and the officer are from different London Boroughs, which underlines the point that the demand for clarity transcends a particular local administration

really do do that because they also know that the minister will move on if they just delay it, just delay it.

The central / local relationship is characterised by a specific type of structure, by political and institutional culture, and by the people who reside in the community. The structure has been skewed toward the centre, and this has in turn led to a culture that has been characterised by acute discomfort and which, over many years, has become oppressive, as articulated by local leaders. The end result has been that human interactions, the people element, became charged with what was perceived as either high-handed disregard from a patrician elite or a degree of reciprocal resentment that doubled back. The leader who blamed the civil service expanded on his theme of the peculiarities and arrogance of central government and how immersion in the realities of local government might redeem it:

The occasional minister may get it, then when you bang up against particularly the civil service, that just absorbs it all and somehow (you) don't get real change. To be honest I think it's the civil servants as much as the politicians at the centre who sustain that notion that all power comes from Westminster. And it's interesting, you occasionally encounter people who've been in the civil service, come out, and outside it's marvellous, it's the great thing the British gave to the rest of the world. Well (I'm) not convinced by that. And the sheer bloody arrogance of a lot of them and this strange belief that they have that developing expertise is a bad thing: (you're) a generalist, you should be able to move on every couple of years because if you start to really understand your subject then

you get captured. I suspect that works with localities; that civil servants who get to know localities start to actually feel differently. We've got staff here, people come out of the civil service, and are kind of blown away that they now do things that have a real impact. They can actually see the effect of what they're doing.

This complaint was shared by another leader:

I think the civil service is just an incredibly dead hand that we have got to try to get to grips with... The civil service don't get it, they don't want it. Some, some are better than others but it's really hard to move them along, so there is distrust.

It is the job of community activists to understand how power works at every level of the state apparatus, how it can be challenged, and how local accountability structures can be bent to their will (Alinsky, 1972; Taylor, 2003, 121-126). Activists are, in a curious way, a doppelganger of local politicians, of leaders of councils, because both have cut their teeth on many of the same local battles. The activists interviewed knew that whilst their boroughs were run as a one-party state, wherein the council had a monopoly position on local power, all roads led back to Westminster. In characteristically blunt fashion, one activist asked: *'Tell me something that local government can really do? What can it really do, outside the control of central government and its inspectorates and its regulations?'* Answering their own question, the activist concluded: *'government... will leave some small-scale decision-making around its main structures but the main policies and inspectorates, standard settings, they're all central'.*

This view, that local government existed to deliver targets set and monitored by the centre, was echoed by a councillor from another borough. The similarity between activist and councillor is striking: both highlighted the central diktat given to local government. The power relationship was seen as this: central stipulates what is to be done and local does it, and is then held to account to ensure that it does so satisfactorily. The councillor spelt out the relationship as follows:

The council is basically run to deliver the targets set by (the) centre, or to achieve the markings from Audit Commission or from other organisations, whether it's three stars or two stars, that's basically their target rather than anything else. That's my view. They... need to make sure how they fit into the targets set by the centre.

Whilst leaders and councillors might understandably have a personal investment in viewing local government as an important, distinctive, and separate governance realm, this distinction did not hold for the activist who questioned what local government was actually for. Instead, the activist was prepared to argue that in practice the central / local relationship did not exist, if only because local government was in actuality, solely a function of central government:

Local government just means government taken down to the local level (laughs). That's it. So you know how financial controls from central government determine what gets delivered, housing, social services, education, the rules and regulations and all that sort of stuff. And of course there's a bit of largesse that gets mixed in,

so they can have, so a few of these Labour Party and local government politicians can puff themselves up like bull frogs, but in the end they're part of the establishment. They, I never thought there was any local democracy ... Certainly not since the Second World War, (maybe even)... since the Norman Conquest we've had a central state in Westminster. There is no other bloody governmental centre.

It could be argued that it is in the nature of activists to be polemical, to smash the cant of respectable dogmas (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979). But in fact there was more that united activists on this issue, with leaders and council officers, than divided them. All groups identified the dangers of a one-way relationship, of central government acting on, and dictating to, the local area. Both could see the dangers of a one-way relationship. Another activist, in a different borough, similarly saw that something was missing at the heart of local government:

What they (i.e. local government) claim to be doing, what they're actually tasked to do and what people believe they have the capacity to do and they are not doing, ... actually this expectation is ... far higher than what the council can do. (I) actually think that they are a pretty small structure that should not claim to be what it is not ... The council is claiming to be (the) community, you know ... it is not even a good landlord.

Local government, already confined to a subordinate role in regard to the business of nationwide government, was seen as struggling to fulfil even this basic

administrative function. However, behind issues of delivery of services and miscellaneous local administration, lies a far bigger debate that is not concerned about a dry technocratic functionalism. For much of the time, the central / local relationship was seen as contained within the boundaries of spending the money (given predominantly from the centre) and hitting the targets (as defined once again by the centre). This is a reductive case of 'she who pays the piper calls the tune.' However, what was really underlying the central / local sense of grievance, in the view of those interviewed, was a denial of basic democratic rights. Whilst there were local elections that generated a local mandate for local government, this was not seen as being respected. This was something that the leaders of councils felt understandably strongly about, as one leader protested:

I think one of our problems is that we run away from democracy. The Americans don't, the Americans are very clear, you win by one vote you're in charge mate, you get on with it. And they think you should be in charge because they believe in democracy. We don't. We pay lip service to it but our civil service hate it. They think they should be in charge. Why not? They've been in charge for 500 years. No they've been in charge longer than that. The upper classes are never going to give up power.

The accusation here is that democracy is being vitiated by a convergence of class interest and civil servants and that power is malfunctioning dramatically, culminating in the impairment of local democracy. It was a point that interviewees did not linger over, (perhaps because its implications might serve to overwhelm or demoralise more patient

efforts to establish genuine localism). The same leader who doubted whether the ‘upper classes would ever give up power’ sought to win the argument by returning to the fundamentals of what it means to have a mandate, namely, that power should flow from elections, and hence from the people. Power was given by the people via the ballot box hence both local and general elections gave legitimacy of similar if not equal weight. Whilst he could see that central government also had a mandate, he noted that it was relative, not absolute. He spelt out the argument as follows:

Now they have a right because they're elected. Now I would argue that while Parliament is sovereign, local, local councillors and local elected members have rights because they're elected locally. And I believe the ballot box is what confers legitimacy and Parliament has legitimacy nationally to set national goals and decide nationally what it wants. There's a regional layer in London and a local level, each of us should be entitled to set and do the things we think right.

Whilst one leader spoke about what he thought was ‘right,’ i.e., greater local autonomy given to ‘things we think are right’, another leader spelt out what he thought was wrong:

The assumption in our democracy, going back to Cromwellian times, is that all power rests with the national parliament who may or may not share some of that, which I just, intellectually, emotionally, find utterly wrong.

Those who were most active in local democracy, be they leaders, activists or CDWs within or outside of the council or similar public body, experienced the power relationship between central and local government as essentially unsatisfactory, as unduly limiting and, in principle, undemocratic. The frequency with which this issue came up makes it a pivotal factor in shaping the effectiveness of overall CD. If the wider unwritten constitutional underpinnings and conventions were restricting local actors to such an extent, the environment on which CD could act was already significantly constrained. Put another way: how could officials, workers, and activists empower others, when they felt so systematically disempowered themselves?

The role of local councillors and of scrutiny

At the most local level, CDWs' relationship with elected councillors is likely to be far closer, with more frequent encounters, than with senior council officers, the local MP, or the leader of the council (Twelvetrees, 2002, 71). However, even though CDWs and local councillors may be more grounded in day-to-day local concerns, this proximity also underlines the fact that under the MLGA, both were increasingly cut adrift from the real power bases in the borough. Councillors are party political animals, strongly guided by the local party line (Hall & Leach, in Stoker, 2004, 150-165). The average councillor is white, male and in their late fifties, and this has led to a stereotype of councillors as being 'pale, male and stale.'³¹ The study areas chosen did not buck this demographically

³¹ Responding to the report, called Routes to Power for Ethnic Minority Women, the Government's communities secretary Hazel Blears said: "There are those who talk about our councillors being 'pale, male and stale'. I think that label is unfair, but we do need to ensure all elected representatives, national and local, better reflect communities." (October 2007) http://www.times-series.co.uk/news/1821490.m5ec/?from=ec&c=t&to=1821490&l=taking_a_womans_council

homogenising trend. The faces of those elected onto the council did not reflect the diversity of the street. A council housing officer described it this way:

The majority of councillors are older, male, white and there needs to be, in this country, in this day and age, there needs to be far more diversity and I'm all for that. But there's nothing there to encourage women, there's nothing there to encourage young people, let alone young women with children. I don't see anything coming out from the local authority or from government to encourage any of this.

The traditional role of councillors was felt to be dangerously anachronistic by New Labour; hence the MLGA sought to transform it. The previous committee system, in which there was a high degree of councillor involvement in all areas of council business, was dismantled. In the main, decisions were now taken by a leader (or directly elected Mayor) and cabinet. The majority of councillors, in practice, had a greatly reduced role. To fill the time previously taken up attending committees, backbench councillors were directed towards 'scrutiny' and 'community leadership' roles. Most interviewees thought that scrutiny committees had little actual power, and tended to review decisions that had been taken after the fact. It was exceptionally rare for any scrutiny committee to challenge or overturn executive decisions.

The development of the role of councillors as community leaders under the MLGA eventually saw councillors chairing local area assemblies in all study areas, at times with a small budget for residents' prioritised local issues. Several backbench councillors

described this as a demotion from the previous committee system that had allowed them to be power brokers in the town hall. One councillor said:

It's not the same now. I also chair the scrutiny committee, only thing we do is we get the reports, send our comments whatever they are. We can't really change anything. It's only comments, playing at the edges rather than any major policy decisions.

In all interviews, the plight of the local councillor featured strongly. The general view from CDWs, activists, council officers and councillors themselves was that the role of councillor was increasingly marginal and that this was a further diminution of local democracy. Activists who had no truck with party politics still recognised a democratic deficit. One activist described it by telling a story of a recent encounter:

I was at a funeral yesterday and talking to a (local) councillor, mutual friends of the deceased. Now said (local) councillor has been around not just locally, but across East and South East London in general as a sort of activist and as somebody who gets things done. And she was saying to me that it is now impossible for her as a councillor to get any information about anything outside of her ward because (the council) has decided that councillors are not to be supplied with any information unless it is strictly a constituency matter... Councillors are restricted in the information they can access and agendas for council committees are bulked out with extraneous detail. So we have a situation where backbench councillors are completely controlled by council machines. And it's hard to

imagine why anybody who is a councillor remains a councillor. It's hard to imagine why anybody... would want to be a councillor in a situation where councillors are treated that badly. You know the idea that democracy is going to be extended to the general population, because how can you make decisions without information? It is a tragedy. Local authorities pay lip service and go through the motions but the reality is that power is being concentrated to ever smaller groups of people in boroughs.

If CDWs and local residents want to get things done, then on the basis of the story told by the activist about the thwarted councillor encountered at the funeral of a mutual friend, then the conclusion reached would be that local councillors would be unlikely to be able to help them, because they were under siege from within. The local elected councillor was telling the local activist an extraordinary tale of obstruction. Under normal circumstances, the local activist was the last person to be airing dirty laundry to, but things had become impossible.

A senior council officer confirmed the activist's understanding of 'power being concentrated to ever smaller groups':

I think it's wrong that, de facto, 10 or 12 people run the borough of (X) as a management committee... The real test for me about whether it's wrong or right is, I think that when unelected individuals, whether officers within the authority or officers within the community or any other sector, have more de facto influence and power than elected members, however good or bad they are that seems to

me to be the nub. That essentially you have 50-60 councillors, who take all the crap, but very little purchase on what happens on a day-to-day basis.

A number of interviewees commented on the motivation for wanting to be a councillor: one retired CDW, who at one point considered standing as a councillor and knew his local party machine well, had this to say:

(When) people become a Councillor they're interviewed by those of a same mind. They're passing through a system and they eventually become MPs, that's the route. Those that don't have that incentive to move in that way die by the wayside and they're the ones that are locally committed with the passion. So therefore (there are)... two major factors, you're in control of the factor... (of those) who are going to come through as your Councillors and your MPs, and you know that the others will get frustrated and fall away so therefore your opposition goes.

The people most likely to have an affinity with CD and local issues, who are committed to their local area seem to be fated to 'die by the wayside', sacrificed in pursuit of party political power. This retired CDW saw the hand of government once again pulling the strings and went on to say:

The very thing that a centralist government doesn't need is a mobile committed power, a power struggle. So therefore to fit in with this process they've almost been able to have, like, feeder schools to their own political parties. And local councils become feeder schemes to them.

Councillors, like CDWs, can be seen as the opposition by their own parties and by central government. The municipal Left of the 1980s triggered a set of responses from the Thatcher government, whose ramifications were still being felt, years afterwards. Many in the VCS have found transitional careers in the sector before moving on; similarly, the position of local councillor has been a stepping stone for the most ambitious and arguably the most able. A former senior councillor described his ex-colleagues in this way:

We aren't blessed with 60 bright councillors, so you'd have the brightest would obviously be taken up with the mayor and his cabinet, right? So the community lead members were nothing but the dross.

One community activist echoed this disparagement, but rooted it in a culture of fear, tied to the hope of internal political advancement:

I think the whole lot of them are some lazy scallywags who God knows why they, you know, either they are in those positions because it's a step up for somewhere else, MP or you know. But... there is a fear, people are fearful of some the things, there is no question about that because of what some of them told us to our faces... Before we used to have questions asked that we wanted. Now we have to depend on the Freedom of Information (Act)... When we attend the meetings we see how they've voted and you know I remember going up in the gallery

looking at some of these bastards who I'd spoken to before and they want to keep (their jobs) you know what I mean, they're so scared.

The councillors interviewed fell into two camps: those who robustly defended the new direction set out by the MLGA, which couched the role of backbench councillor in terms of scrutiny and more active ward business, and those who felt a profound antipathy towards it. Whereas under the old committee system councillors' work was done within the council chamber, on committees that had recognisable powers, the MLGA transferred power to a smaller grouping of cabinet and leader or Mayor. The role was then redefined in terms of a smaller town hall presence, which included occasional scrutiny of decisions made by leader and cabinet or Mayor and cabinet and a strong exhortation to throw themselves into ward-based activity. One former councillor who viewed the new scrutiny role positively had this to say: *'In my own experience there's a lot of councillors struggle with scrutiny, they don't understand it. ... I think one of the crucial issues to scrutiny is leadership'*.

His critique of colleagues was based on their deficit of knowledge and skill – they didn't understand the policy and implicitly they lacked leadership. He went on to say:

I think that's a tragedy really 'cos I think if used properly scrutiny can both influence, call to account and can even lead the agenda. I mean it's not a very popular statement but I think when it's handled right you've got the space and time to suggest things and bring people in to articulate vision and I think in that sense scrutiny has got everything going for it. I didn't believe that to start with I guess but I had quite an unusual structure through scrutiny because I began as a

chair of a committee... I did have the power and influence to stop the dinosaurs, as it were, in my own group from wrecking it.

A stinging riposte from another councillor, who had twenty years experience and was active in the same borough, described supporters of the changed governance arrangements in this way:

To my mind such councillors, usually they pontificate (about) themselves, (how) they're powerful, (but) they're not really powerful, they don't mean much these days. Power lies basically with the mayor and the cabinet. And their power lies with central government but they're delivering the agenda, shaping the local things rather than anything else. There is not much originality. Other councillors don't mean much these days ... They think they've got the power. I don't think they have. I don't think they all know that (laughs). If they know, they pretend not to know it. They think they're powerful but in my mind, no they don't have any power. Power lies in six or seven hands.

As has already been argued (chapter four), CDWs need to know where power is vested in order to empower local communities. They need to know who has it, how it is used, and how it can be held to account and accessed by local people. If local councillors, as the formal elected expression of local democratic power, feel powerless, then the work of CDWs may become more difficult because there are fewer elected representatives that have influence. According to the councillor who argued his colleagues were not really powerful because power has been transferred upward, into

fewer elected hands, away from communities. However, his former colleague, who viewed the changes more favourably, argued that such pessimism could become a self-fulfilling prophecy and stressed two key capabilities: individual pro-activity and resilience:

In my book the local councillor (should be) saying: look, don't worry what Party you're in, here's some, here's a set of things you can do, even on the backbenches. Don't get upset, you know, you can make a difference. Go for it and don't be bullied by the people in your group. Just do it, just do your thing.

This challenge is an important statement: clearly, in his view, individuals have a degree of personal responsibility towards any outcome. They can be assertive, hard working, and by choosing to take an optimistic view, may be more likely to engender change. The former councillor who urged colleagues to go for it felt that:

You can do more than MPs, you know, in a council you'll be doing stuff rather than just passing laws, so we don't have the same salary and the same prestige but you get stuff done if you take it in the right way and you don't overload yourself.

In contrast his more critical and pessimistic colleague said:

The consequences of doing this (i.e. being a councillor) I've known people spend a lifetime, sacrificing so much of their careers, and they achieve nothing and they left their families starving.

Whilst it may be possible that two councillors can have such different experiences it is harder to believe that both may be broadly right. However, it is possible to bring in another perspective on the efficacy of local councillors, from an activist who ran a long and successful campaign in the same borough, who had dealings with every councillor in the course of their campaign:

The council's supposed to do much more than they can do. There's a lot of people who are left out, they are left out and they are cut out from any discussion altogether. That's a fact you know and that's why I say it as it is, but I would say the problem, my reason for saying it as it is, was for me the first round of meetings with the councillors, meeting with the Labour councillors – completely sheepish and uncritical to the point of actually denying the knowledge of what's going on you know. 'Oh! If they are doing so it must be right'. Ah well, you are there to scrutinise, you know, I am coming here to ask what is going on. You tell me you don't know! I did probably lose patience very quickly because I thought that they were woefully inadequate.

This activist's experience was that councillors were 'cut out of' decisions, uncritical, and complacent ('completely sheepish') about their lack of power, and overall her conclusion was that they were 'woefully inadequate'. It is a damning indictment. There is a Kafkaesque quality to her encounter as a resident and a citizen asking questions:

(They) don't even understand the question (laughter). (They) are surprised, you know, there is a question. Actually (they're) pretending to be surprised because of course there is a question and they are elected members of council. There's a lot of good people and there is a big number of filling, complete filling. You know people elected (their) candidate and they're elected on loyalty, that's it, the capacity to be uncritical.

Part of the inspiration for CD work arises from dialogue, as described by Paulo Freire (1972), whereby local people ask open-ended questions of themselves and others as a way of breaking the culture of silence. In the example cited by the activist, the local councillors had the opportunity to pursue purposeful questions. Instead the activist noted that some denied that there was even a question. Another community worker had an insight into why this might arise:

Yeah it seems to be in most local authorities regarded as bad form to ask the simplest questions... It does seem unacceptable for councillors to ask factual questions of officers... If a councillor asks a question it's perfectly acceptable for officers to be rude and insulting answering that question in public. I have witnessed it at ... planning meetings where councillors, whether of the ruling party or opposition parties, ask a perfectly reasonable question and get spoken to in a manner nobody should be spoken to in a public meeting... So of course eventually councillors learn to stop asking questions unless they are extremely determine.

Whilst some councillors were able to ask questions, typically, cabinet members and chairs of scrutiny committees, the community worker observed 'rude and insulting' responses to mainly powerless local councillors, and noted a different dynamic in relation to their more powerful colleagues. The community worker noted that this dynamic was conditioned by political patronage and claimed that it worked in the following way:

(The leader) of course sussed out that the trick wasn't to have your cronies in the cabinet. The trick was to have your cronies as chair of scrutiny. And that having totally emasculated the scrutiny system, where it didn't matter who was in the cabinet they'd do, do what (he) told them to do anyway.

The discipline of party politics was seen to have a powerful influence on the kind of questions asked by councillors and the consequences for any departure from the expectations of party loyalty. Both CDWs and local councillors must not only be extremely determined but also dedicate years to unpacking the relationships and nuances of their local party machine, it was suggested. One cabinet member described their formative years as a councillor in this way:

When I first started I was a councillor in (ward name) and my first four years was definitely a steep learning curve despite the fact that I used to be an MP's case worker and the lack of actual input into what was happening. You were almost, almost but not quite, apologists for services from the council, where if it went wrong it was your fault and then you had to field those things.

The fielding of complaints was a punishing introduction to the role of councillor - 'an apologist for services'. The key question is whether changes to council structures, specifically the change from the old committee system to directly elected Mayors with a cabinet or a leader and cabinet, has led to better outcomes. The cabinet member that progressed, after a 'steep learning curve', had little regard for his colleagues' fondness for the past:

They hark back to committees, they love it, yeah but I think a lot of the committee structure gave people a feeling that this was something that they were doing, if they attended the attendance sheet was ticked so it made them feel as though they were doing that, that job.

In other words, it the golden age of committees was illusory. The cabinet member argued that his colleagues felt they were 'doing something', they clocked in via 'attendance sheets', but questioned how much was actually achieved. In policy terms, as chapter two has already shown, the decline in voter turnout at local elections prompted New Labour's modernisation of local government in order to revive local democracy. However, it was not only backbench councillors who annoyed their senior cabinet colleagues by 'harking back'. A council manager, with a CD background, reached back in time to describe an era of greater accessibility and responsiveness:

It used to be, oh God, I'm showing my age now. Back in the late 70s early 80s (in the borough)... there was the committee structure, rightly or wrongly. I still think

that's the best way in democratic terms. But it didn't become personalised, you could go and have your debate, and you could still go down the pub and have a pint afterwards whether you were a community activist or someone who was just involved... And that all changed very quickly. And again it's down to personalities... A lot of local authority councillors... were high on power and so for me it was, I watched the change in ward councillors... the power had shifted hadn't it? The power had gone from ward councillors who knew their role within the political system to not knowing their political role... You can wrap it up and call it whatever you like can't you, and that was just a holding position I think, to try and find out why or try and work out a position for backbenchers who were not involved in the cabinet. And that's what this is all about, you know, let's be realistic. All of this stuff that Hazel Blears is doing about ward councillors is because too many of the old, the ward councillors up and down the country have said 'what's the point of us being here with the new cabinet style, we have no role'.

The role of councillors is a critical element in the CD equation, yet activists, CDWs, council officers, and many councillors saw that the role had been radically undermined. Consequently, it had little to offer to CD, in their view, unless elected members were able to thrive in adversity: to be especially determined and creative.

In the next section the MLGA innovation of directly elected Mayors will be considered, along with the stronger centralised leadership that this entailed, and whether

this change was understood to have led to actual benefits for CD despite the decline in the power of backbench councillors.

The role of directly elected Mayors

The location of power that CDWs needed to work with and be able to influence in order to benefit the communities they worked with became more centralised under the modernising local government agenda. In two of the three study areas, the boroughs chose the directly elected Mayor model – a signature innovation of the New Labour government, albeit first mooted by Conservative minister Michael Heseltine, drawing inspiration from the strong leadership of American cities. The American Mayors of such cities as New York, Washington, and Chicago were known around the world, and this easily identifiable means of vesting power in one person was thought to facilitate accountability, because every citizen would know who was in charge (Rao, 2000, 175).

If the objective was for communities to know who was in control, it succeeded, according to one officer:

I wasn't working for the council before the Mayor but I would say, as a resident, I would say that I feel I've noticed a difference in having an elected Mayor.

Because rather than having sixty people contemplating their navels, various committees, whatever else, never actually making decisions, you now have one person. Whether you agree with what they say or not, is prepared to put their head above the parapet and say: 'I did this'.

In contrast, a CDW officer, active in the same borough, also noted there had been a difference:

That sense of having the glowering figure of the Mayor hanging over (us)... I can't reinforce enough just how much you've got this person who is actually very, very powerful indeed.

Before the institution of elected Mayor was created power was the monopoly of a local political party. It was now seen as being concentrated even more heavily in just the hands of one person. The CDW described how the sense of a strong figure 'hanging over' him was rooted in political stasis:

They do say they weigh the Labour vote here rather than count it. It's never going to change. So what's interesting about that is locally, if you become the Mayor, and you have frankly, considerably greater powers than you would as a local MP... (the Mayor) can stay mayor almost as long as he wants effectively; the turnout for elections are still not great and I get the sense that that post can be really whatever its post holder wants it to be.

In his experience of working for the council, his observation was: 'You really got a sense everyone was trying to second guess what it was the mayor wanted'. A councillor in another borough, who had unsuccessfully campaigned against the setting up of a directly elected Mayor, explained her reservations:

We're trying to, sort of, put some American head on a British torso, and really it doesn't deliver the things. And for me it's a step backward rather than a step forward. There are, as far as I know, 12 directly elected Mayors and nobody wants them anymore, the government's keen to push them forward. Personally I wouldn't like them to be extended anywhere else. ... I'm against it.

