Community Asset Transfer in England 2010 to 2017 - enabling innovation for positive social change or perpetuating entrenched social inequalities?

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Abstract

This research sets out to evaluate whether Community Asset Transfer (CAT), a mechanism for disposing of public property assets by selling, leasing or giving them to community organisations at less than market value, has any effect in reducing place-based inequalities. The use of CATs by local authorities has increased since the passing of the Localism Act in 2011 and they are portrayed as forming part of the localism agenda adopted by the British Coalition government at that time. Given the rhetoric of community empowerment surrounding this agenda, it is considered legitimate to evaluate asset transfers in these terms.

In this study Community Asset Transfers are set into the context of both theory and policy. Theoretical frameworks used to analyse the transfers include capability approaches and notions of social capital and social innovation. CATs are also considered in relation to other forms of community-led and asset-based development, as they can be seen as part of a historical continuum of social programmes and initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and regenerating deprived neighbourhoods. Research also covers relevant UK policies such as the imposition of austerity and its impact on the behaviour of local authorities, and the promotion of localism and the 'Big Society' idea favoured by Prime Minister David Cameron.

The research focuses on the county of West Yorkshire, a region with a reportedly high incidence of Community Asset Transfers. The policies and practices of the five local authorities making up the county are analysed and compared, using both secondary sources and primary data gathered through interviews with councillors and council officers from those authorities. A further set of interviews, with members of community groups who have gone through the CAT process, builds on this information to create a picture of how CAT is experienced by these groups, and what value it brings to them. The distribution of CATs across the region is mapped against deprivation indices and analysis is made of any correlation found.

Having collated and coded the data from the local authorities and the community groups, the emergent themes are then mapped back onto frameworks and models previously discovered as part of the background study into the capability and social capitals approaches. Kleine's (2010) Choice Framework is deemed to have the best fit with the findings of the study, but even it is a less than perfect match. A new framework, the Community Asset Transfer Framework (CATF), is therefore developed, better to reflect those findings. This new framework is explained at length.

Declaration

The author of this thesis hereby declares that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Copyright Statement

Thanks

There are many people without whom this thesis could not have been written: all the people who agreed to participate in the research, sharing their experiences, cups of tea and occasionally even delicious slices of home-made cake! I am grateful to all of you for your honesty and generosity. I hope that I have done justice to your stories.

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Dedication

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my mother, Sue, who has believed in me my entire life and pushed me to go further and aim higher in everything I did. You kept me afloat when I floundered and nothing I have achieved would have been possible without your unconditional love and faith in me. In the immortal words of Nick Spalding: “All the good things I have done to this point, I owe to you. All the bad things I owe to the consumption of too much white wine.” *

Thank you.

*(Spalding, Nick. Love...From Both Sides (Love Series) (p. 271). Hodder & Stoughton. Kindle Edition)

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABCD	Asset Based Community Development
ACV	Asset of Community Value
BMDC	Bradford Metropolitan District Council
BHPS	British Household Panel Survey
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CAMRA	Campaign for Real Ale
CAT	Community Asset Transfer
CATF	Community Asset Transfer Framework
CCF	Community Capitals Framework
CIC	Community Interest Company
CIO	Charitable Incorporated Organisation
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
FoI	Freedom of Information
HDI	Human Development Index
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivations
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JWA	Joint Working Arrangement
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LSOA	Lower Super Output Area
MAUP	Modifiable Areal Unit Problem
ME Framework	Measuring Empowerment Framework
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PEST	Political Economic Social & Technological
PRODEL	Local Development Programme (Nicaragua)
PRSP	Participative Poverty Reduction Strategies
Q&A	Question and Answer
RDI	Regional Development Index
SLA	Service Level Agreement
TUPE	Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study is sponsored by a University of Manchester Research Impact Scholarship, under its Global Inequalities research beacon. It seeks to examine inequalities between English communities through the lens of Community Asset Transfer and asks whether this form of local government disposal results in any change in the inequalities experienced by individuals in different communities. This introductory chapter sets out the rationale for such a study, the background to its inception, and the structure of the thesis.

Background to the Study

Community Asset Transfer (CAT) is the transfer of either management or ownership of a property asset from a public body (usually a local authority) to a community-based organisation, at less than full market value, as long as it continues to be used for purposes beneficial to that local community (social, economic or environmental benefits are all permissible) (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006). CATs were made possible initially under a provision of the Local Government Act, 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) 2003, which allowed local authorities to dispose of property assets at 'less than best' value, something they had previously been prohibited from doing. Although CATs were promoted by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) under the banner of the Coalition government's (2010-2015) 'Big Society' initiative, with a strongly 'localist' agenda, the Localism Act of 2011 does not itself make direct reference to Community Asset Transfer. The Act contains chapters setting out the right of local authorities to take over the provision of services from central government; and others creating a requirement for these same local authorities to maintain a register of nominated Assets of Community Value (ACVs) in support of the newly created 'Right to Bid'; but CATs are not explicitly mentioned.

CATs were first brought to the researcher's attention in 2015, when studying regeneration along the Calder Valley in West Yorkshire. This regeneration had not occurred evenly up and down the valley. The town with the greatest apparent success at re-inventing itself was Hebden Bridge, the former 'trouser town', almost derelict in the 1960s, which had become known for its vibrant cultural life and independent spirit. Comparing Hebden Bridge with its neighbours showed that the single largest difference was the bottom-up, grassroots mobilisation of local people and groups willing to work to save and improve the town (Briggs, 2015). The epitome of this can-do attitude was the Hebden Bridge Town Hall, which had been acquired from Calderdale council on a long lease some years earlier as one of the first CATs in the country. Individuals interviewed who had been part of the transfer were very proud of their achievements in acquiring the Town Hall and other premises in the town, but the effort that had been needed to make this happen was apparent in their stories. Hebden Bridge's particular demographic profile of middle-aged, middle-class, politically and culturally active individuals with skills in finance, media and marketing seemed to confer an advantage to the town in making community acquisitions that other places were unlikely to share.

The question became: does this form of ownership happen in areas with different socio-economic profiles? Who else is using asset transfers to take back control of local property assets? In seeking answers to these questions, it soon became apparent that there was very little written on the subject. There were news stories about local landmark buildings being acquired by community groups and about the fights of local people to stop favourite assets being sold off for development, but little mention of Community Asset Transfer itself. Although there appeared to be considerable popular interest in the idea of asset transfer, there was little evident questioning of its value, or explanation of any mechanism by which it benefitted local communities.

This lack was even more apparent in the academic and scholarly literature, where only two 2011 papers could be identified at the time: both came from a study of Scottish village halls transferred to community ownership, undertaken by Sarah Skerratt and Clare Hall. In highlighting the concerns raised by community groups who had taken over some of these halls, a number of questions were raised about the reality of such transfers being a catalyst for the empowerment of local people (Skerratt and Hall, 2011a and 2011b). The Skerratt and Hall study is discussed in greater length in the literature review in chapter 2. A paper by Murtagh and Goggin (2015) referred to Community Asset Transfers in Northern Ireland but was primarily focused on the rights and wrongs of using social finance as a means for community organisations to make independent, self-empowering choices. As will be discussed in chapter 2, the ability to make and act upon such choices goes to the heart of the literature on inequalities.

More recently there have been other papers published on the subject of Community Asset Transfers: Murtagh and Boland's case study of three large, housing-focused community groups in Northern Ireland, (Murtagh and Boland, 2019), and a suite of articles derived from a study of leisure centres and libraries by a group of researchers based in the north of England (Nichols and Forbes, 2014, Nichols et al., 2015, Forbes et al., 2017 and Findlay-King et al., 2018). Of these, Findlay-King et al.'s critique of whether the transfers of these two types of assets represent a form of progressive localism is more closely related to the present study than the others, and its findings mirror our own in a number of ways. These are discussed as part of the data analysis in chapter 7.

The decision to study Community Asset Transfers was taken to remedy the paucity of scholarly research on a matter that was being promoted by government agencies as a means to empower people at the community and neighbourhood level. The aim of this study was to discover whether CATs offered a genuine vehicle for reducing place-based inequalities, or whether these transfers only succeeded in communities that already possessed certain advantages of financial and social capital, thus entrenching inequality rather than removing it.

Initial ideas of compiling a national database of transferred assets, which would enable a large-scale comparison of numbers of CATs with deprivation indices of the areas in which they had taken place, had to be revised when it became apparent that collecting the necessary data would require many freedom of information requests, which the University of Manchester advises researchers to use sparingly, and with caution. Given this, and initial research suggesting that the county of West Yorkshire has a greater number of transferred assets than many other parts of the country, the decision was taken to focus the study on this area specifically. Local authorities have no legal requirement to maintain registers of CATs in their districts and the very definition of what constitutes a Community Asset Transfer is subject to subtle variations from borough to borough. As is discussed in chapter 3, on the research design, a more focused, qualitative approach was therefore adopted.

Framing the Study in the Literature and Policy

Although there has been little scholarly research published into Community Asset Transfers *per se*, there is an extensive literature on inequality, empowerment and social capital, as well as on the subject of asset-based development. These different theoretical strands are picked up in the literature review.

The credibility of community-led development and regeneration is discussed from two perspectives: theoretical and philosophical ideas around the meaning of community and the means it might have at its disposal to improve its own lot are examined in the literature review. Community initiatives under the guise of localism in the UK are considered separately in chapter 4, the first empirical data chapter, which looks at the policy environment in which CATs evolved.

Why does Inequality Matter?

In *The Price of Inequality* (2013), Joseph Stiglitz analyses the rise in levels of inequality (primarily in the United States of America) over the last thirty years and considers the price that societies have paid, and continue to pay, for this. In the early nineteen-eighties, he says, the top one percent of American income earners received around 12 percent of the nation's income, but by 2012, following the financial crisis, this had increased to 20 percent. But this is not the whole story: increases in wealth (rather than simply income) generated by the long-standing growth of the US economy have gone disproportionately to the top earners, with the top one percent having received 60 percent of those additional resources during the period from 1979 to 2007 (Stiglitz, 2013).

The very rich have thus got substantially richer, while the poor have not; meaning that, relatively speaking, they have become worse off, with a variety of negative consequences for society as a whole. Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) compare levels of inequality between the world's 23 richest nations by measuring the average income gap between the top 20 percent of the population and that of the bottom 20 percent. The differences are striking. In Japan and the Scandinavian countries the top 20 percent earn, on average, four times the income of the bottom 20 percent. At the other end of the spectrum, in Singapore and the USA, the top fifth of earners receive more than eight times the income of the bottom fifth. And these differences have discernible consequences for the populations of these generally affluent nations across a spectrum of measures relating to health and social problems. Wilkinson and Pickett calculated a correlation coefficient of 0.87 when assessing the association between an index of national health and social problems, compiled from internationally available data and levels of inequality. As a contrast, they demonstrated that this same index showed almost no correlation to the average income level of the countries concerned (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010, p. 21). It thus appears that inequality itself has an influence on social problems as diverse as obesity, teenage pregnancy, homicide and mental illness. Stiglitz takes this further, arguing that rising levels of inequality (especially in the US) are contributing to the erosion of justice and true democracy (Stiglitz, 2013).

It is worth pointing out here that both Stiglitz, and Wilkinson and Pickett are talking about income inequality within some of the richest, most economically developed countries on the globe, and not about inequalities either *between* those countries, between those countries and less developed ones, or within poorer, less economically developed countries. This is important because of the limits it places on the conclusions drawn by the authors. Much of the field research discussed in this study uses frameworks derived from the capability approach to inequalities (Sen, 1992, Kleine, 2010, 2011), has been carried out in an international development context and is therefore not directly comparable with Wilkinson and Pickett's findings.

How to address the issue of inequality is at the core of Amartya Sen's development of the capability approach and its extension by Nussbaum (2000) into the capabilities approach. Sen considered inequality of choice to be foundational to all other forms of inequality and he argued that projects seeking to reduce inequalities therefore needed to focus on enabling people to make real choices that could lead to achieving what they desired in life (Sen, 1992). Nussbaum defined a set of capabilities (something Sen himself refused to do), which she identified as essential to human wellbeing (Nussbaum, 2000) and other scholars working in areas related to social justice and poverty reduction continue to use this approach in their work (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005, Kleine, 2010, Munger et al, 2016). A number of these studies (mostly in the field of international development) and critiques of them, and of the approach more generally, are discussed as part of the theoretical underpinning for this study, and in the selection of suitable models for analysing the results of the research. The Measuring Empowerment (ME) framework of Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) and Dorothea Kleine's, Choice Framework (2011), which was derived from it, both seek to implement a capabilities approach in order to deliver development projects and these are considered at some length.

The notion of social capital does not address the problems of inequality directly but suggests that differences in the resources represented by social networks and connections account for much of the cause of social injustices. Robert Putnam's work (1994, 2004) refining the idea of social capital is discussed at length, as are the responses of critics like John DeFilippis (2001), Forrest and Kearns (2001) and

Randy Stoecker (2004). In spite of the philosophical and political misgivings of these latter, the concept of social capital continues to have traction in community-based regeneration and development work. Alongside the capabilities frameworks mentioned above, this study makes use of the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) of Emery and Flora (2006), who suggest a range of seven different capitals, including social capital, as a means to evaluate the capacity of community groups to improve their living conditions.

The literature review includes a discussion of social innovation and whether this term has any validity in debates around social justice. The term is critiqued by authors like Nicholls and Cho (2006), who question the legitimacy of implementing social change policies by groups other than democratically elected bodies. Parallels are drawn between this perception of social innovation and some of the criticism of community-led development, of which similar questions are asked. Other theorists, such as Cajaiba-Santana (2014) sidestep these issues and focus on the ways in which social innovation can act as a driver for social change, from a structural perspective, rather than viewed simply in terms of its outcomes. He suggests a blend of institutional and structuration theory to position social innovation as achieving legitimacy once a critical mass of social actors accept its proposals for changing society and are willing to adopt these changes.

More empirical work on social innovation links it explicitly to social benefits and to improving functionings among deprived communities around the world. This section concludes with examples of such programmes in Colombia and Bangladesh and a discussion of how real value has been created by socially innovative institutions like the Grameen Bank and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) (Mahmuda et al., 2014, Yunus, 2007).

Research Design

There are three phases to the research. The first is a compilation of secondary data on national policy, the policies of local authorities in West Yorkshire and the evaluation of data on deprivation in West Yorkshire and how it is might be spatially related to CATs. Data on Assets of Community Value across England are collated and compared to the picture of such assets in West Yorkshire. The national policy dimension is considered through time, contrasting the various initiatives on social justice and poverty reduction by successive British governments. How these initiatives are either complemented or undermined by policies such as public-private partnerships, the Third Way, austerity or localism is discussed and related back to the qualitative findings of the study.

The study is focused on the five authorities of West Yorkshire, each of which has its own Community Asset Transfer policy and a track record of transferring built and land assets to community groups. These five bodies have quite different policies and activity rates around CATs and these are compared and an analysis is made of the variations they present. Deprivation measures are considered at two different spatial levels (Ward level and LSOA) to overcome any fallibility in these complex measurements.

Assets of Community Value (ACVs) were created by the Localism Act (2011), which allows community groups to nominate local assets – buildings or land – to be registered with the local authority for five years. These registers are publicly accessible and from them, it has been possible to compile lists of ACVs from all the local authorities that form part of the study. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had an aggregated set of ACVs, dated November 2015 and this has been used as a national reference point against which the local data can be measured.

The second phase is qualitative in nature and consists primarily of semi-structured interviews with members of local authorities and members of community-based organisations with transferred assets. The use of a single area case study (West Yorkshire) with multiple sub-divisions allows the research to look in depth at this region and at the experiences of different organisations within it. 30 individuals were interviewed for the study; 14 representatives of the local authorities (a mix of councillors and council officers) and 16 from community groups.

The third phase of the study analyses the material from the interviews, using an inductive coding method, from which emerge a number of significant themes. These themes are mapped against the elements of frameworks previously examined in order to discover whether any of these offers a useful model for interpreting the study results. Having established that Kleine's Choice Framework (2011) offers the most complete structure for such a mapping exercise but that aspects of it are not suited to a complete description of this research, an adapted framework is developed.

Policy Review and Analysis

Chapter 4 considers the national policy environment from which Community Asset Transfers and ACVs emerge. The review follows the development of communitarian ideas in British governmental thinking over the last 20 years and the extent to which any of these can be said to promote greater social equality or community empowerment. From ideas of devolution under the New Labour government of the early millennium, through to the 'Big Society' localism espoused by the Coalition from 2010 to 2015, the tendency has been for public service provision to be moved from local government into the care of either third sector or private partners. Critics of this trend describe it as a form of creeping privatisation and an attack on the welfare state (Hastings and Matthews, 2015, Raco, 2003). In addition to this perceived undermining of local governmental apparatus, the decade following the 2008 crash has seen a policy of austerity imposed across the UK. All government departments were expected to make cuts in their budgets and the DCLG suffered particularly heavily in this regard, leading to significant loss of services, and increased spatial inequality (Gray and Barford, 2018, Pugalis et al., 2014). This is the background against which asset transfers are being undertaken and the issue of whether these transfers are forms of austerity localism or its more progressive counterpart is important to the question of the social value of CATs (Featherstone et al. 2012, Findlay-King et al., 2018).

Data Gathered from Local Authorities in West Yorkshire

Chapter 5 compares the policies and practices of the West Yorkshire local authorities as discovered both through the secondary information available and from interviews with council officers and councillors from the five authorities. The chapter opens with an overview of the county and then looks at each of the five local authorities in turn, noting both similarities and differences in approach and analysing the consequences of these for communities and Community Asset Transfers in the different districts.

Data Gathered from Community Groups with CATs

Chapter 6 is the third empirical chapter in the study. It begins with the secondary data about the types of assets transferred to community groups from local authorities in West Yorkshire, and the nature of the acquiring groups. It includes data compiled from both the Indices of Multiple Deprivations (IMD) and Ward level census data, which allows for an assessment of inequalities across the county and for analysis of the varying levels of deprivation experienced by those communities with CATs.

The bulk of the chapter reports the findings of the interviews with members of community groups. These individuals represent groups from all the local authority areas, different types of transferred asset and different organisational forms. All have experience of an asset transfer; most have been through the CAT process at some time in the previous five years, a couple are on the board of a group currently going through that process, and one is a director of a community cooperative which acquired a local pub through ACV. The material from the interviews is discussed thematically, drawing upon the analysis of the coded transcripts. The major themes detected in the research are found to be: the nature of the asset transferred; the relationship the group has with its local authority; issues around funding and finance; group membership and capacity; and levels of community engagement with the CAT. These are explored at some length, using interviewees own words to paint a picture of the experiences they describe of Community Asset Transfer.

The Community Asset Transfer Framework

Chapter 7 further develops the analysis of the findings from the previous chapters, assessing the emergent themes from the empirical data against the frameworks discussed in chapter 3. Having determined that Kleine's Choice Framework is the closest to representing the results of the study, these themes are then mapped onto it. The Community Asset Transfer Framework (CATF) evolves from this exercise as the Choice Framework is adapted, removing some of the resources in the original and using elements of the CCF and others to form a picture of the resources and circumstances needed by community groups if they are successfully to undertake this form of asset transfer. The CATF incorporates knowledge as a factor from Perrons' RDI and political capital from the CCF. In addition it brings in the idea of time as a resource important to groups going through the CAT process and managing an asset as volunteers. It shifts perspective from the individual search for empowerment through the exercise of choice, to view all the resources selected as belonging to an organisation.

Reducing or Reinforcing Inequalities?

Having considered both the theory and the practice of community empowerment through the adoption of asset transfers, the study returns to the question it started with: does Community Asset Transfer genuinely reduce inequalities between communities, or does it merely serve to reinforce existing inequalities? The answer it comes up with reflects some of the complexities of contemporary society. CAT is being used by community bodies and local authorities as a means to mitigate the effects of austerity budget cuts on non-core local service provision. Successful transfers give considerable autonomy and genuine empowerment to the groups who have them, and these groups in turn are focused on delivering a range of social benefits to their neighbourhoods. On the other hand, the capacity requirements for a small, volunteer-led organisation to navigate the CAT process and run a potentially expensive asset sustainably over the long-term, mean that certain local areas are denied access to this form of mitigation. Communities in more deprived neighbourhoods need additional support in order to take advantage of the benefits CATs may offer, and this is not always available to them.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter reviews previous literature on Community Asset Transfers (CATs) and broader ideas about community empowerment and the changing role of the state. It explores the origins of community-led development and discusses critiques of this approach in different international contexts. The discussion then moves to the consideration of inequality and to different theories that have sought to understand the impact of inequality and how to tackle it. Three theoretical approaches are described in detail: the 'capability' approach of Amartya Sen, the concept of 'social capital', especially as promoted by Robert Putnam, and the concept of 'social innovation' – particularly in its applications to the reduction of poverty and social injustice. These approaches are discussed on a theoretical level with examples of their application in practice in different parts of the world.

Having looked into the theoretical context of CATs, this review works through the scholarly research so far conducted into the practice itself. Drawing on the limited volume of research undertaken on CATs in the UK to date, the chapter identifies key findings and discusses their links to the theoretical ideas raised earlier in the chapter and to the findings of the present study. Shared conclusions and differences between previous research and the findings of this study are brought into sharper focus in subsequent chapters of the thesis.

Community-Led Development and Its Critics

Political philosophers since Edmund Burke in the eighteenth century have seen devolution of government to local bodies as a means to reduce the power of a remote elite class and put it into the hands of communities and their local representatives. For Burke, social institutions based on community groups and bottom-up governance were the foundations, not merely of nationhood, but of humanity itself (Davies and Pill, 2012). Similarly, Alexis de Tocqueville (2016 edition), disgusted by the excesses of post-revolutionary government in France, wrote of the virtues to be found in the newly-independent States of America, where governance was structured from the township level upward, not from the federal level down. More recently, sociologists such as Amitai Etzioni (1997), seeing the nation state as too distant from individual citizens to be truly representative of their needs, saw place-based communities as the ideal level for civil engagement (Etzioni, 1997). The belief remains in many quarters that government structures anchored in small villages and neighbourhoods are less bureaucratic, more efficient, more responsive to local needs and more democratic than government at the national or the regional level (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013).

The early roots of community development in the 20th century can be found in Latin and South America in the 1950s and 1960s, when these ideas were employed by Christian Democratic governments in the region, as a means of dispelling civil unrest and potential overthrow, following the Cuban revolution (Gonzalez, 2013). Healey (1974) discusses the ways in which structural change was wrought in Venezuela and Colombia after the removal from power of long-standing dictatorships in both those countries. Although political stability was largely sustained in both countries, there were populist uprising aimed at giving additional rights (particularly land rights) to communities, at the expense of the ruling elites (Healey, 1974). Further south in Chile in the 1950s, neighbourhood citizens' committees ('juntas de vecinos') were prominent in urban development and again active in land redistribution efforts. Eventually, however, this led to the mobilisation of marginalised sections of the population by different left-leaning political factions and ultimately to the overthrow of a democratically elected government by a right wing military coup in 1973 (Posner, 2004).

Community development as a potentially positive force for change was picked up in the USA, however, when President Lyndon Johnson launched his 'War on Poverty' in 1964. In this period, the growth in the American economy improved the financial lot of all classes of American society, with the people at the bottom of the income distribution actually experiencing faster 'wealth growth' than those higher up the pyramid - a situation that has been dramatically reversed in the last 30 years (Stiglitz, 2013). Overall, American society became more equal (at least economically) in the decades following the Second World War but, by the mid-1960s, it was apparent that there remained groups of people, concentrated principally in the inner cities, who had not experienced this surge of upward mobility and whose social and economic circumstances remained largely unimproved. Impoverished households, spatially concentrated in particular neighbourhoods and comprising disproportionate numbers of residents from ethnic minorities, were the targets of the War on Poverty (Cochrane, 2007).

The programmes that emerged as part of this 'War', as with those from the similar 'Urban Programme' in Britain, focused on deprived communities in the inner cities. Broad, universal welfare was seen to have failed to solve the problems of the inner city 'ghettos', and so new, place-specific interventions were put in place to target these communities and help them to help themselves. In the UK such programmes were often described as 'community initiatives', with an emphasis on residents from the areas being targeted acting as drivers of change (Robson, 1987).

Programmes aiming to deliver community empowerment and raise living standards and opportunities for people in poor and deprived areas may sound ultimately benign but Cochrane claims that "at the core of the War on Poverty was an assault on the 'culture of poverty', understood as the culture of the poor" (Cochrane 2007, p. 18). Sugrue (2005) is also critical of these programmes, arguing that they ignored structural reasons for the poverty and deprivation that afflicted inner city communities, focusing instead on the supposed need to modify the behaviour of people in these situations and seeing modification of this behaviour as the solution to their problems. In other words, these policies sought to adjust the behaviour of poor (often ethnic minority) people so that it conformed more closely with that of their more affluent (mainly white) neighbours. Underlying issues such as chronic unemployment created by economic restructuring, racism and racial segregation of neighbourhoods were not acknowledged or tackled (Sugrue, 2005). The middle-class, caucasio-normative values underlying the programmes appear not to have been questioned by their initiators.

Adamson and Bromily (2013) highlight another potential problem with the push to enable communities to deliver social benefits to local areas, namely that, by offering something called 'empowerment' to those communities, and by helping people within them to up-skill and develop greater social capacity, an expectation is created in the people of these communities that they will have real power to effect change. Empowerment has become a key concept in international development work, with the World Bank recognising it as one of the three pillars of poverty reduction since the turn of the millennium. In developing their Measuring Empowerment (ME) Framework (see 'Conceptual Models and Frameworks', chapter 3), Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) start from the idea that a person is empowered if they possess the capacity to make effective choices; that is to make real choices that lead to outcomes they desire. The goal of much development work is to empower people through community programmes and initiatives, widening local participation in decision-making, promoting education and capacity-building. The experience of community participation in projects in Nicaragua under the Local Development Programme (PRODEL) is assessed by Stein (2001) and concludes that the engagement of local people in the development of these projects was a determining factor in a number of aspects of their success. The key to this success is seen to be PRODEL's ability to mobilise matched contributions from municipal and community sources (in the form of either cash or labour), enabling the initial funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency to be spread more broadly across the population and offer support to more families than would otherwise be possible (Stein, 2001). Brown (2004) sets out how major development agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank have adopted participative poverty reduction strategies (PRSPs) as the mandatory framework for recipients of funding and concessional finance. Community participation is a requirement for projects seeking to attract international finance (Brown, 2004).

The achievement of empowerment can be illusory, however, as effective control over, or access to, scarce resources may not be transferred to communities or community groups (Adamson and Bromiley, 2013). As DeFilippis (2001) points out, groups and social networks who enjoy substantial advantages of wealth, power or other forms of privilege actively seek to retain those for themselves and not to share or dissipate them (DeFilippis, 2001). Brown (2004) is sceptical about the positive democratic benefits from participation as it is understood by the international development agencies. He accuses the 'participation movement' of mythologising its own agenda in ways that deny the possibility of failure of participatory projects. This, he suggests, leads it to ignore that participation as it currently imagined fails to hold to account those in power: "positive participatory sentiments function as much to obscure as to reveal the nature of central control" (Brown 2004, p. 249). Uncovering whether power or resources are truly transferred as part of Community Asset Transfers is an important consideration in determining the extent that they have served to empower communities.

Politically, the idea of 'community' is sometimes treated less critically than other social constructs. The achievement of community cohesion, for example, is seen as a desirable outcome for social innovation (Evers and Ewert, 2015) and popular parlance supposes that the possession of 'community spirit' by an individual is a sign of social and moral virtue. Communitarian principles are seen by those who espouse them as enabling and supporting social and political reforms. The nature of the reforms varies in accordance with the political vision of the speaker (in the UK, notions of community have been championed by both major political parties over the last twenty years – see chapter 4), but the general principle of positive expectations from community empowerment spans all sides of the political spectrum (Tallon, 2013).

Nor is the notion of communities entirely unproblematic in and of itself: aside from the difficulties in defining ‘a community’, individuals within any defined community are likely to have differing and conflicting interests, and this can result in communities being hostile and oppressive places for those who do not share the outlook and prejudices of their neighbours. For these people (often from vulnerable groups of one kind or another), the state and its apparatus offers protection from abuse and a guarantee of fairness (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2011), which a shift to more localised and informal modes of governance may undermine. Communities may also be closed and exclusionary, defined by ‘them’ and ‘us’ thinking, which can lead to demonization of ‘the other’ with attendant prejudice, isolationism and hostility (Tallon, 2013).

Imrie and Raco (2003) are critical of political discourse that uses the term ‘community’ as a way of effectively excluding the purported beneficiaries of policy interventions from the process of forming those policies. In considering the urban policies of the New Labour government, they conclude that the use of the term ‘the community’ serves to distance those in receipt of regeneration funding from those who distribute it. Community, they say, thus becomes either the object of policy, a policy instrument or a thing to be created (Imrie and Raco, 2003). This objectification of communities also highlights the unequal distribution of power between supposed partners in the co-creation of regeneration and renewal programmes (Edwards, 2003).

In their seminal book, *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, Kretzmann and McKnight (1996) introduced the idea of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) as a policy initiative to combat urban deprivation in the USA. Previous researchers looking at the deployment of different categories of ‘asset’ as ways to combat vulnerability to issues such as famine and disease, had focused on the rural poor, particularly those living in the poorest areas of the Global South, or in places historically prone to large-scale humanitarian crises (Chambers, 1995, Moser, 1998, Swift 1989). Kretzmann and McKnight argued that the policy approach, still prevalent at the time, of seeing neighbourhoods (particularly those in inner cities) as ’troubled’ and needing help, created negative spirals of dependency and hopelessness. They proposed an alternative path, allowing local people to figure out their own solutions, using the various 'assets' (financial, infrastructural and social/personal) available to them to regenerate an area from the ground up (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1996).

Their contention was that all communities have many of the resources (albeit often unrecognised) that they need to reinvent themselves and resolve any issues they may be experiencing. Enabling them to understand and develop these resources would not only create a sense of empowerment and social cohesion in these communities, but it would also ensure that the solutions generated were appropriate to local problems and would be more likely to be sustained because they were 'owned' by local people. The key to successful neighbourhood regeneration, they argued, was to discover the network of existing resources and capacities within that neighbourhood, harness them collectively to give a 'multiplier' effect and then to leverage that to extend the project to encompass other assets, which in turn could be used to change the profile of the area. A major part of this extension is the transfer of control of tangible, physical assets from a more remote governmental or quasi-governmental agency, into the hands of local, community-based bodies. Managing their own infrastructure, providing services of value to the community and a focus on combating local problems with locally generated solutions is central to the ABCD approach to regeneration (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1996).

Kretzmann and McKnight's notion of Asset-Based Community Development chimed with earlier concepts of community regeneration. Like the programmes of the War on Poverty, it stressed the responsibility of local actors to make changes to their own areas. Unlike more Marxian interpretations, neither approach looked for structural reasons for poverty or inequality, focusing instead on the personal resources of individuals and their ability to effect change in their own lives. This positive message of self-help and self-reliance, emphasising possibilities for local people to take back control of their destinies and improve their lives without the intervention of external parties was picked up by researchers and policy-makers both in parts of the developing world (see, for example, El Asmar et al., 2012, Koontz and Sen, 2013 or Paul, 1987) and in the UK and North America (Davies and Pill, 2012, Grengs, 2002, Imbroscio, 2013 or Rose, 2000). Community Asset Transfer can be considered to be a form of ABCD, insofar as it places control of built assets into the hands of members of the community. As shall be made clear in chapter 4, there is not a strong philosophical belief underpinning the use of CATs themselves, but they do form part of a broader, localist agenda, which, like ABCD, sees positive social, economic and political benefits accrue from shifting power away from governmental bodies and into the hands of ordinary citizens. As this study demonstrates, the reality on the ground in West Yorkshire is rather more nuanced, with CATs supporting community empowerment in a somewhat piecemeal, patchwork way.

Chambers (1988) considered assets to be important in protecting vulnerable groups most particularly when these assets could work in combination with one another, forming a portfolio of resources. His notion of livelihood, and the importance of understanding poverty from the perspective of those experiencing it, rather than as a purely economic metric, focused on income (Chambers 1995), was taken up by other researchers interested in how poverty could be understood and eradicated by deploying the various tangible and intangible assets possessed by those who most keenly felt its effects (Rakodi, 1999). Moser (1998) built on these ideas to develop a framework, which could analyse the vulnerabilities of urban communities afflicted by poverty in order to enable them to make productive use of their own complex asset portfolios as part of broader poverty reduction initiatives (Moser, 1998).

Some researchers point out, however, that this increased emphasis on community provision of services coincides with an on-going retreat by central governments from direct provision of such services itself, as part of a broader reconfiguration of the respective roles of state and communities - the so-called 'hollowing out' of the state (Moore and McKee, 2014; Rose, 2000). Whether intentionally or not, the idea of ABCD is at least partially congruent with the 'Small State', anti-welfare agendas of the centre right, espoused in both Britain and the USA since the 1980s. President Reagan in the USA, and his friend Mrs Thatcher, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, had both overseen a period of planned retreat of the State in favour of market-oriented policies in their own countries, and this was then exported (via the mechanisms of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank) as the so-called 'Washington Consensus', setting out conditions to be applied to developing countries seeking support in times of economic crisis (Hurt, 2016). This libertarian trend has, if anything, accelerated since the financial crisis of 2007-2008 by policies of austerity pursued by various governments. The argument runs that there are issues of importance to local communities from which national, or even regional, governments are too remote to resolve satisfactorily and that, therefore, these issues should be placed back into the hands of local people to reach solutions that are optimal for them (Moore and McKee, 2014).

There is some scepticism around this agenda, as it appears to push the responsibility for the success or failure back onto communities themselves, and limits any responsibility the state might have had for delivering services at a local level. In emphasising the existence of resources and capabilities already present within impoverished communities, a new narrative can be constructed in which those that 'fail' the test of empowerment (by not using those resources to regenerate successfully, or to increase the capabilities available to them) have only themselves to blame. Government and other agencies are thus absolved of the failure of their policies to regenerate poor and disadvantaged neighbourhoods. One example of this is cited by Joseph Stiglitz in his 2013 book, *The Price of Inequality*. Stiglitz paraphrases a response given by Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, in an interview on the *Today* show in January 2012, in which the billionaire businessman states that, in a land of opportunity such as the USA, the poor have only themselves to blame for their inability to escape their unhappy situation (Stiglitz, 2013, p33).

ABCD, in some readings, can be seen to amplify this attitude because although it views responsibility for poverty as communal, rather than merely personal, it ignores the larger structural limitations facing communities who have suffered economic decline, loss of employment as local industries have disappeared, or the effects of wage deflation brought about through globalisation and the deskilling of manual jobs through automation. The question becomes whether all (or even many) such communities have the strength in depth needed to break free of their situations without substantial financial support. Localism and the push to replace state provision of services with forms of community self-help and other partnership arrangements are considered further in chapter 4.

Community Inequalities and the Idea of Capability

In the introduction to his book, *Inequality Reexamined* (1992), Sen poses the question: what do we mean when we speak of inequality? There are, he points out, many different forms of inequality between people as individuals and between groups of people. Furthermore, different models of social justice choose to focus on different forms of inequality as fundamental, leading to conflicting positions and analysis when suggesting ways to reduce inequalities or provide social benefits to different groups. Wealth and income inequalities are seen as critical to some commentators, whereas inequality of liberty is considered foundational by others (Sen, 1992). If communities are expected to achieve positive social change using only their own internal resources, how comparable are those communities in terms of the ‘assets’ they have at their disposal, as these will ultimately determine their effectiveness in overcoming these barriers? The likelihood of major discrepancies in the nature and level of resources available to different communities can be expected to result in clear inequalities between these communities when they seek to take control and manage physical assets and provide services.

In seeking to address this complexity of potentially conflicting perspectives, Sen proposes that what is important is not the *possession* of a particular resource (be that material, social or political) that enables a person to address the issues at the heart of the inequality in the structures they inhabit, but their *capability* to make use of that resource. A person’s position in a social arrangement, he claims, can only be judged by considering both their actual achievements, and their freedom to achieve. Achievement is concerned with what we *manage* to accomplish, whereas freedom deals with the *real opportunity* that we have to accomplish what we value (Sen, 1992, p. 31). Or, as Mahmuda et al (2014) put it, the “capability approach introduces a bridge between the person’s earnings and his ability to convert the earning into functioning” (Mahmuda et al., 2014, p. 256).

The central requirement, therefore, in order to achieve equality (or at least to reduce inequality) is that individuals should have what Sen (1992, p.40) terms ‘capability’, which he defines as “a set of vectors of functionings, reflecting the person’s freedom to lead one type of life or another”. In this way, he clearly links the possibility of freedom to the capability to make use of that freedom – to exercise real choices in determining one’s future. From this he concludes that the fundamental measure of inequality is disparity of capability as this leads inevitably to inequality of available choice (Sen, 1992). A person’s ‘capability set’ is defined as the combination of functionings available to them, based on the extent to which they are able freely to make and implement choices, which lead to the outcomes they desire for themselves. By observing changes in a particular set of functionings over time, it is possible to determine whether the person’s capability set has expanded or contracted over that period, and to compare capability sets between individuals or groups of individuals (Drydyk, n.d.).

It is clear that capability is not evenly distributed. There are structural and social differences in people’s access to resources, and human diversity results in large differences between individuals in their ability to achieve certain desired goals (Drydyk, n.d., Munger et al., 2016). Sen makes the point that equalising ownership of resources or holdings of primary goods (as predicated in Rawls’ (1971) theory of 'justice as fairness') may not lead to equalisation of the substantive freedoms enjoyed by different individuals, as there can be significant variations in how these resources and primary goods get converted into freedoms (Sen, 1992, p. 33). Freedom of choice is of direct importance for someone's quality of life and their wellbeing, and capability, he argues, is central to the notion of freedom itself; without it, whatever the means an individual has to achieve freedom, their choices remain constrained. Capability therefore is primarily a reflection of an individual's freedom to achieve what he or she values (Sen, 1992, p. 49).

Bebbington (1999) considers assets in this sense to be more than simply resources to be exploited by the poor in order to improve their livelihoods but as the means they have at their disposal for exercising capability and acting to achieve personal life choices. He and Sen (2000) both suggest that because of their importance in underpinning capability in this way, possession of assets (both tangible and intangible) offers the possibility to people who would otherwise be disadvantaged and disenfranchised in many aspects of their lives, of challenging the power relations inherent in the systems and institutions through which their lives are constrained. Indeed, so important are assets considered to be that it is argued that such challenges would not be possible in the absence of assets (Bebbington, 1999, Sen, 2000). In their chapter *Claiming rights: citizenship and the politics of asset distribution,* (in Moser (ed)'s book *Reducing global Poverty)* Ferguson et al. (2007) invert this concept, claiming that certain levels of political capital need to be in place in order for communities or individuals to gain access to assets, which would in turn protect them from vulnerability to poverty and deprivation. They discuss how different forms of rights provide this capital and thus lead to the possibility of asset accumulation (Ferguson et al. 2007).

While Sen (1992) and Nussbaum (2000) see the capabilities approach as pertaining to individuals, other researchers have considered that it could be translated into a communal ethic, rather than a merely personal one. By adopting this approach as the basis for urban planning and development, Fainstein (2014) argues, poorer and more deprived communities could achieve just and fair outcomes for themselves without having to trade what Nussbaum terms 'necessary capabilities' off against one another. Current neoliberal models of development and regeneration, Fainstein contends, oblige deprived urban communities to make self-harming choices, such as accepting the presence of polluting industries in their midst because there are no other forms of employment available to them. A just society would ensure that the least well off benefitted from (or minimally, were not harmed by) proposed change and their capability sets would be unimpaired, allowing them freely to choose the outcomes they genuinely desired (Fainstein, 2014).

In their study of capacity building under the auspices of the Welsh Community First programme (discussed at greater length later in this chapter), Adamson and Bromiley (2013) note that communities with a history of self-organisation were more likely to benefit from the programme than places without such a history. This they attribute to the fact that such communities had already achieved a level of capacity, which meant they were a step ahead of neighbouring communities where residents were starting from a lower base of capability (Adamson and Bromiley, 2013). This may not be surprising but reinforces the intuition that community groups are not all equal when it comes to being able to effect meaningful change. Initial capability conditions vary, and this variation can potentially contribute to an enduring inequality between communities that would be very difficult to redress without in some way artificially disadvantaging any communities possessing higher initial levels of social capital.

This is a theme Sen returns to in the updated 2017 edition of his book, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare,* arguing that it is possible to judge individual advantages in terms of the respective capabilities that such different individuals have, giving them the freedom to live as they choose. This approach, he claims, focuses on the substantive freedoms that people have, rather than only on the particular outcomes they end up with, which may not reflect either levels of satisfaction with these outcomes or an individual's ability to have ended up with any other outcome (Sen, 2017, p. 24).

Although Sen's approach has prompted widespread academic interest and been developed in a number of different directions (Deneulin, 2005, Munger et al., 2016, Nussbaum, 2000) it has been described as difficult to use in practice (specifically on development projects). According to Kleine (2011) there are several reasons for this. One is the difficulty in assessing capabilities directly: capabilities are complex and it is difficult to disentangle them from other aspects of an individual's lived experience. Models developed to use Sen's approach (for example, Alsop and Heinsohn's (2005) Measuring Empowerment (ME) Framework, or the Sustainable Livelihood Framework used by the Department for International Development) generally rely on a range of proxies to uncover a person's capability to achieve the things they value in life. This in itself can be problematic. As Gasper (2007) makes clear, the tendency to simplify the capability approach in order to operationalise it can lead to the introduction of proxy measures (such as per capita GNP as an indicator of economic wellbeing), which directly undermine the rationale of the whole approach (Gasper, 2007).

Another problem Kleine notes in using Sen's approach for development work is that, in order to follow the logic of freedom of choice built in to the theory, the outcomes of the intervention cannot be pre-determined: they must emerge from the choices and preferences of the individuals (or communities) for whom the intervention is being enacted. This open-ended aspect to the capability approach is at odds with the way much development funding is organised. Funders typically look for projects with clear, measurable goals and outcomes, and the success of a project will be measured against how well it achieves these after a given time lapse (see, for example the Girls' Education Call for Bids on the Foreign and Commonwealth website: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/girls-education-2018-to-2020-call-for-bids). In order to embrace Sen's capability perspective, development agencies and other funding bodies would have to take the political risk of supporting open-ended, dynamic projects with potentially no recognisable result or endpoint (Kleine, 2010).

This is in contrast to the practice of some development agencies, which do make 'core funding' available to not-for-profit groups in the Global South (and elsewhere). This is valuable in supporting organisations working on different projects to run their central operations and cover so-called 'core costs' but this is distinct from funding for targeted interventions in specific locations or to benefit particular groups of individuals. Thus the Swedish International Development Agency, Sida, supports organisations like the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) with core funding as part of the latter's push for greater global democratisation of ICT (see: https://www.apc.org/en/partner/swedish-international-development-cooperation-agency-sida). Kleine's point applies principally to project funding, rather than to this latter, and reflects the reality that in times of straitened finances, and a very target-driven, managerial emphasis on spending by government and quasi-governmental bodies, the sorts of projects which lack clear goals and outcomes will have less appeal to funders. This does not mean, however, that the capability approach cannot be of use. Kleine's Choice Framework (see figure 3.b, p.68) is based on Sen's capability approach, and is in turn further adapted in the present study to analyse asset transfers as projects with potential consequences for the choices available to local communities.

Social Capital

The term 'social capital' was first developed into a theoretical framework by James Coleman (1988) as he sought to overcome the perceived inadequacies of both sociological and economic explanations of social action. The problem he identified with the sociological framework current at that time is that it places the human actor into a social context but gives them no mechanism to direct purposive action. The classical economic model considers the individual to be motivated purely by rational self-interest and removes all consideration of the social context in which action takes place. In trying to reconcile these two perspectives, Coleman developed a concept of social capital, based on a theory of rational action, in which individuals have access to different sorts of resources in order to achieve desired effects. One of these types of resource is social (Coleman, 1988).

Coleman considers social capital to inhere in the relations between actors in any social interaction, rather than just in the individuals themselves or in any material resource they may possess. Like other forms of capital, it is productive but, unlike some - cash, for example – it is not completely fungible, only being of use in particular circumstances or with specific others. He also differentiates it from human capital, which he deems to be created when there are changes brought about in the skills and abilities of individuals, enabling them to act in new ways. Social capital is derived solely from changes in relations between people, which facilitate action (Coleman, 1988).

Robert Putnam's interpretation of the term is based largely on Coleman's and has become the most influential in the literature on economic development. He defines social capital as referring to "features of social organisation such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1995, p. 67). His work is largely focused on how differing levels of social capital influence the ability of communities to work effectively together and how loss or weakness of social capital leads to negative consequences for society at varying levels (Putnam, 1994).

The use of the term social capital to describe these networks and their internal reciprocities arises by analogy to notions of physical and human capital as means to create value, both for individuals and collectively. There is a sense in which we can 'invest' in networking in order to strengthen our social value. Management development courses, for example, routinely emphasise the importance of building strong networks as a way to achieve career success for budding executives (the Manchester Management Development Programme, run by Alliance Manchester Business School, for example includes a module on grasping the value of networks). Putnam asserts, however, that social networks should not merely be seen as investment goods, but also as providers of what he terms “direct consumption value” (Putnam, 2004, p. 7). This ‘consumption value’ equates to what most people would call ‘happiness’ (the literature mostly uses the term ‘subjective wellbeing’ in an attempt to distance itself from the inevitable subjectivity of emotional states).

Putnam (2004) reports the fact that much of the large body of international literature on the correlates of subjective wellbeing suggests that social capital may be more important to human happiness than material goods. Humans are essentially social beings, and being part of cohesive, stable and mutually supportive groups of fellow humans increases their sense of wellness, both physical and mental. This sense of wellbeing is shared through society as it tends to improve social cohesion and engagement in civic and governance activities, thus resulting in a healthier and stronger society with higher levels of trust and mutual co-operation (Putnam, 1995). The importance of social capital, as Putnam expounds it, is thus strongly tied in with the ideas of community previously discussed. The idea of community may be slippery and sometimes contentious, but it remains central to discussions of human wellbeing.

There are critics of Putnam’s formulation of social capital. In his 2001 paper, *The Myth of Social Capital in Community Development*, DeFilippis (2001) argues that Putnam’s interpretation is flawed because if fails to take into account the dimensions of power in how communities are created, and the centrality of economic capital in enabling communities to self-organise and produce social benefits (DeFilippis, 2001). The problems he discusses in Putnam’s descriptions of social capital fall under three broad headings:

1. A failure to recognise the fundamental importance of inter-group power dynamics in the creation and maintenance of inequalities.
2. The conflation of social capital and civil society in an outdated, neo-Tocquevillian interpretation of American society, leading to a perception of associationality as a win-win framework for all communities, no matter what the type of association involved.

3. The lack of empirical support for Putnam's claims for the centrality of social capital in generating economic prosperity (or for the mirror claim that lack of social capital is responsible for economic decline).

On the first point, DeFilippis argues that communities should be understood as outcomes, rather than simply as actors. They are creations of the nexus of relationships between individuals and small groups (such as families or friendship groups) living in proximity to one another. What is more, these communities cannot simply be read as the aggregation of the characteristics of those who make them up; communities are also created out of the complex power relationships between the individuals and sub-groups that ultimately form them, as well as those that exist between the community and the wider world.

Putnam seeks to address this problem by introducing the idea of there being two forms of social capital: 'bridging' and 'bonding'. Bonding refers to the strong social ties between individuals within a group (whether a sports team, neighbourhood or family); it is the form of social capital that enables people to 'get by'. Bridging, on the other hand, refers to the number and quality of the connections members of a community have to institutions and people outside itself (whether friends from other areas, business associates or other, generally weaker, connections); this is the form of social capital that underpins peoples' efforts to 'get on' (Kearns, 2003).

Others, however, are unconvinced by this argument, making the point that connections, no matter whether they link out or within, do not change the economic realities for people in impoverished communities. Stoecker (2004), in his chapter in Silverman's book *Community-Based Organisations: the Intersection of Social Capital and Local Context in Contemporary Urban Society,* asserts that social capital is inherently ineffective in creating community development because it is a false construct, a 'Scooby-Doo villain's mask' behind which the causes of inequality – those things that sustain unequal social structures – hide from view. The true purpose of social capital, he claims, is to push the blame for structural inequalities back on the poor (Stoecker, 2004). For DeFilippis, because it is those outside the community who have power and influence on decision-making, any change to improve a community's wellbeing must come from changes to the power relations between it and those exterior bodies with power, not from the level of connections made by community groups (DeFilippis, 2001, p. 790). Similarly, Cooke and Kothari (2004) conclude from the various contributions to their book *Participation: the new* *tyranny?* that development professionals have historically been naïve about the complexities of power and power relations (Cooke and Kothari, 2004).

In response to this criticism, theorists have posited an additional form of social capital: 'linking' capital, which expressly refers to the vertical connections between individuals with differing levels of power both within and outwith a community group. This introduces the idea that power and politics can influence outcomes for a community, depending on how well members of that community connect with political and social elites (Kearns, 2003). Empirical evidence in support of this comes from Skerratt and Hall's (2011) study of community managed parish halls in Scotland, which concludes that the three most important factors contributing to the success of these enterprises are social, financial and political capitals available to the community (Skerratt and Hall, 2011a). In isolating 'political capital' as a separate term, and considering social capital to be merely the bridging and bonding forms, Emery and Flora (2006) (on whose seven capitals model Skerratt and Hall drew) are effectively shifting 'linking' capital into a different dimension and giving it increased significance, over and above the value of social networks themselves.

DeFilippis (2001) is similarly critical of the conflation of social capital with civil society, both of which he considers that advocates of social capital view in an overly positive light. He sees this as stemming from the adoption of what he describes as a Tocquevillian interpretation of civil society by Putnam and others, but which is ultimately ahistorical, and fails to recognise the context in which De Tocqueville was writing, namely the early nineteenth century, when the USA's institutions and governance structures were still in development. In *Democracy in America,* De Tocqueville notes the strength of civic life in the US and interprets this as being founded on voluntary associations, enabling local groups with shared interests or experiences to find and offer mutual support as they seek to establish themselves in the emerging democracy. Without these associations, newly formed (and newly arrived) American communities would lack the coherence and dynamism needed to build the country (de Tocqueville, 2016 edition).

It is precisely this notion of shared interests, however, that DeFilippis contends is problematic. By definition, he says, a group which bonds together to defend a shared interest is doing so in opposition to (or at least as a defence against) some other group whose interests differ from its own. Putnam's interpretation of social capital is predicated on the idea that all forms of voluntary association, from trade unions to school PTAs, are comparable in nature and they all result in mutually reinforcing benefits for the community. DeFilippis points out, however, that there are very real and substantial differences in the material interests of different groups within society (and both within and between communities) and that associations often exist to reinforce inequalities that exist between groups with different interests, generally in favour of those groups with the greatest power (DeFilippis, 2001, Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The very strength of social bonds between members of a community can result in the creation of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' with concomitant problems of exclusion of minorities and 'unacceptable' individuals, differential access to resources between and within community groups, the emergence of tribalistic forms of identity politics, and oppressive communities with strong requirements for members to conform to particular social, moral or religious behavioural norms (Kearns, 2003).

There is also criticism of Putnam's assertion of the primacy of social capital over economic capital. Forrest and Kearns (2001) make the point that a focus purely on the social capital (or lack thereof) of disadvantaged neighbourhoods (those communities where most research into social capital has been conducted) fails to take account of differences in material resources and other opportunities available to more affluent communities in other areas. It is not clear from Putnam's descriptions of social capital, how or whether it is formed – or at least, underpinned – by existing conditions of economic advantage within that community or in that neighbourhood. As they put it, "As well as who you know, what you've got is also important." (Forrest and Kearns, 2001, p. 2138).

Social capital thus only becomes valuable when it confers some meaningful advantage, enabling a group or community to create benefits for itself. In order to do this, the community must both have access to a range of resources (material, political, educational, etc. as well as social) and possess the capacity ('capability' in Sen's term) to effect change in their circumstances, along lines that they have chosen for themselves. Light (2004) argues that communities can only benefit from their social capital, if they are either already in possession of these other resources, or they are able to translate that social capital into material, financial, human or other capitals. He does, however, consider possession of social capital to be foundational for what he calls 'necessitous communities' to achieve agency (Light, 2004). This belief is borne out by a 2011 study by Daniel Aldrich in which he analyses how different areas in Kobe in Japan recovered from the 1995 earthquake there. Case studies of different neighbourhoods show that, once factors such as damage, population density, economic conditions and inequality have been controlled for, social capital remains the strongest and most robust indicator of successful recovery (Aldrich, 2011).

Emery and Flora's Community Capitals Framework (CCF) can be considered to be a hybrid approach, using both the idea of social capital and some of the underlying principles of the capability approach. In common with the latter, it takes a systems perspective, identifying the resources available to groups and to individuals, in trying to isolate the factors present in the successful regeneration of a deprived neighbourhood in Nebraska (Emery and Flora, 2006). Their focus is on capacity building within the community, rather than on improving choice or reducing inequalities *per se*, but they are looking for the broader outcomes of social good, rather than just the raising of resource potential in individuals or the community.

Their development of the CCF can be seen as both a fragmentation and an augmentation of the idea of social capital. As well as social capital, they describe human capital, political capital, cultural capital, natural capital, built capital and financial capital. While financial, built capital and natural capital are all clearly located outside the group or individual, but are available to them in varying degrees, the first four are intangibles, formed by the relations between individuals and the group, the group and other groups, and both group and individual connections to the broader social milieu. Capacity is derived, in this model, from the possession of each of the seven capitals by community members, as well as through the investment of any of these into the community. Their study was of a capacity building programme in Valley County, Nebraska and they found that investing in financial, social and human capitals led to increases in all the capitals (to varying degrees) creating what they term the 'spiralling up' of a community's ability to self-regenerate. Importantly, they note that the investment in these capitals delivers these systemic benefits when it is linked to clear community goals rather than being seen as an end in itself (Emery and Flora, 2006). The CCF model is one of those considered as a framework of analysis in this study and it will be further discussed later in this chapter.

The idea of social capital has evolved from Coleman's original concept and from Putnam's elevation of it to primacy over other types of resource. Social capital has been pushed by justified criticism to become a more complex notion, with greater nuance and clarity. The interplay of different forms of capital is now considered as important as the possession of any one of them in a group or individual's ability to be self-determining. Networks and connections within and between groups are still recognised as vitally important to achieving choice and wellbeing, but access to material resources and to the levers of power and influence are also admitted as necessary to reaching those goals. Multi-faceted models such as that of Emery and Flora may lack the simplicity of the original notion of social capital, but, in denying it primacy over other assets, they restore the more complex realities of human social existence to the debate.

A note on terminology: different authors writing in this field use slightly different terms to describe concepts that are often indistinguishable. This can lead to a certain amount of confusion, when one or other then makes slightly differing use of a term that is elsewhere in the literature. Bebbington, for example, uses 'assets' and 'capitals' interchangeably whilst employing 'resources' to mean something subtly different (and lesser) (Bebbington, 1999), while Kleine (2010) drops Alsop and Heinsohn's (2005) use of the term 'asset' from her adaptation of their Measuring Empowerment Framework in favour of 'resources' (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005, Kleine, 2010 & 2011). In the foregoing discussion of the literature on community development, capability and social capital, the terminology used has been that of the author under discussion. Because of the specific meaning of 'Asset' in Community Asset Transfer, the findings and analysis of the present study will restrict the use of the term 'asset' to mean a material property asset (land or building), which can be transferred from one organisation or individual to another. The Community Asset Transfer Framework subsequently developed follows Kleine in using 'resources' to denote the required attributes of a community group undertaking CATs, but these resources can be considered equivalent to what other researchers mentioned in this thesis refer to as 'capitals' or 'assets'.

Social Innovation

In a similar way to that in which social capital has been adopted as an organizing concept by the development community for both describing and overcoming many of the ills facing deprived communities, the idea of social innovation has been deployed as a means to remedy local woes and offer hope to the disadvantaged. Pol and Ville (2009) offer a definition of social innovation as "the creation of new ideas displaying a positive impact on the quality and/or quantity of life" and suggest that social innovation may be seen by some in the social sciences as the prime mover of institutional change (Pol and Ville, 2009, p. 881). Others are less convinced by this explicitly positive definition of social innovation, however, and point out that, in common with other forms of social behaviour, its effects may be experienced differently by different groups within a society. For Nicholls et al (2015), however, 'social innovation' remains a contested term. Instead they describe it as a "growing set of examples and attendant discourses and logics [that] have yet to coalesce around a single, common definition, a set of standards or performance measures, or an agreed policy agenda" (Nicholls et al, 2015, p.1). In the same volume, Howaldt et al. (2015) reiterate Howaldt and Schwarz' (2010) perception of social innovation being more "a kind of descriptive metaphor in the context of phenomena of real world problems, social change, and the modernization of society." (Howaldt et al., 2015). This, however, is unhelpful in trying to establish whether any particular policy or policy tool can be considered socially innovative. Or even socially valuable.