She described how the idea was presented:

When the system came in we were told that once we got a directly elected Mayor people would become more involved. They will have one person to go to, he or she will be recognisable and the participation will increase. I haven't seen any participation.

In her eyes the power of making decisions was crudely repositioned into the hands of a single individual:

One person's bad. The Mayor dictates, the cabinet follows, officers deliver, and the councillors to my mind are irrelevant at the moment ... The Mayor, he's got the full support of the officers and he's very much confident that he can deliver whatever he wants to deliver... We are not privy to what goes on in the group officers meetings... The policy used to be made by the... Labour group... (but now) the mayor comes to the group... He may listen, change to some extent but usually he will follow his line... because he knows he's setting the trend.

This was exactly what the government modernisers would have wanted – a leader able to be confident in being able to ‘deliver whatever he wants’. In another borough, a former councillor described what he had witnessed:

We had an elected Mayor who makes all the decisions. I mean there is genuinely no purpose for there to be any elected members on the basis that they're not allowed to do anything. They have no influence. The Mayor has formed this little very highly paid circle around him and pays everybody so that you don't have a voice so therefore your community doesn't have a voice.

In recent years, in corporate and managerial terms, strong and clear individual leadership has become ever more conspicuous. However the cult of leader does not sit easily with CD practice, which has a preference for collective action and the sharing of power (Lifelong Learning UK, 2009). The fear of offending and the damaging effects of being shut out from the council, in turn limit the quality and diversity of what CD, the VCS, and wider civil society were able to generate. A CDW described the mentality this way: ‘It’s almost like it has to be we win everything, we will destroy you, to be honest, even when they probably agree’.

Something about the political culture, the way power was habitually used to shape everything around it, was perceived to be increasingly absolute and vindictive. Clearly, if this equivalent of political warfare were to become normalised, then the prospects for CD and local democracy would be correspondingly limited. Another CDW regretted the move to having a Mayor, noting the political culture had tendencies that

fostered division: 'Actually with an elected Mayor I think it's such a bad idea, he's become such a divisive figure'.

A community and youth worker similarly contradicted the conventional view of directly elected Mayors as a democratic innovation. For her, the capacity for deeper democracy had become more constrained: 'The whole democratic process of either having an elected Mayor or inner cabinet or whatever doesn't work, it's a closing down of democracy for me'.

The CDWs and activists interviewed were consistently critical of the new mayoral model. Instituting the position of mayor took power further away from people, in their view. It was not just that backbench councillors were left out; the whole culture was affected. A community activist saw a putrefying effect over the years:

(We've) got an executive Mayor and everything that's happened... goes back to that change so: What has the executive mayor brought about? Well it's brought about drastic changes, all negative... You have an extraordinary focusing of power on one person. And I can't remember whose dictum it was, 'all power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely', I can't remember who it was, a famous guy. But it's been the story of that really, coming true.

One aspect of community work and the issues it generates is to put pressure on officials. From this it follows that there are invariably consequences, a process of falling into, and out of, favour. This swing back and forth was possible where power is distributed. A community group might alienate one department or councillor but gain allies elsewhere, even in a one-party state. However, if that same group raised issues

that alienated a directly elected Mayor, the consequences were likely to be far more severe. The activist who believed in the truism that 'power corrupts', saw relations with the VCS atrophying, as a consequence of the adoption of a mayoral model:

In the olden days, the council used to have departments (who) had their own relations with voluntary sector groups for various reasons. So there was always some sort of reason that could be worked out because if your group was naughty, in inverted commas, there'd be people in the council who supported you for their reasons and others who were against you. And in the end they'd sort of balance. And in a way although it's not democracy, there was a democracy in that, because people could speak up and against you in local government. Now all that's gone and the only, you're treated in a single way. So if you don't please the Mayor, or the Mayor sees no point in you; that's it. So you're either right in there or you're right out and there's no medium. So that's the big change that's occurred.

The next section explores the efficacy of new joint-governance arrangements that arose alongside of changes in local government. The opportunity afforded by such innovations as the local strategic partnerships (LSPs) was that they might bridge the gap between council and community, through the sharing of power across agencies and sectors, and so enable not only better-quality public services, but also stronger CD and deeper local democracy.

The new governance: local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and community empowerment networks (CENs)

For CD to add value to the MLGA, its most likely point of entry was via CENs and their LSP. This was where both the funding and rhetoric of engagement was strongest. The 2000 Neighbourhood Renewal Framework and 2001 Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plan signalled the creation of both LSPs and CENs to address the problems of the 88 most deprived areas in England. Lewisham, Greenwich, and Newham featured at the most deprived end of the spectrum, with Newham scoring especially highly, including third highest on two of the six indices of multiple deprivation indicators (IMD 2000).

However one CD worker, who sought to open up the new governance structures by supporting local VCS representatives, felt only discomfort and defensiveness from his council. The notion of shared power, brokered by CD, proved in this instance problematic:

We used to organise, so I would have regular meetings with the LSP reps and the community forums chairs because they were the community input into the local strategic partnership. And they really didn't like that, they really didn't like the organisation of having somebody who would regularly meet with the community forum chairs and the LSP reps and organise them... It was... very basic work like taking the Local Strategic Partnership agenda and going through each item on the agenda and doing a briefing note so that actually we created more of a level playing field. So instead of the council always being the only people who knew

what was going on. We organised so that actually everybody went to the table with roughly the same amount of knowledge and information.

Supporting and briefing community representatives was precisely what the government community empowerment guidance was asking for, but for many councils it was a step too far. They regarded themselves as leaders of community empowerment, and they could not see how such a role could be shared. In this case CD, and by extension the VCS, was not a partner when it came to building or strengthening partnerships. The CDW recalled the refusal to countenance an alternative power base and the tactic of apparent inability to comprehend what government guidance in this instance entailed:

But the council ... said right from day one, 'we don't understand this community empowerment network. We don't understand what it is'. And first for about the first six months I always responded to them, and gave them briefings and stuff like that. And then they continued and I just said: I've had enough of your nonsense. You don't want to understand. This is what we do. We are part of the local strategic partnership. We are the community part of it and you can't get rid of us like that.

From another study area, a local activist recorded the instinctive antagonism held by local authorities toward the VCS which was present before but was now heightened by the VCS-led CENs. She said that a notional partnership designed for cross-sector work had become monopolised by its strongest partner (the council):

I think, certainly across East London, East and South East London, local authorities perceived local strategic partnerships as a threat and did a very good job of strangling them at birth. Councillors and council leaders were told that the government says the council has to run it, which wasn't true. Council's usurped the administration of LSPs and then proceeded to administer them badly. They failed to, having usurped the role of administering LSPs, they failed to administer them to the sort of basic standards of the cemetery grass cutting subcommittee, you know. Attending LSPs where there'd be various random heaps of unpaginated papers and the main achievement of LSPs was to give multi agency working a bad name, you know. It's all rather sad.

Working in a partnership requires a belief that power can be shared and that no single identity trumps any other. In particular, for the LSP to retain a distinct and shared identity, it was important that all partners understood the interconnectivity of the LSP and for that reason did not seek either to opt out or take it over. However, the CEN CD worker who met with alleged confusion over her role from the council faced similar incomprehension over the separation of council and LSP:

They don't understand, or maybe they do understand and couldn't give a toss, that the LSP is not the council. Now in (my borough) there isn't a fag paper between it. So as far as (they are) concerned, the council and the LSP, well it's all the same organisation. Now in other areas it isn't so clear cut, so in some of the more enlightened boroughs the LSP is quite separate from the council. And I

think, you see I think that government thought that that was the case. And it was never the case, or certainly not here.

Another community worker active in the same study area argued that the community representation on the LSP was not grounded in the wider VCS, despite the existence of the CEN and their CD efforts in trying to bridge the LSP. This criticism (quoted directly below) underlines how difficult the task of CD was in relation to the LSP could be, given the council antipathy towards the CEN's support of such representatives and the way power could be fiercely contested within the local VCS. The community worker who criticised LSP community representatives felt that:

No they never, they never penetrated the community; they were the product of patsy voluntary sector groups, Labour Party members and their friends in the community and local government; never. And the debate never got beyond that inner ring of people who were gonna discuss these things and before a discussion was had they decide who is going to take part in it. So, (laughs) it's byzantine in its complexity and they spend a lot of time carving things out before they happen and making sure certain people aren't invited and certain people are.

The community worker describes his view that the types of people who found their way onto LSPs on behalf of the VCS became insular and took on characteristics more reminiscent of bureaucracy and nepotism. For a part of the VCS with temporary privileged access, to close its doors, is a depressingly familiar story – the empowerment of some, by the exclusion of others (McCulloch, in Hoggett, 1997, 51-67; Taylor, 2003,

138; Wallace, 2010, 82-86). However, the challenge of taking on such a role in its fullest sense, required superhuman perseverance. The same community worker who scorned 'patsy voluntary sector groups' recognised that:

Yeah you have to make that your day job to achieve it and even then you're up against powerful forces. And they can ... chop it, they can cut you off. Well they certainly can in (my borough).

For statutory agencies there was less agonising about representation and more of a brass tacks approach to the need to be seen to be doing partnership working in order to secure the resources that were premised on this new form of collaborative working, as directed by central government. As a council LSP officer described it:

I think the funding drive (is) being partnership driven (and) is like, well how does this fit in with this, this and this?... But a lot of it is (that) you won't get funding unless you can prove you are working with your partners to do so. And I think that's been the driver for it, not that people would suddenly feel 'oh wouldn't it be nice if we all got on together'.

The problem with adopting a steely pragmatism, rather than idealistic goodwill, was that the LSP required a measure of reciprocity. Specifically, it required that the partners put their hands in their pockets, to demonstrate active and tangible commitment. The LSP officer described the following scenario:

The idea is that all the partners that should sit on the LSP all pop in £10,000 and then we end up with, you know, a reasonable sized pot of money for people to apply for small grants from. Don't really see it happening and ... and when we did the Compact we asked all the partners that we need to contribute some money to making it happen. I think we got £5k from the PCT.

Reflecting on the commitment required and the demands that were made of partners, the LSP officer concluded:

I don't think from my point of view if it was me I would probably stop coming because I, if it was my time and my evening that I was giving up to go to an LSP board meeting I would have undoubtedly stopped by now.

In another borough, her equivalent said she felt that expectations might be too high, but that informality was the key to making progress:

Well I think there is room for manoeuvre, otherwise why are we all getting out of bed? But I think people expect too much... I think it's unrealistic for things to happen at the partnership table. In my mind things always happen off table. Everything happens off table. The really important partnership decisions happen off the table.

From a CD perspective, it was not ideal that 'everything happens off table' because the VCS reps then had to attend even more meetings, meetings they may not

even know to be happening, on occasion. However, there were seen to be consequences in asking straightforward questions:

When you're in a partnership table you're either discussing something in general terms, agreeing a strategy in general terms, raising concerns in general terms, specific stuff at the partnership table is never ever right... When you have meetings off the table... with people, it's in their interest and they, they're there. They want to discuss something. They don't have this collective we're in a room, we're in public, nothing. The only thing about partnership tables is it doesn't suit the partnership to start embarrassing each other because that goes against partnership working. Nobody at that table has to be there. It's all about interest of working together. If I turn up to something and I'm made to... feel crap... I might stop turning up, so what happens in the end is that we start having people not turning up. So yes, you need to get people to pull their weight and everything else. You don't do that on the partnership table in public with everyone else around; that just doesn't happen.

In community forums, which could be equally collusive, the CD aim was for plain speaking, in a safe space that would generate not only accountability but also the confidence to take collective action. The LSP, as described by its principal officer, was status conscious and self-censoring; people were checking each other out, seeing who was worth talking to later, outside of the meeting. People were also sensitive to any imagined slights and attendance could easily become an issue. The LSP officer was aware of the limitations:

They may be thinking about their shopping list, I'm not saying they do because I actually think most of my members are brilliant. But I am aware, you know, some of these people just pitch up, some of them don't even read the papers. I'm lucky if they do.

A senior manager in a council neighbourhood renewal department argued that there were limits to local representation as practised by the VCS and local residents. Beyond a certain point:

(They) could engage on a par with service providers around the quality of the services... (but) it has not always worked well because that relationship is not always, it's not equal... Now the interesting thing is, from my experience is that at a neighbourhood level it worked very well. But in terms of connection to real centre of power, at the centre ... that balance between the focus and service delivery and the real change in relationship in terms of power relations did not change materially.

As long as VCS and resident representatives could know their proper role, which was wherever possible, to engage on issues pertaining to local service delivery, then all would be well. Real shifts of power from the centre, the town hall and other bastions of power to local communities might be a part of the MLGA, but no change was discernible according to one of the lead officers tasked with neighbourhood renewal. This officer noted that:

Even at the LSP level most real decisions are made not at the LSP level but at cabinet level. So even when people do participate at a neighbourhood level and then go on to participate at the LSP level it doesn't make much difference. Because in my experience, for example I have to give all my reports to cabinet to be approved before they go to the LSP anyway. And by that stage nothing really changes anyway... In terms of democratic mandate, the council has taken the view that there is a mandate and we're not sharing that mandate.

All too easily community empowerment (as driven by the LSP), with CD as a more concentrated empowerment activity, clashed with entrenched institutional and political attitudes. CD, along with the wider aspiration of the MLGA, became ensnared in deep-seated and perhaps underappreciated local realities.

Local assemblies

Another structural innovation that appeared in the wake of the Neighbourhood Renewal Agenda (NRA), albeit with close correlation to previous community involvement structures (Cockburn, 1977), was the formation of Local Assemblies. These bodies were designed to enable community involvement at a local level, typically defined by ward boundaries. Formal power was mediated by the council, via councillors and council officers, as chair and co-ordinator respectively. Local Assemblies can be seen as an outpost of the MLGA and its stated ambition to empower local communities. Assemblies emerged several years after the announcement of the MLGA and NRA, with less fanfare

than the streamlining of decisions engendered by the creation of a directly elected Mayor or local leader and cabinet executive. Assemblies were intended to complement the new scrutiny role for backbenchers, i.e., non-cabinet member councillors, who as many observers felt, had been widely felt to have been left behind by the new modernising structures. Councillors were encouraged to get closer to their constituents and in order to enable them to do so new structures were created including local assemblies, area forums, and similar ward-based structures.

The locus of power is of critical importance in ascertaining the degree of devolution. Since assemblies were facilitated by the council and chaired by the local councillor, they can be understood as invited spaces (Cornwall, 2002), as distinct from autonomous ones, owned by local people and the community itself. This distinction is crucial when considering the comments made by interviewees from their respective standpoints.

A council officer with a leading CD and VCS link role detected an absence of CD practice in the transmission of assemblies. He described the council approach from the inside, as hidebound:

You get so wrapped up in targets that you need to achieve, that the community development element seems to go to the wayside. And an example of that is the concept of local assemblies, double devolution. The concept is good but the people who have been appointed are process driven, they are not community development workers. In terms of the hierarchy of it and they don't really understand community development. So their idea of empowerment engagement is sending emails out... Again it was a control thing and it takes time; time and

resourcing and engagement with those local areas to enable them. But the senior officer in charge of assemblies didn't want to hear, he just wanted to hear about process. He just wanted to know about the process he didn't want to hear capacity building, empowerment, community development. He wanted to know about forms, time scales.

The council wanted to engage with local people, but the way it sought to do this vitiated CD. It sought to control directed by timescales and was 'wrapped up in targets'. One leader agreed with the 'long term' analysis and explained his commitment, freely acknowledging risk but recognising the need for mechanisms to connect local people to their elected representatives:

The assemblies, I take a very long term view of this, that we've not had effective structures across the whole borough. At different times we've had things that have worked either well or less well in different parts of the borough but we've not had an offer that was kind of universal. And what I hope we've done is set something up that has enough flexibility in it that over time they would grow to look very different. And to some extent that's a high risk but we're trying. What we're trying to do is kind of square the circle really... The elected representatives, three councillors, part of their role has to be to provide community leadership. But how do they do that if they don't have the mechanisms, they don't have the processes (and) they don't have the structures that enable them to engage with their community?

The councillors would provide 'community leadership,' which is not the same as providing CD or overseeing a CD process. The logic of this assumed leadership, and possibly assumed for good reason given a local electoral mandate, was that the council and councillor would control the overall process of engagement, which even when done with sensitivity could still create friction. A well trained CDW would never assume they had a right to leadership, but would seek a sharing of power in order to develop the whole group (Batten & Batten, in Craig, Mayo, Popple, Shaw & Taylor, 2011, 25-33). Power under the council assemblies or forum model could attempt a certain form of pluralism, but its default position was one of council 'control', in the minds of several interviewees. This generated antagonism and was often altogether self-defeating. A council officer tasked to coordinate local forums spoke of the stress this caused:

I have had officers coming back, ringing me after meetings at ten o'clock at night in tears and they were good officers, strong people you know? And or coming in, in the morning and yeah I did at some stage get disillusioned with having to put them back together... all of that can keep a team busy without ever achieving anything. It's one thing I can understand the shortcomings and the limitations for events.

In one study area, local forums that arose out of the MLGA and advertised as an opportunity to engage become instantly hostile. An activist outlined their antipathy towards the shutting off of critical debate:

They're drunk with their own authority. I mean the other thing you've got to look at is what's happened with the community forums... There was money from central government to have these democratic accountabilities so they set (them) up... It became a place where serious debate was being had. The ruling party was totally, holes below the water line. Every time there was a forum there was a debate, so they got rid of the community forums. And they established these appointed committees – there's no democracy in it at all and they keep on advertising events: 'this event is run by your community forum'. Well of course I've written back and I've said look there is no community forum, this is a false statement. It's a little game of nomenclature that you're playing. You know it; I know it so why are you doing it? There are no community forums; there is no genuine community involvement. It's all gone because it didn't fit.

The premise of an open community forum was examined and found wanting, in the eyes of this activist. In one sense, the construction of forums broke a cardinal principle of CD, which is to welcome critical reflection (Lifelong Learning UK, 2009, 69 f.). Once the space for debate was created, it was not possible to contain it, which then led to vilification of the segment of the community who engendered it. A council LSP officer had this to say, both in praise and defence of their own council:

With the modernising government agenda I think (the council) are trying to be very forward-thinking... They're very much trying to find out what the people think and get their views on board. So an example of that would be... the community forum(s)... and what we found, in some instances, was that some people felt that

whoever shouted the loudest would get heard. But also as well as that some of them kind of morphed into monsters and they felt that they were councillors.

A VCS CDW offered an alternative view, however:

They were always totally controlled... And they claimed they're doing all sorts of training with them but of course they're totally managed by an elected member. So if you've got an elected member, and there won't be any at (a senior) level because I genuinely mean that they are the dross. Then actually what are they going to be doing? And all the time that these things happen they are totally motivated against the community because they think that everybody that comes to these ... community forums all want to be a councillor. Actually I mean!

One former councillor felt that the area assemblies he attended were successful but recognised the risk, as stated by the council LSP officer who spoke of wannabe councillors and the dangers of creating a monster:.

The ward assemblies, yes I think they are beginning to empower people. But all these things are dangerous... You can get a whole bunch of people voting for the wrong thing, you know? And these things can go horribly wrong. Those that shout loudest and can pack a meeting and you can get the wrong outcome. But, you know, that's, that's politics isn't it? When you decentralisation power, you know, what may happen.

But for a senior council youth and community worker, active in the same borough as the councillor who thought the assemblies were 'beginning to empower people', the empowerment was not happening because the agenda was skewed to the benefit of the council, thereby guaranteeing ultimate failure:

I think they're a genuine attempt at one level to try and find something for councillors to do... I think they'll fail; they'll fail for the same reason as neighbourhood management failed, is that the majority of people involved still believe that the relationship between the authority, its partners and the people who live out there is based on: this is what we want to do to you, this is what we had to do to you, yeah, this is what we have done to you or this is something we're interested in having a chat with you about what you'd like us to do to you. And I don't think that's the basis, you're not going to rebuild civic society on.

If the aim was a form of managed democracy, with ultimately controllable risk, many in the VCS, and CDWs in general, were unwilling to support the local manifestation of the MLGA. In this way, CD and the MLGA parted company once again, because the transmission of power was incommensurate with shared endeavour.

Government Office for London (GOL)

From the outside, the existence of regional Government Offices, including one for London, appeared to suggest they had powers to regulate and intervene in local affairs. However, it was one of the anomalies of both Neighbourhood Renewal and the MLGA that their role was frequently muted, hedged as it was, as a regional body, between

central and local government. A case in point was the guidance for GOL, as handed down for all nine regional government offices (GOs), in relation to the Single Community Programme. In this instance, the guidance was threefold: GOL was to be a facilitator, mediator, and co-ordinator. This meant that when CD approaches were tested by CENs and the wider VCS, as a means of deepening local democratic renewal courtesy of the Neighbourhood Renewal Agenda, GOL had played a last resort support or backstop role. It was an important background role that interviewees described with varying degrees of approbation. One community worker who had consistently raised shortcomings with GOL felt the institution legitimised an existing status quo:

The (Borough) way of doing things is simply to tell Government Office for London that they've done (everything). And Government Office: (it) seems to be one of the qualifications for working there, is to be happy to believe three unbelievable things before breakfast. (The council) has on occasions simply totally invented things, people have told Government Office that (the council) has simply invented it and Government Office doesn't care, their boxes are ticked. You know (another London Borough) will go to the bother of going through the motions; (my council) won't even bother to do that. They'll just invent the whole thing.

A councillor substantiated the lack of rigour with which GOL fulfilled its notional role of mediation:

(My borough) has a very bad reputation ... but the Government Office for London and the Information Commissioner has not really intervened in these areas. I

know for a fact, without going into detail that there's been a whole range of areas where they're not happy. But they have never taken any sanction against the local authority and this is in part because of the political culture that we've got here. When they are aware of issues like this the bureaucracy seems to be very unwilling to intervene even where there are, you know, allegations of significant breaches and moreover, where those complaints are sustained.

Both the community worker and local councillor felt GOL sought to ameliorate, rather than deal with problems brought to their notice. In this instance, local government was sufficiently powerful to thumb its nose at partnership stipulations and that the usual central control between branches of government did not apply. The implication of this apparent inability to take timely and equitable action was that the oxygen of trust on which partnership working, and by extension the MLGA, depends on was depleted. In another study area, a key element of the LSP, the LAA (Local Area Agreement), a framework of local action developed by the LSP and approved by central government, via GOL, was agreed to in the teeth of VCS opposition. A CDW described events:

The Local Area Agreement was basically signed off without a statement of intent from the voluntary sector... I don't think it was ever formally agreed. Government Office London just accepted it without it because they, you know, for all the pressure... They're not going to stand up to a council with such good links to central government.

According to central government guidance signing off of the LAA was supposed to be mandatory, and the regional government offices were supposed to ensure this happened. At the most basic level, it seemed implausible that a self-declared partnership could or should proceed with one of its major partners expressing categorical disagreement. But in fact, it was accepted and signed off. At this point the LSP became, in effect, a VCS free zone, as sanctioned by regional government as the proxy for central government. And because the LSP was a major element in the MLGA, it is possible to conclude that parts of local, regional and central government felt that modernisation could be freely detached from partnership working and from other sectors, when it was expedient to do so. A council LSP officer described the benefits of a close and supportive working relationship with GOL:

We do have a good relationship with Government Office London. So like they turn up to our meetings... I tend to meet up... beforehand so we can go over issues... (Its) like another critical friend where they can say to you: 'well...' And like people in the council come along and stick their two fingers up because they just think, oh you know: 'Government Office London! We don't need to take any notice of them'. But me, it's a case of, for some things you can say, 'OK that's what their saying', because sometimes you can have a bit of a squeeze because (they'll) go and talk to the various ministries and say this is what they're doing ... so I've found that very useful.

Whilst some officers found GOL intrusive ('and stick their two fingers up') the LSP officer who depended on significant amounts of goodwill to smooth the regular formal

and informal reporting meetings, found the relationship advantageous ('very useful'). In contrast, a local CEN, which also reported back to GOL, and was likewise obliged to have regular meetings with their GOL liaison officer, had a less accommodating relationship. A VCS manager said:

(GOL) does nothing about it apart from make sympathetic noises. And the time has passed for sympathetic noises. I don't have to go all the way up to Government Offices for London. And they in my view are complicit in what is happening in (the borough) because unless they are going to use a stick then they're just agreeing. I mean you know? Government Office for London know that there is no third sector representation on the local strategic partnership, there's no community sector representation on the local strategic partnership, so where's that bit of jigsaw then? Where's that bit of the partnership? And it doesn't exist and what are they doing about it? Nothing!