Nicholls et al (2015) go further, postulating that social innovation may have what they term a 'dark side', which would include innovations with explicitly socially divisive or destructive objectives and intentions (e.g. secret societies or extreme political parties); as well as deviant or unintended consequences that achieve negative social effects (e.g. by excluding some groups from the focus of social goods, services or change); or even operational failure, mission drift or strategic co-option by an external party. (p. 5) Social innovation may be well intentioned but is not immune from human failing or manipulation. They also question the potential lack of legitimacy of certain forms of social innovation, pointing out that "when social innovation addresses public welfare issues or aims to drive political change, it typically does so as private action that lacks any formal democratic legitimacy" (p. 20). The very fact that social innovations arise in order to make up for gaps in institutional provision of services may mean that they lack legitimacy for some populations or sections of the population. This can result in perceptions of social innovation as being attempts to privatise, dismantle or undermine the institutions of the state and civil society (Nicholls and Cho, 2006).This echoes the questions around legitimacy posed by critics of community-based development discussed earlier. Where social innovation or community development bypass or subvert formal and democratic channels of governance, they raise questions about the legitimacy and effectiveness of both.

In their chapter on the value of social innovation for social cohesion, Evers and Ewert (2015) seek to side-step issues of 'improvement' or 'positivity' in social innovation, stressing that these are normative issues, subject to widespread debate and disagreement. Instead, they prefer to define social innovations as "those that, at any given moment, raise the hope and expectation of progress towards something 'better' (a more socially sustainable/ democratic/ effective society)." (p. 109) Whether the purported innovation does, in fact, deliver on the hopes and expectations aroused will, they say, depend on the perceptions of those impacted by the innovation and will likely only be discernible after some time has elapsed (Evers and Ewert, 2015). Cajaiba-Santana (2014), however, takes exception to the idea of social innovation being interpreted in such an instrumental way. Instead, he claims, the underlying 'path' of social innovation is not "a social problem to be solved, but the social change it brings about"(Cajaiba-Santana, 2014, p.44). While the manifestations of social innovation may well be new institutions, social movements or social practices, it is ultimately the generation of lasting social change (and its impact on future social development) that defines it.

Cajaiba-Santana suggests a theoretical underpinning for notions of social innovation, which seeks to combine aspects of institutional and structuration theories to allow a complex and nuanced study of social innovation as a driver of social change at different levels of analysis. He deploys institutional theory to argue that "social innovation is always related to collective social action aiming at social change" (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014, p.43) and then uses structuration theory to show how this is created by the dynamic interplay between agents, institutional structures and social systems.

The two strands of theory are blended together in order to overcome perceived weaknesses in each. Although institutional theory, by focusing on the socially constructed nature of the human world, explains how institutions (meaning norms, rules, conventions and values) shape our understanding of society, it lacks a clear explanation of agency. The importance of individual actors is down-played and the mechanisms by which innovations become socially embedded through personal acceptance and dissemination are missed. Structuration theory in contrast sets out a theoretical framework to explain how social systems and social structures are "iteratively and reciprocally created by agents who are both constrained and empowered by institutions" (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014, p.47). Pulling the two ideas together, Cajaiba-Santana suggests that agent actors are both constrained by and able to change social institutions to which they belong and from this, social innovation can be interpreted as arising from a dyadic relationship between the actor and the complex structures in which he or she is embedded. The social change created can be termed 'social innovation' once it is perceived by other actors to have gathered a sufficient degree of legitimacy that they are willing to adopt it themselves. In this way, he argues, social innovation displays a complexity of creation, which is at odds with any interpretation seeking to position it as simply a rational means to an end or normative description of social good.

Restrepo (2015) explicitly links social innovation to the alleviation of poverty, quoting Colombian president, Juan Manuel Santos' remarks at the inauguration of the Colombian Center for Social Innovation: "Social innovation can help us be more effective, efficient and sustainable in our goal of reducing poverty", (Restrepo, 2015, p. 15). The alleviation of poverty and inequalities is central to the notions of 'positive social change' through social innovation, discussed in the literature. Mahmuda et al. (2014), for example, discuss the results of a socially innovative programme for poverty reduction in Bangladesh. The programme, 'Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction' (CFPR) was run by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) from 2002 to 2007. What distinguished it from other similar microfinance initiatives was the transfer of assets (usually livestock or vegetable seed) to ultra-poor households, rather than loans of cash. Recipients of these assets were trained in how to care for and develop them into microenterprises, building up income and savings to help the household move out of extreme poverty. The results were largely successful and most households saw significant improvements among many markers of poverty reduction and wellbeing. The authors explicitly relate this socially innovative programme to an increase in the functionings of the beneficiaries, as they were able to use the transferred assets and the training received through the programme to build on their pre-existing capabilities and achieve desired improvements in their circumstances. Indeed, one of the reasons identified for the small number of perceived failures on the programme was lack of motivation (attributed to various reasons) among those participants whose circumstances did not improve (Mahmuda et al., 2014).

While microcredit is perhaps the most successful form of social innovation to emerge in the world to date (it was announced at the Microcredit Global Summit in 2006 that 100 million poor people around the world had benefited from microcredit schemes (Yunus, 2007)), there are other approaches to social enterprise and poverty reduction. McKague et al. (2015) argue that the best way to reduce poverty is for organisations, be they commercial organisations or social enterprises, to create productive jobs for low-income individuals, using the principles of the free market, but bringing government and civil society into play in order to support and enable that job creation. (McKague et al., 2015). In this they echo the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which declared in 2002: "Nothing is more fundamental to poverty reduction than employment." (ILO, 2002), and the World Bank's research canvassing the views of 60,000 low-income individuals from 60 countries around the world, which concluded that people themselves value regular employment in commercial organisations (Narayan et al., 2000). McKague et el. (2015) do not advocate unfettered market capitalism, believing that it can only be a force for poverty alleviation if all the elements of society are aligned to that purpose. Only in this way, they claim, can the world's poorest people truly benefit from social enterprise and innovation, rather than simply being exploited by it (McKague et al., 2015).

Scholarly Research into Community Asset Transfer

There have been very few studies of community groups managing assets post-transfer in the UK to date. Murtagh and Goggin (2015), and Murtagh and Boland (2019) both use examples of CATs in Northern Ireland as case studies. Murtagh and Goggin focus on the financial aspect of these transfers and their paper is an investigation of social finance more than a study of asset transfers *per se*. They challenge critiques of social enterprise and the voluntary sector, which question the legitimacy of this form of enterprise as a means of transferring economic risk from governmental bodies to community ones. Authors such as DeFilippis et al. (2010) and Purcell (2012) argue that these forms of social finance are a significant factor underpinning a neoliberal assault on public service provision. Murtagh and Goggin refute these criticisms, claiming that the use of 'social finance' can offer opportunities for not-for-profit organisations, which would struggle to raise funds from elsewhere, to provide social benefits. While recognising the ways in which state-funded social finance may be used as a control mechanism by government and other agents with neoliberal agendas, they argue that it can also be a liberating force, facilitating and sustaining truly radical, socially innovative projects with communitarian ideals. They quote Dart (2004) as highlighting the need to balance 'social pragmatic legitimacy' (satisfying the requirements of resource holders, such as the state, contract managers and lenders) with 'moral legitimacy' (the need to hold true to protecting and furthering the interests of the social group the enterprise is set up to serve) (Murtagh and Goggin, 2015).

In discussing the implications of social finance policies for the 'disciplining' (the enforcement of strict capitalist principles by means of financial constraints) of social and community enterprises by government agencies, Murtagh and Goggin acknowledge that such finance could implicate social enterprises in the displacement of welfare services from the public sector. They argue that social finance is currently not being used in that way, and that it remains a vital component of any possible radical re-imagining of local and regional economics by socially motivated groups.

Murtagh and Boland (2017) undertook case studies of social enterprises, which have asset transfers in Belfast. Their paper builds on Murtagh's earlier work with Goggin to conclude that it would be overly simplistic to see these enterprises as unaware or uncritical of their relationships with capitalist structures or government bodies. They argue that these organisations find themselves facing situation-specific issues that are often highly nuanced. Radical groups need to strike a balance between the disruptive and manipulative use of external resources to further the social aims of the organisation, and the need for compromise with forces inimical to their own values in order to operate effectively within the broader socio-economic context (Murtagh and Boland, 2017).

It is worth noting here that the three community organisations in the Murtagh and Boland study are all substantial businesses, with control and ownership of assets worth millions of pounds each and annual revenues in six and seven figure sums. As shall be seen in chapter 6, the present study highlights the differences between such large, essentially commercial community organisations, with access to multiple forms of finance and support, and small community groups eking out a precarious existence with marginal finances and limited resources. Although all may be described as 'community groups', and the process of Community Asset Transfer may be similar to all, in fact they inhabit different worlds with different problems and different possibilities for remedy. Likewise, much of the scholarly examination of the sector appears more relevant to the larger players within it than to the smallest, for whom day-to-day survival is the chief, and often only, concern. Issues surrounding community group finance will be considered further in chapters 6 and 7.

Findlay-King et al. (2018) also considered very specific types of asset in their study of transfers of leisure assets in England. They note that while transfers of sports centres have overwhelmingly been to large corporate-style organisations (many of which run multiple facilities) with paid employees, library transfers are more likely to have gone to community groups, using more volunteer labour (Nichols et al., 2015, Forbes et al. 2017, Findlay-King et al., 2018). Like this study, their research found wide variations in both policy and practice between transferring authorities, and this variability (especially in the levels of support available from the authority to volunteer groups running libraries) had a substantial impact on whether transfers had occurred. Equally, however, they argue that all the transferred assets studied were benefitting from some level of support as all were paying low ‘peppercorn’ rents and those with charitable status were additionally eligible for substantial rate rebates. This hidden financial support was considered crucial for the success of the transfer.

The central question underlying the Findlay-King paper was whether Community Asset Transfer could be considered an exemplar of ‘progressive’ localism or whether it typified what could be termed ‘austerity’ localism: localist agendas in which state provision of public services is replaced by volunteer-led community groups with lower funding commitments (Featherstone et al, 2012). Progressive views of localism take a more positive perspective and seek to reclaim localism for more left-of-centre political agendas by stressing the potential empowerment of citizens through local control of valued amenities and increased participation in civic life (Findlay-King et al, 2018), as well as through the involvement of more cooperative and mutualist forms of social enterprise (Williams et al, 2014). From interviews with employees and volunteers in 12 different libraries and leisure centres, Findlay-King et al concluded that although there was evidence of ‘progressive’ traits in the transfers studied (including genuine handover of power with real autonomy of service provision), they found no evidence of any challenge to the neo-liberal political agenda of central government or of the adoption of radical organisational forms such as those that emerged in the late 19th century. Thus, they argue, the CATs they observed did not meet the given definition of progressive localism. The interface of localism and austerity will be considered in greater depth when discussing policy environments in chapter 4.

Skerratt and Hall’s (2011a, 2011b) research on community-managed parish halls in Scotland is the earliest attempt in a British context to explore how community groups fare when given control of local built assets. Their research raises a number of questions about the viability of asset transfers during times of financial retrenchment. Using Emery and Flora’s (2006) Community Capitals Framework, Skerratt and Hall suggest that there is a strong requirement for social, cultural and political, as well as financial capital to be available to community groups seeking to manage these assets outside local authority or church governance structures. Given that these forms of ‘symbolic capital’ (to use Bourdieu’s expression) are unequally distributed between and within communities, it is reasonable to hypothesise that not all communities will ultimately enjoy equal access to the potential benefits of asset ownership and management on this model. The availability of specialist knowledge and relevant skills means, they suggest, that asset transfers will often be more successful in more affluent areas, thus perpetuating socio-spatial inequalities (Skerratt and Hall, 2011b).

Skerratt and Hall's study looks to evaluate directly the practicalities of implementing asset transfers to community groups, but there are other studies of programmes with parallel aims. One of these by Adamson and Bromiley (2013), considered the effectiveness of groups formed under the auspices of the Welsh Communities First programme in creating true empowerment of local communities to enable change in their neighbourhoods. Community First focused specifically on deprived areas, as measured by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, in the 2001 census. Its stated aim was to increase 'capacity' in these neighbourhoods in order to enable local residents to deal more effectively with official bodies such as local government and service providers, leading to bottom-up regeneration of the areas, along lines which would be seen by residents as most relevant and useful to them. The expectation was that this increase in capacity could be recognised by the extent to which community groups had been able to 'bend' mainstream service supply to meet local needs. 'Bending' is a term used by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) in 2006 and described as: "a process of getting mainstream funders to change their ways of working to deliver more effective services in response to a better identification and understanding of needs developed by the local communities" (WAG, 2006).

Adamson and Bromiley found, however, that while the interventions of the Community First programme resulted in residents reporting that they felt more empowered to make changes to their communities, the expected measure of bending of mainstream expenditure was not forthcoming. They concluded that this was because of a fundamental mismatch between the bottom-up, grassroots nature of community-built regeneration initiatives and the centralised, top-down structures of agencies and resource providers, meaning that, even given the increased social capacity created in the area, engaged residents remained as powerless as before to translate this into meaningful and visible change for their communities (Adamson and Bromily, 2013).

Some of this failure can be attributed to the difficulties of making change to large, complex and bureaucratic power structures. 'Bending' well established large-scale systems to accommodate multiple variations was never going to be easy. The institutions themselves resist the push to make such changes both consciously and through the inertia of their governance and other structures. Furthermore, the customising of public services poses both a practical and a moral dilemma for service providers: practically, costs will increase with any increase of non-uniformity; morally, it undermines some of the fundamental principles of parity and universality on which welfare provision is based (Adamson and Bromiley, 2013).

The most significant difference between the interventions studied by Adamson and Bromiley and the present research is that Community Asset Transfers do not automatically involve the transfer of services, and thus the need for bending of systems and processes is greatly lessened, if not entirely removed. Local authorities develop policies governing CATs and these are apparently applied without prejudice or favour. Different authorities have different policies and offer greater or lesser degrees of support to groups going through CATs (as shall be seen in chapter 5). While there is a widespread recognition for the need to develop and improve both the policies and the support structures over time, this is an evolutionary process and not a distortion of existing rules and frameworks, intended to benefit any single group.

Summary

Community Asset Transfer can be seen as part of a number of ideas and innovations aimed at making communities better, stronger, more reliant or more resilient. This review opens with a consideration of the historical attempts in the USA and in Britain to frame poverty reduction initiatives within community-led programmes. A number of criticisms of these programmes and their underlying philosophy are discussed.

When researching a complex topic like social inequalities and the ways in which it might be addressed, there are many different potential routes that could be taken – each of which could be pursued as a study in its own right. For this study, the capability approach of Amartya Sen and the interpretations of social capital by Robert Putnam and others have been found to be especially relevant, and much of this review examines these ideas in order to make use of them in subsequent understanding of the CAT process and how it is experienced. For this reason, criticisms and elaborations of these concepts have been discussed at some length. Another conceptual strand in the thinking behind this study has been ideas of social innovation and how social enterprise might be of value in the reduction of poverty (an important form of inequality).

The idea of asset transfer cuts across both the social innovation, microfinance research, and into community empowerment through participation in change projects. This review critiques the idea of Asset-Based Community Development and the sometimes contentious idea of 'community' upon which it rests. Considerations of community empowerment, transfer of assets and development of individual and group capability are all of relevance to the present research on CATs and the findings of this study will be set into the context of these frameworks throughout the thesis.

The final section of the review focuses on the empirical work that has been conducted to date on CATs in the UK, and seeks to link that body of work both to the wider theoretical material covered earlier in the chapter, and to the basis for the present study. The next chapter sets out the methodology that was chosen for this research and considers in more detail how Kleine's Choice Framework (2010, 2011) and Emery and Flora's Community Capitals Framework (2006) can be embodied in a customised framework which can be used to assess, monitor and guide future CATs. Chapter 4 goes into greater depth on the UK political and policy context for CATs and how this influences their deployment and effectiveness.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods

Introduction

This chapter sets out the aim and objectives of the research, the questions by which these objectives were investigated, and the form of the study undertaken to answer those questions. There is an exposition of the philosophical ideas that underpin the study, emphasising the social nature of the research and its empirical, realist roots.

The research built on the preliminary collection of secondary data with qualitative semi-structured interviews involving both community group members and representatives of the five local authorities in West Yorkshire. Transcripts of these interviews were analysed using an inductive coding method to find meaningful patterns in the data. The chapter also explains the ethical considerations posed by this research and the ways in which these have been addressed.

A number of models, developed by researchers working with Sen's ideas of social capability and choice-making, were considered as frameworks for the interpretation of the study's findings. These are explored in detail, and the chapter concludes with a brief exposition of the Community Asset Transfer Framework, an adaptation of Kleine's (2010) Choice Framework, which incorporates elements of some of the other models discussed in order to better represent the situation of community groups undergoing the CAT process.

Aims and Objectives of the Research

This study aims to investigate the potential of Community Asset Transfer (CAT) as a tool of community empowerment and thus aid the reduction of place-based inequalities. It explores experiences of Community Asset Transfer across West Yorkshire. The study aims to fill a gap in the evidence base by exploring how differences between communities affect their ability to take control of local assets of community value using the tool of Community Asset Transfer. It uses a capability approach derived from the work of Sen (1992), and includes aspects of similar frameworks, including Kleine's Choice Framework (2010), the Regional Development Index of Perrons (2006), and Emery and Flora's Community Capitals

Framework (2006). These models are used to understand the ways in which different community organisations interact with local authorities and their policies, and which resources are of most value to these groups in seeking to employ CATs as tools for increasing empowerment.

This aim can be fulfilled via four objectives as set out in table 3.a, below. The table also enumerates the actions, which are undertaken in order to achieve each one.

Table 3.a: Objectives and actions arising from them

Objective	To be achieved by:
1. Determine whether the capability set of an acquiring community group (and specifically the resources at its disposal) at the time of the transfer influenced the group's ability to take control of the asset and which particular resources seem most valuable in this context.	a) Analysis of Office for National Statistics data to ascertain local levels of deprivation; b) Interviews with community groups to get their understanding of resources they have (and had) at their disposal; c) Interviews with community groups to get their transfer stories – what worked and what didn't.
2. Explore the level and types of support available to acquiring community groups and how this might affect the capability of the group and the long-term viability of CATs undertaken.	a) Examination of documents and policies of the local authority and other relevant bodies; b) Interviews with council officers and councillors to determine levels and types of support available to acquiring groups; c) Interviews with community group to get their perceptions of any support they have had and of its effectiveness. d) Interview with Locality about its role in promoting and supporting CATs.
3. Consider whether community groups lacking these capability sets, or crucial resources giving rise to them, suffer on-going disadvantages, including the possibility of losing access to the value represented by the asset to their community.	a) Comparison of groups' apparent capabilities and access to critical resources as identified at item 1 in this table.
4. Explore the potential value of taking a capability approach in order to assess whether community groups have the conditions in place to take control of community assets in a sustainable way. Consider the implications of this for practice.	a) Map responses from interview respondents onto capability models to determine which offers the most appropriate tool with which to analyse these findings; b) Develop modified framework suitable for future research in this field.

The actions listed in the right-hand column form the basis of the research fieldwork, which is discussed below.

The research aims give rise to the following questions:

1. In what ways does Community Asset Transfer (CAT) empower communities where it takes place?
2. What are the most important resources needed by community groups seeking to take control of local assets of community value? Can these be assessed using capabilities models and frameworks?
3. Are the acquiring groups able to manage the assets into the foreseeable future, given the resources available to them? What else might they need? What sorts of risks are involved? Who carries them?
4. From the perspective of the local authority, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using asset transfers in this way?
5. What are the implications of this research for the practice of local authorities in regard to CATs?

The study uses Community Asset Transfer as a lens for examining the issue of community empowerment in relation to socio-spatial inequality by considering whether the process or achievement of a CAT offers any form of empowerment to those undertaking it. It is believed that this form of asset disposal is a valid way to consider this issue, as the research so far conducted into CAT makes clear that there are significant resources requirements for volunteer-led groups taking control of and managing property assets (Skerratt and Hall, 2011a, 2011b, Findlay-King et al., 2018). Furthermore, these resources are unevenly distributed across the population, suggesting that groups in places where the necessary resources are more abundant will be better placed to take advantage of CATs than similar organisations in places with fewer of them. Because CATs explicitly involve the transfer of assets owned by local government bodies, this differential in capability of local communities may mean the difference between retaining or losing some public service or amenity. Statements from politicians about Community Asset Transfers, Assets of Community Value, the Right to Bid and the Right to Challenge present these as tools to empower citizens to take control of their local areas and deliver the social value and social benefits they wish to see. The study aims to determine whether these tools can in fact deliver this empowerment, or whether they are only truly of benefit to neighbourhoods with existing high levels of resource.

Creswell (2003) defines a case study as an exploration in depth of some event, process or group of individuals. Such a study can include several 'cases' and these are time-bounded, with detailed information being gathered, using a variety of data collection methods. Yin (2018) describes a case study as an empirical method that investigates a contemporary (as opposed to an historical) phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context. He suggests that it is a particularly appropriate form of research for studies dealing with complex situations, where the phenomenon under observation and the embedding context are so entangled as to be difficult to differentiate clearly. The nature of case studies allows them better to answer research questions dealing with 'how' and 'why', than with 'what' or 'when'; and where the researcher has no meaningful level of control over the behaviour of the subjects of research (Yin, 2018). The present study meets those criteria, and so it was decided that a place-based case study of the phenomenon of Community Asset Transfers in a single English region would be the preferred methodology for addressing the research questions.

The research design employs a single case study (Community Asset Transfers in the county of West Yorkshire), using qualitative methods to explore perceptions and experiences among key actors involved in CATs from community groups and the local authorities of the region. In-depth qualitative interviews were used because these were considered to be the most appropriate way to answer the research questions, as these latter do not readily lend themselves to quantitative methods of research. Creswell (2003) advises that the decision of whether to use quantitative or qualitative methods of discovery depends on the intent of the researcher. Where the intention is to measure responses against a pre-determined structure, or to acquire a large dataset of comparable information to analyse, quantitative techniques will deliver the best results. Where the study aims to allow information to emerge from participants, in order to gain a sense of their experiences and the way in which the realities of the situation under discussion are formed in their own terms, qualitative techniques are considered more appropriate. Berger and Lucknow (1966) in their classic book, *The Social Construction of Reality*, give primacy to face-to-face interactions as the basis for our social constructions of reality: "The most important experience of others takes place in the face-to-face situation, which is the prototypical case of social interaction. All other cases are derivatives of it." (Berger and Lucknow, 1991, p.43). In this spirit, it was decided that the best way to understand the realities of people involved in Community Asset Transfers, from whatever their perspective, was to meet them face-to-face and engage in this primary social interaction by means of interview. In a world beset by telephone scams, face-to-face conversations can also be considered more appropriate for reassuring participants of the genuine nature of the research and of the researcher.

The form of interview chosen was semi-structured, ensuring that the subject matter covers the research questions, whilst allowing participants to express personal thoughts and feelings. This openness to allowing interviewees to volunteer information outside of a strictly controlled framework of enquiry often results in new insights and ideas for the researcher. It also makes it more likely that people will express themselves in their own language and terms, an important point when considering research from a socially constructed perspective. It is recognised that this form of data gathering will pick up the biases of participants being interviewed but that is not considered to be problematic in this instance as the study is seeking to uncover personal experiences and perceptions.

Ontological and Epistemological Underpinnings

> There's nothing you can know that isn't known
> Nothing you can see that isn't shown
> There's nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be
> It's easy
> *(Lennon-McCartney, All You Need Is Love, 1967)*

Although it is important, in order to appreciate its limitations and challenges, to situate any piece of academic research within its intellectual context, this work is not primarily a philosophical tract or a treatise on social research methods. This is an empirical study and its focus will be on the investigation of observed phenomena and their analysis.

Rene Descartes (called by Bertrand Russell "the first modern philosopher" (Russell, 1984)) set the stage for philosophical debate for the next three centuries with his *Discourse on Method*, first published in 1637, and his conclusion that, using rational deduction alone, it was impossible to know anything about reality (Descartes, reprinted 1983). But this inherent 'unknowability' leads to the further question of whether the world exists at all. The nature of reality itself was called into doubt. This extreme scepticism was rejected by philosophers like Locke and Hume in the 18th century, who took a more empirical position, arguing that it made no sense to suppose that we were somehow disembodied minds, dreaming the universe from within the bubble of our own consciousness. Indeed Hume goes so far as to call such thinking "sophistry and illusion", pointing out that no-one, not even the most ardent sceptic, lives as though they genuinely believe that the material world does not exist – or even that it is unknowable (Hume, reprinted 1982, p.165). It makes more sense, employing the principle of Occam's Razor (that the simplest explanation for any observed phenomenon is to be preferred over more complicated ones), to assert a realist/empiricist position: that the natural world does exist, does so independently of human observation, and is constructed broadly as we apprehend it – at least insofar as our sensory apparatus allows us to perceive it.

But as humans, our lives are bounded not merely by the physical and mental realms, as philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries debated, but by social realities, which seem to transcend both. We are social animals and our lives are lived within complex webs of expectations, rules and behaviours that we learn from infancy and which define our understanding of the world we live in and of ourselves. What differentiates this social reality from either the material world or the purely internal universe of our own thoughts and feelings, is that it is shared. According to Durkheim, it can only be understood in its own terms, and is not reducible to either physical or psychological states. What he calls 'social facts' have an objective reality, which means they can be studied by researchers in the same way that the facts of physics, or the other 'hard' sciences can be studied (Durkheim, 2013 edition).

The current study shares Durkheim's 'social realism' and his insight that the social realm is formed of both internal (to the individual) and external (to that individual) parameters. Social phenomena form both the matrix of rules, expectations and structures within which human lives are lived, and the organising principle of our thoughts and beliefs about the world. Durkheim pushed his analysis of social facts into an epistemological construct of sociology, as well as the ontological ideas described above, asserting that people's notions of the world are entirely derived from the representations they have of that world in their heads. These representations are socially constructed and all knowledge that can be claimed by individuals about the world is thus knowledge of the representation, rather than of the thing itself.

Perhaps the most important source of social representations of the world is language. In its various forms, it is the most common way by which we communicate, and the principal path to our expression of ideas, emotions and sensations. It is also, according to Durkheim, the means by which we can conceive of the idea of truth. The ways in which we use language both shapes and is shaped by our social world. It does not arise spontaneously in a single mind but takes root there as a result of interaction with other users of language during infancy. The language we learn as children will be that of the adult speakers around us, clearly demonstrating its socio-cultural dependency.

Language filters our experience of the world in similar ways to the ways in which our perceptual sensory apparatus does: it is difficult to express an idea or feeling if there are no words in a person's language that match it. The articulation of 'Newspeak' in George Orwell's classic dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a deliberate attempt by the rulers of "Airstrip One" to prevent the subject people of the territory formulating thoughts and ideas subversive to the behavioural code laid down by Big Brother (Orwell, 2000 ed.). Language also evolves, inventing and borrowing words from elsewhere to describe new objects, ideas and social events (Big Brother's thought police could never ultimately prevail in shutting down linguistic sedition, even though they kept cutting words out of the dictionaries). We can thus have a sensible and intelligible conversation today - about uploading 'selfies' from our smartphones, for example, which would have been incomprehensible to our grandparents.

Durkheim does not deny the existence or reality of social conventions, norms, networks and structures but asserts that these are productions of the social realm itself and can only be studied and understood through interaction. Indeed, it is questionable how much sense it makes to speak of these things even existing independently of a society - of people interacting with one another. By definition, any *social* phenomenon has to be *socially* constructed and maintained, or else it ceases to exist. This seems ontologically self-evident and from this it is a logical step to assert that knowledge of social phenomena can only reasonably be gained via social means. The current research is therefore based primarily on the social interactions of the researcher and participants in the study, including interviews and conversations, and observations of social interactions between participants and other members of the community groups under consideration.

Sociological methodology does pose a problem for researchers in the social sciences, stemming from this essentially constructed and fluid nature of language: words can change their usage and meaning, both through time and between social groups. Specialist and local vocabularies deliberately and accidentally exclude out-groups from certain forms of discourse. Researchers tend to speak in specialist terms, derived from their field of study. Academics are encouraged in their professional speech and writing to use longer, more complex vocabulary – often in convoluted and archaic forms – when expressing their ideas. Any research communication with non-specialists (conversation, interview or survey) is therefore subject to the possibility that the researcher and the respondent do not share understanding of the terminology being used in its particular (social) context. This issue is particularly evident when the study uses qualitative techniques such as interviews and observations, as participants will (and indeed, should) use terms and phrases from their own cultural and social frames, which may have subtly different meanings from what is understood by the researcher. Equally, the wording used by an interviewer may not convey to a participant the nature of the information being sought.

The decision to use this type of research therefore places certain requirements on the researcher: the acknowledgement of the researcher's own potential influence on the outcomes of research and a degree of transparency in relation to this; the need to spend time ensuring that the language, values and beliefs of the research participants have been properly understood and accurately conveyed; the recognition that the ultimate description and analysis of the observed phenomena is the researcher's own, and has been interpreted through their perspective (is not therefore 'objective' in a scientific sense); and a sensitivity to the ethical implications of engaging with people in the context of their own lives and communities. Our understanding of the phenomena inherent to our own social context is deeply embedded (so deeply that we may be unaware of how they shape our responses to events or, indeed, our personal beliefs, prejudices and expectations). In order to comprehend more fully the meaning of social phenomena observed among groups of people whose society we do not share, therefore, we need care, sensitivity and proper humility.

In conclusion, the phenomena studied as part of this research are taken to be real things, with an independent existence outside of both the observer and the observed but co-created by all parties within a broader socially constructed set of meanings. These meanings are shared across the various social groups represented here by use of a language, which, because of its imperfect replication and comprehension, simultaneously allows knowledge to be transmitted and lost in translation. An awareness of this meant that time was taken to keep questions jargon-free and non-technical. Where an interviewee responded in terms that could be construed in more than one way, a follow-up question was asked to clarify their meaning. The decision to conduct the interviews face-to-face (see 'Approach taken' below) also enabled a broader set of social cues to be gathered during the interviews. Even though these do not appear in the transcripts, they aid the researcher in gaining a fuller sense of the experience of participants in the research.

Approach Taken

As mentioned in the introduction, the initial intent of this research was to attempt to investigate Community Asset Transfers (CATs) that had taken place across England in order to assess whether they had had any impact on the levels of inequality experienced by the communities in which they had taken place. The first phase of this research would be a compilation of all the CATs that had taken place, mapped against location, measures of deprivation and asset type. It became clear very early on, however, that there was no nationally held database of assets thus transferred. Enquiries were made to both Locality and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and established that neither body holds a record of CATs that have taken place in England. The advice given to the researcher upon enquiring at the DCLG was that this information would need to be obtained from each local authority individually. Unfortunately, local authorities have no statutory responsibility to hold this information, let alone to make it public. The scale of the problem was made clear in reading the March 2016 New Local Government Network (NLGN) report for Power to Change, which sought to map CATs as accurately as possible across local authorities. NGLN set out to do this with a survey of English local authorities. Unfortunately, however, of the 353 authorities originally contacted as part of the research, only 14% responded – a decent response rate to a survey but still not a large sample (Gilbert, 2016) and not clearly representative of the country as a whole. From this it became apparent that the only way to obtain authoritative and representative data about the distribution of CATs across the country would be to use of Freedom of Information (FoI) requests.

This idea was rejected for two reasons: firstly, FoI requests are often seen as hostile by the bodies receiving them. University of Manchester guidelines require researchers to have strong reasons to undertake such requests because of the University's broader connections into local government, and its need not to compromise future working relations with them. Secondly, it became clear from preliminary conversations with individuals connected to CAT in council offices that definitions of what was meant by 'Community Asset Transfer' varied from authority to authority. The terminology differed, the policies differed, the rules differed. Even if all the authorities in England came back with definitive lists of CATs in their boroughs in a usable time frame, the information would still not reveal the patterns sought, as such a database would not be measuring like with like. It was therefore decided to revise the scope of the study and to meet its aim and objectives as well as possible through a different approach.

Having discovered that local authority policies were so varied, it was felt that the study should encompass several council areas, in order to gain an insight into whether these variations had any substantial impact on the ground. This would allow conclusions to be made about the importance of local authority policies and practices in the success of asset transfers. In order to be able easily to study several areas simultaneously, West Yorkshire was chosen as the region for the research, as according to a representative of Locality, the network for community organisations, interviewed as part of the study, it is a hotbed of CAT activity, with three out of five of the councils actively pursuing and promoting transfers in their districts. The choice of this English county was due to this relatively high level of recorded CAT activity, with a sufficiently socially and economically varied profile to be likely to offer contrasting cases for analysis, and with likely CAT activity recorded in the contrasting areas. The region is made up of five local authorities of varying sizes and with differing policies relating to CATs. Within the region, Leeds and Bradford are both classed as cities, while Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield are centred on substantial post-industrial towns. All five authorities include urban, rural and market town areas and their populations each exhibit a variety of demographic profiles (ethnic, socio-economic, educational, religious, etc.). There is a West Yorkshire Combined Authority (which also includes York) but it is largely focused on transport delivery and on working with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Decision-making in the region occurs predominantly at local authority level.

This sampling strategy has limitations in that the conclusions drawn from it cannot be reliably extrapolated to all cases. West Yorkshire, though, exhibits wide variations in levels of deprivation experienced by its residents and in the mix of urban and rural environments it possesses, which makes it a more appropriate regional target for study than other, more homogenous areas. Indeed, as the research progressed it became increasingly apparent that different local authorities have very different approaches to how and when they offer assets to community groups, extending to the very definitions they give of which transfers they consider to be CATs, and which are simply low-rent, long-term leases. It was therefore clear that, in order to achieve a depth of analysis and meaningful comparison, the number of authorities under consideration needed to be small enough to be a practical research proposition but large enough to offer possible insights into how differences of interpretation and practice between councils might impact CATs in their boroughs.

The sampling strategy was to focus on assets that have transferred, either by freehold or by leasehold, at less than best consideration, from the local authority to a community group or organisation. It excludes other forms of property disposal by local authorities, either assets sold at full market value, or given into the control of housing associations, or sub-contracted bodies employed to deliver council services or manage their property for a fee, as these would not meet the legal definition of a transferred asset under the Local Government Act (1972) General Disposal Consent (England) 2003, which establishes the possibility of Community Asset Transfers. The CATs considered were mostly built assets, serving the local community in which they are located, such as community centres and hubs, village halls, libraries, museums, galleries, sports facilities or local heritage buildings. Some may fall into more than one of these categories, and also offer additional services such as business spaces, cafés, and training.

The decision to exclude transfers for residential developments such as land to community land trusts or assets to housing associations or other agencies was also taken in order to simplify the data and sharpen the focus of the research. Also, there is a substantial body of work already published on community housing and the shift from local authority ownership of dwellings to private or charitable bodies managing social housing, and it was felt that it would be more productive to explore more uncharted territory.

Research Conducted

The research involved collecting and analysing a range of primary and secondary data nationally and for the case study area, based on three phases.

First Phase

The initial phase of the research involved finding secondary data in published sources. These included policies at national and local level, deprivation indices, lists of Community Asset Transfers that had taken place in West Yorkshire, lists of Assets of Community Value, both national and within the West Yorkshire region.

The principal policies affecting CATs and AVCs at national level are the Local Government Act, 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 and the Localism Act of 2011. Because there is no statutory requirement on local authorities to undertake CATs, individual authorities have their own policies relating to these. Close examination of the CAT policies for each of the five authorities in West Yorkshire discovered a range of approaches and substantial variation in how CATs are conducted across the county. The national policy environment and how it has developed over time, is discussed at greater length in chapter 4. A comparison of the policies and practices of the five West Yorkshire authorities follows in chapter 5.

Deprivation indices were studied at two different spatial measures in order to gain a better understanding of patterns of deprivation across the authorities of West Yorkshire. The measures used and the results from the study are discussed in chapters 5 and 6. These population measures alone, however, do not offer the depth of understanding of participants' lived experience of the transfer process and the reality of managing the asset subsequently. They merely establish the background conditions in which the asset is transferred and used by the community.

The greater challenge was finding lists of Community Asset Transfers in West Yorkshire. Bradford Metropolitan District Council (BDMC) and Wakefield Council publish these lists on their websites. In the case of Wakefield, however, the information given turned out to be inaccurate, with only three of the six properties listed being real CATs. There was no public domain information available from Leeds, Kirklees or Calderdale about CATs in their districts. Gathering information regarding these areas therefore took considerable detective work, trawling the internet for stories in the local press and documents published by Locality, which uncovered some of the more high-profile transfers. Pulling together a more complete list of West Yorkshire CATs depended on the help and co-operation of interview participants from local authority offices and Locality itself. Whilst this information was gratefully received, subsequent investigation found that some of the assets named by respondents to the study did not, in fact, consider themselves to have been asset transfers. These were removed from the final lists being studied.

Because of the initial difficulties in tracking down Community Asset Transfers (and the fear that it might be impossible to do so), it was decided to look at a related phenomenon: Assets of Community Value (ACV). ACVs were brought into being by the Localism Act of 2011, under the newly created 'Right to Bid'. Property assets can be nominated by community groups (as defined above) on the grounds that these are important facilities for that community and it is up to the relevant local authority either to add them to the register or not. Assets are put on the register for five years and registers have to be maintained by the authority and made public. During the period of listing, the community group that nominated the asset has the right to be notified if it comes up for sale. Should this arise, a moratorium period of six months is imposed, preventing the asset from being sold until the group has had an opportunity to put in a bid for it themselves (the right to bid). Note that there is no obligation on the vendor to sell to the community group, even if they match or top any other bid, so there is no 'right to buy' implied by the legislation.

A clean list of 2613 ACVs was compiled from data on the DCLG website, dated November 2015. This appears to be the last complete set of data covering the whole of England. It has since been removed from the website. The data available was of dubious quality: some assets appeared twice and details such as the nominating body for the registration was not always present. There is no uniform set of descriptors for the assets, with many being listed as simply 'other building'. The ACVs listed are spread over 274 local authority areas but very unequally. 36 local authorities only have one ACV registered, of which 16 are public houses. The Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) has campaigned for ACVs to be used to prevent the closure and redevelopment of pubs around the country, and the predominance of this type of asset in the registers appears to reflect this push.

A classification was created for these ACVs and then applied to those assets registered in the five authorities of West Yorkshire. It is noticeable, for instance, that, after pubs, the most common sorts of asset listed are open spaces: nearly 300 natural and other green spaces as well as likely a significant proportion of sport and recreation assets, the community spaces and some of the amenities. This raises a number of questions about whether the policy is being applied as was originally intended: local people appear to be using ACVs to prevent development of unbuilt land – and this at a time when housing shortages up and down the country are recognised to be chronic and government is imposing building quotas on Local Authority Strategic Plans. The prevalence of outdoor amenities in the ACV list is also significant, given that the LAs with the highest numbers of ACVs are affluent rural districts with, presumably, no shortage of green space.

Table 3.b: Classification* and number of assets of community value noted

Type of Asset	Number listed
Public Houses	1016
Natural and green spaces	297
Community and youth spaces	338
Sport/recreation	210
Amenities	216
Unknown	208
Heritage	84
Religious	83
Cultural	41
Other	78

*classification is author's own, derived from varying descriptions used in the database

Although ultimately enough information was gathered on Community Asset Transfers themselves, and the ACV data was not central to the study as it developed, the fact that a proportion of registered assets are council owned means that some can (and do) go on to become CATs. For this reason it was felt to be of interest to the broader aims of this study to include the ACV data for West Yorkshire as part of the discussion in chapter 5.

Second Phase

As well as examining the policies of the local authorities regarding CATs and ACV listings, officers and councillors in the authorities selected were interviewed to ascertain where within the area CATs have been attempted, and where they have endured. As people with an overview of the area, individuals attached to the local authority in this way are able to offer insights into how the transfers proceeded, and the extent to which the ability of transfers to go ahead was related to particular resources held by the community, or by specific individuals within it.

Local authority participants were senior members of the asset management departments within councils as these were the people with responsibility or oversight for CATs. Community-facing departments in local authorities also have a connection with CATs, through their work with community groups. Attempts were made to contact officers in these departments, but these were unsuccessful, perhaps because asset transfer is not central to their function. While it is regrettable that no voice from that side of the local authorities was heard in this study, the participation of councillors from each of the authorities means that the perspective seen in the study is not entirely that of a property/asset management team. The councillors interviewed were all executive members of their councils with portfolio responsibility for asset transfer. In addition, three of these had had personal experience of involvement with CATs. All five local authorities in West Yorkshire were represented in these interviews.

Contacting community group members was more difficult. Using information gathered from council officers and Locality, the list of CATs in West Yorkshire was drawn up and verified. Given the relatively small numbers involved, it was decided to contact as many groups as possible for interview. In some cases, details of likely individuals to speak to was suggested by previous participants and in others, where the group had any kind of web presence, contact details were found online. 28 organisations were emailed, and a request made for interview. Of these 10 responded positively and agreed to participate in the study. The organisations concerned were based across all five local authorities and comprised a variety of organisation structures and asset types. Table 3.c sets out the types of asset transferred to the participant organisations. The participants' organisations were at different stages of the CAT process. Some had only recently completed the transfer; others had been in control of their assets for some time. One group was still embroiled in the process, having been given Cabinet approval for their transfer but still some way off signing a lease. As well as those from the CAT groups, one interviewee was a director of a community cooperative that had acquired a pub via the ACV process. This contribution was considered valuable as it offered a contrasting perspective to the experiences of interviewees who had taken over assets from local authority control. Although the sample size for community group respondents is not large, it became clear as more interviews were conducted over time, that the same points were being raised again and again (table 3.d on p. 61) and, by the time the later interviews were conducted, no new themes were emerging. The research can therefore be considered to have reached a level of saturation with regard to the inductive technique used in the analysis (Saunders et al., 2018).

The self-selecting nature of participants in the research has implications for the findings and replicability of the study. It is more likely that individuals who felt comfortable speaking about their experiences to a researcher will have responded positively than those who were reluctant to do so for whatever reason. There is the possibility that groups who chose not to participate in the study did so because the CAT they were involved in was somehow at risk, and they did not wish to expose that to public view (they may have even feared repercussions from the local authority if their problems were revealed). Having said that, interviewees were far from shy about expressing their views of their authorities and their councils, and many were eager to describe the problems they had encountered and the challenges they still faced. The reasons given for not participating (where any reply was received) mostly involved lack of time on the part of group members, or that the individuals who had been part of the transfer process were no longer involved with the group and therefore the knowledge of that process had been lost.

Table 3.c: Types of asset represented in community interviews

Asset type	Numbers of assets of this type
Community centre/village hall	4
Enterprise centre	1
Health centre	1
Training/education hub	1
Leisure/sports centre	1
Library	2
Public convenience	1
Pub	1
Park/ outdoor space	Multiple all managed by one group

Note: One of the groups that agreed to participate in the study had taken control of multiple assets so there are more asset types represented in the table than the number of community groups involved.

In total, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted, involving 30 separate interviewees. Where multiple participants joined in the same interview, this was always at the request or suggestion of the initial contact in the organisation. The same researcher conducted all the interviews, which were recorded and subsequently transcribed in full. These transcriptions were then coded, to look for recurring themes across community and council respondents.

Interview questions were prepared separately for the different categories of interviewee because the nature of the information sought from individuals in community organisations was slightly different from that sought from respondents who worked in local authorities or were local councillors. Both sets of questions were derived from the research objectives and questions, seeking to draw out the issues that seemed most relevant to the aim of understanding the relationship between asset transfers and community empowerment. The interviews with council officers were held before the interviews with community group participants or local councillors. These first interviews were looking to uncover the practical concerns and considerations of CATs from the local authorities' perspective. They also established factual data, such as numbers of CATs in the authority, where they had taken place, and the sorts of assets that had been transferred. Because of the practical difficulties of identifying CATs and community group members to target for interview, the council officers were also asked to suggest possible contacts for subsequent rounds of interviews.

Although the interview questions for community group members also included factual data-gathering, they focused more on the lived experiences of people who had gone through the CAT process; how they had found that; what differences (if any) it had made to them or their community; and how the process could have been improved, from their perspective. Because the potential pool of interview targets was small, the questions were tested and refined with the supervisory team, rather than being piloted in the community. It was felt that the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for topics that might have been missed in the questions, to be explored in more detail, should they emerge during the interview. The questions thus set up a 'scaffold' upon which to build a conversation, rather than being a rigid suit of armour within which it was constrained.

Interview questions for local authority officers and councillors:

- Are you aware of any Community Asset Transfers (CATs) that have taken place in the authority over the last seven years? Have you had any personal involvement with any of these?
- Do you have a list or any information about of those anywhere that I could access?
- Whereabouts within the authority have CATs occurred? Have they been clustered in one or two places, or spread more widely?
- What sorts of buildings/services were involved?
- Does the authority still own the freehold of the buildings?
- What is the council's primary objective in transferring control of its assets to community groups?
- How well do you think these transfers have gone?
- Are they all still continuing in community hands at this time? (If not, do you have any idea what went wrong?)
- Do you believe CAT is a useful policy for this authority?
- In what ways is it beneficial?
- Are there any downsides, from the authority's perspective?
- How supportive would you say the authority is of CATS in its jurisdiction?
- Does the authority have any specific support mechanisms in place for groups undertaking CATs?
- What is the take-up on these support services?
- Do community groups report back to the authority with any problems or queries, or do they pretty much go it alone after transfer?
- [Optional extra questions if appropriate in context – e.g. the person has direct experience of CATs and there is time]:

- This research is about inequality and CATs. Do you have any thoughts on whether CATs tend to happen more or less frequently in areas where communities have more assets and resources?
- Do you think that the level of community assets and resources in an area has any bearing on their ongoing success? In what ways / what factors do you think are at play?
- In areas with less assets that have taken on CATs, Have you seen any changes in their level of assets / inequality that could have been affected by the CAT?

Interview questions for community group members:

- How long has the group been managing this building?
- What is the nature of the community group?
- What is your role in the group?
- Was the group established before the CAT, or entirely to acquire the asset?
- How did the transfer go?
- Do you know of any other CATs in the area? Or further afield?...
- Are you in contact with other community groups managing similar services?
- Where did funding for the CAT come from? How is it structured?
- Were there any significant problems or challenges in acquiring the building or obtaining funds?
- What would have happened to this building if your group hadn't acquired it?
- What do you believe enabled you to get through the process? What hindered you?
- Was the council helpful, if so, in what way?
- Did you, as a group, feel that you really needed (or still need) extra training or support in order to make the CAT successful in the long term?
- Did it feel like a risk to take over the building or to apply for the type of funding used?
- Was there any perceived risk in the local community that the services offered here would be lost if you didn't take over the management of the building?
- Who uses the building now?
- Is it well used and supported by the local community?
- Would you say that community management has changed the way local people see the building and the services it provides?
- Do you think having a CAT here has benefited the local community? In what way?
- What do you feel that you get personally out of being part of the community group and your involvement in the CAT?
- What does the future hold for the community group and for its continued management of this building?

Most of the questions addressed to community group members relate to how well the group felt able to undertake the transfer; what resources they had at their disposal, and where those came from. Empowerment is derived from being able to make use of resources, within the structures in which the group finds itself, in order to enact choices that lead to achieving their objectives. These questions are intended to elicit comments on the availability of both internal resources and supportive external structures, which would enable analysis to determine the level of empowerment in place.

Third Phase

The coding of the interview transcripts used an inductive technique, whereby the coding categories were derived by the researcher directly from the words of the interviewees, without any pre-conceived structure. The advantage of this method is that the results of the analysis reflect the interviewees' actual statements, rather than needing to be fitted into the pre-formed ideas of the researcher. This means that ideas introduced by interviewees themselves are allowed to assume whatever level of importance those interviewed give them by their insistence on the subject matter. The significance of the codes can easily be detected by both the proportion of interviews in which a topic was raised, and the number and duration of separate remarks made on that topic. Table 3.d (below) ranks the topics discovered firstly by the number of interviews in which they occurred, and secondly by the number of actual references made to them. A total of 58 separate codes was recognised in the study interviews and these form the basis of the subsequent analysis of the work.

Table 3.d: List of response codes and frequency of appearance by interview and by reference

Codes	References	Interviews
Funding and finance	138	20
Lack of relevant skill (or not)	99	20
Support (nature and availability)	99	20
Council attitude	113	19
Process	103	18
Community involvement	84	18
Problem	82	17
Benefits of CAT	43	16
Types of users and uses	52	15
Type of organisation	37	15
Lease period	24	15
Risk	37	14
Social deprivation	31	14
Building as liability	39	13
Governance	37	13
Building type	26	12
Future of group/sustainability	24	12
Political dimension	23	12
Link to service provision	36	11
Conflict	29	11
Size of group	17	11
LA community structures	34	10
Local amenities	23	10
Leadership of group	15	10
Part of broader LA policy	45	9
Austerity council cuts	29	9
Time taken to transfer	20	9

Offer vs request for CAT	19	9
Role of interviewee	10	9
Contacts in council	25	8
Location of CATs	22	8
Councillor involvement	18	8
Motivation	15	8
How policy is made	13	8
CAT failure	12	8
Other plans for building	11	8
Reason for group	10	8
Leadership of group	15	10
Part of broader LA policy	45	9
Austerity council cuts	29	9
Time taken to transfer	20	9
Offer vs request for CAT	19	9
Role of interviewee	10	9
Contacts in council	25	8
Location of CATs	22	8
Councillor involvement	18	8
Motivation	15	8
How policy is made	13	8
CAT failure	12	8
Other plans for building	11	8
Reason for group	10	8
Financial tensions in LA	32	7
Time commitment	19	7
Type of transfer	16	7
Plan for building	14	7
Number of CATs in LA	12	7
Social value	26	6
Relationship with LA	20	6
Terms	17	6
Church-going	11	6
Types of assets transferred	10	6
Success rates	9	6
Local history	8	6
Community coherence	12	5
Type of arrangement with groups	6	5
Perception of CATs	8	4
Social problem	8	4
Emotional response	5	4
CATs vs leases	15	3
Activity level	6	2
Reason for LA offering CAT	4	2
Responsibilities of groups	1	1

The disadvantages of using this inductive methodology include the sometimes-haphazard nature of the topics thus created, and the possibility that these codes will not be of direct relevance to answering the research questions and objectives. These problems can be mitigated by ensuring that the questions asked at interview have been carefully considered as being ones most likely to elicit responses relevant to answering the research questions. The semi-structured format ensures that interviewees are asked about matters believed by the researcher to have a bearing on the research topic, whilst also allowing them to introduce new ideas, which had not previously been thought of. At the analysis stage, the topics can be clustered into categories to help reveal larger patterns in the data.

Analysis of interview material was focused on the types and quantities of resources apparently available to the community group at the time of the transfer and in the on-going management of the asset; the structural constraints and opportunities surrounding the community generally – especially those that pertained to the group's relationship with the local authority; and the extent to which individuals in the community felt able to exercise choices regarding the asset's transfer and its future. The categories were determined both by the actual content of the information in the referenced text and by mapping that content against the frameworks and models discussed previously. Ultimately seven clustered categories of community resources were identified, with an eighth cluster of responses pertaining primarily or exclusively to the attitudes and behaviours of the local authorities. The categories are described in detail in chapter 7, where they are used to create an adaptation on Kleine's Choice Framework (2010).

Ethical Considerations

In keeping with the University of Manchester's Policy on Ethical Involvement of Human Participants in Research (UoM website, accessed 07.07.2017) on protecting the privacy of respondents in research settings, all interviewees in this study were anonymised when referring to them in the text or when quoting their words verbatim. It was decided to use real, randomly designated first names for all the participants. This decision overcomes the problem of having more interview participants than there are letters in the alphabet, and also creates a greater sense of connection to the individuals describing their experiences. These, after all, are real people, not numbers on a spreadsheet. In the text respondents are thus identified by their designated name and their role, but not typically by the organisation to which they belong. The exceptions to this rule are interviewees from local authorities and from Locality, where the remarks made can only be intelligibly interpreted in the context of knowing which organisation is under discussion. While this may make it possible for individuals with personal knowledge of the people concerned to recognise them, this was deemed an acceptable compromise as all were speaking in a professional capacity and as representatives of the body of which they were part. No further personal information was gathered about any individual taking part in this study, so it is deemed that the research protocols have adequately protected the privacy of all respondents.

University guidelines also specify the need for all participants to be given an information sheet, outlining the aims of the research; their role in its creation; their right to withdraw from the study at any time before publication; and the procedures set down by the university in the event of dispute of complaint. All respondents signed a participant consent form, agreeing to the interview and to being recorded on an audio device. These consent forms only exist in hard copy and will be destroyed once the research is complete, in order to preserve the anonymity of the subjects involved.

A further ethical consideration taken seriously in this study is the question of reciprocity and the relationship of the researcher to the participants of research. Notions of reciprocity in a research setting are discussed by, amongst others, Maiter et al. (2008). They believe that reciprocity underpins the “respectful nature of good research relationships” (Maiter et al., 2008, p.307). Indeed, they go further and point out that it is reciprocity in all its many aspects, which forms the basis of societies (a sentiment echoed in Molm, 2010). Coming from an anthropological background, they discuss the benefits of reciprocal working arrangements for both the participants and the researchers, which start from the requirement, placed in the first instance on the researcher, to do no harm. This raises another strand in the literature on reciprocity, the problems of power imbalance and exploitation.

Ben-Ari and Enosh (2012) begin their article on power relations and reciprocity by highlighting the extent to which most writing on the subject has considered the relationship between researcher and participant to be asymmetrical with a power distribution, which favours the researcher. This view is based on the fact that it is the researcher who sets out the parameters of the research and enters into the relationship equipped with theoretical and structural knowledge relevant to the situation. The authors argue, though, that in an interview setting, the participant holds power based upon the practical knowledge they have of the situation under discussion. Their lived experience – and whether or not they choose to share that with the researcher – means that in certain very real ways, they control the output from that interaction. The knowledge created through this form of research is, they argue, produced collaboratively from a shared understanding of the research environment (Ben-Ari and Enosh, 2012). The present research was therefore constructed with all of these considerations in mind: the genuine human need to express gratitude and engage in social discourse; a belief in the ethical requirement to avoid exploitation or harm; and an expectation that by working collaboratively and sharing the findings generated by the research, researcher and participants could create new insights into this area. As part of that ethos of sharing, the preliminary findings of the study have been shared with local authority officers who took part in the research. The final conclusions will be shared with all participating groups. It is intended that the adapted Community Asset Transfer Choice Framework will be developed into a usable tool and put at the disposal of people and organisations involved in the process of asset transfer, in order to improve their experiences and ultimately, enable CATs to become truly supportive of local empowerment.

Conceptual Models and Frameworks

Considering this subject from the perspective of Sen's capability approach (1992), it is important to start from the preferences and desired outcomes of the community groups themselves, and to establish the resources and 'functionings' (Sen's terminology) – and the gaps in resources - available to these groups, which would enable them to achieve these outcomes. It is proposed, therefore, to use a model of analysis derived from and compatible with Sen's capability approach, which takes as its starting point the expressed desires of individuals living in communities where assets have been, or are being, transferred, and seeks to uncover the capabilities (resources, choices and functionings) that these communities possess, which would empower them to achieve these desired outcomes via the ownership or management of the asset in question.

The legislative framework surrounding asset transfers is broad and open-ended, without prescriptive targets or outputs. The most relevant piece of legislation is the Local Government Act, 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) 2003, whose major stipulation in this regard is that if local authorities dispose of assets for less than market value, it should be done in the interests of local people. The 2011 Localism Act barely mentions transfers at all, focusing instead on the requirements applicable for property to be listed as Assets of Community Value and on the new rights of community groups to nominate assets and to challenge the sale of property deemed to be of community value (Localism Act, 2011). The political language surrounding the Act stresses the empowerment of local actors in developing and protecting their own amenities and services. This can be seen as aligning the policy with the aims of the capability approach, making it possible to appraise the Act's effects, such as the creation of ACV registers and the rise in the number of CATs being undertaken, using the sorts of choice and empowerment models that have been developed by capabilities researchers. The study of groups who have gone through the CAT process, whether using the ACV route or not, allows the post-hoc discovery of the outcomes of these communities sought from their asset transfer, and a consideration of what individual and collective capabilities they needed in order to make those choices and achieve their goals.