The MLGA included structures such as directly elected Mayors, scrutiny committees, and new multi-sector partnerships (LSPs), where the modernising vision was to be made into reality. For CD to get a foothold, the MLGA needed a degree of equal partnership across sectors, which GOL struggled to safeguard. In the vacuum created by broken guidance stipulations councils were able to bend others to their will, to proceed at their own pace. Where a CD process would seek to spread power and co-author a shared local agenda, Government Offices extended their 'sympathy' but did not take up the option of enforcement, or of an enabling environment conducive to

devolution of power away from the town hall. As a result, the contribution of both the VCS and more widely, of CD, were fatally undermined.

An experienced CDW recounted one conversation with regional VCS colleagues who were hopeful that GOL might intervene, as their role allowed them to, to ensure a VCS sign off of an LSP document:

I can remember having a conversation... and I just said we hadn't signed it off. And they all look at me and they, said 'well, so what are the council going to do about it?' So I said: 'haven't noticed that the council could give a toss'. (They said) 'Oh well, Government Office for London.' I said: 'they couldn't give a toss either because actually they know that we haven't signed it off. Last year and this year we haven't even seen the plan, never mind sign it off'. And I can't have been the only one who actually thought that this was, at last, they will not, it will not be signed off by government unless the third sector have involvement. Oh well, yes it was.

When government could not adhere to even its own rules, many CDWs could conclude that there was a lack of seriousness in this project, even if at first, there was a willingness to believe ('I can't be the only one who thought that this was at last').

Conclusion

The voices of those interviewed have highlighted a consistent derailing of stated intent and actual operations of power. In practice, not only was CD marginalised, but by extension, the MLGA collapsed into competing and polarised bases of local power.

Rather than power being transformed, devolved, and reformed, the testimony of those interviewed suggests an intensification of existing frustrations, where familiar and one-sided contests were played out with predictable and enervating consequences.

Discussing power in these circumstances, with interviewees, became a breaking of a taboo. Amidst the daily pressures of larger institutions the issue of power was largely unmentionable and yet, simultaneously, it was at the kernel of the sequestered space of an interview.

Post-structuralist theories of power, along with beliefs in liberal pluralism have long posited the idea of polyvalent forces at work. Hence, crude simplifications of power as a single malign force, of the council as a single oppressive entity, are misplaced (Rose, 1999). However, the failure of power to spill out and renew existing civil and civic relationships remained surprisingly frequent. The sophistication that we might have expected to see at the start of the twenty-first century, notionally liberated from grand ideological narratives, was not borne out by what people said. In the main, power was seen as continuing to be used as a blunt instrument in spite of the highly imaginative and aspirational policy descriptions issued by government. The distance between the evocation of a dynamic and liberating opportunity and the way MLGA played out on the ground was so great as to suggest that the project was scarcely viable to begin with, and became increasingly moribund as time progressed. Many of those interviewed were sceptical or cynical enough to suggest that this was the intent all along and that 'power,' as framed by government, continually sets in motion a set of promises and a hegemony of ideas that are consistently at odds with what is actually intended. In this sense the MLGA could be seen as a kind of promissory note that could not be redeemed.

Chapter eight

Findings: community, identity and mutual respect

**The meaning(s), making and strengthening of
community**

Introduction

This chapter will examine the following topics. How interviewees used the term community. How they believed a sense of community was engendered, enabled or made, and finally, whether they deemed community to have been strengthened under existing arrangements. Whilst there is a substantial literature on the meaning of community (chapter two), the focus of this research is not on the theory of community, which is often vague, platitudinous and fiercely contested. Instead, it is concerned with

what people with a specific and practical engagement with the term actually said about it.

Those interviewed did not agonise over the semantics of community. However, they all used the vocabulary of community, most commonly as it relates to CD, community engagement, community participation, community capacity building, community empowerment and so forth. They used practical terms to define what community does and does not mean, in relation to their work and their operating values.

Community – a cautionary note

Whilst this chapter has a practical, rather than theoretical bent, it is informed by some of the warnings that are found in the literature on community (chapter two). In turn, these warnings feature in the critical reflections of those interviewed – namely, that the positive intent of strengthening community was frequently confounded. The competing definitions of community can undermine CD. Use of the term community can be overly simplistic. Sometimes it can be destructively insular. In addition, it can often be hijacked as a vehicle for political ideology.

Richard Sennett wrote that ‘a place becomes a community when we use the pronoun ‘we’ and with this comes a grave risk of conflict and unhealthy insularity’ (Sennett, 1974, 296). The danger is that ‘modern community seems to be about fraternity in a dead, hostile world; it is, in fact, all too often an experience of fratricide’ (ibid). The fratricide that Sennett had in mind is a literal act. He did not suggest that murders would arise from the practice of CD – even though conflicts across the world

are replete with examples of communal violence. Instead, he railed against an 'experiential fallacy' (ibid), that assumes an authenticity which became rigid and destructive because it could exist only by defining us against them. Community thus sets in train a cycle of moral postures and withdrawal that is destructive.

Zygmunt Bauman noted that community evoked a, 'cosy and comfortable place' (2001, 1), whilst warning that 'the attraction of community of communitarian dreams rests on the promise of simplification' (ibid, 148). Bauman's warning was well founded and echoed Sennett's caution about using the word 'we', that is, what he called 'the dangerous pronoun' (Sennett, 1998, chapter 8).

In a similar vein Andrew Wallace bemoaned New Labour's deployment of a, 'banal model of community' (2010, 10), which was overly simplistic and accident prone. Where fractured, complex and shifting identities predominate, the assumptions of homogeneity are not only misplaced. They can even exacerbate local conflicts, by generating competition based on real or imagined authenticity in the pursuit of nugatory power and resources. Such is the centrality of community that Wallace speculates that, 'perhaps the key leitmotif of New Labour was its belief in, and commitment to community' (ibid, 23), which was to be, 'bolstered by an ethos of responsibility, which provided a regulatory ideal for individual agency as well as a key goal for welfare reform' (ibid, 26).

This chapter follows the question invited by Wallace. In the study areas of South East and East London, New Labour's *leitmotif*, the belief and commitment to community was understood to either be a banal model, or proved meaningful to those implementing or implicated by it. The focus is on what those interviewed had to say about community,

what community meant to them and how community was worked on, developed and defined and what kind of behaviours and relationships were required, in their view, to engender an environment conducive to strengthening community. The quality and tenor of encounters across sectors were seen as critical by those interviewed, as was the degree to which they were enacted on the basis of mutual respect, or departed from civility (as Sennett warns is latent within the construction of community).

Chapter structure

It is possible to identify every regeneration intervention in terms of where the actors hail from (Chanan, 1999, 1-2), and which community they belong to (Wallace, 2010, 55-61). Who does what to whom, and why, is frequently a product of where they come from and where their base is (Ledwith, 1997, iv). This is often foremost in the minds of residents visited by community initiatives, who have noticed that many would-be advocates happen to come with strings attached (ibid, 15). Since corporate and / or sector identity is of primary importance, the chapter is structured around three types of organisational, professional or sector intervention and looking at how each of these constituencies is understood to define, create, support and strengthen community.

The three constituencies are:

- 1) CDWs and CD
- 2) The Council
- 3) The voluntary, community and community activist sectors

Community, identity and mutual respect: a CD perspective

CD has a strongly contested professional identity (Mayo in Craig, Popple, Shaw, 2008, 13-15), yet retains a distinctive and challenging analysis of what makes for a strong community and a passion for equal relationships based on mutual respect (Ledwith, 1997, 13). In this, it might appear to be uniquely well placed to build the kind of communities envisaged by New Labour, whose policy also stressed progressive social outcomes (chapter one). The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR), launched in 2001, proclaimed the vision that within 10 to 20 years no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live. However, the picture presented by CDWs in the study areas was far more complex, indicating a less benign and straightforward correlation.

CDWs were able to articulate a clear meaning of what they did and how it contributed to building stronger communities. One experienced community worker posited two iron laws of CD:

Of course there's a maxim, I would say a law, a law of CD. And the first law is that you cannot have a state-run CD Unit. And I think if you don't accept that central maxim then forget it; you're not a CDW because the whole point of CD means it must come from the bottom up. It must make its own mistakes and it must target what it sees as its problems are and it must write its own agenda... Power comes from power centres. In a community a community must come up from the ground and gain power and win it and fight for it. It cannot be given. If

*you could give power away we wouldn't have any political problems in the world.
But you can't, it's a second law if you like, of CD: power cannot be given.*

It is an uncompromising view and one by no means shared by all CDWs, given the inevitably contested nature of CD. However, it does speak to a widely held belief that CD has a strongly held affiliation with the struggles of the community it seeks to work with and therefore operates in a difficult, often adversarial space, consisting of choices and sides. For this worker, CD was defined by the prohibition that it could not be 'state run' and that communities could only come to be powerful (not empowered) by the imperative that they 'must write [their] own agenda' and 'fight for it'. Special vitriol was reserved for ersatz CD, for those that depart from the two rules: 'Look, if you've had power devolved to you, you're a patsy. You're a plastic community patsy. You're a turd that doesn't even smell, you know?'

Such incivility may be seen as an example of what Sennett describes as 'destructive *gemeinschaft*' (1974, 223), where communities' engagement with issues is characterised by 'purification, of rejection and chastisement of those who are not 'like' the others' (ibid). However the analysis of the laws of CD and an attack on those that deviate from them, should also be understood as an attack on consensus and pluralist models of CD, as defined by Bennington, in Lees & Smith, 1975; Taylor 2003, 18; Popple, 1995, 4.

Of those interviewed, in particular those who were CDWs, no one argued the case for, or identified with, consensus or pluralist models of CD. All were rooted in a recognisably radical and critical tradition. Any enthusiasm for forms of CD that were directed towards pluralism, consensus and partnership, came largely from VCS and

council managers. There was, however, considerable variance in what CDWs chose to stress in regard to the facilitation of stronger communities. For some, rather than polarisation and conflict, it was about education and the adoption of a liberating pedagogy.

Looking back on a lifetime of work with communities and with young people, one CDW retained his belief in a form of education embedded in the community, as making the decisive difference:

This group creates laws to control that group and for me, the whole debate should have been in terms of a community commitment to education. And he (Blair) was right when he said it, 'education, education, education', but it had to be carried out in a sense that you made education something with worth... It doesn't start because a group of people have managed to become councillors and you can make them elected mayors now. It starts from that early picture.

His analysis juxtaposes the sterility of existing social and political arrangements that creates laws to control, with a, 'community commitment to education'. Education that is embedded in its community that, 'starts... early' is what he felt community work was all about. The notion of councillors and directly elected Mayors as the starting point for the MLGA is rejected. This is precisely where, 'it doesn't start'.

He goes onto explain why:

[We] say there is no difference between a human being. They're all born. They all live on the same planet but there's a thing in there called education that creates

something... It's been worked out for them quite early on, that there's a process, you go to school, you go to university, there's no question about will you go? You will go to university, you will come through the political picture, you will select your party and that's your circle. The whole process of what's been taken away from the other group.

The reason why some communities struggle, according to this radical community educationalist view is primarily because of a malign long term educational process that, 'creates something' namely opportunities for some at the expense of others. In the past, CD recognised this and sought to tackle it in a number of specific and distinctive ways, he argued:

CD has to be a development from those going through it? It shouldn't be managed. It's not a managing process. What we need to do is facilitate it and if a local authority believes in its community, it should provide facilitating processes. We used to have them at all ages, from all levels, from play leadership, from the parks, through to adult education. And we used to have a crossover from the youth service to adult education, where youngsters wishing to go and do things in [the] adult education world, they could go and do it for free; all gone. So therefore, where are we with community development? I think we've lost the roots... It's because steadily those groups have become cut off.

The way to strengthen communities is presented as being through a, 'facilitating process' that develops people at all ages and in particular enables, 'a crossover from

youth services to adult education', that everyone can access because it is free. This worker's view of the role of education, as both an oppressive and liberating force in the construction of community, features strongly in wider CD literature. This is captured in Paulo Freire's (1972) description of the banking approach to education, where the learner is passive and the dominant interests of society are imposed. Margaret Ledwith adds a 'pedagogy of difference' (2005, 157 f.) to Freire's transformative vision, that factors in gender, race and environment to counter male-centred models of reality, and critically reposition and embrace a multiplicity of ways of knowing the world. The CD worker's view that CD is 'not a managing process' but an educational one, which facilitates the development of individuals, groups and communities, was described by him as the 'roots' of effective community building.

This is in stark contrast to New Labour's vision for community, where strengthening communities is emphatically a managed process. In her speech³² to the Fabian Society (April 2008) on building communities, Hazel Blears stated, '*(m)y argument is what works is a centrally-devised framework, driven forward by a determined Government*'. On the one hand, communities are facilitated autonomously at the local level, enabled by their own learning and thus strengthened. On the other hand, they are made stronger because they are driven by a determined government with a centrally-devised plan. Although Blears completes the sentence by adding that the driving forward by government would allow 'space within the framework for creativity, innovation, quirkiness, and experimentation' (Blears, 2008). However it is not clear what this 'space... for creativity and innovation' is (Stoker, 2004, 2) and therefore, whether a locally facilitated, autonomous process of CD can co-exist, or if it simply imposes and perpetuates the forms of social control community education has set itself in opposition

³² <http://www.fabians.org.uk/events/speeches/blears-speech>

to (Freire, 1972; Ledwith, 1997; Shaw & Martin, 2000). In the mind of the worker who stressed the value of education, there were clear consequences of a managerial orthodoxy which sought to strengthen communities: 'I think we've lost the roots'. CD had become deracinated in his view.

The impairment of CD by both central and local government managerialism was frequently voiced by other CDWs. This was most commonly experienced as an overbearing tendency to control, that inhibited the 'creativity, innovation, quirkiness, and experimentation' envisaged by Blears. Its enervating effects were described by a long-standing senior council officer as follows:

So for me, and this isn't meant cynically, the rebirth of community development in this borough is ... it's constrained, tamed ... and has to be re-invented as local people's right to talk about the services that should, would or are delivered to them.

From her senior position at the heart of a modernising borough her candid view was that CD would only be supported if it were heavily managed and that such control would amount to a profound reining in of ambition. When CD met the council, it would inevitably be 'constrained (and) tamed'. In addition, not only would it be domesticated, to use the Freirean description (1972) of education that does not seek to liberate, but its agenda and very *raison d'être* 'has to be reinvented'. The agenda was a *fait accompli*. It was about services that will inevitably be 'delivered to them'.

One LSP officer did not see that an overt form of CD had a future and explained that their colleagues were unlikely to support CD unless it were changed, adding credence to the previous view that CD 'has to be reinvented' by the council:

I think the kind of community development I'm thinking about you know, the stuff a statutory organisation can't do as effectively... There are people around who probably don't want to hear it badged in that way... But there must be people around, in positions of influence in the local authority that see community development and link it to things they don't particularly want or enjoy or like.

Whilst it was widely recognised that there are aspects of community work that 'a statutory organisation can't do as effectively'. For example, community associations may enjoy greater levels of trust or engagement with excluded groups than a council. This triggered discomfort for "people... in positions of influence", who "don't want to hear it". The implication being that if CD were 'badged' differently, (i.e. 'reinvented' as previously suggested), they might listen.

In fact, the implication from the comments, that CD would be reinvented around service delivery, suggests that the council and those in positions of influence might take it upon themselves to do precisely that. The argument that there is 'stuff a statutory organisation can't do as effectively' appears to be a secondary consideration for local government and could be sacrificed to primary interests, which, on this reading, appeared to be about being in control.

The imposition of control felt wrong to a VCS Youth and CDW, who had herself, also worked for a time at the local council. She explained why:

If it's controlled, if the whole process is controlled, how can there be any form of developing in that? So one has to look at it, we're looking about community development. It's about working with groups, individuals, people... They've got formulated ideas... that need to be supported so that they can reach their goal.

The ideas that existed in communities 'need to be supported' but not 'controlled'. This enabled CDWs and communities to 'reach their goal'. To replace ideas formulated within communities with a centrally imposed agenda made the likelihood of strengthening communities highly improbable: 'how can there be any... developing in that?'

However, a centrally imposed agenda, as previously described by Hazel Blears as a centrally-devised framework, driven forward by a determined government (Blears, 2008), was a given. One CDW described how this played out at the local level:

What we've got now at the moment, is the nearest picture I can see at the moment is, local authorities come up with a policy, the community has to react to that. If the community doesn't react to that, it goes through. If the community reacts, they have consultancy. And the consultancy is never quite clear at what point in the process is it a consultancy, or is it a brain washing exercise, right? So, therefore, community development needs to be done at much earlier stages of that process, because at that stage of the process it's too late. But I would say, and it's hard to put a percentage on it, but I would say something like 70% of community development (is too late).

On this account, the CDW showed how the meaning of community work could be something the 'local authorities come up with'. The meaning appeared to be non-negotiable and if questioned, 'if the community reacts', as a critical pedagogy or autonomous process might seek it to, external experts reinforce the council line through a process akin to 'brain washing'. At this point, the CDW noted that CD also entered into this contested terrain between council and community, when it was 'too late'.

A CDW in a neighbouring borough ascribed a similar meaning to her work and the necessity of long-term sustained support in order to build stronger communities:

Community development work to me is long term... You have to put in a lot of effort and resources if you really truly want to get people independent. And I think it's just a really, really, difficult thing to do and I think it's been completely trivialised.

For community work to be long term, the effort and resources would have to be integral and present at the start rather than arriving, as stated previously, 'too late', because this would risk it becoming 'completely trivialised'. If the effort and resources were put in, building stronger communities would still be a 'really difficult thing to do' and would only take place 'if you truly want to get people independent'. The implication is that it cannot be assumed that this is what everyone might 'truly want'. This appears to be partially confirmed by previous comments made by an LSP officer in a different borough, regarding 'people... in positions of influence in the local authority that see community development and link it to things they don't particularly want or enjoy or like'.

One community programme manager and long time CDW explained the reluctance to embrace CD this way:

It don't come cheap and it isn't quick. You don't get any quick fixes with community development and it doesn't come cheap and if you want to build something on shifting sands that will stand up for a year, eighteen months, until the next initiative comes along and then that can be allowed to fall by the wayside and you set up something new, then that's fine. That doesn't do our communities any good.

The inability to find methods to strengthen communities in ways that were 'cheap and quick', was often put to one side, because of the need to 'set something up' for a short time, typically a 'year [or] eighteen months' that could then 'be allowed to fail'. This might sound perverse, to do something in the knowledge that it will fail, but it was entirely compatible with following a strong central framework, which guaranteed the requisite amount of control to 'set up something new'. However, there is a huge risk in complacently setting up community programmes that fail. When people recognise 'that doesn't do our communities any good', the whole exercise becomes redundant and trust breaks down. When the same manager tried to encourage dialogue between a residents group and the council leader, she was told:

We don't want him, what do we want him for? He don't care, if he cared about us he would have... you know and that. And so, therefore, from my job as a community development worker, where do you start at something like that? In

terms of trying to build the political base... or to be encouraged to be part of the political process. It ain't going to happen. It just ain't going to happen.

Part of the CD vision of building stronger communities involves not only a given community setting its own agenda, but it being able to pursue and achieve it (Barr & Hashagen, 2000; Twelvetrees, 2002; Lifelong Learning UK, 2009). Frequently, this may involve organising collectively, to campaign on issues of concern, as well as the confidence to use established political processes and structures. To use, in fact, the same structures that the MLGA had targeted, hence the attempt by CD to address a local democratic deficit (Shaw & Martin, 2000).

The CD manager's experience of being rebuffed by residents, who saw no point in her suggestion of meeting a local politician as part of a longer term community strategy to build a 'political base', was a consequence of the proven lack of seriousness and regard with which they felt they were being treated: 'he don't care. If he cared about us, he would have [acted differently]'. However, despite the potential for further isolation, CDWs usually persisted in encouraging engagement with the council and its political structures, as an essential means of empowerment. This concern with small 'p' political processes was widely noted by CDWs as a primary aspect of community work. One second tier VCS CDW identified the change as a pervasive de-politicisation:

I think community development's changed a lot from when I trained as a student, back in the late 70s... It's a lot less politicised now, people are coming in now see it differently.

The consequences of new practitioners 'seeing it differently', meant CD was radically diminished in her eyes and that led her to speculate, from trainee student (1970s), to jobbing CDW (1980s), to the current era, whether CD was incompatible with any form of government support.

I feel we're kind of losing (CD) because I started working in the early '80s, you know, where it was much more, we were much more radical, incredibly much more radical. And you just think that's all going. That's, we don't want people to be, we don't want people to be critical. We don't want people to actually control their own lives. We don't want that. Actually, truly, no government actually wants that. How cynical is that? I just feel that they don't want that.

Over many years, the worker saw community work pouring a lot of 'radical' effort to get communities and local 'people to actually control their own lives', by using political means to assert needs and issues. The result from government, in her view, was, 'we don't want that'. There was a possibility of a substantial increase in the number of strong, confident and assertive communities generating demands that were not welcome. This scenario was covered by Marris and Rein (1967) as a classic dilemma of social reform, whereby community work, if it is successful, risks challenging the status of established power holders who are in a position to take the resources and support that made the original community advance possible in the first place, away.

A community and youth worker who had worked across two of the study areas and had experience of working in both the council and VCS put himself in the council's position:

So you're a local authority, you create seventy community development workers, you do not expect them to create a revolution in your borough. You do not expect people to be knocking on your door saying I want so and so changed. What they want is a quiet managed society through its community development work.

In fact, a generation ago many CDWs were attempting to 'create a revolution in (their) borough', as part of a militant wave of social movements and Trade Union organising. The head of one council directorate who started his career as a CDW remembered those times in this way:

I think it's changed a lot... When I was a community worker it was quite clear most people who were community development workers were engaged in it because they were politically motivated to do so. You know, there's no doubt about that and actually they were fighting for change and believed that, you know, that that was their raison d'être. And for many community development workers they had a political philosophy that lay behind what they were doing... There were a number of different kinds of perspectives. If you think back to the '70s and I mean, there was a kind of strong feminist perspective that I really think impacted on women community development workers. For others, it was a wider sort of Marxist belief system and people came from very political backgrounds. Now I don't think that is the same now, because you know I think community development disappeared really... The workers themselves were often working with community groups, to fight against the state.

According to this memory, 'most' CDWs were 'politically motivated', seeking to 'fight against the state' in their work with community groups (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979; Popple, 1995, 22; Twelvetrees, 2002, 141). This had now changed and as a result CD had disappeared. Rose writes that 'within a rather short period, what began as a language of resistance and critique was transformed' (1996, 332). The council director knew CD was 'not the same now' and pinpointed a change in the use of language and focus:

And I think that now a lot of people who work in the community, when they talk about community development, what they're actually talking about is community engagement. They're talking about people being involved in services... or getting involved with public bodies in terms of trying to shape issues... It's just now the issues are different in terms of how people see them.

Strengthening and supporting communities was now about 'people being involved in services... or... with public bodies', in order to 'shape issues'. Rose writes of community work as 'a new way of demarcating a sector for government' (1996, 333) and this is reflected in the view of the council director that 'now a lot of people who work in the community, when they talk about community development, what they're actually talking about is community engagement'. In this case, engagement with the state is always on its own terms and can be narrowed down to service delivery improvements, as distinct from issues generated from local people. As an earlier CDW interviewee

commented, the reinvention of CD, is 'local people's right to talk about the services that should, would or are delivered to them'.

This simplification, whether erroneous or not, is the dominant understanding of what communities should aspire to and how they might measure and attain success. Community work was now seen as being equated to involvement in, and engagement with public services, and operated according to the norms of a new market of public sector provision. The community was an extension of this market, a testing ground. A VCS CD officer noticed that now that CD work was 'commissioned', other considerations arose:

If you've got a contract, if you've got commissioning, if essentially you're a sub-contractor of the council, it takes a great deal of bravery to be able to put your head up above the parapet and say that there's a problem on something else because there's going to be consequences from it. There's no doubt about that at all and I think it's not that people will just say we're not going to say anything, but it will be, there'll be a certain degree of self-censorship... I'm sure that will happen and I'm already getting a sense of it.

Given the necessity for CD to speak truth to power in order to enable communities to have a voice, the assertion that 'there'll be... self-censorship', suggests community work is in an increasingly weak and fearful position. The reason for this was identified as being because of the new market arrangements. Commissioning was argued by the VCS CD worker, to make VCS groups especially vulnerable to withdrawal of funding because of negative consequences might ensue as a consequence of 'putting

one's head above the parapet'. A threat did not need to be made. It was enough that the possibility loomed ominously, and was connected to the provisional status of being 'a sub-contractor of the council'.

A council grants officer, who commissioned CD work herself, confirmed that 'CD in local authorities had definitely changed':

Thirty years I've been doing it, yes. I have watched the cycle of going from local community development work and outreach into centralised (delivery models) and then back out again... What people are able to do in enabling and empowering is... not (possible) in the same way. I would say community development in local authorities has definitely changed... things aren't done in the same way.