Chapter 2 discussed fieldwork that had used the capability approach, and raised a number of criticisms of its practicability. Seeking to address the practical difficulties of implementing Sen's capability approach in live development projects, Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) suggest that the degree to which people are empowered to act in their own self-interest can be a proxy for difficult-to-quantify capabilities. They propose the following model, the Measuring Empowerment (ME) Framework, as a tool for adopting a capabilities approach in development.

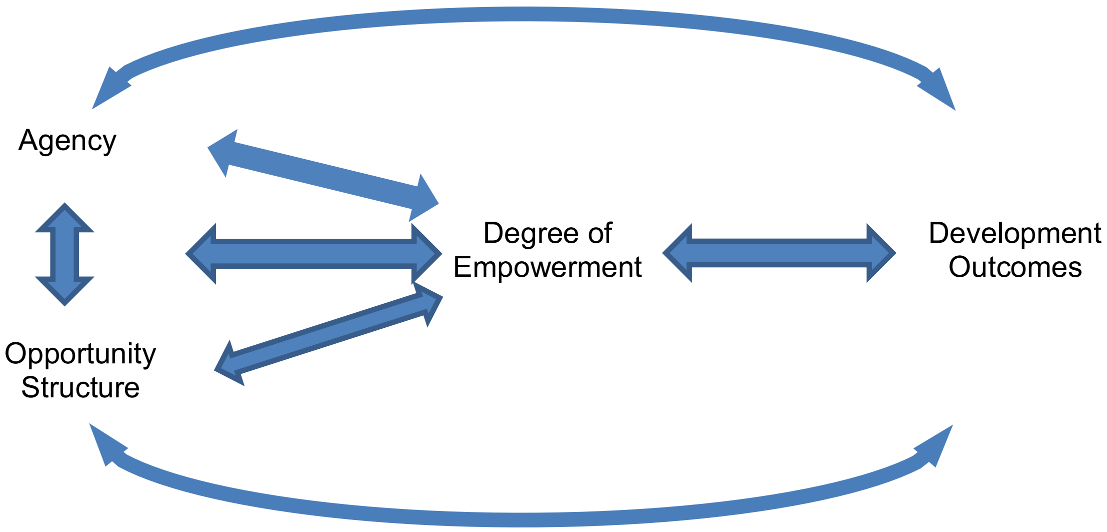


Figure 3.a: Relationship between outcomes and correlates of empowerment (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005)

In the ME Framework 'empowerment' is defined as a person's capacity to transform choices into desired outcomes. The extent to which someone is empowered is influenced by their personal level of agency (the resources they have at their disposal, which allow them to make purposive choices) and on the nature of the opportunity structures (the institutional contexts in which choices are made) within which they live. They recognise seven types of resource (they use the term 'asset' but in this context that would be confusing), which contribute to the concept of agency: psychological, informational, organisational, material, social, financial and human. Opportunity structures include formal and informal laws and norms and the institutions, which work to enforce and reinforce these rules and norms. Empowerment itself is broken down into three components: the existence of choice, the use of choice, and the achievement of choice (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005, p. 4).

Kleine's (2010) Choice Framework builds on Alsop and Heinsohn's model, and expands it with the addition of a more extensive and granular set of resources (the term 'human resources' is split into educational and health resources; natural, geographic and cultural resources replace organisational resources), and by introducing the concept of 'sense of choice'. The reason for introducing this extra dimension is that Kleine discovered during her field work in Chile that, even when certain choices existed for people, they were not necessarily aware of them: they lacked a *sense* of their ability to make that particular choice in the given context of their opportunity structures (Kleine, 2010). See figure 3.b, below.

The Choice Framework recognises that the levels and types of agency an individual possesses are both determined by and help to create the structures within which their lives take place. This interplay in turn establishes the extent to which that individual is empowered to make choices, which will generate desired outcomes. The achievement of these outcomes – and the very fact that the individual is able to exercise choices to accomplish them – loops back into both the structures surrounding, and the resources available to, the individual.

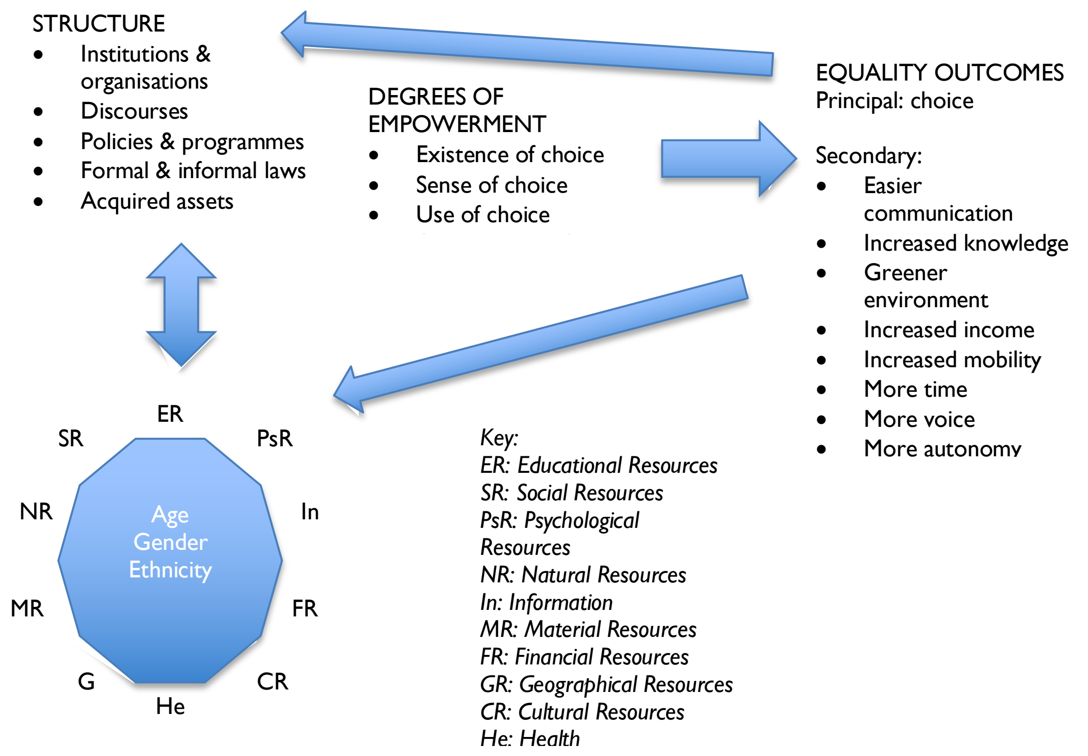


Figure 3.b: Choice Framework showing the relationship between the individual and the structures that surround them, and how their agency (made up of 10 resources) enables them to achieve their desired outcomes through the possibilities of choice they possess (Kleine, 2010).

While the Choice Framework captures the complexity of attempting to analyse development projects using a capabilities approach, that very complexity makes it appear somewhat unwieldy in practice. Kleine acknowledges the difficulties in seeking to assess the extent to which any individual (or community group) possesses each of the resources listed, or to disentangle the ways in which the structural components of the framework empower or constrain the possibilities of choice-making. Even if starting from the desired outcomes and working back to uncover the capabilities present which might enable them to be achieved, as she suggests, the picture of the variables involved in any one case is likely to be partial at best.

A similar criticism can be made of Emery and Flora's (2006) Community Capitals Framework (CCF) (figure 3.c). The CCF looks at seven forms of capital which impact on a community's ability to build capacity:

- Natural capital (the natural environment of a place);
- Cultural capital (how people 'know the world', language, tradition, etc.);

- Human capital (the skills and abilities possessed by individuals within the community);
- Social capital (the connections between individuals within the community, referred to as 'bonding' social capital; and those which exist between the community and bodies external to it, known as 'bridging' social capital);
- Political capital (a community's access to power, both to organisations and resources and to peoples' ability to mobilise in their own interests);
- Financial capital (the financial resources available to invest in capacity building); and
- Built capital (the infrastructure supporting capacity building activities).

(Emery and Flora, 2006, p. 21).

Although this is the framework used in Skerratt and Hall's (2011a, 2011b) research into the transfer of parish halls to community ownership, the reality of examining not just the prevalence of each of the seven capitals within a community, but also the ways in which these seven interact, build upon or negate one another, represents a serious research challenge. It is possible, however, to mitigate this problem by analysing information from multiple sources in order to look for patterns of resources owned. This is the route taken by Skerratt and Hall and it enabled them to limit the CCF capitals down to those they deemed most significant for the groups they studied. Of the seven capitals in the CCF, they conclude that social capital (features of social organisation such as networks, norms of trust and the subset of spiritual capital, and which comprises both bonding and bridging capital), human capital (peoples' health, knowledge, skills and motivation), and political capital (a community's ability to influence the distribution and use of resources) are the three most important in their observed instances of asset transfer (Skerratt and Hall, 2011).

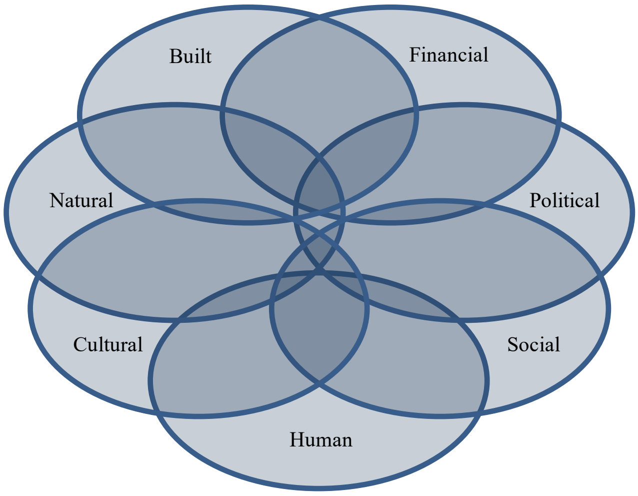


Figure 3.c: The Seven Community Capitals (Emery and Flora, 2006)

An alternative approach, using capabilities thinking, is that developed by Austin (2015), which involves the creation of an index for evaluating wellbeing in the UK, using the capabilities approach. Her index is based on the indices developed and used by a number of earlier researchers, including those of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, the OECD and Nussbaum (Austin, 2015). Having derived a long list of resources of value from these lists (many of which have a developmental slant), she proceeds to pull out the most significant resources of value to a British population by correlating her long list with the results of research conducted by the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) into peoples' opinions about what constitutes 'quality of life'; and a debate commissioned from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) by the British government, seeking to establish metrics for 'national wellbeing'.

The results of these two latter pieces of research show a high level of correspondence: in both surveys good health (interpreted as lack of chronic ill-health and access to medical care when necessary to maintain that condition) was rated as the most important resource contributing to respondents' quality of life and sense of wellbeing; family, friends and good social connections came second in both surveys; and some combination of material living standards, access to satisfying employment and economic security came third (in the case of the BHPS, joint third with 'happiness/peace of mind'). From this, Austin concludes that, for people in the UK, wellbeing means roughly "Health, Wealth and Connectedness" (Austin, 2015, p. 90).

Austin acknowledges that this list represents what Sen terms 'functionings', rather than capabilities but argues that it is much simpler to measure achieved outcomes than any of the possible options that might have been available for an individual to choose in pursuit of wellbeing. She uses Sen's notion of 'refined functionings' as a pragmatic way to side-step this difficulty; allowing actual observation as a proxy for the understanding of choices that could have been made. 'Refined functionings' are defined as a combination of capabilities and functionings, or the measurement of achieved functionings with alternative possibilities and acts of choice considered (Austin, 2015, p. 96). This idea, of using the observation of the situation as it presents itself, combined with an understanding of what alternatives might have been chosen in different circumstances, is adopted for this study, as a shorthand for the capability set of an individual or group.

In her paper, *Regional Performance and inequality,* Perrons (2012) uses an existing publicly available index to give a baseline in the development of a Regional Development Index (RDI). She is interested in comparing development between regions of the UK, using a broader base than the more commonly used measurement of GDP, arguing that the EU sets objectives for both economic and social cohesion in its policies for regional development and that therefore a more comprehensive method of analysis is needed to appreciate the bigger picture of inter-regional inequality (Perrons, 2012).

The RDI is derived from the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) and like it "seeks to put people at the centre of the development process" (Perrons, 2012, p. 20) but with a shift in order to make it more relevant to a study of UK regions. She considers the EHRC approach but concludes that, although it maps inequality with great precision, the sheer number of component parts in the model makes it unwieldy to use and risks a multiplication of errors in the measurement of each of its many aspects. For this reason, she chooses the simpler HDI, which only has three elements: income, life expectancy and knowledge. While acknowledging that there are differences in all three of these elements within the UK, Perrons points out that the variables need to be understood differently in the British national context, as interregional disparity in life expectancy or level of education is markedly less in the UK that which can be witnessed between the countries the UNDP is typically measuring.

Perrons therefore chooses health, as measured by infant mortality and the standardised mortality ratio; knowledge, as measured by the proportion of the population without any formal qualifications; and economic standard of living, as measured by earnings, earnings inequality and child poverty. To the UNDP list, she also adds the notion of employment rate as a measure of involvement in productive and socially valued activities (Perrons, 2012, p. 22). She too acknowledges that this deviates from a pure capability approach, being a mix of inputs and outcomes, rather than the hard-to-measure capabilities Sen discusses.

Table 3.e: Perrons' RDI factors and how they are measured

RDI Factor	Measured by:
Healthy Life (HL)	infant mortality and the standardised mortality ratio
Knowledge (K)	the proportion of the population without any formal qualifications
Economic Standard of Living (ESL)	earnings, earnings inequality and child poverty
Employment or equally valued involvement in social activities (E)	measure of involvement in productive and socially valued activities

Both researchers weight the measures used equally in their final analysis. Perrons provides the following simple equation summing up the RDI:

$$RDI= (HL+K+ESL+E)/4$$

Where RDI=regional development index; HL=healthy life; K=knowledge; ESL= economic standard of living; and E=employment or equally valued involvement in social activities. It its notable that the terms grouped under 'human capital' and 'social capital' as defined in Emery and Flora's CCF, are broadly in line with the measures emphasised in the indices developed by Austin and Perrons.

How the frameworks were used

An early part of the analysis assessed the various models described above against the coded data gathered from interviews with community actors, in order to determine the most relevant sets of capabilities held by groups successfully able to increase their choices, and thus empower themselves and their communities by using Community Asset Transfers. The codes discovered in the transcribed data were much broader in scope than either Austin or Perrons models envisaged; and even the CCF, with its focus on capitals to the exclusion of environmental factors and the mechanism of choice, was insufficient to capture all aspects of the data that had been gathered. The model that most closely matched the output of the research process was found to be Kleine's Choice Framework and this was then adapted to improve its explanatory power in the current instance. These adaptations included incorporating ideas from some of the other frameworks and indices discussed above, such as the inclusion of political capital from the CCF and the idea of knowledge factor from Perrons' RDI.

Additional resources and relationships, which were not present in previous models but which appeared as significant factors in the present study were then added to create the 'Community Asset Transfer Framework' (CATF) (figure 3.d and table 3.f). CATF sets the elements of the framework into the context of the broader Political, Economic, Social and Technology (PEST) environment, which, while it affects what choices are available to community groups at the macro level, is considered to be too large for them to exert much influence over. It also creates space for the role played by the local authority in the achievability of CATs by community organisations, recognising the crucial part these play as writers of policy, promoters of asset transfer in their districts, and supporters of groups undergoing CAT. The concept of action is added to the framework as a necessary component of agency that appears to have been overlooked in Kleine's Choice Framework, which considers agency solely in terms of the resources available to the individual. Finally, an extra resource is identified as important to groups seeking CATs: time. The achievement of desired outcomes for volunteer-led community organisations depends very heavily on being able to draw upon the temporal resources of those volunteers. This resource requirement comes into focus particularly when looking at the process of asset transfer as it is lengthy and time-consuming.

From the descriptions of the various frameworks given above, it will be clear that different authors use slightly different terminology to denote similar concepts. Thus Kleine's 'resources' are broadly equivalent to Emery and Flora's 'capitals'. For the avoidance of further confusion, this thesis will use the terms used by the original authors when discussing their own work – the CATF follows Kleine in using 'resources' - but will reserve the use of the term 'asset' to mean a tangible property asset (either built or land), such as can be transferred from one person or organisation to another.

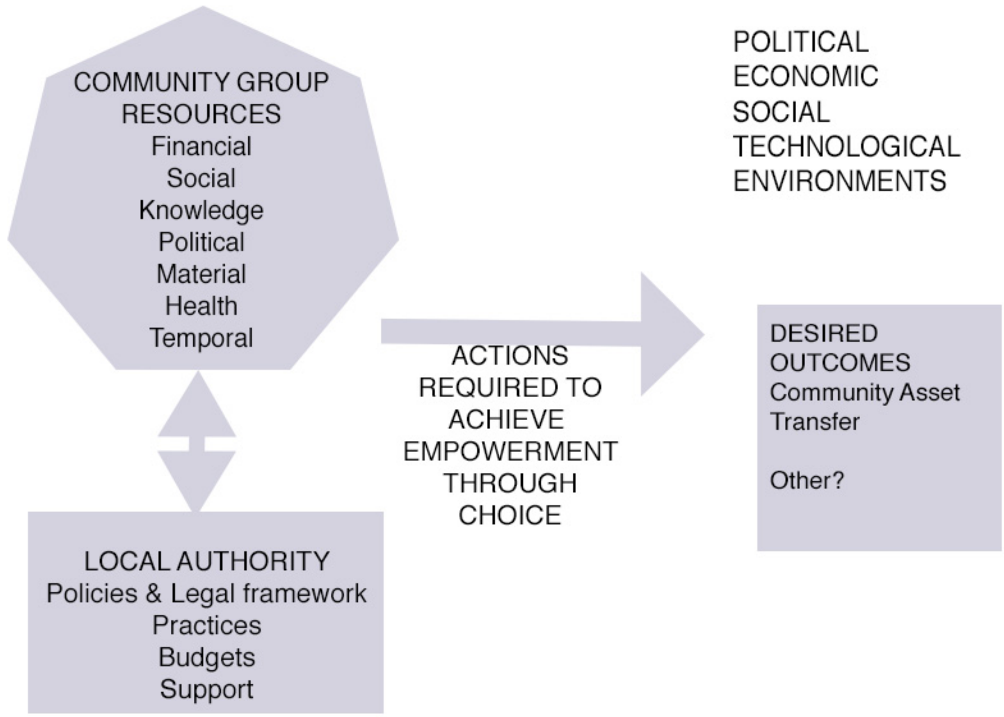


Figure 3.d: The community Asset Transfer Framework (CATF)

The rationale for CATF and its derivation are explained in depth in chapter 7.

Table 3.f: Comparison of the elements of CATF against other frameworks

Community Asset Transfer Framework	**Kleine's Choice Framework**	**Emery and Flora's Community Capitals Framework**	**Perrons' Regional Development Index**
Resources: Financial Knowledge Social Political Material Organisational health Temporal	**Resources**: Financial Educational Information Social Material Health Psychological Cultural Natural Geographical	**Capitals**: Financial Human Social Political Built Cultural Natural	**Factors**: Standard of living Knowledge Employment or equivalent Healthy life
Structure: Political Economic Social Technological	**Structure**: Institutions Discourses Policies Laws and norms Acquired assets		
Role of the local authority: Policies			

Practices Relationships			
Degrees of empowerment: Existence of choice Sense of choice Use of choice	**Degrees of empowerment**: Existence of choice Sense of choice Use of choice		
Action as means to convert choice into desired outcomes			
Desired outcomes: Community Asset Transfer Other	**Desired outcomes**: Choice Other		

Summary

This chapter has worked through the methodology and methods used in this study. The aims, objectives and research questions were set out and the models and frameworks deemed most appropriate to achieving those aims and answering the questions were described. Before moving on to describe the research carried out, there is a digression into the philosophical approach taken by the study, which situates it in wider theoretical thinking. Given the empirical nature of the research, a social realist approach is taken, respecting the socially constructed nature of the phenomena being observed without imposing ideological or philosophical perspectives that might distort the results. The research conducted is broken down into three distinct phases and each is described in outline. There is a brief discussion of the ethical implications of this form of research and how these have been addressed.

The methodological approach taken in this study has been to gather primary qualitative data, with a grounding in secondary information. The decision to focus on a single case study area was taken as it became apparent that there was no national dataset covering Community Asset Transfers. West Yorkshire was chosen as the area to focus on, being both a ‘hotspot’ for CATs and a geographically convenient area to cover when conducting interviews. A substantial amount of secondary data was gathered about policies and practices around CATs and ACVs nationally and in West Yorkshire. This is explored through chapters 4 and 5. The primary data in the study comes from semi-structured interviews with individuals representing local authorities and community groups. These were conducted across all five local authorities in West Yorkshire and comprise as broad a range of community organisation and asset types as possible. Transcripts of these interviews were coded thematically using an inductive technique, and the codes were then grouped into broad categories, which related to models and frameworks previously discovered as part of the research into inequalities and capabilities.

Having discussed the use of the capability approach as part of the literature review, frameworks derived from that approach were explored as potential frames through which to analyse the findings of the research. Emery and Flora's (2006) Community Capitals Framework, Alsop and Heinsohn's (2006) Measuring Empowerment Framework, Kleine's (2010) Choice Framework, Perrons' (2012) Regional Development Index and Austin's (2015) Wellbeing Index are all evaluated in detail. The framework that best explains most of the findings of this study is Kleine's Choice Framework but even this does not completely address all aspects of the data. It was therefore decided to create a new framework, incorporating many aspects of the Choice Framework, but with additions from other models and new elements discovered from the research undertaken.

The next chapter sets out the findings from the first phase of the research: the review of national policy and the connections to Community Asset Transfer. These initial empirical findings come from secondary research into the development of policy ideas in the UK, and from an interview with a representative of Locality, as being an organisation with a national overview of CAT and community concerns.

Chapter 4: Community Asset Transfers in England - The Policy Environment

Introduction

This chapter sets Community Asset Transfers (CATs) into the context of British national policy. It reviews the historical context for policy and the ideas that underpin it, documenting the shift in political ideology from the post-war era to the 2010 Coalition Government. As well as discussing the relevant legislation around CATs and Assets of Community Value (specifically the Local Government Act 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) of 2003 and the Localism Act of 2011), it considers how the concepts of the 'Third Way' came to influence political thinking under the 1997 New Labour government. The movement to devolve power to regions and communities changed the relationships between local and national government, and local government and non-governmental agencies and the idea of participation of the third sector became current.

From there the chapter considers the idea of 'localism' and how the politics of austerity, practised since the financial crisis of 2008, have shaped this notion into a form of withdrawal of the state from civil life. Community Asset Transfer is assessed as part of this trend towards the disintermediation of power, and the question is asked: can CATs be interpreted as genuine empowerment for communities, or as evidence for the hollowing out of local government and privatisation of public sector assets and services? The under-researched area of parish councils and their role in enabling or mitigating so-called 'austerity localism' is contemplated and suggested as a direction for future research.

The National Policy Environment

Sociologist Anthony Giddens coined the term 'Third Way' in the mid-nineties (Giddens, 1994, 1998), to describe an Anglo-Saxon version of the social market economy model (*soziale Marktwirschaft')*, popularised by then economics minister, Ludwig Erhard in Germany after World War Two, to combine the principles of free market capitalism, with provision for social and socially important programmes of government support (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). This model became very influential in Europe and informs many subsequent ideas of a balance to be attained between public and private enterprises in order to maintain both economic viability and social justice (Sally, 2015). The Third Way was promoted in the UK by Tony Blair and New Labour during the successful Labour electoral campaign of 1997, and beyond into government (Tallon, 2010). It aimed to shift the strategies of the political Left by encouraging their embrace of regulated markets, and the decentralisation of power through the strengthening of civil society at various levels. In this, it had much in common with the US-originated Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), highlighting the moral basis of civil society with references to "civil society, civic activism, strong communities, rights, duties and responsibilities" (Rose, 2000, p.1397). As with ABCD, the rhetoric was of empowerment, the flourishing of communal wisdom and the placing of responsibility for delivering social value via the agency of community-minded individuals working collaboratively to achieve common goals.

This growing belief in grassroots, locally based communitarian activity to produce social benefit is in stark contrast to more collectivist, top-down models of social provision, such as had informed the origins of the welfare state back in the 1940s. The Labour government of 1945 had recruited vast numbers of new civil servants to run the expanded bureaucracy of nationalised industries and government-funded public services like the NHS and Family Allowance (Marr, 2009). The Socialist-influenced governments of the following decades kept these structures in place, along with a belief in a paternalistic state, offering cradle-to-grave care for all. Volunteerism and charitable good works were seen as a hang-over from the Victorian age, and as alien to modern, socially mobile Britain as 19th century workhouses. That changed under the 1979 Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher, which re-asserted what it termed the 'traditional values' of self-reliance and private enterprise (Marr, 2009). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s and on into the twenty-first century, the now well established, top-down bureaucracies of local government would repeatedly confront the small state, monetarist policies of central government. Even after the country returned New Labour to power in 1997, the 'Third Way' politics embraced by Tony Blair sought to stitch together the 'welfarist' centralising tendencies of old Labour policy with the individualised, money-oriented culture that had steadily emerged over the previous two decades (Tallon, 2010).

Delivering what Fyfe (2005) terms New Labour's 'neo-communitarian' agenda involved drawing in the so-called 'third sector' of the economy: non-governmental organisations that use their trading surpluses to re-invest in achieving social benefits. This includes the charitable sector, voluntary organisations, social enterprises, cooperatives and community groups of different types. The term, first attributed to American economist Jeremy Rifkin in 1995, is derived from a differentiation between these types of organisation and the public and private sectors of the economy (Rifkin, 1995). Such ideas had previously been developed by researchers working in different parts of the world, including Albert Hirschman (1984) in Latin America and David Korten (1984), when working for the Agency for International Development in Asia. The British government adopted the idea that this 'third sector' could be deployed as part of public service provision through the construction of partnerships across all three parts of the economic sphere (Fyfe, 2005). Place-based initiatives were developed to incorporate partners not just from the private sector but also community bodies and engaged individuals from those communities (Bowden and Liddle, 2018). Unlike ABCD and some of the other communitarian initiatives discussed in chapter 2, this embrace of third sector organisations into local and regional service delivery was a broadly European, rather than a US construct (Jones and Liddle, 2011). In the UK, the government went so far as to create the 'Office of the Third Sector' within the Cabinet Office to lead and support these partnership initiatives.

Third sector bodies were seen as having key advantages, including their relatively small size (meaning that they were faster-acting and more flexible than governmental agencies) and their geographical closeness to local communities (enabling them to reach deeper into those communities, especially when targeting groups traditionally considered to be difficult for 'official' healthcare and support services to reach) (Flanagan and Hancock, 2010, Hastings and Matthews, 2015). The 'local' aspect was considered to be important both in ensuring that service provision met actual local requirements and in devolving more power over community, local and regional decision-making away from central government and out to the broader population largely in order to improve the economic outlook for different regions (Pike et al., 2006).

It was of a piece with other devolutionary projects undertaken by New Labour during its years in office, including the establishment of devolved governments in Scotland and Wales, the creation of the Regional Development Agencies across England and, later, the restoration of the power-sharing government of Northern Ireland following the Good Friday Agreement (Tomaney, 2000). The thrust and direction of British politics through the late nineties and noughties was towards the decentralisation and fragmentation of power. The old assumption that public sector organisations would fulfil all the roles required to deliver public services was gradually eroded. By the time the Coalition government left power in the mid-2010s the role of local authorities in partnership projects was reduced to providing technical expertise and support to other players in the team (Bowden and Liddle, 2018).

This shift in role has not been universally embraced by councillors and officials in local authorities. In particular, there have been concerns about the involvement of commercial organisations being brought in to offer services as part of local authority provision. In this context, third sector, community bodies can be seen as preferable partners to private sector ones. A councillor interviewed for this research put it bluntly: “The administration have a view that public sector good, private sector bad, and if it can't be quite retained within the public sector, they want it to be not the private sector that's coming in and taking it over.” (Councillor ‘Philip’) Although this position is not true of all local authorities by any means (as shall be seen in chapter 5, Wakefield Council has outsourced a large swathe of its services to a private management company), there is a sense coming from council respondents to this study that CAT is a means by which public assets and services avoid privatisation. This idea will be picked up later in the chapter.

The push towards devolution under the New Labour government was tempered by an apparently contradictory centralising managerial tendency, inherited from the previous, Conservative government (Edwards, 2003, Tallon, 2010). Since the nineteen-eighties, governmental business had been run through a mechanism of targets and performance measures. Success of urban policies was determined by comparison of inputs and outputs, those with the strongest positive ratios of output to input being deemed the most successful. Any idea that this performance management emphasis would be reversed when New Labour came to power in 1997 was, as Tallon (2010) asserts, refuted by the tone of the incoming government, which remained as target-driven as its predecessor. As Edwards (2003) argues, the rhetoric of partnerships and shared vision, which underlay the New Labour emphasis on devolved government, was seriously undermined by this managerial position.

Echoing the positions discussed in chapter 2 about the appropriateness of community bodies as deliverers of public services, Raco (2003) argues that the principles of community empowerment espoused by the New Labour government failed to lead to any serious devolution of power to either place-based groups or communities of interest because those charged with implementing them did not fully believe in the representational legitimacy of such groups. As Giddens (2000) describes it; some people on the political left are suspicious of third sector involvement in politics, seeing it as little more than amateurish philanthropy (Giddens, 2000). A lack of trust in either the private or the third sector meant that local authority bodies, whilst paying lip-service to the principles of participation and devolution to community power, were implementing these policies in limited ways, meaning the project overall was ultimately flawed (Raco, 2003).

This formed the political environment in which the idea of handing publicly owned assets over to legally constituted community groups took root, and in 2003, the General Disposal Consent (England) amendment to the 1972 Local Government Act made possible the first forms of Community Asset Transfer (CAT). The 1972 Act had allowed local authorities to divest themselves of properties in their portfolios by means of sale of freehold or leasehold as long as they obtained "best consideration" i.e. as close to the current market price as possible. The 2003 General Disposal Consent ("the Consent") is a short (two-page) document, which withdraws that requirement, allowing local authorities to dispose of land and built assets at less than best consideration, as long as the authority is satisfied that such a disposal will, in the words of the circular accompanying the Consent: "help it to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area." (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006)

Using the powers granted in the Consent, English local authorities began to sell or let properties for which they had no perceived on-going use, to community enterprises at less than best considerations. It is a little unclear where the term 'Community Asset Transfer' originates. There is no mention of it in either the 2003 Consent or the 2011 Localism Act, although the Quirk Review of 2007 (see below) does refer to 'asset transfers' and the term does appear in local authority documents from 2012 setting out early CAT policies. Community Asset Transfer is defined by Locality as:

> "The transfer of management and/or ownership of public land and buildings from its owner (usually a local authority) to a community organisation for 'less than best consideration' – ie less than the highest value obtainable or estimated market value. This discount is based on the presumption of long-term local social, economic or environmental benefit." (Locality, 2018b, p.5)

All responsibility for the maintenance, repair and refurbishment of transferred properties rests with the acquiring group, and this is one of the main features of

CATs, distinguishing them from other long-term lease arrangements offered by local authorities. This comment from council officer, 'Gina' sums up the predominant view among West Yorkshire local authorities:

> "A lot of the incumbent groups were on these shared responsibility leases. Generally the council would have been responsible for the big ticket items, and that kind of expenditure that we do need to now start bringing in and restricting so it was ideal that we could pass this on to the community." (Council officer 'Gina').

Indeed, according to officers and councillors interviewed for this research, cost divestment is the principal driving motivation for councils undertaking the process. Typically these transfers involve property the local authority is looking to divest, because it is under-utilised or too expensive to maintain. "Where council can no longer afford to maintain assets felt to be of community worth, then we would offer them to the community." (council officer, 'Harry').

The asset is then offered on a long-term lease (between 30 and 100+ years) with favourable terms (less than best consideration), to a not-for-profit or company limited by guarantee or other non-commercial organisation (Communities and Local Government Office, 2011). Some authorities charge small rents to CAT leaseholders – "nothing that will trouble their finances", according to Council officer 'Michael' – others do not. In officer 'Gina's' authority CATs are not charged any rent at all - "No rent. They all go at nil consideration."

Support for the Community Ownership of Assets in an Age of Austerity

The Consent is couched in terms of lifting restrictions on local authorities, but these transfers have also been espoused as a tool of empowerment for local communities and encouraged (with varying degrees of enthusiasm) by various British governments of all persuasions since their inception. In 2007, the New Labour government published the Quirk Review of Community Management and Ownership of Public Assets. The report is wholeheartedly supportive of asset transfers and sets out a range of benefits they bring to communities who undertake them. These include:

- Enabling users of an asset to plan for the future of the asset and of any services it delivers to the community;
- Supporting grassroots wealth creation activities, often by offering

employment and training to local people on the premises;
- Promoting community cohesion by providing a hub from which community anchor groups can operate across ethnic, religious or other divides within a community;
- Giving back local landmarks with emotional resonance to people in the area and thus helping to engender notions of (local) civic pride with attendant increased optimism for the future of the neighbourhood;
- Acting as a multiplier for economic regeneration in a neighbourhood by providing an early, and visible, focal point upon which other activities (business and social) can grow.

(Quirk, 2007)

A report commissioned by the Rowntree Foundation and published in 2011, concludes that there were numerous potential benefits associated with community ownership of assets. These include those identified by the Quirk Review, and less tangible benefits such as improving the perceptions of outsiders, who had previously held negative views of a neighbourhood, thus helping its rehabilitation and potential for regeneration through in-migration (Aiken et al. 2011). The report does, however, include the important caveat that these benefits will be unlikely to be realised if certain conditions are not met:

- The burden of responsibility for taking on managing transferred assets needs to be broadly enough spread throughout the community that the whole weight of it does not fall on the shoulders of the very few;
- That resources of money and skill are made available to communities where there is less likely to be a self-generated internal capacity to undertake transfers unaided;
- And that community groups are not left with properties that are unsuitable for their needs and budgets because those are the ones local authorities will be keenest to divest themselves of.

(Aiken et al. 2011).

Given some of the findings of this study, the report appears almost prescient in its concerns about whether these conditions will (or can) be met under the prevailing economic gloom.

Although there is an acknowledgement of some of the risks and problems involved in effecting and sustaining the shift to community control, Aiken et al.’s (2011) report repeatedly emphasises the worthwhile nature of these transfers and proposes a number of changes to legislation and infrastructure (financial and knowledge-based) to enable and support more transfers to take place. In its 2016 report, *Places and spaces: the future of community asset ownership*, however, Locality laments that, far from increasing support for CATs, funding for them has been cut. Coupled with the impact of austerity policies on local government service provision since the 2008 economic crash, this was said to mean that "many communities will be unable to ensure that valued public land, buildings and services are retained for community benefit." (Locality, 2016, p. 2).

The banking crisis of 2008 led to cuts being implemented at all levels of government spending. This policy of austerity was continued and intensified under the UK Coalition government from 2010. Jones and Liddle (2011) suggest that the shrinking of governmental resources combined with the slowdown in the economy following the 2008 crash made it essential, in their words, to "promote third sector organisations, build up their capacities and give [them] greater 'voice' and 'choice' in commissioning services to achieve local outcomes." They also recognised, in the same paper, that this was not happening evenly across the country as local authorities struggled to understand the shift this would bring in their own work and their relationships with non-governmental bodies (Jones and Liddle 2011). By 2013, another Rowntree Foundation report concluded that the relationship between local authorities and citizens would have to change as the former withdrew from non-mandatory service provision. This withdrawal, the report argued, would require individual citizens and community groups to step in and take responsibility for providing those services, if they were to continue to exist (Hastings et al., 2013).

It is outwith the scope of this study to consider the legitimacy or efficacy of austerity as a policy in general economic terms. Blyth (2013) argues that it has neither attribute and merely serves to reinforce the ideological mind-set of market-led, monetarist economics. Other economists disagree, claiming that it was and is a necessary correction to the unsustainable debt burdens carried by nation states following the financial crises of 2007-2008 (Edwards, 2015) and even that reducing public spending would result in increased economic growth as private sector confidence grew and private enterprise stepped into the gap left by retreating public sector bodies (Reinhard and Rogoff, 2009; Alesina and Ardagna, 2010). What is undeniable, however, is that austerity has had real impacts on public service provision at all levels in the UK, especially for local authorities. As Gray and Barford (2018) point out, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) suffered cuts of more than 50 per cent in its budgets between 2010 and 2015 (Gray and Barford, 2018). Pugalis et al. (2014) discuss how austerity cuts to local government budgets have resulted in reduced funding for community support services and neighbourhood regeneration initiatives. This reduction in support has the effect, they argue, of increasing socio-economic inequalities as more deprived neighbourhoods lack the social and political capital to take advantage of the alternative 'bottom-up' programmes, which often spring up following the withdrawal of government sponsored interventions (Pugalis et al., 2014).

In the findings of their 2018 paper, *The depth of the cuts: the uneven geography of local government austerity*, Gray and Barford analyse the ways in which sweeping across-the-board cuts in funding of local authorities by central government has had differential impacts on those authorities because of the varying capacity of local authorities to mitigate the loss of these funds. Existing differences in economic and industrial structures, resilience and the demographic profile of the inhabitants of the authority are reinforced under conditions of austerity, in which the redistributive power of central budget allocations is reduced or removed. The very formula used to allocate funding to local authorities, which supports areas with higher levels of deprivation through higher budget allocations, becomes pernicious in times of austerity, as these are the authorities who are most dependent on central state funding for their budgets and will therefore suffer the greatest losses overall. Overall, they conclude that the imposition of austerity on local government has reduced its ability to act as a redistributive agent and thus led to increased place-based inequalities (Gray and Barford, 2018).

In this context, the increasing use of CATs by local authorities seeking to balance the books and maintain as broad a range of services as possible can be seen as a crisis response to an intractable, long-term problem. Wigan Council, for example, state that they "will increasingly need to develop alternative and innovative ways of meeting [their] objectives, and asset transfer could be a means of achieving this" (Wigan Council website, n.d.), clearly positioning CAT as a strategy to address the challenging fiscal situation they face. The growing visibility of CATs from 2010 onward appears to be part of an on-going shift in the dynamics of local service provision. Bowden and Liddle chart this shift in their 2018 paper *Evolving public sector roles in the leadership of place-based partnerships,* where they contrast case studies from the pre-Coalition government noughties, with parallel cases from the 2010s. They conclude that local authorities, although still actively involved in policy development at local level, have stepped back from a dominant role driving that agenda, and are now finding themselves working more as influencers and technical support to policy-making partnerships. Some of these partnerships are with third sector organisations or individuals, looking for local solutions to local problems; others are led by private sector companies, seeking to offer services that are no longer available from the local authority, at a profit (Bowden and Liddle, 2018). Given this context, there appears to be a genuine potential for conflict between achieving real empowerment of local people, and the mere abdication of governmental bodies' local and national responsibility for the provision of services and facilities - a change which will have a disproportionately larger impact on more deprived communities (Rolfe, 2015). This in turn, links back to Cajaiba-Santana's (2014) thesis about the emerging tensions between the social structures within which social innovations occur, and the role of different actors in effecting these innovations, as were discussed in chapter 2 (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014).

One critic of the trend towards creeping privatisation is Michael Fabricant, researcher in education at Hunter College in New York (2013) who describes the current moment as " an era of sustained, unrelenting attack on all things public" (Fabricant, 2013, p. 404), before going on to discuss how the American education system is being quietly privatised and moulded into a profit-making, rather than a public service model. Fabricant considers this to be both the consequence and the motivation for much austerity policy making across North America, Asia and parts of Europe, as public goods and services are starved of resources and forced to look to capitalist models in order to sustain themselves in the name of fiscal responsibility. The chief beneficiaries of this change he sees as being the very wealthy, who have benefitted from reduced taxation as funding for social goods was withdrawn, whilst not being overly inconvenienced by the loss of local services they would not have used (Fabricant, 2013).

This is also the line taken by Peck (2012), who argues that austerity is imposed on the poor by the rich and the powerful. He describes as a way of making 'others' - i.e. not the people in charge – pay the price of financial retrenchment by government. Austerity is, he says, "the means by which the costs of macroeconomic mismanagement, financial speculation and corporate profiteering are visited on the dispossessed, the disenfranchised and the disempowered." (Peck, 2012, p. 632).

In *The Corruption of Capitalism* (2016), Guy Standing discusses what he terms 'The Plunder of the Commons' and it is impossible to look at the transfer of assets from public to 'community' ownership without questioning whether CATs are in fact an example of such a diminution of common ownership. Standing traces the loss of communal rights in England back to the proliferation of Enclosure Acts during the second half of the 18th century, when landowners made concerted land grabs for property that had previously been held in common by villagers. Because a substantial proportion of the rural population subsisted off this common land (through grazing, gleaning or wood-gathering rights), the effect of the enclosures was to force poor people off the land and into the cities, seeking employment. Although the focus of socio-economic struggle during the 19th century moved away from land ownership and the effects of enclosures, the issue has emerged in different forms over the intervening period. Standing includes mineral and environmental resources in his definition of the common weald, as well as social, civil, cultural and intellectual assets shared by society, and discusses how the rights to these assets have been sold by successive governments worldwide to enrich privately owned commercial organisations, at the expense of the citizens of the country, who might legitimately claim that these assets belonged to them (Standing, 2016 – see also, Barlow and Rifkin's (2001) *Treaty Initiative to Share and Protect the Global Water Commons* endorsed by the participants of Water for People and nature, Vancouver, Canada).

If publicly owned buildings and publicly funded services are viewed as contemporary commons, their removal from public ownership could therefore be interpreted as part of the neo-liberal attack on common rights that Standing discusses. Local authorities are not typically selling the assets that go to CATs, but transferring them on long-term leases. Councillors and council officers interviewed for this study were keen to stress that they were not looking to re-take control of transferred assets in any foreseeable future, however, the legal position of most transfers remains that the community group are tenants of the authority, without the legal rights and protections of freeholders. The assets, though, have effectively been withdrawn from general public use, potentially for several generations to come. CATs thus appear to occupy a 'halfway house' between public goods and private ones: owned by local government, run by independent enterprises, given to the service of local public needs. They represent a hybrid form of public good and some of the tensions inherent in that ambiguity became evident in the research conducted for this study, with reports of funding bodies challenging certain clauses within community groups' CAT leases as implying that assets could revert to the authority in the event of the group's failure. Charitable funding organisations appear wary of providing 'back door' funding for local authority properties. One interviewee had had to fight to get such a clause removed in order to secure necessary capital funding for their project:

> "And then we're in the final stages of getting a decision from the Lottery and they came back and said your lease is unacceptable. It [the lease] said that the building was non-assignable. It has to be assignable to another group with similar aims and objectives to yours." (Community group secretary, 'Katherine').

Mangialardo and Micelli (2017), make a different point, noting that, in Italy at least, the assumptions of continuing market growth and demand for property assets that marked the turn of the millennium have floundered. Policies that were put in place to facilitate private development of former public buildings and land have failed to keep pace with changes in the Italian real-estate market, which has seen demand drop and capital development projects go unfinished. This, they say, highlights one of the problems of relying on inflationary pressures in the property market as a mechanism to fund broader economic growth and prosperity. In their paper, *'From sources of financial value to commons'* they discuss how local authorities are now putting in place policies and procedures to enable bottom-up community and not-for-profit groups to occupy these spaces for the benefit of the surrounding neighbourhood and its people, rather than seeing built assets simply as a source of short-term finance. In this way, they suggest, public property has gone from being considered "a reserve of financial value" to "a commons at the service of the city's economic and social development" (Mangialardo and Micelli, 2017, p. 1399).

Should the example of the Italian real-estate market be replicated in England, this would answer the issue raised by Pugalis et al. (2014) of community groups not being able to take advantage of asset-based development opportunities because the assets they were seeking to acquire are so valuable to the proprietor (in the case of CATs, the local authority), that they can never be let go at less than best value. While this concern is still very real for properties in London and the South East of the country, Northern areas with weaker property markets may be more akin to the Italian situation, making the shift to consideration of built assets as public commons rather than financial investments more feasible. This difference in the property market between the North and the South of England may, according to representative of Locality interviewed for this study, form part of the explanation for the proportionately large number of assets transfers that have occurred in Yorkshire.

The 'Big Society' and the Localism Act, 2011

> "I think a lot of thinking around localism is very middle-England focused. It doesn't happen here. It's not the same type of place. In order to move that lock, in terms of cycles of deprivation and so on, you need a very long stick. The WI raising £300 holding a village fete isn't going to solve the problems of this area."
> ('Victor', vice chair of a charitable community group in a deprived area)

From the outset, the UK Coalition government of 2010-2015 made localism a central plank of its domestic policy. In this they sought to move even further along the road taken by New Labour of decentralising power, and shifting control of various aspects of service provision out of the hands of governmental and quasi-governmental bodies, into those of community-based groups and grassroots organisations. Described by Secretary of State for Local Government, Eric Pickles, as a "bonfire of the quangos", the new government abolished a swathe of organisations that had previously been tasked with measuring and reporting on the performance and activities of local and national government. Pickles framed this wholesale abolition as a triumph of localism and an increase in democracy, with his interview in the Daily Telegraph of August 2010 culminating in the hope that a future visiting alien would proudly be told by a resident of Barnsley that there were no leaders for it to be taken to, because "localism is now in charge" (Prince and Watt, 2010).

From the perspective of this present study, one notable consequence of this loss of agencies whose remit had been to monitor the performance of local government (Timmins and Gash, 2014) has been the lack of any national data about Community Asset Transfers. The Department for Communities and Local Government could not reply to a request for basic information about numbers of transfers undertaken, let alone provide details of types of transfer, or offer criteria for determining the success of such transfers. In rejecting the performance-based approach of previous administrations, the Coalition government left itself with reduced means to measure the success of its own policy initiatives (Timmins and Gash, 2014).

The adoption of this radical policy of slimming down the public sector meant simultaneously increasing the powers available to local authorities to make decisions without the need for approval from Whitehall, and forcing those same authorities to outsource more of their peripheral activities to partner organisations, either in the private or the third sector. The 2011 Localism Act, the policy embodiment of Prime Minister David Cameron's 'Big Society' idea, proposed five key measures to achieve this goal: community rights, including the right to challenge, the right to reclaim land and the right to buy community assets; the right of communities to draw up their own development plans; decisions about housing development being taken at a local level, rather than being based on regional or national targets; an assumption of local authority competence, allowing an authority to act as it sees fit, within the bounds of the law; and provision for greater empowerment of cities and other localities, through the direct election of public figures such as mayors or police commissioners (Tallon, 2013).

Hastings and Matthews (2015) question whether localism can be considered an equalising or empowering force, examining the ways in which provision of public services favour the middle-classes. They use a Bourdieusian framework to analyse who benefits from the key aspects of the Localism Act, and conclude that the forms of engagement promoted by the legislation are more likely to form part of the cultural repertoire of the more affluent and better educated members of the population. Earlier pushes towards increased public participation in local government sat alongside capacity building initiatives in communities seen to be at a disadvantage in these exercises. The form of localism espoused by the Coalition government, which rolled back this type of support, reinforces the uneven distribution of capability between communities and thus reinforces existing inequalities (Hastings and Matthews, 2015).

The 'Big Society' was the umbrella term used by Prime Minister David Cameron to summarise a raft of initiatives aimed at reducing the size of the state and increasing the engagement in civil life of 'ordinary' citizens. A Green Paper of 2010, entitled *Control shift: returning power to local communities* set out the essence of this vision. Although always - as Featherstone et al. (2012) describe it – a 'nebulous concept' - the 'Big Society' was promoted by David Cameron as a positive return to social values of mutual support and community empowerment, rather than as a restriction on public service provision. By facilitating enhanced 'people power', he argued, the Big Society would represent "the biggest, most dramatic redistribution of power from elites in Whitehall to the man and woman on the street" (BBC, 2010). This 'Power to the People' rhetoric, however, went hand-in-hand with a prolonged period of budget cuts and austerity measures that impacted government and welfare services at all levels and across all sectors (Featherstone et al, 2012). The Welfare Reform Act (2012), which aimed to reduce welfare dependency and cut the costs of welfare provision to the government, uses different tools and different language but its purpose is in line with that of the Localism Act: namely to reduce the size of the state and cut costs to taxpayers of providing public services.

According to Bailey (2012), The Big Society agenda, espoused by the Coalition government of 2010 to 2015, was intended as a means of replacing the loss of public expenditure by community-based, local initiatives. Localism encompassed a range of strategies that devolved power, and responsibility, down the hierarchy from central to local government and from public to community bodies (Bailey, 2012). It was thus a reactive, rather than a pro-active approach to neighbourhood engagement, used by local councils to ameliorate the problem of budget deficits and threats to local service provision. This less rosy perspective can be put into the context of broader academic and political criticism of what may be described as 'covert privatisation' of public assets and the co-option of social enterprises by the forces of neo-liberal capitalism (Fabricant, 2013, Peck, 2012). That it sits firmly within this neo-liberal agenda can be seen from remarks made by Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Local Government, as early as 2010, when he spoke of replacing 'Big Government' with the 'Big Society' (Liddle and Murphy, 2012).

As Featherstone et al. (2012) point out, this use of localism is therefore not politically neutral. They coin the term 'austerity localism' to describe a neo-liberal attack on the public sector, portraying government agencies as inefficient, fiscally irresponsible and to blame for the economic woes of the country at that time. According to this narrative, 'benefit cheats' and over-staffed public services were the villains of the recession, rather than bankers, hedge-fund managers or sub-prime mortgage lenders, whose roles in the crisis were quietly forgotten. The UK was facing massive debt and deficit problems and these were cited as the reason there were no funds available to pay for the delivery of non-core services. This put the onus back onto communities who wished to retain these amenities, requiring them somehow to fund them themselves (Featherstone et al., 2012). This led to an unequal loss of services, as communities differed in the extent to which they could pick up and carry on services that previously existed in their areas (Deas and Doyle, 2013). In the USA, austerity manifested itself principally at sub-national level, and uneven spatial development meant that the burden of the policy fell disproportionately on those urban areas without access to credit markets or other financial advantages. According to Peck (2012) this shifted the way in which localism could be regarded, from an essentially benign, even progressive, notion, into "a pressure point for some of the most pernicious consequences of late neoliberalization" (Peck, 2012, p.651).

The rhetoric of the Big Society was based in a vision of homogenous, rather old-fashioned neighbourhoods, populated by time-rich middle-class people with a particular sense of civil responsibility (Hastings and Matthews, 2015). Because of this, Featherstone et al. (2012) argue, the effects of austerity localism are indeed pernicious, disadvantaging the poorest, who are already struggling with the loss or reduction of welfare services on which they previously depended. They contrast this with the possibility of 'progressive' localism, in which grassroots activism around particular causes uses place-based interventions to effect political change for local communities (Featherstone et al., 2012). Deas and Doyle's (2013) study of neighbourhood regeneration in Manchester found that the austerity impacts of localism were not spatially evenly distributed. Even some of the more disadvantaged neighbourhoods studied had greater amounts of social capital than others because they had been in receipt of public funding from initiatives linked to the Urban Programme and its successors over an extended period. This enabled these areas to develop formal and informal structures of community engagement with a more progressive feel and for grassroots regeneration to emerge in these places (Deas and Doyle, 2013).

In using austerity localism as the framing question in their paper on Community Asset Transfers in the leisure sector, Findlay-King et al. (2018) seek to understand whether these transfers can be considered to be a form of progressive localism in the way defined in the Featherstone paper, or whether it is not more accurately described as a form of austerity localism, "using volunteers and the private sector to fill the gaps left by retreating public provision" (Findlay-King et al., 2018, p.159). They conclude that, in fact, CATs show evidence of both progressive and austerity localism in action. Some of the facilities they studied showed a high level of community engagement and the forming of a sense of local identity based on shared values. The nature of CATs means that volunteer-led organisations have considerable autonomy over the operation of their facilities and they are therefore able to meet local needs for services in ways they consider to be most appropriate. They are, however, dependent on local authority support, if only in the granting of low rents and rates in order to sustain themselves. The less support there is from the local authority, the more the individuals within the community organisation need to possess high levels of social capital in order to succeed in what is, in effect, a business. Overall, therefore, they conclude that CATs show more signs of belonging on the austerity localism side of the balance, as they are more likely to entrench existing social inequalities between neighbourhoods than to reduce or remove them

(Findlay-King et al., 2018). The present study's findings echo those of Findlay-King's in that this double-edged aspect of asset transfer is visible in both cases. As the vice chair of a community group in a deprived area, 'Victor' spoke of the limitations that a lack of local capability placed on a community's ability to empower itself:

> "Everyone around wants it to happen but the amount of time or availability or capacity people have is generally quite low, which is a major consideration for projects like this. Much as localism revolves around the idea that local people can make a difference in their own areas, finding the right person to do it locally, and to pull something like this off, is incredibly difficult." ('Victor')

The Developments Trusts Association was established in 1993 to coordinate the activities of community bodies working under the rubric of 'development trusts'. In 2011 it joined forces with British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres (bassac), which had a similar remit, and they adopted the name 'Locality', to reflect the priorities of the Coalition government and focus attention on the positive aspects of the Big Society agenda. Locality have an explicitly 'localist' agenda, arguing that democracy, prosperity and self-determination can best be achieved through the decentralisation of power and the development of area based community projects (Locality, 2018a & Locality website, n.d.). They promote CATs as an important element in building community resilience and reducing dependence on top-down governmental infrastructure. This happens, they say, because CATs:

- Encourage local enterprise and thus reinvigorate neighbourhood economies;
- Protect local assets and landmarks beloved of local people;
- Maintain local service provision at a time when such services are being withdrawn by local government bodies under austerity measures;
- Encourage the formation of partnerships between individuals, community bodies and the public sector;
- And enable the development of strong and sustainable community organisations.

(Locality website)

Community asset ownership can help support a sustainable and thriving local civil society: "In a context of reductions in grant funding, for example, asset ownership can increase financial resilience and provide a physical base for local services and community activities." (Locality, 2018b). In this way, Locality's contemporary publications follow the line taken by the Quirk report, some ten years earlier. 'Judy', a representative of Locality interviewed for this study, also considered financial security to be a key benefit of CATs: the presence of an asset on their balance sheet gave a group greater ability to borrow money or secure funds against that asset.

Locality plays a major role in promoting Community Asset Transfer both to local authorities and to community groups. Since the resignation of David Cameron as Prime Minister following the Brexit referendum in 2016, the localism agenda has languished somewhat. The Big Society was perceived to be very much his policy idea and no-one in subsequent government positions post-Cameron appears to have picked up the baton to push this agenda forward. Localism appears to have slipped out of governmental consciousness: it continues to be policy but there is little sign of it being actively promoted anymore. Locality is the largest organisation (and the only one with national visibility) still actively supporting and working up a localist agenda. They not only talk up the benefits of CATs in their publications and membership events, but they offer concrete support and help to groups and local authorities who are working through this process. One of the questions asked of community group participants in this study related to the quality of support they had received in going through the process of asset transfer. Respondents either replied that they had had no support or that the only useful help they had received had been from their local Locality representative.

CATs and ACVs

Although there is no mention of Community Asset Transfers in the Localism Act of 2011, the term is often associated with it. In part this is because the use of CATs by local authorities has increased substantially since 2011, as councils have sought to shift property costs off their books and onto other groups. But also, there is sometimes a confusion between CATs and Assets of Community Value (ACVs), which were created under the Act, as part of the Right to Bid. 'Community Asset Transfer' is used to denote specifically the transfer of publicly owned assets into community hands, but these are not the only properties that are acquired by community groups seeking to offer facilities to their local neighbourhoods. Privately owned land and buildings can also be acquired and run by local groups seeking to provide social benefits to their communities.

Under the Localism Act, community groups are defined as those based in geographical proximity to the asset, with a non-commercial structure and comprising at least 21 members drawn from people resident in that area. They can include parish councils, co-operatives, charities and companies limited by guarantee. They have the right to nominate assets they believe are of importance to the community as Assets of Community Value (ACVs). These assets can be either publicly or privately owned and the decision on whether to accept the nomination and register the assets as ACVs rests with the relevant local authority – subject to appeal through the courts. A listed asset is subject to a six-month moratorium on sale – the idea being that during this period, the nominating community group has time to find funding for a bid to acquire the asset themselves (Department of Communities & Local Government (DCLG), 2011).