Her view was that 'enabling and empowering' worked in a cycle, moving between centralised and decentralised approaches and that under the aegis of MLGA there were limitations on what is was possible to do. Community work was inhibited by the current cycle, which was more markedly controlling than many others, and marking a break with the past, where 'things aren't done in the same way'.

CDWs have described CD as 'very difficult', but made far harder, when heavily managed, controlled and reoriented to a pre-set government agenda, which was typically one of community involvement in public services, cognate with the MLGA. The sense of heightened difficulties, led one recently retired CDW to conclude their interview by saying:

So therefore, who in their right mind is going to become a community development worker? I'm not saying that's not possible in today's society, but certainly community based anything is a difficult one now... How did all that used to gel before? Surely it was all there but maybe people were just more friendly? I don't know. I haven't got a clue, but anyway, sorry". (Laughs)

His judgement, after a lifetime working in communities, was that the current prospects for CD were not enviable. '[W]ho in their right minds' would want to do it? Community, in its broadest sense, is a difficult proposition – 'community based anything is a difficult one now'. The affiliations that glued people together in society, the 'gel' was less apparent. Although claiming to be baffled, it was not entirely true that he hadn't 'got a clue'. His life had been spent working with communities and with young people. He had a very clear idea about the primacy of education as a CD tool and its role in the democratisation of society:

If you encourage a process at an early age of looking at things, arguing, making the mistakes, learning from others and you also encourage those that are teaching you to take part in that debate, you get a much better democratic process going on, because it's actually involving you in your life... I'm looking for a government that educates young people to ask 'the question' full stop. And if you learn the skills of asking, you learn the skills of change. And if you learn the skills of change you learn the skills of participation.

The pre-set measures of the MLGA contrast with this description of a process of learning where it is possible to argue and debate goals and objectives. The way of guaranteeing stronger communities and safeguarding democracy was not through following 'a strong central framework', but in embedding the habit of always thinking critically, of asking 'the question', akin to Freire's dialogic action (1972, 68 f.).

Another experienced youth and community worker recognised the power of 'asking the question' and argued that rather than feeling trapped, community workers always had the opportunity to ask critical questions that created new space to work in:

I've only been able to look at the question the other way round. What's going on in the world? What are the main drivers? What's the political economy of where I'm working? OK, therefore, what space have I got to open up the kind of conversations and do the kind of work that I want to do?

This was not to deny the constraints, but to analyse and think critically about the political economy of 'where I'm working', the behaviours, assumptions and 'main drivers' that explained 'what's going on in the world'. This enabled the worker to think about and analyse but also to communicate purposefully and to link reflection with action (praxis), 'to open up the kind of conversations and do the kind of work that I want to do'.

Whereas previous CDWs had located problems externally, he argued that one of the dangers was that this could obscure an important form of critical thinking and acting which was accessible to the VCS and CDWs:

I think that one of the downfalls of all that people-centred work, of which I've been party, whether that's community development workers, campaigners, voluntary sector, community sector, and youth, is that I think they've made the mistake of always worrying about why the world doesn't look like they want it to. And actually condemning the world for it not being a reified version of how they perceive themselves. I've never been able to get my head around that... We mistake our personal space as being something that everyone else has got. Whereas actually, I think our personal space is that we're essentially, because our work is around ideology, we're workers around ideological re-creation... (we're) dealing with ideas and the way that people view the world.

On this reading, the proposition that community was forever 'ideologically recreat(ed)' and is the way of the world, affords an invaluable opportunity to 'use our personal space' to 'deal ... with ideas' and influence the ways in which people view the world. By virtue of working with communities, CDWs work with and reproduce ideas and this was something to be treasured, because it was comparatively rare. Something not 'everyone else has got'. Rather than use this 'personal space' in a dynamic and thoughtful way, he argued that all too often, those working with communities connive in their own 'downfall' by 'worrying about the world' and 'condemning the world', which said more about 'how they perceive themselves'. The worker argued that this was a 'mistake', because it was done without realising that they had choices and could use their mental and emotional energy more effectively. In particular by focusing on the reasons why the world did not match their expectations, workers who indulged in this were at risk of forgetting that they too create the world. The worker argued that this

creation could be either empowering or fatalistic and that fatalism was an unhelpful and 'reified version' of themselves, as the world. It perpetuated the fallacy of treating an abstraction as if it were a real thing.

To take this position, one of radical praxis and personal responsibility, does not undercut all the previous testimony given by CDWs who have described the experience of facing increasing difficulties against the backdrop of the MLGA. It simply places the role and value of CD work firmly in service to local communities and is profoundly respectful towards them. This dedication to a goal beyond one's immediate organisation or profession, a sense of obligation and accountability to communities that are routinely marginalised, is the *sine qua non* of radical CD work (Ledwith, 1997).

I noticed that a significant number of CDWs that I interviewed had spent the majority of their life working to support and develop communities and this finding is supported by CDF in their 2009 survey and positional work on the Big Society (Bowles, 2010, 9). Even for those yet to pass that milestone of a lifetime dedicated to CD, community work had clearly become a central part of their lives and this tendency to become absorbed in their work is a feature that appears in the literature (Murphy, 1999, 3; Twelvetrees, 2002, 186; Taylor, 2003, 132-134; Diamond & Liddle, 2005, 148). In a world of changing ideas about what makes for a strong community and what identities and behaviours of community become politically expedient to valorise, perhaps a limpet-like commitment defined CD work more than any other attribute. Unlike the incivility of destructive *gemeinschaft*, this respectfulness and commitment was immediately and powerfully apparent, setting the marker for what it meant to make an affiliation with community and what was required to develop and strengthen it.

Community, identity and mutual respect: a council perspective

As part of the research a range of people were interviewed, who either worked for or were elected onto the council. They consisted of a wide range of officers, including heads of service, along with councillors, ranging from backbenchers to cabinet members and leaders. The two directly elected Mayors (Lewisham and Newham), having previously been councillors, were firmly connected to their party apparatus. This contrasted with some Mayors elsewhere, for example Middlesbrough and Hartlepool, who have stood as independents. The combined comments of those interviewed who worked for and represented councils, articulated a particular institutional standpoint and brought together lucid statements on the meaning of community and how it can be made stronger.

The sheer size of a London borough local authority dictates that whilst a council is a corporate body, with a notional single corporate line about many aspects of its work including working with the local community, it also remains a diverse and complex body. Some individuals, whether as officers or councillors, were more obviously in sympathy with CD and were prepared to comment critically on aspects of the council's performance. Others occupied a more official role, presenting the formal council line and a strong defence of it, based on their own personal and sometimes party political convictions.

The council approach to community, what it means and how it can be developed, is not only made up of many diverse opinions from a range of positions. The council as

a body is ontologically expansive; it can take over the meaning of community and make it its own. In a publication by the Dockland Forum on Millennium Partnerships for Sustainable Regeneration, Francis Dolan, Managing Director of Woolwich Development Agency, described partnership working as 'whatever we will be doing anyway' (1996, 30). The difficult and amorphous meanings of community are thus simplified and equated to the council and what it does.

Institutions invariably develop a culture and become associated with certain characteristics. In the study areas this affected not only the council but impacted on the quality of their involvement with local communities. Barry Quirk, Chief Executive of Lewisham Council, described the need for dedication and team spirit in a JRF paper (2001) entitled *Esprit de corps*, in which he warned against taking an 'overly *ad hominem* approach to local government' (Quirk, 2001, 71). This implies that many people frequently attack their council, notably local residents and community groups, in pursuit of local concerns. In his view 'we are all good people trapped in a bad system' (ibid, 69) and the solution is a 'thorough managerial approach', as a means to overcome something that is socially constructed, that 'we have built ourselves... that we claim traps us' (ibid, 70). For Quirk, this is the means of approaching not only leadership of councils, but also 'leadership for the wider community' (ibid, 4). Getting the operations and culture of the council right, equates to community renewal. Council leadership is elided with community leadership.

Whilst Quirk's vision of an adaptive managerialism demonstrated a wholesome *esprit de corps*, Erving Goffman described a range of dysfunctional characteristics that adhere to bureaucratic organisations and their handling of human needs which he termed 'total institutions' (Goffman, 1960, 18). Mutual respect became strained and

behaviours are warped due to intrinsic encompassing tendencies that are generated by a 'large number of like-situated individuals (who) lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life' (ibid, 11) and are 'symbolised by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside' (ibid, 15).

Councils are a community within a community. As a state bureaucracy, their attachment to the wider community, to the public and to civil society had both a legal underpinning and democratic mandate. The legal and democratic aspect has made the wellbeing and strengthening of community obligatory. Yet it also suggests that the meshing of council with community and vice versa, whether conceptually, operationally or relationally, would be riven by competing understandings. Moreover, those tensions projected a richer sense of the meanings, making and strengthening of community, by way of the local state.

The scale and capacity of the council appeared to tower above the resources that individual residents and community groups might have hoped to access and mobilise. When community was contested and a range of objectives were being pursued, this inequality of arms was the reason identified by one council manager, who headed up neighbourhood renewal team, for a degree of obfuscation:

As long as the balance of skills and support is on the side of the centre then when people raise issues, we all sit back and write responses to petitions, bamboozling people into a position, which is, if they were only to be more articulate, or had a little bit more information, a little bit more support, they would be able to come back to the council. But they don't have that support.

On this reading, the role of the council in relation to the community was primarily defensive ('we all sit back'), and disingenuous. The council monopoly on 'skills and support', rather than strengthening the demands and agenda of local communities, instead undermines them. In this example, petitions merely led to 'bamboozling', rather than an empowerment of local people.

From a different borough another council manager, who was deeply involved in local provision, as well as having experience of CD and resident led ways of working, bemoaned her employer's reliance on PR and of style over substance when it came to doing engagement:

Well, we used to say years ago that they invented spin before Number Ten and Alistair (Campbell) appeared and I think they do. They're very good at spin and they are control freaks. I mean the instant, you know, they do not like people speaking out of turn ... They react – very reactive as opposed to being proactive aren't they? They tick the boxes, they lie. We've found examples where they've lied before. And they also have a culture in terms of a work culture which is a blame culture so therefore you've got staff who are not prepared to take risks.

The engagement with communities, which included 'people speaking out of turn' threatened the image and narrative the council wanted to project and retain control over. According to this officer, who had worked for decades within the council and led on a neighbourhood management pilot, this led to a 'very reactive' response, a default 'tick(ing) of boxes' and a routine telling of 'lie(s)'. Internally, it caused a stultification of

personnel and innovation, because the 'work culture ... is a blame culture' making the council unwilling 'to take risks'.

The longevity of the problem was explained by one resident activist:

Oh well yes, because of the disillusionment there is around, how you deal with the council? When I started campaigning, I started meeting people in health who had been involved for many, many years in engaging with the council ... especially pensioners. And the picture that comes out is really of people being messed about for years with techniques. You were never told what's happening. [There were] delays and changes of plans and at the end, you lose, because they can just change the focus and move on and leave you behind... There's a lot of people who are left out, they are left out and they are cut out from any discussion altogether. That's a fact you know and that's why I say it as it is.

Engagement of the community by the council, equated to 'being messed about for years with techniques'. The building of stronger communities not only failed, but was marked by discourtesies and disregard, in her view. Local people, notably pensioners by virtue of their length of experience, were 'never told what's happening', subject to 'delays and changes of plans' and then were left 'behind'.

Due to its position, the council could select how it engaged and with whom. This appeared to mean that, at times, 'a lot of people... are left out and... cut out from any discussion altogether'. One council officer gave an example of supporting a local resident to take part on a community engagement board run by the council, only to find the person was left off the invite list:

I was speaking to a (local) activist who... there's this new thing called the community engagement something or other... And she was told... it would only be identified people that were invited to it and her group was not identified as a relevant group you know, which is a way of squeezing people out... So I emailed her saying actually you can just go along if you want to. But it's the way they do it, it's who do they engage with. And that's you know, that's the thing, it isn't in their interests to engage with (those) people.

The ability to simultaneously 'squeez[e] people out' whilst doing community engagement, was determined by what is in the council's interests, in her view. In this instance it had the additional effect of blind-siding the engagement work of a council officer, operating in another part of the council. The engagement that happened circumvented the formal process, requiring a degree of extra persistence, if not outright gate crashing – 'you can just go along if you want to'.

In a manner redolent of Francis Dolan's earlier take on engagement - '*whatever we will be doing anyway*' (1996, 30) - a council-employed LSP officer, when asked about existing community strategies, doubted their existence and went on to question their need.

I don't think we have a community engagement strategy at all. You make the assumption we do. We don't. And to be honest with you, I think the ethos that's kind of been taken is that whatever we would put in a community development strategy we pretty much do anyway. So if we were asked whether we do this, this

or this, well we do do it. The fact that it's not all written down, how we do it, what we do and what we have to achieve all in one document, has never really been an issue. And we certainly haven't had any problems with the CPA³³, us not having one, because they always been able to adequately evidence what we do do anyway, without having had a community engagement strategy.

One of the early tasks of LSPs was to produce two overarching strategies: a neighbourhood renewal strategy and a community strategy. Another LSP task, as defined by central government, was to deliver support against evidence of need for 'stronger safer communities' as one of four strands of a Local Area Agreement between central government and the local council. The initial MLGA vision was that local communities would have a stake in the writing of these partnership documents and hold statutory bodies to account for them, so the apparent absence and lack of 'any problems' was anomalous. However the resources at the disposal of the local authority were such that it was "always ... able to adequately evidence" community engagement, so this was not 'an issue' for the inspection regime (CPA), which appeared to sanction this catch-all approach.

Another CDW council officer, working in the same borough backed up the sense of community engagement as a foregone conclusion: 'You know, this whole engagement agenda, On paper they will meet it'.

The meaning of what strengthening of community looks like, how it is tested, measured and held to account, was manufactured by the council, in his view. Because it lacked decisive external intervention from outside the council, from an independent sphere of civil society, any actual engagement had a pre-decided and therefore

³³ Comprehensive Performance Assessment as undertaken by the Audit Commission on all local authorities

pointless feel. Engagement was driven by minimal compliance, whereby council officers could be certain that whatever the standard, '[o]n paper [you] will meet it'. Under this description, the actors involved highlighted a simulated, even counterfeit feel to community and its development.

Having described the ethos of the process, the same LSP officer sign posted the council communications department:

I recommend that you speak to somebody in our communications team. It sounds a bit far out. What's communications, I want to know about community engagement? But they kind of do a lot of that, in that they're communicating with borough residents and they're responsible for collating a lot of the stuff that comes back, in terms of opinions and views and things like that. And organising these events and things, and seems the biggest vehicle the council's got for community engagement and... what we as a council get out of it.

Strengthening community, and reporting about communities to government, or back to the community itself were conflated: the 'communications team' is 'responsible for collating' engagement responses and 'organising events'. Community engagement was therefore, significantly, a council communications task driven by what the council 'get(s) out of it'. The officer underlined the centrality of this approach:

The council's main form of consultation with its residents if you like, are the (community events) where people will be consulted about the colour of their bins and things like that.

Of all the possible conversations and processes that can be initiated, a consultation on, typically, the colour of bins, by a media and communications arm of the council was seen as the paramount, its 'main form'. Many community concerns are mundane and rubbish disposal has always been something quickly identified by residents as one of the services funded by their council tax, that they would want to see well managed. But its potential to spark a wider civil / civic engagement is hard to imagine.

The council interfaced with the community (and communities) through distinct types of personnel, by paid officers and by elected councillors, who also receive payment (which, under the MGLA, has increased substantially at the level of cabinet and leader, though it is not equivalent with the salaries of senior officers). Both groups commented critically on the other group, citing impediments to building communities that arose directly because of actions and behaviours characteristic of each other.

One cabinet member, a long serving councillor with extensive experience of working in the community sector, expressed his frustration with how officers worked:

The more we work together to do joint work, that's a positive thing there, there again how many officers really understand that? There's still a lot of silo thinking in councils. There's a lot of 'jobsworths'. 'It's not my job', all this sort of jazz you know... So there's quite a lot of that still around, that's going to take time to change... The problem with local government is a lot of people (have) been here for a long while, probably like the civil service. It's a job for life... The council always accepts second best, but what I think part of what it's [now] doing, is

saying the council wants the best. That's, for some officers, quite difficult. That's why I think you see a lot of former directors have gone on gardening leave or that sort of thing, so there you go.

The cabinet member applauded the increased emphasis on sharing of power and influence under the MLGA, through partnership working: 'the more we work together to do joint work that's a positive thing'. But he felt it was undermined by the low calibre of council officers, who were 'second best' and 'jobsworths'. They were characterised as people who were prone to the upholding of petty rules, in addition to being insular and unimaginative, 'thinking in silos', rather than reaching out to communities. In the past, 'the problem with local government' had been officers' feelings of entitlement, 'a job for life'. This previous security had not worked for the best interests of the council or the community and would now change. Officers who could not adapt were not missed and proactively encouraged to move on, to the point of being required to serve out a period of notice at home ('gardening leave').

In a neighbouring borough, a backbench councillor, who herself also worked extensively within the VCS and statutory sector, extended the critique of officers as opportunist and parasitic:

The resources and capacity building has been focused... through the council officers and very bureaucratic structure rather than community investment. It's created a lot of opportunities for council officers, but now that the funding is being reduced the chickens are coming home to roost, because projects are being cut... Of course council officers can move on to other jobs or other areas. The local

community is still there. They could have done much more to develop local community structures.

Money for community investment, for strengthening and capacity building communities, was instead focused by council officers for the primary benefit of council officers, in her view. It 'created a lot of opportunities for council officers', whereas it could 'have done much more to develop (the) local community'. The observation is that officers' first instinct was towards bolstering 'a very bureaucratic structure', over and above bolstering communities. This sustained their career mobility, even when 'funding is ... reduced', because they could 'move on to other jobs' whilst 'the community (was) still there', unmoved and unchanged.

The councillor complains of an inversion of community need into organisational and individual self advancement, achieved entirely at the expense of local communities. The accusation does not implicate every officer and is almost certainly unfair if applied to the majority of officers, and yet the testimony of even a few routine instances of venality cast very serious questions on a council's credentials to support local community, or engage respectfully and fairly.

The same councillor described a specific aspect of council engagement with community which is that of the council officer relationship with community groups:

The dialogue with the community sector has actually come through officers... You know there are always policies or projects, but they are all taken forward through officers. And again I think there are some democratic deficits there. I think there are some officers around who almost view the community sector as

their own personal fiefdom. And indeed do everything they possibly can to limit any kind of engagement and democracy. Whether that's through their own volition or through a political steer, I wouldn't like to comment, but certainly that's been my experience.

In this instance, officers are described as gatekeepers to the community sector: 'dialogue... come[s] through officers'. Access by councillors is controlled by officers, who resist 'any [other] kind of engagement'. On this reading, community identity equates to the 'personal fiefdom' of an officer. Supporting that community is done through 'policies and projects' that are 'taken forward through officers'. As a backbench councillor of the ruling party, this person was not privy to closer engagement of their party, hence the acknowledgement of the possibility of a 'political steer'. The prospect of officers following orders was not discounted and the reluctance to comment further ('I wouldn't like to say'), is suggestive without being categorical.

One council officer, who worked for many years in the local VCS as a CDW before joining a neighbouring local authority, described a greater empathy for officers as a consequence of now working on the inside:

What I've certainly learnt is that there's a high calibre of staff, high calibre of output from those staff, people who really think about things. The other thing I've learnt though is that the people with the least power are the officers. Unless you're really senior, or unless you have some sort of political lobby behind you in some way, or you're a member of the Labour Party, you know, all these other things... You can make recommendations, you can give advice, you're employed

for your expertise in a field, but it doesn't go anywhere and that's very frustrating. And I think a lot of officers would agree with that.

Unlike the views described by the cabinet member, that officers were 'second best', this insight was about the calibre of officers based on output and reflectivity of staff, 'people who really think about things'. The room for manoeuvre was limited though (Diamond & Nelson, 1993), making the role 'very frustrating', unless 'you have [a] ... political lobby', typically a member of the 'Labour Party', which was seen to trump officer 'recommendations... advice... [and] expertise'. The officer went on to describe how political steering not only fast-tracked insider influence, but pushed down on the majority of officers:

I think what I'm saying is, from internally, how difficult and frustrating it is for officers to be able to do work, because there's such a high level of ... interference. Really in mundane things, that's the issue. And that comes from the top because there's a culture of fear.

Before officers could work with the community on the most 'mundane things', they faced a situation that was 'difficult and frustrating', due to high level 'interference' which generated a 'culture of fear' internally within the council. On this testimony, communities were hindered from working with reflective, 'high calibre' officers by the council hierarchy itself.

In a passage describing the 'underlife of a public institution', Goffman (1961, 170 f.) wrote that 'in crossing the threshold of the establishment, the individual takes on the

obligation ... to be properly oriented and aligned in it' (ibid). This is a 'primary adjustment... (that is) officially asked' (ibid). Below this, a secondary adjustment that employs unauthorised means consists of low level 'defaulting from prescribed activity' (ibid), as with the example of an officer sending an email to an activist suggesting they go to a meeting despite being told they are not invited.

Goffman describes another secondary adjustment which does not depart from the smooth running of the organisation but is contained by it, where individuals make do and tacitly tolerate the system and seek to work with rather than resist it. Goffman's insight into the behaviours and norms induced by the disciplined activity of 'total institutions' corresponds to the varying degrees of 'fear' and 'frustration' reported by officers in their engagement within the council and carried outwards to communities. It has the potential to explain the 'jobsworth' approach adopted, that enraged the cabinet member.

This frustration was echoed by another council colleague in a different department, who picked up the difficulties in progressing 'mundane things' cited previously:

I think council officers are often frustrated with... what they can and can't get done. And often the council officers are told that they need to get something done but they're banging their head against a brick wall trying to get someone to agree the next part of the process. And don't get me wrong, I don't think people are in deep depression and taking it home with them. But I do think that people are thinking: 'for God's sake when's this ever going to get off my desk' and that's because you know it can't go anywhere. You almost feel like sometimes you get stuck holding the baby, someone take this off me you know.

If we take an aspect of strengthening and developing of community as a task given to an officer, for which, 'they need to get something done', the feeling of impossibility ('banging their heads against a brick wall') arises not within the community, but within the council. The block is in 'trying to get someone to agree the next part of the process', in order to trigger action, build momentum and ultimately deliver support, for example, to local communities. The bureaucracy and insular behavioural norms within the council are obstructive and isolating. The officer is left with feelings of powerlessness and futility because what they are being asked to do 'can't go anywhere'. In this environment, community engagement could come to feel like being 'stuck holding the baby', before the community had even been able to have an input.

The ability of officers to transcend their internal constraints in order to carve out an enabling environment for CD was questioned by one CDW, who also used the very same description of a culture of fear within the council, although they worked in the voluntary sector and in a different borough to the previous accounts given by council officers. The VCS CDW described the following experience of CD commissioned work with their council:

[We've] been working... with this commissioning with the council and getting emails every two minutes and someone trying to take over our worker and make her do what they wanted them to do... All the projects I've done have always been independently funded and I'm just not used to that... there's this real culture of fear. And I know that this person who's harassing us is harassing us because she's getting harassed by her bosses, who are getting harassed by the chief

executive, who's got a lot of pressure on him, because everyone's looking at him going why's he getting [paid so much money]. So it, how do you, you can't, I can't break that.

This account speaks of an unbreakable and fearful culture that thwarted joint working to support CD. The smooth running of the system, i.e. procuring the services of CD through the market discipline of commissioning (Patel-Kanwal & Smith, 1997), was notionally about subcontracting a service out, into the community. To the CDW, and others in the wider VCS commissioning was invasive (NCIA, 2011), seeking to take over and control the voluntary sector and by implication, community workers, by bringing them further into the council. The CDW (quoted above) who described working with the council on commissioning and experiencing 'harassment' illustrates how resources to support CD work were conditioned by enormous pressures. The root cause in this stalling of CD is located, by the CDW, in the dysfunctional nature of the council, which 'harasses' its staff from top to bottom. The CDW noticed that this behaviour continued in the way the council interacted with the wider community, in this case, a CD project. The comment is delivered more in sadness than in anger, an appreciation of the scale of the problem and its human cost.

Confronted by internal constraints and the necessity of making both primary and secondary adjustments in order to progress their jobs, a long standing CDW, who worked in both the local VCS and council for many years, pin-pointed the problem for community work in the way career structures of council officers were rewarded by internal compliance, rather than by accountability to the local community:

You have a career structure, so you have senior officers in there somewhere, so therefore you want to get to that senior officer you have to jump through hoops. So there's a problem for me there, right. The hoops should be, they've worked in the community, developed things and taken us on, argued with us, right. So therefore we should have 'em with us, right? As against, they've followed the pattern, kept it quiet, it's all been hunky dory, we'll give 'em a job (laughs). So therefore... in the sense of community development, I don't think it works at all.