Once a building (or other form of property) has been listed, the community group that made the nomination has the right to bid to acquire it, should it ever be offered up for sale. It is important to note that registration does not give an automatic (or any) right to buy, nor does it place any obligation on the vendor to offer the asset for sale. At the point where a registered ACV is offered for sale, however, the nominating group will be notified, thus preventing 'secret' sales of properties deemed to be of particular value to the local community. Should an ACV come up for sale, a community group in possession of adequate funds can make an offer on it, in the same way any other party can. The vendor is not obliged to sell to this group, even if it makes the highest offer (in contrast to the Scottish model in which community groups get first refusal on designated properties offered for sale). In this way, the rights of property holders and land owners retain their supremacy in law, but local people are enabled to express a preference (backed up by potential purchasing power) for the property to continue to play a role in community life (DCLG, 2011).

Nor does this role have to be the same as it previously occupied; pubs can be reimagined as community hubs; library buildings can become enterprise centres, and so on. Although lacking a 'right of first refusal', community groups do have 'right of first offer', meaning that, should they raise the asking price for the property ahead of the end of the moratorium period, the vendor can choose to sell to them, rather than wait to see what other bids come in at the end of that period.

The two forms of asset transfer (from local authorities as CATs and from private ownership under the Localism Act) are not mutually exclusive: designated ACVs include libraries, leisure centres and other properties owned by local authorities. A local authority can sell or let its property to a community group willing to take over control of the facility but it cannot nominate its own property for designation as an

ACV. Parish councils can, however, and when this study pulled together the list of ACVs referred to in chapter 3, it found that the DCLG's national list of ACVs for 2015 (the last date available) showed 810 out of 2613 (31 percent) of assets listed were nominated by parish councils (DCLG, 2015). This may even be an understatement, as the nature of the nominating body is not part of the legal requirement for registration.

Many of the properties listed as ACVs by local authorities in England fall into the categories identified as 'commons' by Standing (2016): libraries, allotments, school playing fields (even entire schools), parks and green spaces make up a significant proportion (more than 500) of the 2600+ ACVs listed in England at the end of 2015. These assets have been nominated by community groups of different kinds, and recognised by the relevant local authority as being important enough that they should be protected, not just be transferred into private hands without due consultation. Could this be a counter to Standing's analysis that common or publicly held assets are inevitably subject to predation by neo-liberal rentiers, seizing more of the world's scarce resources for their own personal enrichment? If so, it must be said that it is a rather weak defence, offering only the right to defer or slow such transfers, not the right to stop them.

Whether or not such was the expectation when the legislation was drafted, ACV registrations have been seen by local neighbourhood bodies as a way to stall or prevent unwelcome development in their area, and private landowners have fought against having their properties listed. There have been a number of appeals against registration, many on technical grounds, others on the basis that the asset could not sensibly be held to be of on-going value to the community, even if it had served in such capacity previously (Cant, 2016a). It would appear that the main reason for property owners' reluctance to see their properties defined as ACVs is a fear that this status would prejudice any subsequent planning applications. It should be noted, however, that the authority does not necessarily have to refuse such applications either on the basis that the proposed development would alter the nature of the property or that it would remove it from community use. A registered asset can be granted planning permission for change of use.

Should private property be defined as an ACV, the owner is entitled to compensation, to be paid by the local authority, based on evidence of loss or costs incurred in complying with listing procedures (Cant, 2016c). ACVs owned by local authorities are not eligible for this compensation, which likely explains the lack of resistance from authorities to the registration of their own assets (DCLG, 2011). This requirement for compensation may impose limits on local authorities' willingness to list certain, more valuable, types of asset, or, potentially to register assets in areas of higher land/development value. Caution about spending from over-stretched budgets on compensation to property-owners and developers may account for levels of variation seen in the number and types of listing seen across the country.

The requirement for the payment of compensation to landowners upon the registration of their property does raise another question about the legitimacy of this use of public funds: it is not clear that the proprietors of the asset have suffered any tangible loss from the listing of their properties (other than possibly costs incurred in seeking to oppose it). They may believe that they will be disadvantaged in some way, come the sale of the asset, but it is unclear that they will sustain any negative economic effect. They remain free to dispose of the asset on the open market, to sell to whomsoever they wish, and to seek market rates when they do so. The burden of cost in the ACV process rests mostly with the local authorities, who have a statutory duty to maintain the registers and to spend time considering the validity of nominations and objections (Cant, 2016c).

The Role of Local (Parish) Councils

According to their representative body, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), there are approximately 10,000 local councils in England. They are variously called parish councils, town councils, village councils and even city councils, depending on where they are situated, and they form the lowest layer of government in England. Similar structures exist in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland but these have different designations and slightly different legal powers. Historically, parish councils were associated with a local church and run by the worthies of the parish to provide charitable support to those in the community who had fallen upon hard times. In a pre-welfare state era, they doled out 'poor relief' to the elderly, the sick and disabled, widowed families, etc. This changed in 1894 when the Parish Councils Act removed all non-ecclesiastical functions from parish councils and made them elected bodies and a publicly accountable tier of government. The role of parish and town councils was further developed in the Local Government Act of 1972 and this act remains the legal foundation for local councils in England (Sandford, 2019).

It was not until 2007 when the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act set out how new local councils could be created, that the law governing local councils changed at all. Parish or town councils can now be created either on the initiative of the local authority or in response to a petition from local electors. The main criteria in deciding whether to grant such a petition are that the new council must provide effective and convenient local government and "reflect the identities and interests of the community in that area". Both the Labour Government of 2005-2010 and the Coalition Government, which followed it, favoured the creation of new parish councils as a way of increasing grassroots involvement in decision-making within a democratic governance structure. The 2006 local government white paper, which preceded the 2007 Act, spoke of the presumption in favour of setting up parish councils; and a 2013 Coalition government consultation paper on the matter stated that parish councils had a vital role to play in achieving localism (Sandford, 2019).

It became clear during the course of the present study that parish and town councils are playing an important role in both Community Asset Transfer and the nomination of Assets of Community Value. It was speculated that the reason for the abundance of parish councils in the lists of nominating bodies for ACVs was because they are simply more aware of the possibility of making such nominations; or because, as already constituted bodies, they are able to move more swiftly to preserve assets they believe to be under threat. Also, as there is sometimes an overlap of both personnel and influence between these different levels of local government, it may be that decisions by parish councils to nominate certain assets may be influenced (for or against) by knowledge of the local authority's intentions. Another possibility, that local authorities are actively making use of parish councils as part of their own strategies in this area, is discussed below.

Although legally the powers of the parish councils are equivalent to those of local authorities, in practice they lack the capacity to undertake most of the tasks, which fall to these last to perform. Some of the larger town councils may manage local facilities and supply public services but these are unusual, as most local councils are rural or village-based and have no full-time personnel. As mentioned, they possess the Right to Bid, under the Localism Act, and also the Right to Challenge. Importantly, they are also able to raise taxes through the 'precept', a charge on domestic properties levied as part of the council tax.

Increasingly, parish and town councils are stepping into roles previously occupied by local authorities; using this legal right to raise taxes (which is unconstrained by the council tax cap imposed on district, borough and unitary authorities) in order to supply services to their areas. According to articles in both the Guardian (Rustin, 2017) and the BBC News online (England, 2019), civil parish councils are taking over the funding of services that would otherwise have been lost through budget cuts. Analysing data from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), England found that three out of four English parish and town councils had increased their precepts for the current tax year; while 45 had more than doubled the Band D levy for this year (England, 2019). The reason given for this increase is the need to cover the costs of local services that were under threat. The article quotes the chief executive of a parish council who claims that it was a "stark choice" between stepping in or watching their town decline. Susanna Rustin, the author of the Guardian article, chairs an urban parish council in London and decries the fact that it is now obliged to increase taxes on local residents in order to fund youth services in the parish. The fact, she says, that town councils are being forced to step into roles vacated by bigger councils is "cause for regret, even rage" (Rustin, 2017).

There is another problem with this reliance on town and parish councils to deliver public services. There are approximately 10,000 civil parish, or town councils in England, and they exist mostly in rural areas, villages and smaller, satellite, market towns. Although it is possible for motivated local citizens to push to get a town council set up in a city (as Rustin's colleagues had done in Queen's Park, London), there are few urban parish councils at present. This means that inhabitants of urban areas, potentially with the deprivation problems associated with 'inner cities', are unlikely to have access to this tier of government as either a structure to manage local assets, or as a funding mechanism to maintain them. The potential 'safety net' (Rustin's term) of the parish council does not exist for most English city dwellers. It should also be noted that parish councils are not equal themselves in their ability to raise funds. The ability and willingness of local people to increase their council tax payments in order to cover additional disbursements for neighbourhood projects will vary significantly. Not all rural areas or small towns are prosperous and not all citizens are willing to support community initiatives through taxation. While the parish councillors of an affluent English village can assert with some confidence that there will be no real backlash to their plans to increase the precept to cover the maintenance costs of their newly transferred community assets, that will not be the case everywhere ("As an affluent area we are much more confident of being able to raise the precept." Parish councillor, 'Evan').

Already parish councils are finding that the dynamics of their role are changing. As assets and service provision pass to them, and their budgets rise to pay for these additional items, the workings of the parish councils become more visible and attract sometimes unwelcome outside interest. One parish councillor noted with dismay: "Now that there is more power at this level of decision making, there are [party] political interests now that are starting to show themselves… And that was a dynamic that I hadn't anticipated." (parish councillor, 'Evan'). As well as this increase in political activity around parish councils with CATs, the attitude of the local community towards them has also hardened. Where previously the local authority bore the brunt of neighbourhood ire about perceived service failures, the blame for local shortcomings now falls on the parish council. From being a small-scale, minority concern, the operation of parish councils is being increasingly scrutinised by local taxpayers, and they are not always impressed with what they see: "Five years from now, the community will trust the parish council and work with them, but right now it's a them and us." (Simon, parish town clerk).

As will be seen in chapter 5, certain local authorities are actively looking to the parish and town councils under their influence to take over facilities under CATs that they can no longer afford to maintain. The offer of village halls, public toilets and youth centres to town councils to manage as they see fit, is accompanied by the threat of closure of these facilities if the offer is not taken up. In putting this pressure on parish councils to pick up this burden, local authorities are undoubtedly aware of the ability parish councils have to raise funds beyond their own powers, and see this shift as a way to allow them to focus diminishing local authority budgets on core services to more deprived groups within the district. In this way, it could be said that the use of parish councils to replace local authorities as providers of neighbourhood-level services is a use of localism as mitigation to austerity, rather than as an augmentation of it. Overall, the position of parish councils in local service provision and the retention of public assets is complicated. Their role in the de-centralisation of power and re-distribution of responsibility has not received much academic investigation to date but, if present trends continue, further research would be warranted to look into this area. This will be considered further in chapter 8.

Summary

Given the political nature of Community Asset Transfers, this chapter has focused on the policies and ideologies that have given rise to them. Although not referenced by name in the Localism Act, CATs are undoubtedly being used as part of a broad-based localism agenda, pushing services and amenities from local government control into the hands of community groups. The presentation of this shift as a policy of empowerment for individuals and groups at the neighbourhood level is complicated by the impact of austerity policies, which have slashed funding for local authorities. If, as Sen (1992) contends, equality is about the ability freely to make the choices people want to make in order to live their best lives, it is difficult to see the use of asset transfers made, as it were, 'under duress' as improving equality or offering true empowerment.

On the other hand, CATs do preserve land, buildings and facilities for the use of the communities they serve. Local authority cuts are happening across the country and places where CATs are not implemented are in danger of losing those local amenities, creating spatial inequalities and increasing social injustice (Gray and Barford, 2018). Where the assets are transferred to a parish council, rather than to a social enterprise, charity or other community group, they are *de facto* retained as public assets, paid for by local taxpayers. These transfers may not be unproblematic, but they present a slightly different face to the dilemma of whether CATs are a form of creeping privatisation.

The following chapter focuses into the policies and practices of local authorities in West Yorkshire and how they deliver CATs in their districts. It will be seen that austerity is a key driver of asset transfer activity in these authorities, but also that the tool is used strategically by these councils to manage and mitigate its effects on their capacity to deliver services and retain valued local amenities.

Chapter 5: Community Asset Transfer in West Yorkshire - Policy and Practice

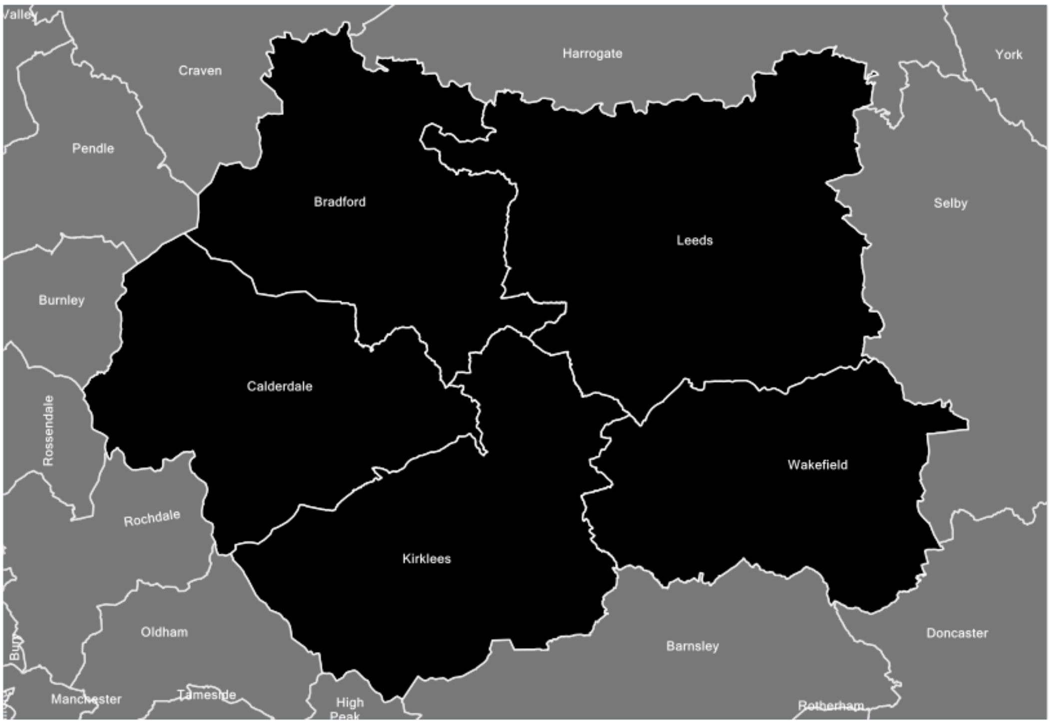
Introduction

This chapter examines the policies and practices of the five local authorities in West Yorkshire as they relate to Community Asset Transfer. As explained in chapter 3, the decision was taken to confine the present study to a limited geographical area. West Yorkshire was selected as the case study area because, according to 'Judy' a representative of Locality interviewed as part of this research, the county has a high level of Community Asset Transfer activity, making it a good place to gather data on the subject. This chapter starts by analysing levels of deprivation in West Yorkshire as a whole. The county exhibits great variation in the deprivation experienced by its residents but may be considered on balance to be more deprived than the average region of the UK.

The policies and practices surrounding CATs in West Yorkshire differ from authority to authority. The five policies are compared and these differences are noted. These are discussed in greater detail in the later section of the chapter, which discusses the findings from each of the local authorities in turn and demonstrates how variations in policy relate to different practices and attitudes on the part of councillors and council officers. The findings come from both the published policies of the councils, and from interviews with both council officials and councillors from each of the authorities. The approaches taken by these five authorities are compared and the views of both council officers and councillors reported.

An analysis has been undertaken of the Assets of Community Value (ACVs) present in West Yorkshire using the classification devised for the national view, as described in chapter 3. This enables a comparison to be made between the types of asset being registered in the county with the national picture. While there are fewer categories of ACV in West Yorkshire than cross the country as a whole, the pattern of nominating pubs and open spaces previously discovered holds true at the regional level as well as at the national.

The county of West Yorkshire is situated to the East of the Pennines in northern England. It is made up of five local authority areas: Leeds, Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield, and has a total population of 2,282,000 people or approximately 3.5% of the population of the UK (figures from 2015) (Country Digest, 2017).



Map 5.a: Authorities in West Yorkshire (Geopunk, 2019, reproduced under Open Government Licence V3.0)

All five West Yorkshire authorities have policies relating to Community Asset Transfers (CATs) and, as of November 2017, there were 57 examples of completed CATs across the county, making it one of the most active regions in England for such transfers, according to Locality. Interestingly, however, both the policies and the ways in which they are implemented show substantial variation from authority to authority. This section examines the differences discovered in the priority given to CATs and the form they take; in the nature of the bodies being offered or taking up CATs; in the types of property involved in the transfers; the places where they occur; and the challenges they present to local authorities undertaking them.

Deprivation in West Yorkshire and its Relation to Community Asset Transfers

Inequality is difficult to measure in real terms. As was discussed in chapter 2, even using Sen's capability approach, researchers undertaking fieldwork in this area struggle to identify the full range of factors that may restrict an individual's ability to choose the lives they prefer to live (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005, Kleine, 2010). For this reason, different proxy measures are used, which stand for reductions in capability, and hence in equality. The idea of place-based deprivation is one such proxy, and widely used to compare different areas in order to assess their comparative advantages and disadvantages. The five local authorities vary in the levels of deprivation experienced by their populations. This variation occurs to some extent between authorities but is actually more marked *within* some of them. Thus Bradford contains both the most (Manningham) and the least (Wharfedale) deprived ward in West Yorkshire, as measured by the 2011 census indicator of percentage of households showing no indication of deprivation (ONS, 2011). The Index of Multiple Deprivations (IMD) also reflects Bradford's problems, with a greater proportion of the Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) that make up the authority being in the 10% most deprived category than for any of the other West Yorkshire local authorities. These differences indicate inequalities on a number of different fronts. The poorer parts of Bradford are also those with the worst health outcomes, lowest life expectancy and greatest likelihood of substance abuse (BMDC website, 23/08/19, https://ubd.bradford.gov.uk/about-us/health-and-life-expectancy/).

The Index of Multiple Deprivations is the most widely used of the Indices of Deprivation employed by the British Government to provide data on social inequalities in England. It combines information from seven separate domain indices (income deprivation, employment deprivation, education, skills and training, health deprivation and disability, crime, barriers to housing and services, and living environment deprivation) to suggest an overall relative measure of deprivation. It ranks the 32,844 LSOAs in England in order from 1, the most deprived, to 32,844, the least deprived. Because it is a relative measure, it cannot inform the researcher as to absolute levels of deprivation experienced by residents in the LSOAs. Nor can it be used to track deprivation through time, because different versions of the index are calculated in slightly different ways (DCLG, 2015).

Table 5.a illustrates the difference between local authorities by comparing the median points of the authorities' Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) on the index. It can be seen from this that whilst across Leeds and Kirklees half the LSOAs sit within the 50% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country, half the LSOAs in Bradford are in the 30% most deprived in the country. Put another way, a higher proportion of Bradford's neighbourhoods are more severely deprived than those of the other West Yorkshire councils (DCLG, 2015). This results in it being ranked the 19th most deprived local authority district in England, according to the BDMC website, 23/08/19, https://ubd.bradford.gov.uk/about-us/poverty-in-bradford-district/)

and the 30th most deprived in the country, according to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG, 2015).

Table 5.a Deprivation rankings by local authority

Local Authority	Median point of LSOAs as percentage of national deprivation	Local Authority Rank by level of Deprivation (Rank of Rank/326)
Bradford	30 % most deprived	30th
Wakefield	40% most deprived	73rd
Calderdale	40% most deprived	96th
Leeds	50% most deprived	100th
Kirklees	50% most deprived	101st

Source: Indices of Deprivation 2015 explorer, DCLG

Note that in none of the five authorities does the median point lift into the 'least deprived' side of the scale and that all fall in the top third of most deprived local authorities in the country. In spite of pockets of substantial affluence, West Yorkshire can therefore be considered overall as more deprived than the country as a whole.

The potential impact of social deprivation, and the attendant lessening of capability within communities that suffer it, is recognised by councillors in the county. Councillor 'Will', whose ward includes both a very deprived area (top two percent most deprived in England) and a more affluent, lower middle class area, explained that residents in the poorer part of the ward would be unlikely to have the capability to form sustainable community groups and undergo the challenges of the CAT process. And 'Philip', a councillor from a different district, asked, somewhat rhetorically: "In really impoverished areas, yes you have a small handful of people who will be committed to do it, but have they got the business acumen? Do they know where to get access to the business acumen to make these tough decisions?"

Others are more optimistic about the ability of poorer and more deprived neighbourhoods to complete asset transfers successfully. Council officer 'Carl' made the point that resources may be available to deprived communities that are not accessible to the more affluent:

> "In fact we tend to get strong community groups in those kinds of areas and although there are the obvious disadvantages of being based in such an area, they have advantages as it's easier for them to attract certain types of funding, because a consideration for the Big Lottery is the deprivation index."

The truth of this was echoed by the secretary to a community group based in a deprived part of Calderdale, which had had to draw up a detailed 'deprivation map' of the estate on which their CAT is located in order to convince the Big Lottery fund to invest in them. Some of the problems associated with different measures of deprivation are examined further in chapter 6.

In the interview with Locality, 'Judy' stressed that they worked with groups from a whole range of backgrounds and that approximately half the CATs they'd worked with in West Yorkshire had been in more or less deprived areas:

> "It might take a bit longer. It might take a bit of support from programmes. But I think we can always get there, and bulk up and empower and bolster the confidence of groups that might not have it in the first place."

In other words, the very process of forming a group and mobilising to acquire and then manage a building or other asset helps to build capability within that group. This is what would be expected from Kretzmann and McKnight's (1993) Asset Based Community Development theory, previously discussed, but the reality on the ground, amongst community groups interviewed for this research, appears more mixed and more finely nuanced than this might initially suggest. This complexity will be discussed in detail in chapter 6, Community Groups and Asset Transfers.

Community Asset Transfers Across the Local Authorities of West Yorkshire

Community Asset Transfer is not a statutory requirement, and the Localism Act of 2011 does not use the term directly. Rather, the Act promotes the right of community groups to take over the provision of services threatened with closure by the local authority (DCLG, 2011). Community Asset Transfer is thus merely a new designation for powers local authorities already had to use their discretion when disposing of assets (land and buildings) at less than market value (often referred to as 'best value'). Disposals can be by means of the transfer of either freehold or leasehold, but are only permissible where the price paid for the asset is calculated to be less than £2,000,000 below current market valuation, and where the transfer will "help it to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area" (DCLG, 2003).

Local authorities are urged to have due consideration, when making such disposals, of their community strategies. They are also reminded that in granting disposals at less than best value, they need to remain cognisant of the European Commission's rules on State Aid, which stipulate that organisations benefitting from public support (e.g. by being granted tenancy or ownership of a public asset for less than its market value) must not use that advantage to trade unfairly with other EU bodies (DfBIS, 2015).

The extent to which the local authorities of West Yorkshire make use of CATs in order to fulfil the requirements of the Localism Act to transfer service provision (as opposed to land or property assets only) varies considerably. This research has found that in the West Yorkshire authorities, CATs tend to be primarily about buildings, and the need to reduce costs to the council (either the maintenance, insurance and other costs of the building itself, or the cost of providing the services that were delivered from the premises). Bradford Metropolitan District Council (BMDC) uses asset transfers for precisely this purpose; actively seeking to let properties, such as village halls and public toilets, which deliver local services but are unsustainable by the council under present budgetary constraints, to existing community-based organisations (mostly parish councils), in order that a needed service can be retained in a given neighbourhood. According to council officers interviewed there, Kirklees Council, by contrast, transfers the freehold of its property assets to community groups, with no particular expectation that they will continue to offer whatever service was previously housed on the premises. A representative of Calderdale Council described that authority's use of CATs as "almost entirely reactive", arising from the response of local community groups to news of the impending disposal of a local building or land asset. Leeds uses CATs to retain community facilities in neighbourhoods but without necessarily having had any prior intention of divesting themselves of the asset.

In addition to more pragmatic, financially based reasons for the use of CATs, the authorities in West Yorkshire all assert their belief in the value of the transfers for improving the nature of service provision to local communities. Interviewees canvassed as part of this study were unanimous in their view that managing their own local amenities enabled community groups to make better use of the assets, tailoring service offerings more closely to local needs and benefitting from access to alternative streams of funding and resource that local authorities are unable to draw down themselves.

> "What we're really trying to do is look beyond just the financial proposition; so actually to try and achieve a community benefit. So that's why a key part

> of the community centre work we're doing is that we think that you can do it better than us." ('Carl', council officer)

> "There's the option for them to think a little bit harder than we possibly could about how they want to sweat the asset going forward and get the best use out of it." ('Richard', council officer)

None of the council officers interviewed had yet encountered 'failed' CATs: instances where community groups had had to hand back or walk away from assets that they had taken on asset transfer. The view expressed is that it was too early in the lifecycle of these projects for that to have become an issue. There were instances, however, where groups had needed additional local authority support in order to complete the CAT process or to sustain it, once the lease had been granted. These were predominantly larger transfers and could be seen as falling into a 'too big to be allowed to fail' category. At two transferred assets in Calderdale, for example, the council had taken out long-term tenancies, moving members of council staff into the properties, to ensure that the community group had a steady, reliable income stream for the foreseeable future.

Interviewees also referred to experiences with community groups the council had had dealings with in the past, and the consensus was generally that these sorts of associations have a finite lifespan, dictated either by the changing needs of people through time (the example of the disappearance of Veterans' Associations was given in one interview), or by the loss of key members of the original groups, often without replacement, leading to a weakening of its core membership and ultimate demise. This is a problem many community groups recognise themselves. The issue of attracting new (and preferably slightly younger) members and officers was previously aired repeatedly by the community organisations of Hebden Bridge (Briggs, 2015) and it came up again in conversations with both councils and community group members in the present study. 'Judy', a representative of Locality, expressed the view that owning or managing a property helps to make a group more resilient by providing them with a base and revenue opportunities. Part of the logic of this view is that having a base in the neighbourhood will help to increase the visibility of the group within the community, and this in turn will help it to attract more people, who had previously been unaware of its existence, to use the facility or join the group.

There was a consensus among council officers interviewed that CATs progressed better and reached completion faster in areas where there was already a strong sense of community and existing local groups with suitable governance structures in place.

This is the reason Bradford council offer assets to parish councils in the first instance, and why Kirklees first started transferring properties to existing tenants. Councillor ‘Robert’ put it most succinctly: “They [parish councils] have more chance because they've already got governance structures and a source of income.” As shall be seen in chapter 6, this is true of parish councils in affluent areas, who have flexibility in raising their precept (the portion of council tax that town and parish councils have discretion to raise for their own use).

Being able to tap into a range of skills and specialist knowledge among their membership was recognised as an advantage to community groups undertaking CATs but it was not seen by council officers interviewed as a critical success factor. The point was made by both ‘Gina’ and ‘Michael’, officers in two different local authorities, that often these groups would need professional or technical expertise to help them with legal, construction or compliance issues and that it is rare for these sorts of skills to be available *pro bono*. Both ‘James’ and ‘Victor’, directors of community organisations with large asset transfers, spoke of having had substantial development costs, which needed to be met well before they were in a position to generate any sort of revenue from their assets. ‘James’s’ charity undertook a feasibility study costing approximately £150,000 and he spoke of professional fees, including legal work and building surveys, which are required by funders and as part of a fully worked-out business plan, but which carry thousands of pounds of up-front costs. ‘Victor’s’ asset needed nearly £200,000 spending on “drawing up the business plan, local engagement, consultations, developing the actual business model itself, developing the financial plans, looking at getting some other funding to help the development of the project, from architects’ fees to, you name it.” ‘Victor’ was able to capitalise these costs on his project but that may not be feasible for all groups.

Other interviewees mentioned costs incurred for electrical and other checks, solicitors, architects’ plans, consultation exercises with local people, building work and so on. In some cases they had secured funding to cover these costs: ‘Katherine’s’ group had received £75,000 from the Tudor Trust. ‘Elspeth’ said her group had been helped by Locality in their successful application for the same amount from WREN, the body tasked with distributing funds from the Landfill Communities Fund and the Scottish Landfill Communities Fund. ‘Tim’ and ‘Ryan’ had found a very cheap builder to work on their project, and had also benefitted from donations of goods and services at cost or free from local businesses. All made clear the significant challenges involved in raising money ahead of having been granted the lease.