The learnt behaviour of successful officers who rose up the hierarchy, was to have 'followed the pattern' set out within the council, rather than 'developed things' by working outside, 'in the community', in this account. The worker concluded that community development doesn't 'work at all'.

This is a severe challenge to the Giddens-inspired MLGA vision of local government as a reflexive organisation. In his book *The Third Way* he writes that 'community renewal must not ignore the public sphere' (1998, 85) and exhorts that 'government must adjudicate... (on) different versions of the community's future' (ibid). The different, but equally toxic accounts of local government's internecine disputes and irregular competition with communities in attainment of community resource, suggests such 'adjudication' to be less straightforward. By some accounts, it was not only venal, but impossible.

The institutional dysfunction was described by some interviewees as an overall culture of fear, which distorted and impeded all council actions, including those on communities. This was compounded by party politics in the minds of some officers. Belonging to a 'political lobby' was previously identified as a route for advancement by

officers, a way to secure greater room for manoeuvre, to transcend fear and frustration.

This officer went on to explain that:

Even as officers, there's an unspoken acknowledgement that if you're a member of the [Labour] Party and an officer, you will go further you know. That's, it's there. It's unspoken, but it's there and everybody knows it.

The means to progress were unspoken, almost unmentionable, but omnipresent because 'everybody knows it'. The observation made by the longstanding Council and VCS CD worker, of senior officers being rewarded by following an internal pattern, that is unrelated to 'work in the community', was developed more specifically to joining a locally incumbent ruling party. The inability to speak ('it's unspoken'), about a primary means of advancing objectives (how to 'go further'), impacted not only on officers, but on what officers did and how they might support communities. A political lobby might enable them to do more in every direction, both with and for communities, despite the fact that it went against both the spirit and the letter of each council's constitution and code of conduct³⁴.

Formal transgression is therefore culpable, but a community activist explained that this did not prevent the influence of Party membership:

³⁴The Lewisham employee code of conduct begins by stating that its employees must act 'with honesty, integrity, impartiality and objectivity' and under a heading on 'political neutrality and activity' states that 'employees are required to serve the whole Council and its Members, not just Members of any party group'. That they must act 'impartially and must not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere with their work'. Under section Part 5, 4.2 on officers code of conduct, on page 257 of the Greenwich Council Constitution, 'all officers (except political assistants ...) are required to observe political neutrality in carrying out their duties – they serve the council as a whole'. Likewise Newham Council's 2011 constitution records on page 215, paragraph 4.1.2 that 'officers will not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere with their work or professional judgement and advice'.

The... concern particularly in a place like [anonymous]] is that because... such a high proportion of party members are employees of the council that effectively the only constituency that [the leader] has to worry about is the workforce, because at the end of the day the only people who in reality have the power to get rid of him are employees of the council.

Whilst political power might have weighed down on officers and stymied effective community work, this community activist saw a parallel process whereby the leader was accountable to an inner community ('constituency') of 'party members who were employees of the council'. In a one party state, the community or constituency that stands pre-eminent is the one that selects the leadership of the party traditionally occupying local government. By implication, the suggestion is that communities on the outside of the council and without membership of the incumbent party, lack an important means of securing their agenda. It is not easy to judge the pull that local politics has, either as a legitimate activity or otherwise. However the fact that perceptions existed of an unhealthy influence across both the council and wider community, suggest it was a significant issue, with predominantly negative consequences for community building (Purdue, D, Razzaque, K, Hambleton, R, Stewart, M with Huxham, C & Vangen, S, 2000, 50; Twelvetrees, 2002, 71-72; Diamond & Liddle, 2005, 188).

One of the most obvious and regular ways in which councils had supported and developed the community had been through their VCS grants programmes. This has more recently also been described as commissioning, or employing elements of commissioning, alongside traditional grant giving. One officer explained that funding was not a given and it came with expectations around what the council felt was relevant:

We do have issues with some of the voluntary sector organisations thinking they have a right to the funding and a right to exist, but with no purpose sometimes and it's quite hard.

The demand for council money to do community work by the VCS was seen to have generated a degree of conflict around issues of assumed entitlement, by 'organisations thinking they have a right to the funding'. The meaning of community support in this respect and the order of priority given to it was determined by the council as funder (Scott, 2010). When it viewed the community activity as having 'no purpose', or - more accurately - a purpose it was not prepared to recognise or support, the reality was often that the particular type of community support was dealt a fatal blow. This was because, as one council officer said when interviewed, there was no automatic 'right to exist'. She reflected that, in personal and emotional terms, this was 'quite hard' for all involved.

There are always difficult decisions to be made. A lead grants officer in another borough reinforced how hard it was to privilege some community projects over others, particularly when needing to make overall cuts:

We were going through some cuts and I was like 'oh my God' if we had, sorry we're not allowed to call them cuts, you called them reductions or some sort of different way. Anyway, when we were going through that, I would agonise about what that actually meant, make sure we got it right so that it's not, obviously it's going to affect somebody, but actually that we got, yeah, we got the cuts right.

And my then boss said, he couldn't understand why I was agonising. He said, 'you've still got a job, there's no problem, what's your', you know,' why are you, why?' It's that actually because it's what I believe in, so it's best someone like me does it than someone like him who doesn't give a stuff.

There are two professional and emotional responses outlined here. To agonise and work hard to ensure the cuts were done conscientiously, so 'we got the cuts right'. Or to distance oneself, to see 'no problem' and not 'give a stuff' about seeking to minimise, where possible, the overall harm, that would inevitably 'affect somebody'. Moving from their line manager to the overall council, the grants officer described how corporate decisions on cuts to community projects were approached:

Doing across the board cuts... was an easier and more comfortable option for them, to have that rationale and they could say you're all in it together. Well, actually, that's rubbish, because actually it, some can afford to, some can't afford to, if they fit with what the priorities might be that the council sees... But using a CD approach to do that... I have got my own process outside everybody else's processes now.

Given the unenviable consequences that would ensue, the officer revealed that the council typically took the 'easier and more comfortable option for them', as distinct from one that might, albeit in a minor way, reduce discomfort for communities but be more difficult for the council. The centripetal force exerted on officers was to pull them in to get behind an agreed 'rationale', a united line, so that 'you're all in it together'.

However, this simplistic homogeneity – ‘doing cuts across the board’ – was seen as ‘rubbish’, because it was at odds with the council's own declared priorities, which could not all be the same. The council had a hierarchy of priorities, some of which would trump others. As a result, the council ‘can afford’ some priorities, but ‘can’t afford’ others. To escape this pressure, the grants officer is prepared to make a secondary adjustment, ‘leading to a rupture in the smooth running of the organisation’ (Goffman, 1961, 180). Due to their individual resourcefulness the grants officer is able to say ‘I have got my own process outside everybody else’s processes now’. This is achieved by ‘using a CD approach’.

The manner in which CD prevailed is instructive, as an act of resistance within the underlife of the council. The process the officer followed created new spaces for meaningful and dynamic communication, as they went on to describe:

Well, with the new three year funding and grants monitoring process, in setting those up, we were involved in consultation events and I’m having regular review events with the sector, funded sector obviously ... particularly (focusing on) the monitoring. We’re kind of like, well, how are we going to go about it? What we gonna do? How’s the best way? What does it mean? And we’ve gone through a process. We’re going to have another review. But what people were saying is they were finding it very useful actually just meeting each other and having that debate and discussions. So it’s kind of like almost forming itself into a funding forum, almost; so some of that is already starting to happen. When I first came here, when I tried to set that up, I was actually stopped from that happening. I

just went in and done it now, without, which is interesting and that's about senior officers and control.

The content of the funding forum has a clear council interest – ‘the monitoring’. It also afforded a reciprocity that was contagious, rather than a tense and limited exchange of information. There was an appetite to ‘keep meeting each other and having that debate and discussions’, with the upshot that a ‘funding forum’ was emerging to facilitate ever greater levels of dialogue. Viewed defensively, the officer had now got more work to do and was more publically exposed, and - by extension - the council had ceded ‘control’, which was why the officer believed they were initially ‘stopped’. Indeed, that would have remained the case until they ‘went in and done it now’ without the permission of ‘senior officers’.

The skilful intervention of officers within the council and actively facilitating the wider community, demonstrates how support can get to the community in a way that is mutually beneficial and respectful. It stood in sharp contrast to earlier testimony, revealing just how variable both the quality of the relationship and the kinds of available support can be. One of the prerequisites for community empowerment, as evidenced by what interviewees said, was to begin with and maintain mutual respect, getting the relationships right. This required an accentuation of people skills and risk taking behaviours, at odds from the norms of ‘total institutions’. The struggle to settle a meaning of what community is and what constitutes legitimate community leadership, ceased to matter so much as the ability of people to work together, in an arena heavily loaded towards bureaucracy and finance (Taylor, 2003, 133-136).

Community, identity and mutual respect: A VCS and community activist perspective

In addition to interviews with council officers and members, a similar number of VCS workers and community activists were interviewed across the study areas. The VCS and community activist identity was marked by a sense of belonging to its own 'sector' or grouping, which stood apart from the public and private realms, even when these realms were seen to encroach and act upon them. The VCS community activists were able to present a strong sense of their independence, along with a clear idea of what the trope of community meant to them and how it might be strengthened. However the research also included equally clear views on what the VCS amounted to, as articulated by officers and local politicians.

The VCS is uniquely shaped by the opinions and operational practices of stronger sectors of society (as covered in chapter two), most immediately by the council (Hudson, 1995, 27; Scott, 2010, 371; Wallace, 2010, 87-91). Therefore, an understanding of the identity of the VCS, its relationship to the wider local community and its behavioural traits, are garnered from this statutory perspective. The meaning of the VCS and its function is created and activated both within the sector and also to a very large degree, from outside the sector.

With the rise of quasi markets there is no easy way to delineate where the VCS begin and the public and private sectors end. These markets have increasingly 'replaced monopolistic state providers with competitive independent ones' (Le Grand and Bartlett, 1993, 10). Unlike conventional markets, organisations are often not

privately owned and are not seeking to make a profit. Demand is not expressed just in monetary terms, but might take the form of a budget or voucher for a particular service. Supply, often the purchasing of a service, typically takes place through a public sector intermediary, for example a health agency or council.

Notwithstanding the influence of quasi markets on social policy, the discrete meaning and identity of community activists and the VCS still remains, largely because only a tiny proportion of the sector has contributed to or benefited from these markets (Community Sector Coalition, 2010, 8-9). To this extent, it has no stake in a quasi market and exists outside of it. However, pinning down precisely what the VCS is and also where community activists might be located, in relation to Civil Society, or in relation to the Public and Private Sector, is extremely difficult.

The NCVO Almanac on Civil Society claims that 'the notion of a civil society 'sector' is untenable' (2008, 7). This is in 'contrast to... a charity... and Third Sector' (ibid). However, there are many 'organisations throughout civil society with no legal identity or status and little, if any, financial resources' (ibid, 11). It is therefore possible to speak concretely about a formalised charity sector, where 'a relatively small number of organisations are responsible for a much larger proportion of the formal resources' (ibid) while the 'overall total' for the wider VCS is typically 'underestimate[d]' (ibid).

With regard to the VCS and community activist constituency who were interviewed as part of the research, they span the formalised, monied and staffed wings of the VCS and the larger more informal, volunteer-led heartland of associative and individual action. As such, the homogeneity of one sector quickly breaks down, but yet is retained as a badge of convenience, to draw the necessary distinctions between the public and private realms. However, the operational differences across the wings of the

VCS lead to sharp differences of opinion on what community means, who speaks for it, whether it can be ever be truly represented and the kind of actions that make it stronger.

Thus the marketisation of the VCS, the retrenchment, or departure into, or from, notions of independence (NCIA, 2011), along with the diversity of understandings on community practice, are decisive in undergirding the testimony of VCS workers and community activists in relation to their understandings and experience of community, identity and mutual respect.

Unlike the Council, the VCS and community activist sectors often struggled to assert a widely recognisable role or have it legitimised. A clear failure of VCS leadership arose in one study area, culminating in a council LSP officer recounting the following scenario:

So when our umbrella CVS³⁵ failed... we sort of inherited them because they needed an accountable body for their money to go to. Otherwise they were going down the pan and we basically took their work on and we babysat them for about three years now. I don't think they're going to go back anytime soon.

The VCS representative body 'failed' and was taken over by the council, who 'babysat' them. The council had a vested interest in ensuring that their work and funding, which partly came from central government in the form of the Single Community Programme (SCP), was not lost. It was necessary that the CVS survived to ensure this money came into the borough and the LSP - 'they needed an accountable body for their money'. By doing that, a key tranche of neighbourhoods and modernisation policy and practice was viable. The weakness of the CVS was such that even after 'three years',

³⁵ Council for Voluntary Service

they were seen as being unlikely 'to go back anytime soon' to being an independently run organisation. The same officer explained:

The voluntary sector... don't realise... they're... fragile as the rest of them [and] that the council is obliged to have one and to fund one to some degree but they can go just as belly up. Certainly in [London Borough] we've had that experience anyway, that they can go just as belly up and have to be liquidated.

The foundations and identity of the VCS was seen as 'fragile', prone to collapse, to go 'belly up'. This was something it was unable to acknowledge to itself, which the VCS did not seem to 'realise' according to the council officer. She felt that parts of the VCS wrongly assumed that the council was 'obliged' to fund it. Whilst true that the council would fund some VCS groups due to its wider stewardship and partnership role, to deliver services, bring money into the borough and take up a place at the partnership table, this was not a guarantee to all VCS groups. In fact some needed to be 'liquidated', according to the officer, which meant the council would close them down. Thus, the VCS identity was diminished by its dependence on the council, and by extension, its ability to stand for a distinctive set of values, command respect and take action to build stronger communities, was radically undermined.

A senior VCS manager, responsible for overseeing several community economic development contracts across the same borough, opined on the shortcomings of the local VCS:

I don't think we stand on our own feet... and that's because we're weak, we're weak. I say it very clearly you know and to [some] extent, I think the local authority prefers the situation... I don't think we have all the skills required (to be... independent.

In his mind the sector, which he readily identified with, as 'we', was 'weak', unassertive (unable unwilling to 'stand on its own feet') and lacking necessary skills. He surmised that this weakness suited the local authority, who 'preferred the situation' to a more voluble, autonomous community actor.

A senior council officer, whose CD team engaged local people across the same borough as the VCS manager, explained why the council might prefer a subordinate role for the VCS:

They would want acquiescence, if you ask me. Local Authorities, the way they use funding, the way they use community leaders, it's about acquiescence: 'don't make too much noise, we'll look after you.

An 'acquiescent' VCS would allow the council to use both funding and community leaders to their own ends. The price for 'acquiescence' was to be 'look[ed] after', or as a previous council LSP officer described it, to be 'babysat'. Conceivably, the consequences of making 'too much noise' might result in being closed down. The sustenance of such VCS bodies by the council, led to the obligation of behavioural norms (such as acquiescence, by not making too much noise). Given the weakness of the position, what little resource and energy that existed, made such groups focus on

maintaining their relationship with the council. However, by doing so, the senior council officer highlighted the value of acquiescence to the local authority and a sector that looked inwards to the council, and went on to explain how it also had a secondary value for the council:

If there's no mechanism for them to engage with the views of the wider VCS, the political sector knows you've not done that so you're on your own and they will challenge you on a lot of those things. Therefore, the contribution is good, some people are very good, but... hey presto: your authority's undermined.

A weak VCS, that was unable to 'engage with the views of the wider' sector was seen as having 'undermined' its own authority. The ability to speak as a voice for the community is open to 'challenge' by the councillors ('political sector'), who unlike the established VCS leaders, vigorously asserted their community credentials. An example of this is evidenced in the comments of a leader of one of the study councils:

We... know they're not remotely representative. Maybe they shouldn't be representative because that after all is our role. But the people who the voluntary sector have periodically placed onto our LSP, for example, we know, with one or two exceptions that they are not the people we would listen to if actually we were talking about the needs of our local wards. And there is a complete disconnection between the Voluntary sector and the people who as councillors we'd engage in our wards. We don't see that, that connect or that follow through, in terms of community representation.

VCS leaders were not seen as 'remotely representative' by the council leader. The role of community representation was exclusive ('that... is our role') and belonged to elected politicians. In this way the ability to aid the democratisation of the MLGA was diminished, along with a wider social justice role (Marris & Rein, 1972, 219; Ledwith, 1997, 5; Shaw & Martin, 2000, 410). There was no connection with the VCS and local residents ('the people... of our wards'). The VCS were 'not the people we would listen to' or 'engage' with regard to community issues. Although the VCS might be used, 'periodically placed' onto partnerships boards, these partnerships belonged to the council, hence 'our LSP'.

The leader's concerns about the 'disconnected' nature of the council-funded VCS were shared by a cabinet member in a neighbouring borough, who had a community portfolio. It was not just the 'disconnect' with community which served to delegitimise the sector as a voice, or its dependence on council funding, but also its probity:

When there was neighbourhood renewal funds and stuff like that, an awful lot of the third sector seemed to come out very, very keenly when there were monies being divided up. We had severe problems with a lot of that, because different groups didn't seem to have the same probity, can we say, as we would hope. And there was potential for corruption there as well... I mean they were creating their own jobs.

One of the most senior local politicians in the borough viewed the VCS as, on occasion, behaving unacceptably, in ways that were 'corrupt'. The opportunity to build

stronger communities via the 'neighbourhood renewal funds' was undermined by the VCS, which sought to 'create their own jobs' instead. Rather than playing a responsible partnership role, the sector gave the council 'severe problems'. He was keen to add that:

There are genuinely good people out there who do excellent work. We have a number of partners... who do an awful lot of work in the community and do very well and are professional ... They do good things, but again you know they're big, they're not volunteers, cost money... in many ways they're just another branch of the council.

Whilst the VCS 'cost money', they also consisted of many 'genuinely good people ... who do excellent work' and 'are professional', in contrast to the venality demonstrated by those in pursuit of neighbourhood renewal funding. However, these VCS professionals and their identity and contribution to stronger communities, was framed as being 'just another branch of the council'. The VCS' community credentials were null and void. This nullification of the VCS identity was spelt out by another council leader, who had similar reservations to his colleague who had argued the VCS groups were 'not remotely representative'.

The voluntary sector... there isn't such a thing... There's the not-for-profit sector which delivers things and they will bid, so we'll commission them to do things. There's (another) sector who don't get paid: they'll do it for nothing. Once you pay somebody, you're in the position of a different; it's just a different means of

delivery... The voluntary sector's a delivery arm. It can either be the very, very best, way better at delivering than us, or utterly corrupt and debilitating. And there's a wide range and actually one of the challenges for councillors is you have to hold them to account. At its best we can't beat it, nor should we, it's just brilliant at its best it's brilliant. At its worst it absolutely works against anything good.

The VCS input into community building was often seen as being malign, it 'works against anything good' and is 'utterly corrupt and debilitating'. But the sector's identity needed to be explained because 'there isn't such a thing' as the voluntary sector, only a 'council delivery arm'. This mirrors the cabinet member's view of the VCS as a 'branch of the council'. What he was prepared to acknowledge did exist, by way of an independent sector, was an informal community sector that 'don't get paid'. The apparent homogeneity of the VCS as one sector, whether as voluntary, community, activist and other sub sectors, was not accepted. However this refusal to countenance a unified sector does not reflect the hybridity of form that actually existed across the sector. For example, the nuances between co-operatives, social enterprises, resident forums, conservation and amenity societies, heritage groups, etc. Instead, a simple bifurcation is made between council funded and non funded, between those who 'get paid' and those 'who do it for nothing'. In this way, the local politicians, both leaders and cabinet members, got to define what the VCS was and was not, as well as how it related not only to the council but also to the wider community. Their definition is also weighted with an eye to their own legitimacy – 'they are not representative, that is our role'. They

could be instrumentalised and brought into the council as 'a delivery arm', but there 'isn't such a thing' as an independent identity for the formal sector.

This stamping of identity and purpose onto the sector by the leader is only one interpretation. Whilst there is a sizeable difference between unpaid volunteers working in small community groups and formal voluntary sector organisations that are funded by contracts and employ paid staff, many of those interviewed in the VCS saw a very different role, identity and purpose for themselves. The VCS manager who lamented that his sector lacked skills, felt nonetheless that the sector should be more independent and assertive, allowing it to 'stand on its own feet'. A VCS manager in a different borough summed up what was required as: 'It is about being brave enough to take action and it's being brave enough to say enough's enough we are not playing your game anymore'.

There were times when the VCS needed to be 'brave' and set boundaries, to 'say enough's enough'. Likewise, the senior council manager who spoke of the council's desire for 'acquiescence', leading to a cause and effect, 'hey presto, your authority's undermined', also saw a means to overcome this, by 'engaging the wider views of the sector'. Hence, a wider, more unified VCS, with one overarching identity, was the means to build not only a more authoritative VCS, but to enable it to act as a strong independent community broker.

A senior VCS figure in one borough commented:

We haven't been able to elaborate our own strategy as to what we see as our own construct of community development. I mean, how do you plan? Anything that has existed here, you know, it's always been borough, you know, from the

local authority ... We haven't had the strength to create our own development plan.

Whilst some of the VCS were 'babysat', 'liquidated' or 'an arm of the council', other interviewees from the wider VCS demonstrated both a strong connection with local communities and the ability to be independent and publically critical. These were largely community activist voices, individuals connected to community campaigns, forums and groups that operated on little or no funding, whilst remaining highly engaged with their local communities and often connected to more formally established parts of the VCS. One activist indicated the value in being publically critical of the council:

Yeah, but you must be able to become a nuisance. It's one of the tools really you know [laughs] and, of course you are effective if you are a big nuisance. The bigger the nuisance, you know, the greater the deterrence actually.

The means to be effective, to secure stronger communities, was to be a 'big nuisance'. To provoke and threaten the council's interests was one of the 'tools' to pursue in order to realise objectives generated within the community by community activists. From this part of the wider VCS, it was seen as essential to have the capability ('you must be able') to 'deter' the council by causing significant trouble. The consequences of not doing so were to have one's role and legitimacy dictated to by the council. A council officer reinforced the aversion of her employer to activists who were able to act independently as community voices:

They do not like key activists getting the press in. There's a difference between an individual ranting and raving. That's controllable, regrettable, but controllable. Whereas if you get an intelligent, well-read community activist, who can put passion into whatever their passion is about, they don't like that. So they are very much... control freak(s)... They decimated the tenants' movement so you could wheel people out and say 'oh isn't this wonderful'. So they're very good at manipulation, at controlling situations I think and picking up the good bits and running with the bits that people want to hear.

In pursuit of their community-related goals, the activist jars the narrative, disrupting the 'manipulation' of the community story, with its focus on the 'good bits', which the council seeks to 'control'. The desire for 'acquiescence' noted previously by a council officer, is exemplified by the promotion of a particular type of community voice by the council, which the officer notes is engineered, 'wheel[ing] people out', who are reliably uncritical and can be counted on to 'say 'oh isn't this wonderful'. This is in contrast to the presence of a VCS activist voice that has 'passion' and is 'intelligent', that is prepared to articulate critical and alternative ideas and approaches to community matters. This representation of community is not 'liked' by the local state, which seeks to privilege ('wheel out') other accounts, in her view.

The officer distinguished between activists who were 'ranting and raving' and others who were 'intelligent, (and) well-read'. The former was 'regrettable but controllable' because, by virtue of it being a 'rant' it lacked focus and could be dismissed. However, the existence of a community activist whose 'passion' was combined with some of the 'skills' deficits, which a VCS manager identified as lacking in

parts of the funded VCS, asserted an account of community and community priorities which could not be incorporated into the vision of stewardship that the council reserved for communities. The dynamic of community representation projected by this wing of the VCS, moves from a homogeneous council-sponsored understanding, to one that is both on the offensive and defensive. The activist community voice initiates and the council response is, by this account, largely self protective, suspicious, if not in outright denial of the proposition. An example of a refusal to countenance an activist VCS representation of community was described by one cabinet member as a quest to go deeper into communities:

It's how far you get beyond what I call normal suspects... are we getting beyond the normal activist groups? That type of thing. So, you know, we got much more work to do if we're going to begin to get real decision-making down to a local level... you got to respond to what people say, it's a delicate balance really.

By this reading, the community activist representation of community and its agenda for community action gives a skewed and warped view, because it comes from a well organised, well represented elite, dubbed 'normal suspects' who are already known to the council. In contrast people at the local level are being missed because 'much more work' is required to enfranchise them in 'real decision-making'. Because the involvement of people who are not in 'activist groups' would lead to 'real decision-making', it could be concluded that decisions which community activists were able to influence, was invalid. In addition, it is the council's job to appear to respond, whilst

maintaining a balance that 'gets beyond', and escapes from, the presentation of community, which is made ever present ('normal') by community 'activist groups'.

The behaviour of community activists was described previously by one council officer as 'passionate', but lapsing between 'ranting and raving', or being more contained by virtue of being 'intelligent'. The former characterisation of incivility and departures from mutual respect was recognised by another cabinet member who did not associate it with an underlying purposeful 'passion':

(I am) opposed to getting a few hotheads in a room and shouting at me. I was going to say this and well, there are five of us and we've got louder voices than you so you must now go and do this... That side of it won't happen.

The assertion of a community agenda by 'hotheads' with 'louder voices' who seek to use weight of numbers – 'there are five of us' – to caucus decisions, 'so that you must ... do this' was flatly rejected, 'it won't happen'. The community activist agenda was illegitimate, because it lacked basic respect for the individual and sought to intimidate, by shouting for example. It was hardly necessary, on this basis, to examine the community issues being pursued by the activists, because of the tactics which were abusive and could not be tolerated. The community objective that was being pursued was not germane, only the tactics and behaviour exhibited.

A council leader confirmed both the desire to escape from activists (as the usual or 'normal suspects') and the absolute refusal to engage with anything they had to say about community concerns: 'I will not be having meetings, so that six people can come, because all that happens is the same bloody people as well. It has to be more than that'.

A council officer corroborated the automatic refusal to count the views of the more activist voices in the VCS, across the whole of the council:

They also view certain people as activists and so say 'well that's just an activist' you know? So anyone at those meetings with political, really strong views is often put down in that way because they're like, 'OK, right, he's your local activist' is how the council are able to explain it away. You know 'that you're never gonna satisfy that person' and I just think that they don't really hear, they don't really hear.

The issues and agenda generated from the activist part of the VCS are typically 'strong views', which might be inspired by both small and large 'p' political motivations. This appeared to be enough for them to be 'explained away', to be 'put down'. The issue has a bearing on the democratic deficit. If the automatic response, when faced with social demands, is to de-legitimise or pathologise the individual, then important local voices and issues are permanently shut out, amongst others that are may be purely vexatious.

The community issues, priorities and vision raised by 'that (type of) person' can 'never' be 'satisf[ied]' so they are automatically discredited and their work with communities is ignored. The lack of basic reciprocity (Putnum, 2000, 134-147) which sometimes characterised comments by some interviewees, typically council officers, councillors and council leaders, towards community activists, closed down possibilities of working with highly engaged and motivated citizens. The activists communicated but the council 'don't really hear'.

However, one community campaign led by activists managed to gain a startling form of recognition. The activist who revelled in being a nuisance found himself being rewarded and reviled simultaneously in the same week:

Oh yeah, there was even a motion, I was commended by the council... That was funny because it was on the same week (the leader said) the campaign was... 'pathetic and run by backward people' and then the unanimity of the council motion commending me for the hard work. And then of course who is pathetic since [it is a] complete vindication of what I said.

His further reflections on the exchange with the leader of the council suggested that the traducing of personality, which had been elicited by a 'pathetic' community campaign 'run by backward people', not only led in this instance to an equal and opposite 'commending... for the hard work done' by a unanimous council motion, but also a sense of play acting.

Oh no, I'm OK with him actually, because he says these things because, I don't know, he's human, you know. My relationship with [the leader] is past that point. We are doing fine [laughs.] You've got to understand that's what I say about thick skin. I have a degree of thick skin myself and it's nothing personal. You know he can say whatever to the newspapers and it doesn't bother me in the least. And I said worse to him [laughs.] It's part of the game.

The account reveals that, in this instance, the success of an organised community agenda was a 'game', which required a 'thick skin'. Incivility was aired publically and included statements on the record to 'the newspapers', which were characterised as 'personal'. It was characterised as a necessary means of engaging successfully, 'part of the game'. Rather than seek to cultivate a public relationship of mutual respect, the activist reflected that he had happily escalated any instance of personal abuse: 'I said worse to him'. Privately, the activist's relationship with the leader was 'doing fine'. The conflict, which concerned a campaign to preserve a community amenity, was a 'game', requiring opponents to play roles that they could readily dispense with at other times.

Whilst there were occasions when adversarial tactics appeared to work for some in the wider VCS by facilitating an accommodation with the council at the highest level, the VCS as a whole did not gain ground. A council VCS grants officer commented on a disproportionate level of scrutiny applied to the sector:

We are scrutinised to the hilt, I'm forever being up, up against, to the select committee, to talk about the voluntary sector, what we fund, how we fund it, is it effective? So, actually, what's being scrutinised is the voluntary sector, not necessarily the process... Public accounts are doing an in depth - and when I say in depth, I mean in depth - kind of like review of what we're doing. Why we're doing it. How we're doing it. They've had a meeting with us where we had a two hour grilling. They've met with representatives of the voluntary sector to check whether we're doing. It just feels, I mean I don't have a problem with that, because I think, you know as a, as a public body, they have a right to do that. But

it's quite interesting that they hone in a lot on the voluntary sector. Internal audit: I get audited every other year to make sure it's all open, above board and processes are in place. Well do they do that at the same level? I mean, I have a £5,000,000 grants budget, commissioned services, adult social care for example, a lot larger budget. Do they have the same level of scrutiny?

The interest taken in voluntary action did not concern 'process'. A CD process, for example, might be expected to facilitate dialogue, share power, pursue mutually agreed goals and enable deeper learning. In place of this, the officer identified a 'review', in which the questions were uni-directional, 'what [the council] fund[s], how [the council] fund[s] it, is it effective [for the council]?' The VCS is interrogated. Hence, a routine 'two hour grilling' and compliance with 'audits', result in a VCS that is 'scrutinised to the hilt', in contrast to other 'commissioned services' that have 'a lot larger budget', but seemingly less scrutiny.

The VCS identity, in all its layers, frequently struggled to set its own agenda, or contribute as an equal and respected partner to policy and programmes to build stronger communities. Its means of working in communities, alongside local people, was constrained by access to regimes of funding that were often disciplinary, without fostering a deeper trust, respect and understanding. The options of either being assertive or compliant both came with the probability of negative consequences being visited on individual groups and only slight hope of substantial gains. Overall the local environment was not conducive to a self confident and autonomous VCS.

Conclusion

Moving outwards from the experiences visited upon the VCS in asserting its identity and in pursuit of its goals, its ability to contribute to building stronger communities was being inhibited. The communities themselves inevitably received less support, as energy was being spent elsewhere.

Chapter nine:

Findings: comparisons across the three study areas

Contents

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Introduction

This chapter explores the extent to which the findings of this research enable comparisons to be made across the study areas. In particular, whether comparisons can reveal a preponderance of similarities or significant differences, given the common geographical, demographic and political features described in chapter five. In chapter three, which covered research methods, the case was made for the use of semi-structured interviews situated across three study areas. These interviews brought together the recognisable roles of councillors, activists, council officers, council leaders and CDWs, all of which were common to each area.

The experiences of these groups were specific to their local area but held a number of themes that were not rigidly contingent on neighbourhood, ward or borough boundary. For example, the relationship between council officer and councillor and the issues which flowed from it were repeated in every local authority. Likewise the community campaigns waged by activists presented all councils with similar challenges, even if the immediate issues that were being fought for differed.

Each area either had identical or very similar structures, such as local strategic partnerships (LSPs), community empowerment networks (CENs) and neighbourhood management. All of which presented opportunities for comparison. Whilst the difference in leadership models might suggest one important difference, even that was not such a crucial difference due to a far deeper tradition of party control. All of the current leaders (Roberts, Bullock and Wales) have held power for a combined total of 42 years (up to 2011). Hence whilst only two of the three study areas adopted the model of Directly Elected Mayor, the councils they lead have experienced unusually long periods of unchanged individual leadership.

The purpose of the chapter is not to mark the three boroughs on a points scale, but to examine areas of similarity and difference uncovered by the research across the study areas. However the scoring of boroughs is precisely what central government inspection and audit regimes under New Labour have done (Taylor, 2003, 108; Diamond & Liddle, 2005, 156; Blond, 2010, 248). The existence of these scores, in particular when they relate to council performance on community empowerment indicators, is extremely telling, in comparison with the testimony of interviewees, as covered at the end of this chapter.

There are potential problems that flowed from the ubiquity of central government audit (under New Labour), which are covered briefly in the next section, using four themes: a culture of competitiveness, a reliance on public relations and marketing, the complexity of accurately assessing performance due to the size and scale of the local civil and civic realm and finally, the subjective nature of success (Diamond & Liddle, 2005, 124).

Having noted these issues the remainder of the chapter examines the findings across the study areas. This is shown to reveal major commonalities and minor divergences. Interviewees from all study areas made both critical and positive assessments of their partners, colleagues and other sectors. These comments are reviewed to ascertain key patterns. For example, the extent to which identifiable types of interviewees, such as councillors, held similar views across the study areas, about other groups, typically on the role and value of the VCS.

The degree of support that existed across the study areas for CD is examined, locating positive statements of endorsement, noting which professions and groups of interviewees were prepared to endorse the importance of a CD-based approach. This is

followed by an examination of recent central government inspection reports, notably the most recent Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), focusing in particular on participation and engagement. Likewise the most recent Audit Commission rankings based on performance of all public services enable a cross-comparison to be made of the study areas. These generally positive government reports are then cross-referenced with alternative measures of community engagement in the study areas, using VCS, rather than statutory sector outcomes as the baseline for performance. The conclusion brings the chapter to an end with a brief summary of the comparisons made across the study areas.

A cautionary note

Whilst there are clear gains to be made in making comparisons across the study areas, given the shared geographical boundaries and similar political and demographic traits (chapter five), there are other factors that warrant a degree of caution. There is considerable rivalry between different London boroughs, especially those who are near neighbours. This has intensified in recent years due to the increase of inspection regimes by central government. One council CDW described the friction that was sometimes caused:

I think it's also about being a bit competitive with other boroughs, you know they hate it when (a neighbouring London borough) gets beacon status or something. They just don't like it because they can't see what they're doing that's different, why they don't get it and why (another neighbouring London borough) is always rolled out in this way.

Research that adds further comment to the relative merits of the study areas therefore enters a highly regimented and contentious domain of audit. To thrive in this environment the boroughs have increasingly honed their PR and marketing skills, and where research comparisons are likely to be viewed according to their utility in driving a favourable narrative, or if found to be unfavourable, to take measures to limit the publicity and impact of such findings.

One council manager underlined how integral this had become: '*they (i.e. the council) invented spin before number ten*'. The dynamic of inter-borough competitiveness and acute sensitivity to image and reputation are filters that impinge on the way in which comparisons across the study areas are likely to be received if given prominence. Ideally such findings would generate reflection, debate and learning but the immediate environment makes it probable that they would be dealt with in the same way as other critical feedback, namely in a defensive and restrictive way.

There are other reasons for being cautious about making comparisons across the study areas. In each of the study areas there existed hundreds of formal VCS organisations, many of whom had a direct involvement with CD and policy making, including the MLGA. Below this formal level of the VCS existed many smaller informal community associations and active residents (CSC, 2010). Likewise across the public sector there were a wide range of teams and departments with a CD role and policy interface, including not only the council, but also the Primary Care Trust, police, Job Centre Plus, local colleges and housing associations. The council itself, typically employed several thousand staff, and was often the largest employer in the borough.

The sheer size and scale of the public and voluntary community sectors mean that there was always a wide range of experiences. It was possible for one council department to enjoy close working relationships with local residents and the VCS, whilst a similar council team became mired in reciprocal antagonism. It was also possible for both to exist within the same department, team or even individual members of staff and for such dynamics to change over time.

A final reason for caution in making comparisons across the study areas is the difficulty in defining success. Not only is success with regard to CD, the MLGA or similar endeavours subjective, it is also likely to entail opposite instances of failure or setbacks that are intrinsic to any positive progress. The purpose of the research was not to judge individual boroughs but discern overall trends in CD, modernisation and democratisation.

The overall comments of interviewees across all three study areas indicated their perception of significant failings, rather than success. This is examined further in the concluding chapter (chapter ten). There is scope for learning from what are partial results but such learning, were it to occur, would require a safe and supportive process for all involved and engagement with this kind of process is beyond the remit of this research. The perceptions of a lack of overall achievement with regard to both CD and the MLGA is an important finding returned to in the final chapter.

Comparison across study areas

Having acknowledged the need for caution the next section proceeds to examine commonalities and differences that arose from the findings. The previous findings chapters were organised around the headings of policy making and participation

(chapter six), power (chapter seven) and community, identity and mutual respect (chapter eight). These themes reappear in the consideration of the nature and content of the cross-comparisons. In addition to these recurrent tropes the interviews covered six worker roles: council officer, CDW, council leader, community activist, councillor and VCS employee. These roles also enabled cross-comparisons to be made amongst similar and different groups and professions.

The findings: major commonality; minor divergences.

Broadly the experiences of policy making, participation, power, community, identity and mutual respect were similar across the three areas; the same issues, concerns and obstacles arose everywhere. It was possible to discern a dominant single party political culture in all boroughs which sometimes led to authoritarian styles and which some interviewees labelled a 'one party state'. This perception was marginally less pronounced in one of the three areas, where there appeared to have been efforts made towards a more pluralist approach to partnership working and local political discourse. However this was relative and did not markedly affect the conclusions drawn in the overall research findings.

Interviewees typically evinced a high degree of dedication, which was apparent across roles and study areas. This was matched by a common frustration with their environment, in particular its political and institutional culture. Most, but not all, interviewees reported a degree of dissatisfaction, which was often expressed in very strong terms. In addition to a political culture, it was possible to discern a similar institutional culture in all boroughs which some interviewees labelled a 'culture of fear'.

Critical and positive assessments

Interviewees across the study areas frequently reflected on the performance and abilities of other partners, colleagues and sectors. These reflections were consistent across all study areas in terms of positive approbations and more critical assertions. Community activists expressed the widest range of criticism which were directed at the council, (both officers and elected members), voluntary sector organisations and central government, usually in that order. However council officers offered similar criticisms, though usually delivered in a more measured way, about their employer. The majority of officers interviewed had significant concerns about the operations of local government. This was matched by similar complaints about the council by backbench councillors. However amongst the leaders and members of cabinet, criticisms against activists were especially pronounced, with parts of the VCS and aspects of civil service culture also singled out as reactionary and self interested.

The critical reflections of CDWs tended to examine processes and values. These were often more oblique ways of voicing disquiet. VCS workers tended to offer the least amount of either positive or critical reflection, tending to be focused on their immediate niche position and hence were more accommodating of existing local power arrangements.

Statements of positive affirmation were also widespread. Local informal community groups and the actions of unpaid volunteers were described warmly by all interviewees, in particular by leaders, councillors and CDWs. Activists tended to privilege the work of local unpaid grassroots organisation as a means of bolstering the authenticity of their own actions and by way of contrast to other formal bodies.

Whilst many interviewees were critical of their own organisations and constituencies of interest they also valorised them in the same breath. For example local politicians cited the shortcomings of the local party but also highlighted its importance as a democratic vehicle, and gave examples of success in tackling poverty and inequalities that could only have been achieved by compromise through political channels such as political parties and central and local government. This affirmation also extended to individuals who interviewees worked alongside, for example as part of a team. Council officers often praised the expertise and dedication of their colleagues in the face of a challenging internal and external environment.

Locating CD: widespread support except at the top

CD was described positively by the majority of interviewees. There was considerable regret that CD had not been better supported because of the rigour of its egalitarian principles and practice, which could have provided far more of a counterweight to some of the more reactionary forces, which stymied progressive change. This affirmation of CD was least evident amongst leaders and councillors, though there were significant exceptions. Whilst not criticising CD, most leaders, and many councillors, did not recognise it as being substantively different from generic council community engagement. As a profession and process CD often lacked a distinct meaning for them. For many elected local politicians CD was most often something the council was already doing, under another name. They also frequently confused CD with engagement and consultation or linked it to unrepresentative and oppositional viewpoints.

The absence of solid support from council leaders compounded the difficulties that CD faced in establishing itself in the study areas. Had an endorsement existed, a wide range of resources and people working to a council agenda would quickly be called upon to give energetic support to the mainstreaming of CD practice, which whilst not making its longer term success and sustainability a foregone conclusion, would greatly advance its future prospects.

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) green and red flags (2009-10)

The most visible means of assessing performance across the study areas were evident in the inspection regimes of central government. The Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition government’s commitment to cut red tape has meant that the most recent comparison was the 2009-2010 Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and in particular the green and red flags. These show all three boroughs as performing adequately. There are no strong concerns or action needed, and Lewisham is singled out as excelling in community engagement.

Table 9:1 Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) green and red flags (2009-10)

	Greenwich	Lewisham	Newham
Green Flags Exceptional performance or innovation that others can learn from	None	Community engagement and empowerment of local people	None
Red Flags Special concerns, action needed	None	None	None

Community empowerment indicators (2009 – 2010)

Among the most recent performance measures are a basket of some 198 performance indicators, by which New Labour government measured local councils. Some indicators were mandatory, like national indicator four (NI4) which sought to measure the percentage of residents who agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area, and others that were a matter of choice. The Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition government dispensed with these measurements on coming into power³⁶. However the performance of the three study areas as detailed below in the final years of New Labour (2009 - 2010), illustrate both their individual performance and attainment relative to one another. The early performance indicators, including NI3, NI4, NI6 and NI7 all focused on community empowerment, cohesive communities and strengthening the VCS. The performance of the study areas is detailed below:

Table 9:2 Engagement and empowerment indicators

	Greenwich	Lewisham	Newham
NI3 % of residents involved in civic participation in the local area	15.1% In the best third	16.1% In the best 25%	17.9% In the best 10%
NI4 % of residents who agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area	33.4% In the best 20%	37.3% In the best 10%	45.7% In the best 5%
NI 6 % of residents participating in regular volunteering	19.9% In the worst third	18.3% In the worst 20%	20.5% Average

³⁶ The area information comes from an evaluation of public services between 2009 and 2010 known as the Comprehensive Area Assessment. These assessments ended in June 2010.

NI7 Environment for a thriving third sector	20.9% In the best 20%	24.4% In the best 5%	18.4% In the best third
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Comment and analysis

The scorings for the four indicators, which measured the relative strengths of community engagement and empowerment across all three study areas, were extremely high, with the exception of NI6 which related to levels of volunteering. Newham has an outstanding NI4 score, where residents report feeling able to influence local decisions. Under the NI7 indicator all boroughs score strongly, with Lewisham's VCS seen to be most vigorously thriving.

These findings cast an especially interesting light on the critical comments made by most interviewees. Whereas the findings from most interviews suggest policy failure, the CPA (Comprehensive Performance Assessment) findings describe strong success, especially relative to other English councils. A number of conclusions could be drawn from this:

1. The interviewees experience is not representative of wider opinion and in particular is overly pessimistic and critical
2. The CPA findings are superficial and do not represent the local realities and frustrations, which have been more accurately described by interviewees
3. Both the CPA scores and interviewee findings are valid. The CPA findings, whilst accurate relative to other English councils, do not contradict the interviewees' criticisms but instead suggest barriers and problems are even stronger elsewhere

4. Both the CPA findings and interviewees comments are inaccurate and fail to capture local realities

The variance between the CPA and interview findings suggests at least one version of events has gone awry. The interviews uncovered an abundance of frustration and examples of policy failure, as evidenced by a wide range of local actors who represented some of the leading figures in their respective areas. These stories were not captured by percentages. The pressures to attain a narrowly defined target appear to be weighted to positive affirmations of council progress. Even the low scores for volunteering (NI6) do not represent the nadir of wider engagement expressed by most interviewees. My own conclusion therefore, based on my research findings, is that the first conclusion is incorrect and that the second conclusion has greater validity, namely that the CPA findings do not represent the local realities and frustrations, and are more accurately captured by the depth and detail of interviewee experience and opinion in this research.

Audit Commission ranking of study areas (2002 – 2008)

The CPA overall scores for each of the study areas show a similar level of performance across each of the three areas. In 2005 all three areas were described as improving well. In the years 2002 and 2008 Greenwich and Newham largely mirrored each other with fair overall performance in 2002 and continuing to improve in 2008. Lewisham scored at a higher level in the same years, which whilst a superior score, was not a dramatic difference in comparison with other parts of the country where scores were given stars and attainment descriptions ranged from excellent at one level, to weak, and below that, poor.

Table 9:3 Audit Commission ranking of study areas (2002 – 2008)

	Greenwich	Lewisham	Newham
2008 CPA	3 * improving well	4 * improving well	3 * improving adequately
2005	3 * improving well	3 * improving well	3 * improving well
2002 CPA	Fair	Good	Fair

Alternative measures of community engagement in the study areas

Under the CPA all three areas are successful, well performing local boroughs. Thus the dysfunctions reported by interviewees have not largely affected the government audit. However it is possible to look at four other measures to ascertain the quality of community engagement and empowerment. These are:

- The signing off of the local strategic partnership (LSP) statement of involvement by the local VCS
- The progress made on the local VCS Compact
- The relationship between the Council and its local community empowerment network (CEN)
- The existence of a local CD strategy

Table 9:4 Alternative community engagement measures

Local structure	Greenwich	Lewisham	Newham
LSP	Signed off without apparent statement of VCS involvement	Signed off with statement of VCS involvement	Signed off without apparent statement of VCS involvement
Compact	Started 2004	Started 1999	Started 2005
CEN	Initially collapsed and taken within council	Funding ended	Ongoing disagreement of CEN role by Council
CD or similar strategy	No	Yes up to 2008	No

Interviewees reported that in two of the three boroughs the statement of VCS involvement in the LSP was signed off by the local council. This was contrary to guidance given by central government that the local VCS, as an equal partner, should sign it off independently. Unlike the glowing scores of the CPA national indicators the extraordinary steps taken by two local councils of both ignoring government guidance and taking matters into their own hands would seem indicative of a deeper partnership failing.

The local VCS Compact, whilst lacking a formal legal status, is a moral agreement that seeks to define and support the local VCS and council relationship. As such it is a weather vane for the levels of esteem with which the local VCS may be held. The fact that only one of the three case study areas was able to progress it before the millennium appears to contradict the NI7 indicator of a thriving third sector across all areas. Although the Compact is an obligation for councils it took several years for both Greenwich and Newham to even begin to attempt to develop their own. This delay is reflective of weak and often deteriorating relationships with their local VCS, as described by interviewees.

The fate of local CENs is another useful example of the true nature of the relationship between local councils and the wider VCS. CENs were initially funded directly, under the Single Community Programme (SCP), by central government. Funding usually went to an umbrella VCS body, bypassing the local council, which might otherwise have been expected to oversee funding and support. The role of CENs was to enable an active and independent VCS input into the LSP and its strategies. Without exception all CENs experienced active opposition from their councils in what, according to central government audit, were otherwise exemplary New Labour empowering local

authorities. In particular, the notion of a wider community empowerment role was seen as solely the council's prerogative, most notably by council leaders. Most attempts by CENs to reflect and mobilise wider community concerns that challenged council policy, for example on housing, led to either explicit or implicit refusals to recognise or work with the CEN (Diamond & Liddle, 2005, 140-149).

The existence of a formal CD strategy is the final test of the depth of commitment in a local area, not only to CD but to wider aspects of engagement and empowerment. Only one local area, Lewisham, between 2003 and 2008 developed its own CD strategy. The obligatory LSP Community Strategy was a common feature to all areas but the types of community interventions described were typically controlled and initiated by the council.

Conclusion

The research has largely sought to avoid direct comparisons between study areas, except where information is in the public domain and has instead highlighted shared traits that are present both in terms of existing demography, deprivation and politics, and also in the barriers to CD and the MLGA uncovered by the research. The key finding is that the existence of significant obstacles that deter and retard CD, the MLGA and local democratisation, as developed in chapter ten, are widely shared across the three study areas and amongst all roles, sectors and professions. Unlike New Labour audits, the research shows that, across each area, interviewees were besieged by a complex array of barriers which impeded their ability to progress either CD or modernisation.

Chapter ten:

conclusion

Introduction

When I started my research, I questioned why public policy continually fell short of its declared objectives. I identified CD as potentially an excellent vehicle for realising many of the most prominently stated policy aims that New Labour's modernisation agenda rhetorically championed. I felt that if only a favourable policy environment could be fashioned, then there was no reason why the most deprived areas could not leap forward.

At the conclusion of my research, with the benefit of so many hours of interviews across three study areas, I am clearer about the key factors which I believe help to answer the research question and also contribute a unique understanding of the perennial problems that bedevil policy making in the community.

A minimal CD role and a wider policy failure

This research generated a wealth of insight into the reasons why CD had largely failed to connect with the MLGA. The interviews fixed upon a deeply contradictory terrain, where both CD and the MLGA were immediately impaired by a host of inhibiting factors. At all levels individuals were beset by severe constraints that frustrated their best efforts. Given the complex and difficult nature of poverty and social exclusion, it

might be expected that both CD and the MLGA would struggle to transform deprived neighbourhoods and revive local governance. More surprisingly what emerged was the scale of the struggles that beset those involved in these interventions of modernisation and CD.

These problems, challenges and struggles, were well known to those interviewed, but have also been documented by a range of social policy commentators, from Marris and Rein (1972), to the Policy Action Teams of the Social Exclusion Unit (1998-2000). In particular, the appreciation of the power of vested interests to resist change is well described in the literature (Taylor, 2003). This power can be deployed negatively, to block, stall and frustrate initiatives, at times almost as a force of unconscious habit. However, when past lessons are known but not applied, both CD and reformist agendas such as the MLGA remain impracticable.

The overall research finding is that the role of CD work in the MLGA has been minimal, especially in relation to the local democratic deficit. This was the case, even when CD, the MLGA and the local democratic deficit were taken in their broadest sense and where a wide range of interactions were possible. The most favourable agenda for CD in a generation, one that spoke the language of localism and the redistribution of power, largely failed to connect up with one of the most well established grassroots professions in this area. These two social policy interventions had similar and sometimes identical progressive objectives, were active in the same field and might superficially have therefore been expected to agree on broad goals. However, they were generally unable to combine, cohere and add value. The end result, in the minds of those interviewed, was that the policy rhetoric of social transformation was, in the main, not translated into reality and often even led to a significant deterioration in the

situation locally, including trust amongst partners, and the quality of engagement and empowerment.

In his speech to launch the Social Exclusion Unit in December 1997, the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, stated that:

[A]t the heart of all [the Government's] work is one central theme, national renewal. Britain re-built as one nation, in which each citizen is valued and has a stake. In which no one is excluded from opportunity and the chance to develop their potential. In which we make it, once more, our national purpose to tackle social division and inequality³⁷.

At the end of 1998, as the introduction reflected (chapter one), 18 Policy Action Teams (PATs) were set up by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), in order to help the government tackle the intractable problems faced by people living in deprived neighbourhoods. PATs were an important departure from the usual model of government policy-making. They represented the biggest exercise to date in joined-up government and brought together government officials from a range of departments with outside experts – including residents – who lived and worked in deprived neighbourhoods. Yet the testimony of those involved in three flagship modernising areas is redolent of failure. Failure of an agenda that was never remotely likely to succeed, because it did not engage with the obstacles that confront any government programme.

³⁷Blair, Tony. (1997) Bringing Britain Together. Speech, 8 December 1997. <http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=61> p. 2.

The deeper failure: the impossibility of reform

At the heart of the research conclusion there is a far more troubling finding than simply a partial track record of failure of implementation, or even outright failure. What is especially exasperating is that, for those experienced in community work and local government, this failure was not only inevitable, but to a greater or lesser extent, avoidable.

Many of those interviewed believed that, given a choice, existing elites advanced their own interests over and above wider community concerns and that this ubiquitous behaviour was widely known (Marris & Rein, 1972) and therefore open to correction. The barriers they faced in their own workplaces, communities and lives showed them, in a way that speeches and policy documents could never do, that there was a lack of small and large 'p' political will, in order to carry out the kind of change that modernisation promised. Interviewees described these obstacles in great detail, because they bore down on their daily practice, and placed reformist considerations on the back-burner. In such an environment it was personally dangerous to take modernisation at face value and interviewees instead viewed it as a cover for maintaining existing power bases.

The normalcy of this cognitive dissonance is striking. Interviewees described having to reinterpret an agenda, on the basis that it is not what it presented itself as being. This required having to make personal adjustments (Goffman, 1961) to accommodate what they felt was expedient and at times actively unjust. They became frozen into structures, behaviours and roles, which were often at odds with their analysis (as articulated in the interviews) of what was needed to address local policy concerns.

The ethical dilemma of having to operate in an erratic and contradictory environment as a public servant or CDW was compounded with a sense of futility. It was one thing to try and fail, especially when it was in the service of a progressive social end. However, to try and largely fail at something that one often believed to be little more than a deception in the first place was of an altogether different order. For many, it was worse than doing nothing at all, since the notional remedy was viewed as an illusion that often perpetuated the very ills it sought to cure.

To gain a fuller understanding of why CD was unable to move forward amidst a seemingly favourable policy environment, specifically New Labour's MLGA, it is necessary to examine the reasons why those interviewed felt that failure and frustration were hard-wired into local policy implementation. This involves an appreciation of several inter-related themes which are typically excised from formal policy considerations, but that were all the more real for not being acknowledged.

The themes that conclude the research are:

- The dilution of CD
- The central / local relationship
- Managerialism and marketisation
- Cultures of fear
- Party politics
- An incorporated and weak VCS
- Vested interests
- Lack of educational praxis

The dilution of CD

CD faced multiple challenges across each of the study areas, but the most immediate and obvious one was the tendency to dilute and redirect CD away from its core values and purpose. CD could not stand on its own terms but was moulded by local government at the outset to fulfil a bureaucratic agenda (service delivery) and so became deeply compromised. It was made to fulfil a narrow state-directed purpose. One council officer described their experience of the impact a modernising local authority had on CD:

[T]he rebirth of community development in this borough is... it's constrained, tamed... and has to be re-invented as local people's right to talk about the services that should, would or are, delivered to them.

This opinion was corroborated by another council officer, who spoke of senior colleagues in the council having a deep seated aversion to CD:

I think the kind of community development I'm thinking about you know, the stuff a statutory organisation can't do as effectively... There are people around who probably don't want to hear it badged in that way... But there must be people around, in positions of influence in the local authority that see community development and link it to things they don't particularly want or enjoy or like.

In order for CD to be made more palatable to powerful colleagues, the officer faced a stark choice of either dispensing with CD altogether, or re-badging it. The

second option ensured that it was compliant with statutory aims and objectives, namely the delivery of council services under the modernising agenda.

Unlike the emancipatory dialogue that CDWs have deployed, based on Freirean praxis, where residents would speak their own truth and work as equals to transform their environment, this process was inverted. Rather than being emancipatory, CD was circumscribed. The ends were set in advance. In Freirean terms, no development was possible. CD could not deliver on central targets solely on the government's own terms and with their criteria, because it was a very different process, one that privileges mutualism and education over command and control. If CD uncritically accepts an external government driven agenda, some of its most deeply held principles are put under great strain, if not entirely contradicted. It was Freire's belief that any externally funded programme of support offered to local people by governments and other agencies amounted to 'false charity' (Freire, 1972, 27). This was because they did not arise as a genuinely open exchange by local people, created, developed and controlled by them, but enacted as a form of 'cultural invasion' (ibid, 119), imposed from outside the community.

Statutory organisations, notably councils, are prone to directive frameworks that set out goals and dictate the broad agenda, rather than entering into the kind of open-ended exploratory process that CD requires. Thus, CD has often worked uneasily at the margins of community renewal programmes. However, under the MLGA, the discomfort felt by CD practitioners and the contradictions between the core values of CD and the managerial approach of modernisation grew. Interviewees described how council managers were increasingly nervous about CD and simultaneously restricted its room for manoeuvre by tying it to public service delivery, rather than a broader democratising

vision. For most interviewees, the MLGA environment was experienced as less pluralist and ever more controlling. Less willing than previous policy eras, to let a thousand flowers bloom and more inclined to regulate.

Within the significant constraints that CD was forced to operate under, up to the point of being scarcely recognisable in terms of its core principles, there were a subset of issues that weighed in to make the remnant of practice especially difficult. The focus on short term projects tended to further undermine and trivialise the work, which depended on a long term commitment rather than a constant stop-start cycle of engagement. This bred cynicism from local communities and workers alike, who came to expect that whatever support was offered would be provisional and inevitably taken away. One CDW put it this way:

We don't want people to be critical. We don't want people to actually control their own lives. We don't want that. Actually, truly, no government actually wants that. How cynical is that? I just feel that they don't want that.

The demand for quick fixes from government and the constantly changing policy landscape meant funding flowed to and from new programmes and structures. The foundations for the kind of long term structural change that CD seeks to achieve became impossible amidst the revolving doors of policy changes, along with the coming and going of workers and money. When cuts were made, CD, with its difficult and long term focus, became especially vulnerable.

As if this were not enough, CD tended to be poorly managed, with workers reporting that the difficult interfaces they encountered, typically between community and

council, necessitated a level of skill and backup which largely didn't exist. There was little training, supervision and support on offer and both professional and ethical dilemmas that were encountered rarely had a means of being aired, acknowledged or dealt with (Hoggett, Mayo & Miller, 2009). CDW interviewees and other officers reported that they were often left to shoulder problems alone, even when the problems that arose were a result of successfully fulfilling the job. One CDW articulated the dilemma as follows:

If you're employing me to do a community based work, then you have to engage with me, because I have to engage with the community. I can't engage with the community if I don't know what you're talking about and if I don't, if I can't... I've got a major problem in my job and yet you're still paying my salary. If I then go to the community and say to the community... this is the route we shall take and if you should win it, I then get attacked by the council for not supporting them... There has to be engagement across the board and there isn't.

Amongst the bodies employing CDWs there appeared to be very few proactive measures taken to counter the Catch-22 situations (ibid). At times effective CD work led to empowerment of communities that resulted in vilification of individuals and their demands, then the closing down of spaces and support that generated the articulation of social needs. The circularity of this scenario, in different settings, was a recurrent feature across the study areas. CDWs with exceptional commitment sought to resolve such conflicts in makeshift ways, typically via informal peer support, rather than as a central activity or as a systemic process of shared learning (Keeble, 1981).

Only one borough had a formal CD strategy, which lasted for several years and placed CD at the heart of partnership working, via its local strategic partnership (LSP). Elsewhere, CD was present only in the job descriptions of disparate workers and lacked a focus, in particular from statutory partners, who concentrated instead on communications and engagement exercises. Finally, it was evident that CD had been largely taken away from local communities. In previous generations, workers had been employed by and accountable to residents, as well as being based in community centres. Now instead, these jobs were increasingly based in outside agencies. One CDW described the loss of connectivity and ownership; once workers had typically come from the communities they served and had been a recognisable part of that community but now this had become replaced by a distanced professionalism.

I'm not sure if CD works, because there was a period when we... took people from the community to develop into CDWs... That [change] probably happened from the 1990s onwards, right? So, therefore, the community was undermined, because their activist wasn't the flavour of the month.

The shift of base, from tenant hall to town hall, from community centre to CVS, may have opened up greater levels of funding, but it also made CD susceptible to a host of new pressures, which ultimately held the profession captive: a profession that became diluted and co-opted at every turn.

The central / local relationship

The monopoly of power that is exerted by central over local government was largely unquestioned by the MLGA framework. However, in the course of the interviews it arose time and again as a grievance, which rebounded onto both CD and democratisation. Several dilemmas arose from having an overwhelmingly strong central government and a much weaker and subordinate local branch of government. Modernisation appeared as an imposition, a threat to reform, with punitive measures in place for councils who could not demonstrate adherence. Likewise, modernisation appeared to ride roughshod over local insight and expertise a central plan, without the benefit of prior local ownership. One of the biggest hindrances felt by local government was central government itself. A council leader described his issue with central government as follows:

I think the problem with central is that it doesn't know what it wants to do. Central is in some difficulty generally. The thing about local is, local is where services join up... [T]hat's where links can be made, but that has to be at a local level, a democratic level, because you need to have the political input to then look at the priorities and actually bring them together and you need somebody to hold the ring... Central government can't join up. It's absolutely impossible... It tries to regulate everything.

It was central government that held local government back in this leader's view, refusing to permit a power of general competence, with the ability to raise local revenues and a recognisable local democratic mandate. As if to add insult to injury, under the

MLGA central government criticised local government's poor community leadership and indifferent public service delivery:

A few councils have failed badly in key local services... [which] are very damaging for local people, their families, and the local people. Inefficiency and failure are not acceptable and must be tackled.

(DETR 'Modern local government: in touch with the people', 1998, paragraph 1.8)

At times, the asymmetry of the relationship between central and local government led local politicians to express disappointment and even resentment at the unfairness of a democratising reform, which itself arose from an oppressive and undemocratic arrangement. Real change would involve consistency across government and require that central government would also come under greater scrutiny. If real power were to be devolved, central government would need to make adjustments. Without reform, from top to bottom, modernisation lacked congruence and coherence. All that was left was compliance to a time-limited updating of a one-sided settlement, defined and enforced by the centre.

If local government was to be reformed, the central / local relationship had to be put on a new footing, whereby local government was valued, not only for its administrative delivery capability as directed centrally, but as a democratic player in its own right. In this, England would be brought closer to the majority of comparable western governments across the world. One community worker described this powerlessness of local government in a wider European context as follows:

Tell me something that local government can really do? What can it really do, outside the control of central government and its inspectorates and its regulations? It is highly regulated, more so than anywhere else in Europe I would say, except San Marino, which is one little municipality... [T]he main policies and inspectorates, standard settings, they're all central.

Without reform of the central / local relationship, officers, councillors and community groups were left to wonder how it was possible to devolve power to local communities and raise levels of democratic engagement, when such actions were imposed centrally by a government that was itself unwilling to broaden the democratic mandate beyond the sovereignty of parliament.

Central government's role in relation to local government remained primarily unchanged. Power did not significantly flow out from Whitehall and Westminster. The MLGA was seen as being essentially a one-way transmission of policy, a command and control operation that consolidated the centralism of Whitehall and Westminster, whilst claiming to achieve greater localism, i.e. it purported to give a smaller role to central government and foster greater decision making in the locality.

This contradictory and fundamentally undemocratic approach appears to have been self-defeating, judging by the range of interviewee comments made. It bred cynicism amongst officers and councillors, who claimed to see a further constriction of power that was channelled upwards at the local level, rather than being shared more widely with backbench councillors, community groups and local people. The consolidation of power by ever smaller groups within the town hall was seen to have been accentuated across all study areas. There was evidence of leaders who had

tightened their control on their local political party and upon the council and likewise of senior officers, who in turn also wielded significantly more power. One Labour councillor described how his local leadership used the MLGA as an opportunity to:

[F]urther centralise already centralised powers. So, effectively, real decision making is made by a handful of people. We've got a system. I'd say in reality a kind of Soviet style system with complete centralisation.

Whilst we could dispute the analogy, it perfectly describes the frustration interviewees often felt with the implementation of modernisation as a blighted and authoritarian approach. From this testimony and others like it, the MLGA appears to have been self-defeating for both central government and local government in particular, when the original objectives are taken into account, notably the 'shift in power and influence', as cited below:

This White Paper has mapped out an agenda for the reform and modernisation of English local government. An agenda focused on a bigger say and a better deal for local people. The Government is committed to it. Its success will be assured, as councils everywhere join in partnership with the Government, in order to bring about a fundamental shift in power and influence in favour of local people".

(DETR – 'Modernising Local Government: in touch with the People (1998: 79)

Managerialism and marketisation

The process of CD has traditionally placed a strong emphasis upon collective and consensual values, imbued by a sense of the community as an independent realm. This is in contrast to the closed and directive norms of new public management (NPM) and private sector ideology. Friere (1972) argued that any approach which did not open itself up to an equal and reciprocal exchange of mutual praxis was a 'poisonous pedagogy', something that inevitably dehumanised.

The dominant ideas that drove the MLGA sprang from a neo-liberal settlement, which brought market-inspired innovations into the public and civil realm (Giddens, 1998, Rao, 2000, Wallace, 2010). With the benefit of hindsight the primary purpose of the MLGA, in contrast with its rhetorically inflated objectives, was to act as a management tool, with a neo-liberal ethos and market bias. The consequences of this philosophical and political freighting, was that local democracy and community empowerment became charged with an ideology that ran counter to its traditions and values (Ledwith, 1997; Robson, 1999). Strong managerial lines of command and control precluded debates about purpose (Tonkiss, 1993). The end was set by the manager. Any debate that followed was purely for information giving. One council community and youth worker described this in terms of a clash of professional cultures:

As a worker, I've always been taught to explore and get your staff to explore and develop. Otherwise, it's like you're in a goldfish bowl... It's just the internal bits that you find out about. You don't know what's happening out there... I think there are restraints on officers and I think that's about management structure... I mean, I really did have my hands tied, that's your job.

Those working with a market based approach have a pronounced tendency to view ethical and social justice issues as normative and therefore beyond their range of inquiry and operation. When commercial confidentiality was raised as a concern in local development issues, the experiences of CDWs and activists were that sensitivity to the needs of businesses took priority over wider public debate. In one case, a community worker was prepared to simplify matters to the extent that:

The whole of the council's allocation policy has just become a tool of the developer, to clear land for the developer. And everybody else, all twenty nine thousand people on the waiting list can go fuck. That's what happens.

The perception that council policy becomes a 'tool of the developer', is deeply corrosive of the good faith needed to sustain partnership working with local communities. This radical and immediate rejection of many of the premises on which government policy was founded was commonplace amongst those interviewed. Local workers often started from the perspective that the entire MLGA policy was oxymoronic. One youth worker argued that:

In terms of its implementation, to me it's the opposite of democracy. It's almost giving someone an index to what should or shouldn't be learnt, or what should or shouldn't be there. And it doesn't allow for the process of natural human change. E.g. at some stage in the political development, there's going to be a debate

about is that right or is that wrong? To me, it's all too formatted, so that's my starting point.

The right to comment on state services as consumers and customers fits a neoliberal view of how public services should be run, whereby citizens purchase and consume products. New Labour's use of carefully choreographed focus groups ensured policies were tested in the same way in which a supermarket might launch a new brand. At a local level councils in the study areas made a virtue of their communications departments, surveys and sampling of opinion, which extracted data in order to enable the council to give people what they wanted. That allowed them to avoid engaging in public meetings, which by definition were less easy to manage. By managing democracy as a technical service delivery exercise around consumer preference, citizens' desires and needs across a range of social markets – housing, health, education, etc. – could be triangulated, to ensure the potential for optimum resource allocation. Simultaneously, the issue of a pluralist approach to participation, in order to deepen democratisation, was firmly off the local agenda.

A number of council officers and councillors called for the return of livelier and more inspiring local debates, not just as a way of galvanising voter turnout, but also as a means of inculcating the skills of citizenship. There was nostalgia for a more polarised era, notably around the 1970s and 1980s, when it was possible to discern clear positions being taken which suggested a real choice, and inspired involvement on that basis. In the minds of many of those interviewed, the shift to managerialism (NPM) and marketisation removed questions of social ends from public discourse. The inspirational and often fractious questions that social movements had organised around – race,

gender, working conditions – were outmanoeuvred. Likewise, working class structures that fostered solidarity had vanished, leaving poorer communities especially vulnerable.

As one CDW judged:

Collective action as a first line defence of your standard of living, that's gone.

Anything can happen to these people now. I mean, look, the working class has been broken, one way or another.

Cultures of fear

Several interviewees referred to a culture of fear within local government that inhibited them both professionally and emotionally. Although this was not a uniform experience, it was a recurrent theme, with significant implications for the implementation of policy. Actual incidences of excessive behaviours, for example with alleged bullying, did not have to happen very often for the perception and actuality of a fearful work culture to take hold. Whilst the average working day was populated by mundane interactions, this backdrop of anxiety often set a defining tone. There were no reports from interviewees feeling confidence and a feeling of security. At best a general sense of unease and caution predominated that suggested an insecure environment. One VCS CDW's primary impression of working with their local council was of an overbearing culture:

I would say brutal is definitely the word for it, you know. You hear stories which I wouldn't repeat here, because they're hearsay, but you think 'wow!'... [Y]ou do

tend to end up with this complete culture of kowtowing and almost fear, you know, you daren't step out of line.

Interviewees consistently located the origin of council culture at the top of the institution, from senior managers, councillors and leaders. Sometimes, it was identified almost exclusively as the latter: the leader whose leadership style set a certain tone and whose operating style brooked no dissent. From a single strong leader, others took their cue and sought to enforce this agenda:

There's this real culture of fear and I know that this person who is harassing us, is harassing us because she's getting harassed by her bosses, who are getting harassed by the Chief Executive, whose got a lot of pressure on him.

However, councillors and officers frequently went beyond this, not only acting on instructions, but acting in such ways, even before instructions were given: 'So, working in the department, you really got a sense [that] everyone was trying to second guess what is was [that] the Mayor wanted'.

This learnt behaviour stymied innovation, since it was deeply reactive, the object being to avoid punishments and curry favour within narrow interpersonal parameters, as distinct from embedding a more diffuse external policy agenda. For this reason, the MLGA often meant nothing at all to council officers, whose lives functioned purely on the basis of responding to highly pressured and erratic office environments. For the MLGA to work, it would need to be understood by officers who had a primary interface in its implementation. Yet, even when this was the case, their working environment ruled out

the opportunity to absorb, internalise and embed this new way of working, because the existing culture of fear was the overriding reality of their lives.

The failure of the MLGA to take into consideration the local organisational culture was a huge error. The commonplace saying that 'culture eats strategy for breakfast' attributed to Peter Drucker³⁸, has long been a truism for leaders considering structural reform. A local government culture of fear drives out external policy and imposes its own makeshift pragmatism. In a perilous local environment, officers needing to make choices inevitably have to privilege short term tactical survival. For policy to be transformational, it has to enter into the lives and consciousness of all the workers concerned, but the research showed that there was a widespread belief that it was jealously guarded and restricted to senior politicians and above most other officers' pay grade.

Another aspect of the compartmentalisation and fearfulness of local government was the way in which this culture was communicated to local communities. Councillors were described as 'sheepish' by one activist. Officers were seen by voluntary sector workers as 'harassed' and therefore having to harass others. Local government as an institution became strangely frozen, unable to meet local demands. One council manager described his job, as on occasion, to 'bamboozle' residents. An activist complained that his council had, 'messed people around for years', whilst a council partnership manager complained that the contentious issues she had to deal with could not 'go anywhere'.

Whilst some officers, councillors and CDWs referred to a 'culture of fear' based on quite extreme incidents, the more usual culture was a lesser, lingering, sense of

³⁸ The quote whilst commonly attributed to Peter Drucker, has a contested origin with Mark Fields of the Ford Motor Company, also being cited. However there is no overall agreement on its source

threat, which prompted risk adverse behaviours. This closed, defensive and fearful posture, continued relatively unaffected by the MLGA, according to the testimony of those interviewed. Indeed, some suggested that it had intensified as a consequence. The learnt behaviour taught officers that empowerment and democratisation were not practised in their workplaces and were therefore illusory. At the same time, they were necessary illusions that gave a degree of legitimacy to a centralised regime of performance. Therefore, the MLGA and community empowerment policies required a constant process of adaptation to ensure demonstrable loyalty and compliance. Whilst it is both necessary and entirely reasonable that large public bodies should have a strong measure of direction, the testimony of those interviewed was that what might be considered purposeful instruction had, under the auspices of the MLGA, long since crossed a threshold. It had become not only brutally authoritarian, but also self defeating for the purposes of wider social reform.

A council community worker described the consequences of the style in which senior council leaders sometimes exercised power. On occasions, this was described as aggressively masculine and profane, which inhibited the performance of others:

I think what I'm saying is from internally, how difficult and frustrating it is for officers to be able to do work... And that comes from the top, because there's a culture of fear... [The] way meetings are held... they're very macho, lots of effing and blinding and swearing and shouting at each other and you know that type of fear culture transcends down to officer level.

Party politics

Policy is mediated by and through political parties. If this was done cleanly and without prejudice, then the lack of consideration to both small and large 'p' politics in the MLGA would have been justified. However, many of those interviewed reported instances of party politics as both omnipresent and as interfering. One council CDW officer said with exasperation, '[i]t's ridiculous, the, it's such a high level of political interference that it actually stagnates officers'. The intrusion of the party political in the lives of administrators, officers, CDWs and community groups, as a not entirely transparent function of power, an inside track that controlled decision making, was a daily reality. That party politics was wholly absent from the MLGA appears to be a significant omission.

The modernising vision stressed partnership and shared governance as a politics free zone, out of which transformation was to be augmented. This ignored the obvious fact that power was held by representatives of political parties, not by partnerships, which tended to lack formal and legal structures, that by default relied on council procedures. The partnerships that promoted modernisation were provisional spaces that senior councillors could take or leave, unlike the meetings of the Labour Group, which is where the councillors of the predominant party in each of the study areas met to discuss policy.

Party politics featured in the accounts of policy implementation in several ways. Officers with party connections appeared, on occasion, to prosper and make easier headway through the council hierarchy. Likewise, ethnic voters were understood to be mobilised by key people, who likewise benefited from their reputation of being able to not only represent a given community, but deliver its vote.

The adversarial nature of party politics, combined with the absolutism of a first-past-the-post system that guaranteed dominance to the victor by relatively small numbers of both overall votes and turnout, bred political mores that were not confined to elections and the party caucus, but spread to every facet of public and community life. This active political tradition, typically the province of white, middle-aged men, was, as described by a range of interviewees, aggressively intolerant to any challenge of its authority, real or imagined. The absolute claims of ownership of a democratic role, the sole right to make policy and claim community leadership, made the finer points of the MLGA impossible. As a council officer explained:

When you have a figurehead who is saying 'I will only have it this way', then that's very difficult for its officers to align itself with government policy, in trying to move away. So it's unrealistic of the government, unless they try to change it fundamentally.

Time and again, senior politicians made it clear that they alone could and should make democratic decisions, whereas, challenges from the community were misguided, illegitimate and vexatious. One leader was mystified that government should offer local government the leadership of community empowerment, because that had always been their role: 'I think we always thought we were'.

Local politicians varied in their willingness to see a value in CD. For some, it was vital and had not been pursued as vigorously as it should have been by the council: 'I just think we didn't do enough development around those individuals, for them to take power... you know, share it a bit more'.

They also saw the value and legitimacy of the VCS in playing an active CD role that challenged the local authority. However, this view was matched by other leading political voices that saw this role as purely belonging to councillors who were the only people with a mandate:

I believe elected members, locally, they've been elected by the community to be the community's representatives and they decide... I often say to people I'm not the council's representative, I am the community's representative.

It is noteworthy that this mandate came only through membership of a political party, where loyalty to the party was mandatory. If issues arose between council and community, that generated a possible conflict of interest, it follows that this could only be resolved, in the main, by deferring to the party. David Miliband³⁹ asked local leaders to sign up to a spirit of pluralism:

I call it double devolution – not just devolution that takes power from central government and gives it to local government, but power that goes from local government down to local people, providing a critical role for individuals and neighbourhoods, often through the voluntary sector.

Speech given on 21st February 2006

The research revealed that in practice local party leaders favoured single devolution, to themselves, but often scorned double devolution. One cabinet member

³⁹ www.guardian.co.uk/society/2006/feb/21/localgovernment.politics

asked: 'Why would you want that double devolution, you know? It doesn't work out there anyway, so why would you want it?'

Finally, the party itself, across all the study areas, was, in the course of the interviews, sometimes seen to seethe with rivalries and tensions between elected members. One party member described the vicious circle of segregation that existed between loyalists and those dissenting from their local leadership:

People become a councillor, they're interviewed by those of a same mind, they're passing through a system and they eventually become MPs, that's the route. Those that don't have that incentive to move in that way die by the wayside and they're the ones that are locally committed with the passion.

The price paid, according to the interviewee, who had personally engaged in the process of becoming a councillor, was often complete marginalisation from party affairs and even overt moves for de-selection. In contrast, absolute and uncritical loyalty was rewarded by progression, often beyond the sphere of local politics, typically as a staging post to Westminster.

The MLGA presented, on paper, a local world that could not only be influenced but transformed. Yet in practice the stormy nature of local party politics stalled reform. All of the local areas were characterised by strong personalities, who polarised opinion and who were guaranteed indefinite tenure, due to a core vote traditionally returning Labour candidates. This power was largely the same across the three study areas and determined how modernisation was deployed. When it was useful, it aided a further

centralisation of local power. When it ceased to consolidate this model of leadership, it was pursued with significantly less vigour.

An incorporated and weak VCS

The MLGA set its sights not only on local government reform, but also a wider transformation within the local community. For some leaders, officers and councillors, the community was coterminous with the council and any reference to community came to approximate the actions of the local authority onto local people. One leader found the idea of a separate civil realm problematic: '[T]he voluntary sector... there isn't such a thing'.

However, for most interviewees, there was an organised voluntary sector which was part of a distinct and separate zone of community that existed outside of local agencies. It was part of civil society and by definition, neither part of the public nor private sectors. Yet, most interviewees tended to share the leader's scepticism about the coherence of the VCS, noting an increasingly incorporated and weak domain. One activist protested that the VCS had become populated by, 'a lot of organisations [who] have sold their soul'. The voluntary sector groups who stood accused of making a Faustian pact, that initially strengthened their individual status, but in doing so, became 'charities in name only ... [W]hat they do, how they do it is controlled by central or local government'. This activist concluded that the consequences for the sector were fatal: 'I think the heart has been ripped out'.

This evisceration was prompted by the splitting off of senior VCS bodies in an increasingly uniform manner, into statutory partnerships and public service delivery

roles, away from the complex amalgam of practices and organisations that co-exist across the VCS and in particular, away from the overwhelming majority of small local community groups. Increasingly, borough-wide voluntary organisations lost touch with this constituency. One community leader described his frustration with one such VCS umbrella body which is:

(P)romoted by the council essentially because it's community involvement... that received funds to run it, but the thing is run in the most professional way, which brings no result.

The question arose during the interviews as to the health of the VCS, its ability to play an active and equal partnership role, as well as the quality and efficacy of its leadership and advocacy, on behalf of a much wider constituency of interest. Without exception, the VCS was problematised. It was described as weak, divided, unrepresentative, obsequious and also out of touch with the wider community. Allegations of corruption and venality were also made by officers, councillors and community activists. One council leader described occasions when the sector was, 'utterly corrupt and debilitating'. Another officer spoke of the need to 'liquidate some VCS groups'.

Whilst there were individuals and organisations that bucked this trend, the overall coherence of the sector across the local study areas, came under increasing stress. In addition, its ability to make a collective impact was often negligible. The myth of a single, united sector, on an equal footing with other partners, was a fiction that met a mandated requirement for VCS involvement in modernisation guidance. Neither the

council, nor the VCS had an interest in decrying its role. In the course of the interviews it became clear that this very act of bringing the VCS into closer contact with modernising councils was responsible for further fragmentation of the sector. This can be seen in the separation that inevitably took place between groups brought within the partnership circle, who sat on boards, and in comparison to the majority who lacked such access. An LSP officer described how this changed relationships in the following terms:

You find that the money goes to [the CVS] and organisations like that. You find that the relationships around funding means that inevitably people temper... their views... They become less of an advocate and what they're supposed to do... [Y]ou then get a part of the community that becomes less and less the community, because they become more and more like you. This is what happens.

The MLGA emphasis on a diversity of public service delivery, led to the wider VCS being valorised for its ability to deliver public services. Whereas the reality was that the vast majority of VCS groups simply didn't have the capacity or desire to compete and win such contracts. This explains why central government's approach to local empowerment and enhanced services not only weakened CD, but also struggled to connect with the local groups, whose work was often synonymous with local communities themselves. Modernisation deepened the divide between different wings of the VCS. VCS groups who held service contracts sometimes changed their core

business, away from a critical campaigning role on social justice issues, rather than risk jeopardising their funding.

The internal weaknesses within the VCS, which came about due to the pressures of modernisation, not only damaged the connectivity within the sector, but spread outwards into the community. Traditionally, the VCS would provide a platform of accountability for more informal community action. With the emphasis on accountability to deliver modernised services, the senior VCS organisations changed their focus, away from the campaigning and social justice issues that reflected concerns of the grassroots, to the language of social markets (Kenny, 2002; Goulding, 2011). The sense of common purpose, along with a willingness to champion often demanding and controversial local issues that flowed from local communities, became increasingly absent (McGill, 2011).

The MLGA, which claimed to work with the voluntary sector, in practice brought a minority of players to the partnership table. At the same time, councils redoubled their efforts, notably through carefully designed communications, to be the sole archetypal expression of community empowerment. By claiming that council actions were interchangeable with community ones, the need to pass greater power to local communities became overtly redundant. CD, outside of what councillors and council administrators could manage, also became superfluous. The spiky exchanges of the past, where CDWs and communities struggled together, did not go away. However, under the heavy traffic of modernisation, they were driven further underground for the most part, intermittently surfacing in debates, with increasing anger and frustration.

Vested interest

The allegation of vested interests was levelled at every recognisable constituency of interest. Councillors accused some officers of monopolising resources from community programmes to build their own careers and departments. Council officers noted the tendency of voluntary sector organisations to compete with community groups for funding, to 'run after the money'. Councillors accused the same voluntary sector groups of 'job creation', when pursuing neighbourhood renewal funding and of being 'utterly corrupt'. Community activists noted the same alleged tendency in local politicians who benefited from large-scale urban developments, one of whom commented candidly that:

The SRB, New Deal and all that stuff, if you want to find out where corruption is in local government, that's where it is. Because that's where lots of money changed hands under loose control, with mates and conflicts of interest rife and rampant. The whole idea of a partnership board is bollocks and if you wanted to find it, if you researched it, that's where you're looking at corruption of local government. That's where it all is and that's what it's all for.

The ineffectiveness of Government Office London (GOL), the Standards Commission and similar regulatory bodies, led VCS workers to see a conflict of interest across government, which was unwilling or unable to apply its own rules consistently across the field. Politicians were seen, especially by local community activists, as having a loyalty to their party and to power for its own sake, rather than an interest in responding to local communities.

The wide range of alleged and suspected conflicts of interest are congruent with the main findings of Marris and Rein's seminal book, *The Dilemmas of Social Reform*, which indicated that at a certain point, it was not in the interests of power holders and policy makers to effect change. Progressive policy and programmes inevitably clashed with extant powerful vested interests that stood to lose proportionate degrees of influence, resource and power. The Third Way refused to accept that this clash was inevitable and believed instead, that interests could not only be balanced, but that marginalised communities could gain entry into the benefits and opportunities enjoyed by the rest of society. This access would not involve a levelling downwards, but instead opened up greater opportunities for integration. However, those providing the chance to move upwards and out of relative poverty, could also exercise their power negatively, to pull the ladders away and out of reach of those seeking to join them in achieving a degree of upward mobility and social status.

The MLGA failed to address the tendency of people in a range of positions of power to jealously guard and perpetuate their respective bases of influence and when given the opportunity to affect change, invert an external focus to one of internal advancement (Criag, D, 2008; Seddon, 2008; Wallace, 2010). Despite the fact that self interest was a primary feature of public choice theory, which informed Thatcherite and later New Labour policy, the vigilance on local enactment failed to prevent the inversion of modernisation into an entrenchment of existing interests. This dissonance, whereby modernisation became a vehicle for sectional advancement, is perhaps unprecedented in contemporary times. Not because of its occurrence, but due to the insistence that the opposite would and should occur. Inevitably, modernisation's rhetorical intent exceeded its reach. However, it was not the failure to deliver change of seismic proportions that

interviewees objected to, but the corollary to this hyperbole, which was that, in the name of reform, powerful interests were able to simultaneously expand their power and deny others access. In the words of one CDW: 'Don't pretend you're consulting, don't pretend you're investing in people, you know? Don't pretend you're going to do change'.

In this sense, modernisation became identified with a language and a practice of deceit, because it often facilitated a proliferation of existing barriers, an ever more fractious competition for status. Whether central government's own partiality in promoting a one sided agenda blinded it to a realisation that local interests could vitiate its policy, is a moot point. It remains the case that this oversight, in failing to plan for negative conflicts of interest, became a culpable error that derailed significant aspects of the modernisation agenda and curtailed opportunities for CD to take root.

Lack of educational praxis

CD, with its focus on open and equal processes, could have been inordinately useful in using the differentials of existing power creatively, as a means of shared learning that brought partners closer together. Instead of a chain of management relationships, a creative and long term exchange of learning could have been achieved, that would be mutually enriching for all. It is precisely this 'practice of freedom' (Freire, 1972, 16, 61) as an educational function that Freire promoted and that CD work has drawn inspiration from.

The one-way transmission of the MLGA, with its focus on a strong central framework and neo-liberal market underpinnings, implied a form of correct thinking, which presupposes for Freire, the 'non thinking of the people' (ibid, 112). However, a

mutual educational exchange might enable a synthesis, whereby elites in both government and local communities participated in the reconstruction of society, in a way where both were open to change. This process was something CDWs returned to time and again, one of whom described it in these terms: 'CD and community work is not something you apply on people. It's something that's there in the community that you work through'.

Several interviewees stressed the loss of a tradition of local community education that in former years had tied community work to poorer communities. Apprenticeships, worker education courses and related homespun opportunities for learning, enabled many working class people to access an alternative and enriching education when schooling and university either ended prematurely, or was out of reach. In this way, local communities were able to weave education into early adult life and local employment. Education was socially generated from within communities and was integral to them. It was commonly the case that youth and community workers grew up in the locality and owed their introduction to the profession to local training. There was often a more authentic and accountable relationship with local people as a result, where local communities could control the worker via local management structures such as a community centre, rather than a distant council office or similar agency. In this way, the skills of participation and wider engagement were embedded locally with local people, long before welfare programmes arrived.

Freire warned of 'naive professionals' (Freire, 1972, 122), who did not see the community as a whole and in particular, 'community development projects that... alienated people' (ibid). The dilution of CD in recent years diminished its radical educative component, at the same time as capacity building skills to address community

deficit rose up the government agenda. This loss of emphasis was combined with a greater distance between CDWs and local communities, with CDW turnover increasing as workers rarely hailed from the community they visited professionally.

The linking of CD to a strong educational vision, places it above and beyond contemporary social palliatives, because unlike interventions that had been shaped according to wider philosophical and political agendas, the educational vision of community praxis creates its own transformation as a cultural action. It works from the inside out, one individual and one conversation at a time. Whilst it is idealistic, its strength is an insistence on starting from where local people are situated. This starting point is all-important, because unlike the obstacles described, it offers the opportunity to not only name submerged and oppressive impediments that would otherwise de-rail reform, but also enable genuine co-operation. Rather than a divide between those acting and acted upon, those issuing policy instructions and the instructed, this domination would be superseded by a process that would be enriching to all. Whilst the relationship would be based on differences, these could be explored and affirmed by an education which built and organised new social structures. However, in the course of the research, the majority of interviewees revealed that both the MLGA and local government fought to maintain and enhance its grip on power to such an extent that the possibility of such an educative process unfolding became largely impossible.

Conclusion

The finding that CD was unable to gain a significant foothold in the study areas has to be viewed within a wider context of general policy failure, due in large measure to

the preceding eightfold barriers detailed at the start of this chapter⁴⁰, most of which were deeply embedded within an all-powerful and omnipresent institutional and political culture. CD did not progress, but then little else did either, with the exception of those who managed to secure ever smaller circles of centralised power. Overall, the frustration experienced by those interviewed, suggests not only failure but regression. One councillor described his council's engagement with the community in stark terms:

My honest view is that we've gone into reverse gear on these things and the community sector needs to rebuild itself and challenge other stakeholders to deal with them on equal terms.

Perhaps more than any other contemporary raft of policy, New Labour modernisation ramped up expectations. From the testimony of those interviewed, it is possible to conclude that if the MLGA had been less ambitious in its declarations the policy might have been less damaged by a later sense of disappointment. Instead, the corollary of this rhetorical inflation was an acute disillusionment when actions did not match words. Given both the active perpetuation of the barriers described and on occasion, studious refusal to acknowledge their existence, the MLGA floundered. By not addressing the culture or underlife of local institutions and areas, modernisation was detached from the wearisome reality of interviewees.

However, in one important way, the MLGA prospered; it exercised ideological control. Gramsci's concept of hegemony is especially instructive in understanding the paucity of actual achievement, since it suggests that retaining ideological control, rather

⁴⁰ These eightfold barriers are as follows: the dilution of CD, the central / local relationship, managerialism and marketisation, cultures of fear, party politics, an incorporated and weak VCS, vested interests and a lack of educational praxis

than material change or social justice, is the underlying aim of government. Hegemony allows the state to move on, to constantly re-present policy, in order to maintain ideological ascendancy and hence social control. Under New Labour's modernisation, this process of adaptive persuasion took on a more fraudulent aspect. Targets were set, often unmet and then forgotten. The pace of change between one set of rhetorical promises and the next policy framework accelerated, enabling politicians to bail out before the full consequences of a superficial and threadbare exercise were revealed - superficial and threadbare, because they did not address the challenges revealed by interviewees.

The outwardly progressive presentation of the MLGA set in train a double movement, an invocation of purposeful action, followed by the deracination of reform by reactionary forces. The trajectory of modernisation arced back into a deeper consolidation of vested interest. Unlike political parties, who can argue for the need of a makeover based on the objective of winning power, CD faces a more stubborn constituency, in the form of millions of people and communities placed outside mainstream society. The potential for CD to work alongside communities, to support local government and deepen local democracy, is an established fact (Gaventa, 2004; Ledwith, 2005; Craig, Popple & Shaw, 2008). This is based not only on the experience of previous UK programmes, but internationally, in the work of NGOs and activists across the globe. However, under the MLGA, the conditions were not conducive. CD did not thrive, and instead lingered at the margins of policy.

The same attenuation is true of democratic renewal. John Keane (2008) cites three forms of democracy that have traditionally arisen: assembly democracy, representative democracy and monitory democracy. The original participative, direct

form of democracy was supplemented by representative forms of democracy, whereby representatives, in the form of professional politicians, were mandated to take decisions on behalf of local people. One councillor expressed her council's attachment to this model:

The primary focus is on representative democracy, there is no recognition whatsoever, in my view, of any kind of participatory democracy here, because those kinds of people who are in favour of representative democracy will simply turn round and say: 'how representative is x, y and z community group of the community? It's not. So therefore they're not going to be allowed to participate. And I think that is an end of story and one of the reasons why there is no real history of participatory democracy. There's always been a... very traditional [style] and that's not changed throughout the New Labour years, it's almost as if it never happened.

By focusing on a local democratic deficit, the MLGA understood this function to have broken down. What had arisen instead was an era of post democracy, where decision making was managed by experts who could sample opinion through marketing exercises and where PR became a substitute for reciprocal and educative communication. All councils relied heavily on presentation skills to get their message across. The distance of statistics became far more preferable to interrogation by CD-supported local forums. However the sophistication of understanding residents' needs, as customers, clients and consumers of services in a social or quasi market, eroded both a deeper democratic practice and CD itself.

One potential countervailing response to this could be a form of monitorial democracy (Keane, 2008), where networks of civil society actors are able to pin statutory agencies down, to commitments made and money spent. With increasing access to information in such a world, democracy can be radically decentralised. Rather than organise a forum to challenge a planning decision and raise campaign consciousness as a collective exercise, one person can simply look up the council website, find the minutes of the relevant committee meeting and then follow up accordingly, with their MP, with a government department, or the relevant audit office. The MLGA increasingly understood the power citizens could access and moulded empowerment to an individualist paradigm, counter to the collectivist tendency of CD and traditional models of solidarity through social movements. Yet behind every able citizen, a network of informal and professional community infrastructure has to exist, in order to counter the isolation and anomie of an atomised society. This ecosystem of support was held together by CDWs and less directly by many sympathetic fellow travellers across the VCS and public sectors. However this came under increasingly strain, because of the intensely managerial practice of the MLGA.

Whilst a new government has predictably decried New Labour modernisation in an effort to assert its own ideology, the research findings indicate a high degree of frustration across all sectors, professions and local actors, which will prove hard to dislodge. This depth of dissatisfaction is indicative of something more than burnout or hard bitten cynicism. Those interviewed remained highly engaged in local affairs and committed to their work. Until such a time as policy and practice are able to address the deep seated impediments that are immediately apparent when workers reflect on the

contingency of their actions, the chances that future programmes of reform will be successful are a distant prospect.

Recent changes to the political landscape: contemporary neoliberalism and reflections on the future of CD

Whilst the research question limited itself to the New Labour government and specifically the MLGA time period (1998-2010), within three London boroughs, it is possible to briefly assert the broader relevance of the thesis to the changing political landscape of contemporary neo liberalism and also reflect on the future of CD nationally. At the time of writing (November 2012), over two years into a new Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition government, it would appear that a great deal has changed. The new austerity, leading to unprecedented public and voluntary sector cuts, has swept all before it. The dominant ideological paradigm of neoliberalism has retained its hegemonic force and CD infrastructure and funding has collapsed.

In its most immediate sense, the research thesis has underlined the contradictions of New Labour social policy, as they were experienced at the time, during a period of relative plenty: notably the feelings of frustration and counterproductive outcomes. What might have appeared to some policy makers as minor difficulty, albeit causing great distress on the ground can now be seen as endemic problems coming home to roost. Whilst the funding environment has radically changed, the ideological drivers are broadly similar (Scott, 2011). Whilst the continuity between the New Labour and Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition governments can be seen, there is much faster marketisation and increasing inequality under the coalition, marking an abrupt departure from any notion of progressive social policy. For an understanding of the

present and immediate future, a radical interpretation that examines these roots is paramount: specifically an investigation of the role of ideological reproduction in shaping policy and practice (Defillips, Fisher & Shragge, 2011), an uprooting of an embedded poisonous pedagogy, notably neoliberalism (Scott, 2010), and the possibility for alternative (counter hegemonic) models of change, notably CD-inspired and related actions (Ledwith, 2005).

The Big Society, albeit poorly understood, leading to its re-launch five times within the space of a year and a half, along with its wider package of social policies, shares many of its assumptions with New Labour modernisers. A desire to re-draw the balance away from rights, towards responsibilities; an extolling of self help, a populist instinct for vilification of certain marginalised social groups, including asylum seekers and single parents, an individualist and managerial focus on citizens as consumers of services and a belief in the efficacy of the market in all areas of life. When asked what her greatest achievement had been, Thatcher is said to have replied; 'New Labour'⁴¹. That this response was possible underlines the commonality of Thatcherism, its New Right and neoliberal underpinnings, across all recent governments (Jenkins, 2006).

New Labour's homogenising and managerial approach to community was especially problematic (Wallace, 2010; Dillon & Fanning, 2011), and the anger with which interviewees across all sectors raised this concern in the course of my research, bears this out and gives a greater specificity to this concern than is traditionally found in the literature to date. The pessimism of New Labour with regard to human nature (Stoker, 2005) and the jettisoning of commitments to redistributive egalitarian distributive

⁴¹ 'When Margaret Thatcher was asked about her greatest achievement, she promptly answered: 'New Labour'. And she was right: her triumph was that even her political enemies adopted her basic economic policies. True victory over your enemy occurs when they start to use your language, so that your ideas form the foundation of the entire field'. Slavoj Žižek (Guardian 13 November 2012)

notions of equality towards more integrationist endeavour (Levitas, 2005) gave a highly conditional and provisional message to communities. Problems and solutions were individualised in terms of personal agency, aspiration or pathology rather than in structural terms which might privilege collective action, resonant with the power of the social movements of the past. This assumed common sense approach has passed over uncritically to the Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition government, who have extolled the virtues of volunteering, whilst decrying the need for investment in community infrastructure.

With regard to CD and its future, the inability of the CD Challenge (2006), fashioned with government and CD lead bodies, to deliver any tangible policy gains, perhaps marked a definitive moment. Whilst CD has had many chances to be embedded in social policy, and correspondingly has been written off many times since the early 1970s (Taylor, 2003), the failure of the declared objectives of New Labour and CD to join up, perhaps mark the biggest missed opportunity of all (Chanan & Miller, 2010). It was this apparent common ground and the great potential for social transformation that triggered my research question and the thesis that has followed catalogues the thwarting of this partnership.

Under the Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition government CD is notable by its absence. In addition to the many CDW jobs that were cut from local budgets, the launch of a government-sponsored community organiser programme, has consciously avoided any association with the wider CD movement, which is mooted to have failed. The inversion of radical ideology (Alinsky, 1972) to service reactionary ends is also conspicuous in New Labour rhetoric, from the early presentation of the MLGA by Blair (1998), to Hazel Blears' foreword to the Empowerment White Paper (2008), where

government legislation was likened to the role played by the Levellers. At the time of writing (November 2012) the fate of the three national CD bodies hangs in the balance. The Community Development Exchange (CDX) voting to formally close at its AGM in September 2012. Under the new government the Community Development Foundation (CDF) lost its NDPB status and many of its staff and survives mainly by distribution of funding as distinct from wider research and outreach activities. Likewise the Federation for Community Development Learning (FCDL) continues to run with reduced funding an uncertain future, amidst limited support from higher education for the CD NOS.

Amidst these changes a new research agenda has opened up, which both underlines and has the potential to build on my own research findings. A sharp focus on the experiences of practitioners using semi-structured interviews and emancipatory dialogic action can unleash long term solutions as well as being immediately empowering and mutually supportive. A radical analysis of power and the role of ideology also retain ever more importance as the convergence of mainstream political parties around neoliberalism continues apace. The repositioning of CD and progressive community-based work, including community organising and activism, amidst an acceleration of inequality and privatisation of the public realm will inevitably continue to be negotiated. In this context, research that seeks to investigate and instantiate the underlying determinants that have moulded society, past, present and near future, must be a priority. Because CD has been an active yet largely hidden historical force amidst progressive and reactionary social forces, it merits continued close attention.

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South East London; November 2012

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