Although the council officers interviewed shared a belief in the value of CATs for local communities, none reckoned to have seen any examples of reduced inequality in areas where they have occurred, although it was mentioned that a couple of the transfers in more deprived parts of Calderdale definitely had this as an objective. This could be because Community Asset Transfer is a relatively new phenomenon (albeit with much older antecedents) and there has not yet been sufficient time for these sorts of social changes to come to light. Councillor 'Philip' made the point that the initial challenge for a group taking control of a building was to ensure it achieved revenue and other requirements in order to be sustainable. The opportunity to work to provide more socially orientated local benefits only comes once the project is secure in its foundations. As 'Judy' from Locality pointed out, a considerable challenge for a lot of groups is that the building they take on may have significant renovation and repair problems, which need to be addressed upfront when the group takes it over. The process of acquiring control of the asset did not in itself appear to affect levels of local inequality, as far as any of the interviewees was aware.

The point was also made by 'Michael', a council officer, that the process of transferring assets, especially to newly formed community groups, takes some considerable time. This explains why, although most authorities have quite extensive pipelines for CATs in different stages of development, there are still relatively few completed transfers across the county (although, as mentioned above, West Yorkshire is still considered a hotbed of CAT activity compared to much of the rest of England). It also makes sense of BDMC's preference for transferring assets to parish councils and other already existing bodies, preferably with previous experience of dealing with the council or with similar official bodies.

Table 5.b Different approaches to Community Asset Transfer taken by local authorities in West Yorkshire

	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield
Number of completed CATs across the authority (as at end 2017)	18	11 + approx. 12 sports facilities	15	10	3
Freehold vs leasehold	All leasehold to date	All but one leasehold	Mostly freehold	All leasehold	All leasehold
Typical length of lease	99 years	99-125 years but 30 years for sports facilities	125 years	50 years	25 years
Support	New team in	Hires Locality	Hires Locality	Refers to	Makes

offered	place to progress CATs with simplification of leases, and grants to access legal support. Refers to Locality and Community Action Bradford. Hosts information events for would-be CAT groups.	to offer support to groups. Makes available grants to help with working capital. Publishes guidance for CAT groups.	to offer support to groups. Makes available grants to help with working capital and loans for capital expenditure.	established 3rd sector community organisations.	available small grants to help with start-up. Provides some services to CAT groups (eg grass cutting).
Types of acquiring organisation	Prefers existing groups with good governance (eg parish councils)	Mostly newly formed groups	Initially existing tenants, moving to newly formed groups	Mix of newly formed and existing (charitable) groups	Mix of newly formed and existing (charitable) groups
Types of asset transferred	Village halls, toilets, libraries, some open spaces	Community centres, enterprise centres, leisure and sports facilities, a local landmark	Community centres, public halls, toilets, libraries	Enterprise centres, community centres, leisure and sports facilities	Community centres, leisure and sports facilities
Proactive vs reactive CATs	Proactive	Reactive	Proactive	Mixed	Reactive

Source: Author

Table 5.b summarises some of the differences between the five local authorities in West Yorkshire, in their approach to CATs. As well as the clear difference in absolute numbers of assets transferred between the different authorities, perhaps the most striking feature of table 5.b is the difference in the length of lease offered by the various councils. Although all the policy documents of the local authorities speak of leases being up to 50 years, Bradford, Calderdale and Kirklees have found it necessary to increase this for CATs in their districts, in order for the acquiring groups to stand a better chance of raising capital funding for their projects (chapter 6 will discuss funding for Community Asset Transfer groups in more detail). That Wakefield council offers much shorter lease periods than the rest may simply be a reflection of the fact that it has only undertaken three transfers to date.

The table also discloses some variation in the support the councils offer to groups wishing to embark on the Community Asset Transfer process. It is hard to quantify how much help is provided directly by councillors or members of council staff but conversations both with council officers and community group representatives suggest that this is sometimes considerable. The role of councillors in community groups will be looked at further in chapter 6. In addition, Calderdale and Kirklees commission Locality to work with CATs in their areas while Bradford refers Community Asset Transfer groups to Locality and other community development services within the area. Similarly, Leeds refers groups needing help to local third sector community organisations. Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield also make small grants available to groups who successfully apply for CATs, in order that they can cover expenses incurred in the first instance, when they have yet to generate revenue from their building. Service Level Agreements (SLAs) setting out responsibilities the groups have with regard to maintenance of premises are commonly drawn up to accompany leases for CATs. Sometimes these SLAs will also include a clause detailing aspects of maintenance or service provision that the council itself will commit to providing, such as running a library service or mowing grass verges in front of a building.

Assets of Community Value in West Yorkshire

In June 2018, there were 135 separate assets registered as ACVs across West Yorkshire. Some of these listings were multiple aspects of the same site, thus Jenny Lane in Baildon, on the outskirts of Bradford, has four assets registered: woodland, a playground and two parts of a rugby ground. It is unclear from the register whether these all form part of the same place but satellite images of the area show the four assets to be in close proximity, if not completely contiguous. The position of the site, on the edge of the village, suggests that this area has been nominated in order to protect it from possible development. The nominating body is given as being the parish council, one of only three nominating bodies described in the Bradford ACV register. The minutes of Baildon Town Council's Environment Committee from March 2017 record the decision to split the plot into four sections in the nomination, but do not record why this decision was taken (point 1617/85 in the minutes from 23rd March 2017). The case does highlight discrepancies in the ways nominations are made and recorded even across a mere five authorities, and in spite of ACV registration being a statutory requirement.

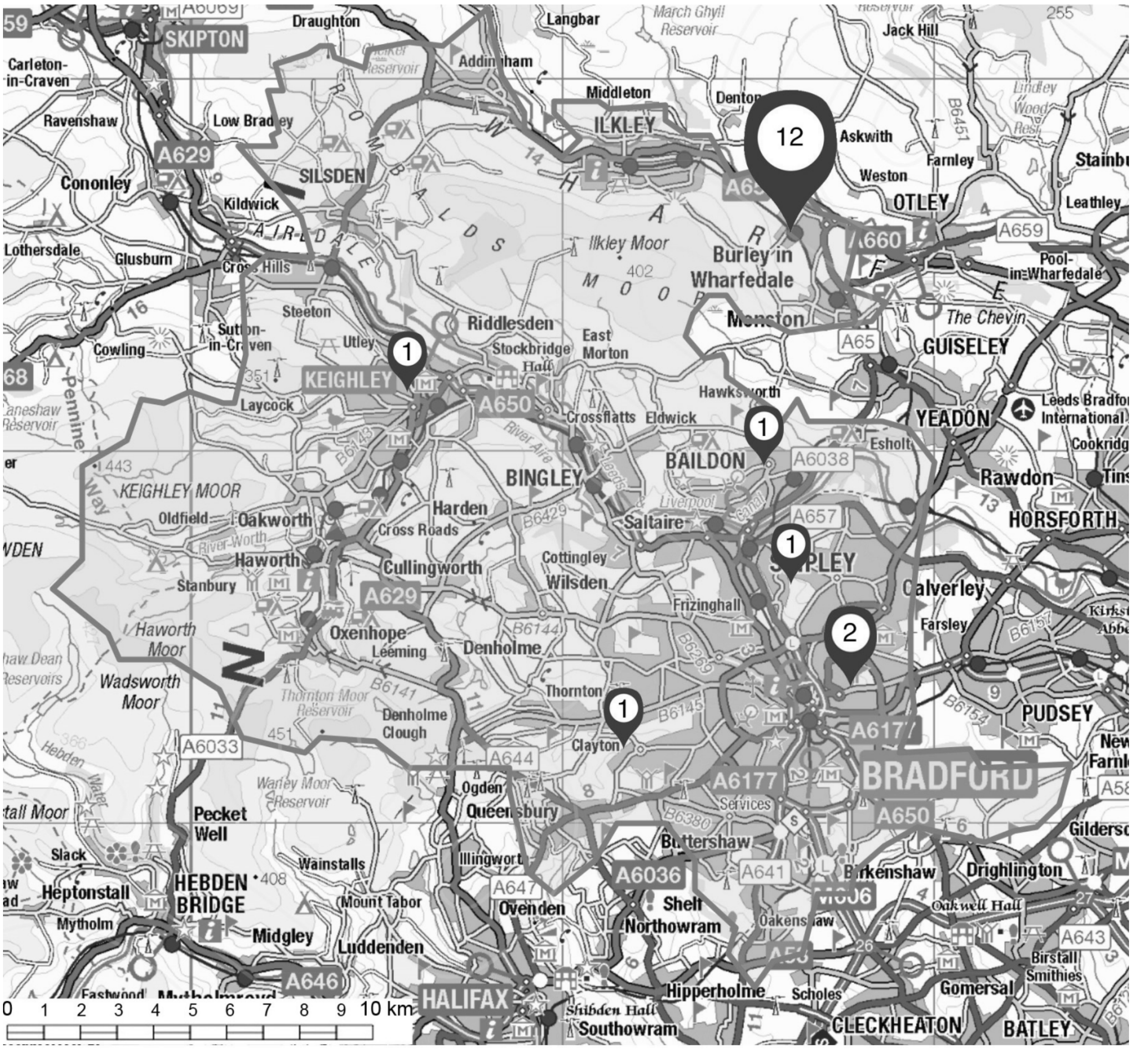
Table 5.c details the ACVs listed by the five local authorities. The numbers of assets registered varies considerably from authority to authority with the two larger, urban districts having substantially higher numbers than those councils having a more rural profile. This does not necessarily describe a significant difference between urban and rural authorities as the figures for Leeds include 19 pubs in the market town of Otley, which were block-registered in 2015, presumably as part of an endeavour to preserve the 'Otley Run', a popular local tradition. As with the national picture described in chapter 3, the majority of assets are pubs, social clubs or other licensed premises. The land assets are a mix of open, natural spaces and public parks or recreation grounds.

Table 5.c: Types of AVCs by local authority

	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield
Public houses	10	4	10	33	4
Land	13	1	4	5	
Sports facilities	3	2	1	4	1
Youth & community centres	6		1		
Libraries	2		3		
Miscellaneous	8	2	7	7	1

Source: Author

CATs in Bradford



Map 5.b: CATs in Bradford
OS Map of Bradford Metropolitan District Council Area (Edina Digimap, 2018)
Markers indicate location of CATs, with numeral denoting number of CATs in the area

According to the November 2017 update to its register of Community Asset Transfers, BMDC had completed 18 transfers, comprising 40 separate assets. The reason for the disparity is because each separate interest in land is noted on this register as an asset in its own right. These are often secondary interests, transferred as a package with the principal asset and are often in the nature of rights of way, easements or proximal verges around properties. For the sake of clarity and comparability across authorities, this study will consider the *transfers* (focussing on the principal asset transferred) as the pertinent measure of activity, rather than the *number of assets*.

12 out of the 18 completed transfers have taken place in the village of Burley-in-Wharfedale, to the north of the city of Bradford. The parish council in Burley approached Bradford Metropolitan District Council (BMDC) and requested that they be given control of all the council-owned assets within the purview of the village. In the end, all but one of these assets (a former landfill site, now a nature reserve with complex management needs) was transferred to the control of the parish council as a CAT in April 2017. It is significant that Burley is one of the most affluent areas in the country (the village comprises Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the least deprived quartile in the country), with an educated middle class community, possessing professional skills and knowledge assets, as well as an understanding of the dynamics of local politics and the media. These enhanced capitals (social, political, financial and human, to use the terminology of Emery and Flora's (2006) CCF) allow this village to take on multiple assets with complex management and financial needs.

The register also reveals that there were a further 67 transfers in progress across the district; a very substantial number and more than the total number of CATs completed across the whole of West Yorkshire at this date. This may reflect Bradford's particular approach to CATs: the council offers property and land assets to existing community groups, favouring those with transparent and democratic governance structures such as parish councils, schools and established charities, as a pro-active strategy. In large part, this approach has been dictated by the financial constraints the council finds itself confronting at the present time. BMDC is no longer able to fund the upkeep and maintenance of a number of facilities it has previously managed and these have formed the first tranche of assets it has offered to parish councils and others to manage on behalf of the local communities in which they are situated. Essentially, CATs are being used to prevent the loss of these facilities to the community and the council is pushing the use of these transfers to avoid outright disposal of property assets.

The majority of building-based (as opposed to parks, playing fields and other open spaces) CATs in the Bradford area have been public toilets, village hall community centres or libraries. The nature of these assets, together with the council's strategic decision to focus resources on maintaining services to those parts of the district with greater perceived socio-economic needs (parts of the inner city and of Keighley in Airedale have high levels of deprivation and a range of related problems) means that the distribution of CATs is skewed toward the outer edges of the authority and the more affluent market towns and villages surrounding the urban core.

How CATs are addressed, and the role they play in BMDC policy, has moved significantly over the last few years. No assets were transferred under the scheme before 2016, but in 2017 the council increased the size of the team handling transfers and embarked on the proactive programme of transfers outlined above. To start with this was led entirely by the need for the council to divest itself of expensive assets. The first step in the process was to inform parish councils that the village halls, public toilets and a number of other assets in their area would be closed – and possibly disposed of – at the end of the tax year 2017/18 if the parish council did not take over responsibility for running them. In general, the parish and town councils opted to take over these buildings and, according to councillor 'Will', this has meant that all the village halls have been kept open, and the only public conveniences to have closed have been in a part of the authority that lacked a parish council, and therefore a mechanism for acquiring them.

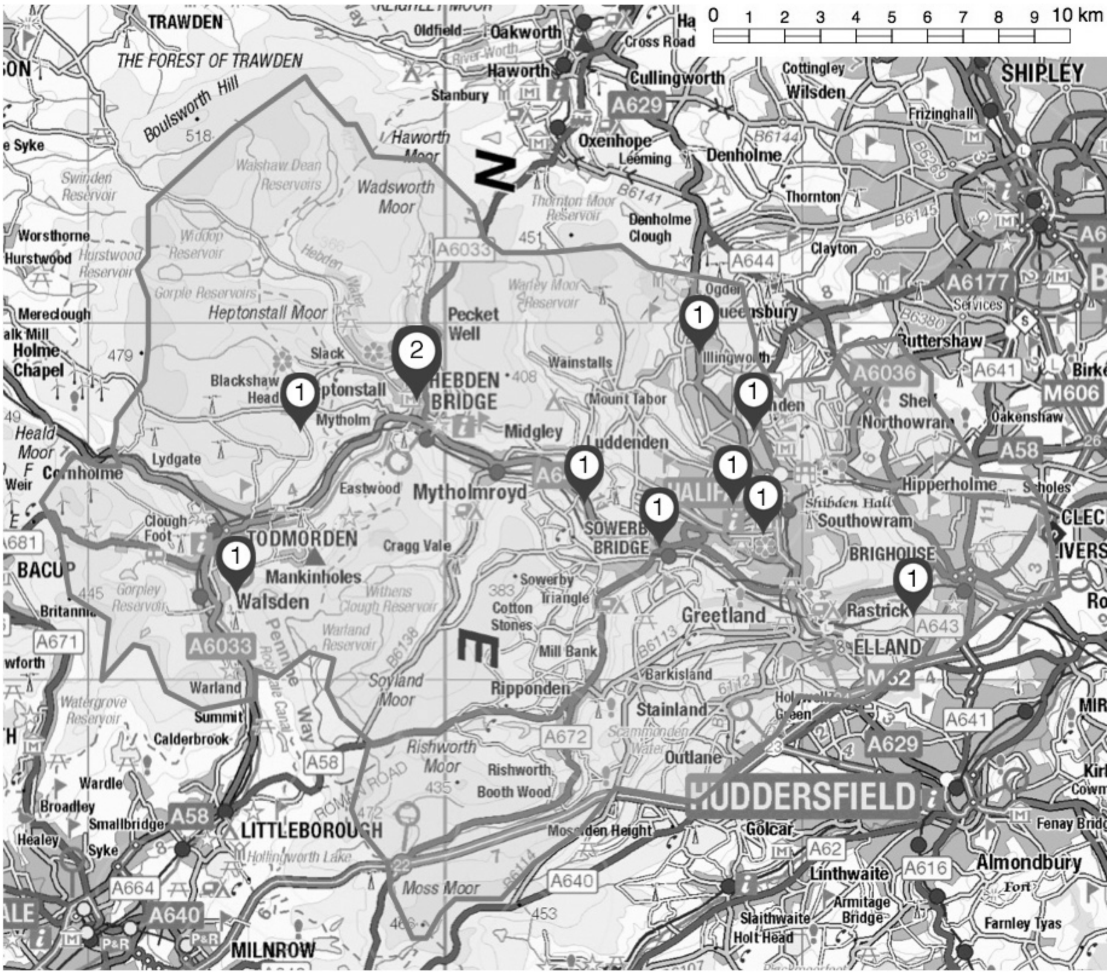
This divestment mentality has, however, given way to a more positive view of CATs, with the emphasis more about allowing local people to decide for themselves on the sorts of services they want to see in their own communities. 'Will' described the change:

> "Maybe at the start of the process, it's about cuts and liabilities and basically a general policy of shrinking the estate; so if we don't need this land, let's get rid of it... For us it was really about liability. But now, we've actually strengthened the policy. What I said at that meeting [to local stakeholders about asset transfers] was actually that even if we weren't facing cuts, we'd still be doing this programme. Now it's more about localism, encouraging and empowering communities to take things on themselves, where they're entrusted to do so."

As well as ideas of community empowerment, interviewees from councils in Calderdale, Kirklees and, to a lesser extent, Leeds expressed the view that community groups might actually do a better job than the council themselves at delivering these services. Although council officer 'Harry' initially described the value of CATs as "doing the same with less money", he later added: "It is less money but we think we can empower and enable communities to actually end up with something that's better." His colleague 'Richard' said: "I genuinely think that communities are in the best place to operate those types of community services in their area. They know what's required better than we do."

Bradford are now working closely with community organisations across the district to encourage new groups to come forward and take over redundant property assets under CAT leases. In order to simplify and smooth that process, they have drawn up a simplified lease for CATs, and provide internal support as well as offering access to external advice from both Locality and Community Action Bradford. That all this effort has only resulted in the completion of two additional transfers between November 2017 and November 2018 (although the pipeline of those 'in progress' has increased from 67 to 77) demonstrates the real difficulty of forming community groups and undertaking complex legal and financial transactions in order to revive problematic property assets. We shall return to some of these difficulties in later chapters.

CATs in Calderdale



Map 5.c: CATs in Calderdale
OS Map of Calderdale District Council Area (Edina Digimap, 2018)
Markers indicate location of CATs, with numeral denoting number of CATs in the area

The study of Community Asset Transfers across even a relatively small area, such as West Yorkshire, is complicated by the fact that they are poorly defined in policy. Councils therefore define what CATs will mean in their authority in slightly different ways. Calderdale's definition of CATs typifies this: they now only consider long-term (100 year+) leases of built assets to be 'true' asset transfers (at least within the property management department). They also let out sports grounds and other such facilities on shorter leases (30 years, typically) but do not consider those to be 'proper' Community Asset Transfers. This differential, however, is not one made by any of the other West Yorkshire councils, who offer extended leaseholds (or freeholds, in the case of Kirklees) to community organisations on both buildings and land assets under the auspices of Community Asset Transfer. This makes like-for-like comparisons of numbers and types of CAT across the five authorities rather difficult. The reason for transferring sports facilities on 25 to 30 year leases, according to both ‘Robert’ from Wakefield and ‘Michael’ from Calderdale, is that Sports England only require shorter leases in order to release funds to sports clubs that apply for them. In both councils this has led to the authority not considering it necessary to go down a full, long-term asset transfer, although the approach taken by the two authorities is still quite different, as shall be seen.

The fact that sports clubs and facilities are treated differently from other types of property transfer reinforces the idea that the logic of CATs, as far as most councils are concerned, is strongly grounded in the availability of external funding for community groups, which is not accessible to public sector bodies. A further aspect of this is that certain funding opportunities are only available to organisations with charitable status, which is why many of the community groups with CATs are registered charities as well as companies limited by guarantee or Community Interest Companies (CICs). ‘Noel’, a councillor in Calderdale, illustrated the importance of this charity status with the story of a community group with a CAT in the borough, that had been turned down by the Charity Commission and was now at risk of not being able to renovate their building as planned.

At the end of 2017 Calderdale thus had 11 acknowledged CATS but another dozen or so transferred sports facilities, which would be termed CATs in other authorities. If those sports facilities were included in the definition, Calderdale would have more CATs than any of the other West Yorkshire authorities. This is because Calderdale sees asset transfers (whether termed ‘CAT’ or not) as part of a broader strategy to increase what councillor ‘Noel’ called the ‘inclusive economy’. By this he means the creation of wealth within communities and by community businesses, which is then effectively ploughed back into the community, to the benefit of all. ‘Noel’ described Community Asset Transfer as a gateway into this larger policy initiative.

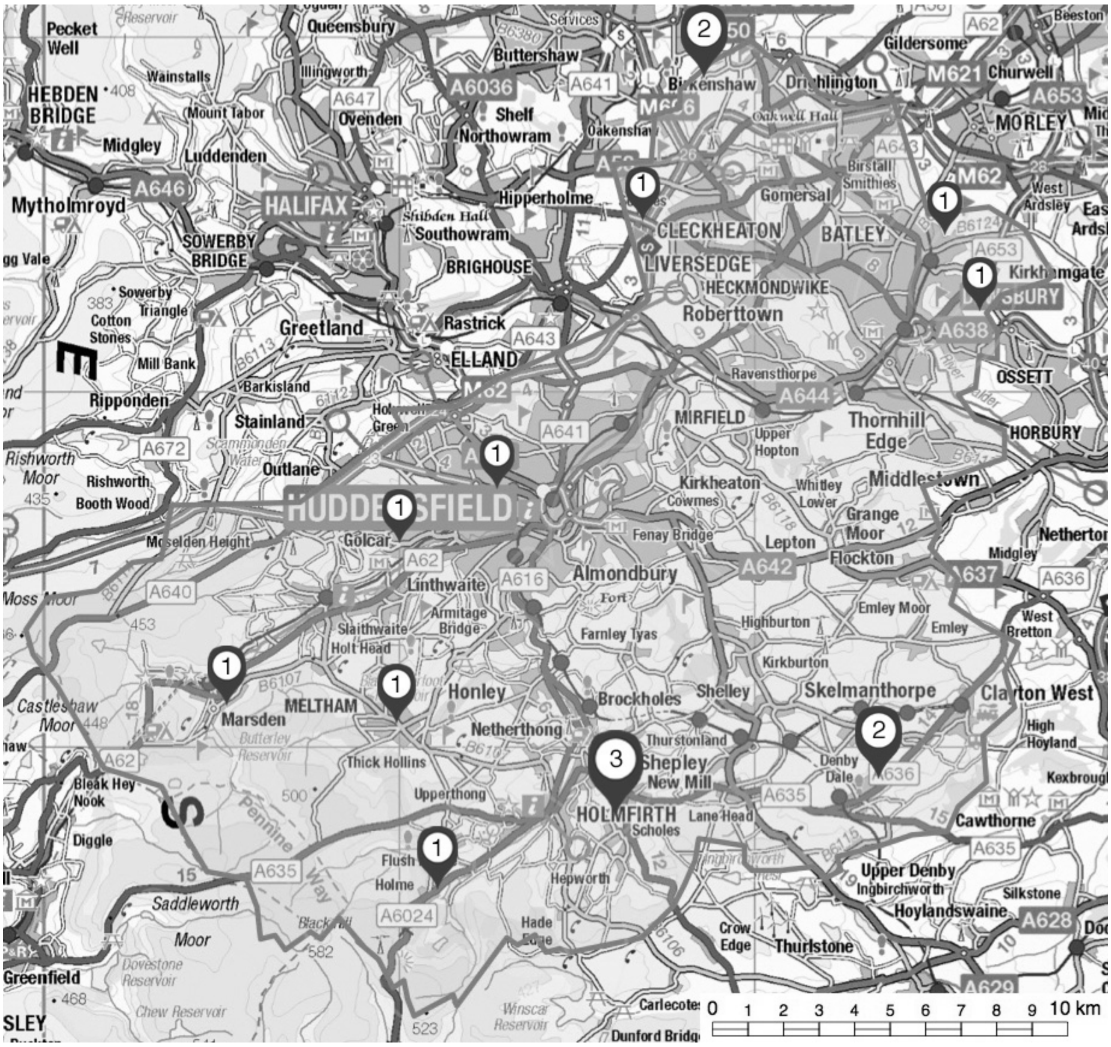
Because CATs in Calderdale typically start with a community group coming forward to object to council plans to dispose of an asset, there is a tension within the authority (within the property and asset management department, even) between the need to generate capital receipts from such disposals, and the desire to strengthen communities by granting them control of buildings in their neighbourhoods to be used for social purposes. This might account for an aspect of Calderdale’s interpretation of CATs, which varies from that of its neighbours: namely its insistence that groups taking over an asset on this basis provide some additional community benefit, over and above whatever the building was offering before. Thus a Calderdale-based community brass band, in dire need of new accommodation, could only be offered a piece of land on which to build new premises if they agreed to offer extra services to local community groups. It was not enough that they would continue to offer the band practice, training sessions and youth orchestras that they were already doing (even though these were recognised as benefitting the community), under Calderdale's CAT rules, they had to create new activities to engage different sections of the community and bring them into the building. This is in contrast to the approaches taken by the other West Yorkshire councils, which simply require community groups to be using the asset for the benefit of the community, often in much the same way the council itself had been using it. Calderdale insists that there has to be what council officer 'Michael' called a "clear additional benefit" to making the transfer, to offset any financial loss to the council.

CATs in Calderdale are mainly either community centres or enterprise centres – sometimes both. A number of the transfers have been very large: the Centre at ThreeWays, repurposing the old Ridings secondary school premises, was thought to be physically the largest single site CAT in England when it went through. The historic Halifax Piece Hall, which was transferred in 2017, is approximately the same size. Calderdale can therefore lay claim to the two largest CATs, by area, to have taken place to date in England.

The transfers are distributed around the district, and, according to the IMD and ward level deprivation data, there is no clear pattern of deprivation (or lack thereof) associated with CATs in Calderdale. It is true, however, that the Calder valley, which stretches out to the west of the borough, has a disproportionate number of CATs for the size of its population. This appears to reflect a particular communitarian sensibility amongst the residents of the different settlements along the valley, with Hebden Bridge especially noteworthy for the number of active community and cooperative groups at work there. Council officer 'Michael' said that CATs in the borough tend to happen "in areas with strong community… Where you have existing groups and they're ready and able to move forward." 'Michael' also pointed out that the more deprived areas of Halifax town had few, if any assets in community hands but it is not clear whether this is solely a factor of deprivation, or whether these are less coherent, stable neighbourhoods with fewer permanent residents. If a sense of community is a key factor in where CATs are done, areas with more transitory populations would be expected to have fewer of them.

As in Bradford, there is an active programme of asset transfers under consideration in Calderdale and the council recently announced that the former Todmorden College buildings were to transfer to local group, Todmorden Learning Centre (TLC), rather than be sold to supermarket chain Aldi (staff reporter, Todmorden News, 2018). Although there is strong local community support for this transfer, the group has been beset by internal problems and it is not clear whether the transfer will ultimately go through. Asset transfers in Calderdale have not always gone smoothly, in spite of the authority's enthusiasm for them. As previously mentioned, two of the larger CATs in the borough: Hebden Bridge Town Hall and the centre at ThreeWays, have needed additional local authority support. This did not dampen Councillor 'Noel's' enthusiasm for the transfers but he recognised the potential problems with putting the policy into practice.

CATs in Kirklees



Map 5.d: CATs in Kirklees
OS Map of Kirklees Metropolitan District Council area (Edina Digimap, 2018)
Markers indicate location of CATs, with numeral denoting number of CATs in the area

Kirklees Council's approach to CATs demonstrates yet another variation in the way in which transfers are made. Unlike the other West Yorkshire local authorities, Kirklees prefers to transfer assets freehold, not leasehold. Of 15 completed CATs to the end of 2017, 12 went through as freehold transfers, with only three being retained on long-term (99-125 year) leases. While several of the other local authorities charge a nominal, peppercorn rent to community groups who take over assets, Kirklees makes its transfers at nil consideration. This applies both to the freeholds and the leaseholds. As well as the completed CATs, Kirklees had a pipeline of 13 transfers both in progress and awaiting cabinet approval as of December 2017 and another ten possibles at an early stage of discussion. Council officer 'Gina' described it as "really active area" for Kirklees council.

In order to maintain some control over the use that can subsequently be made of these assets, freehold transfers include a covenant restricting their operations to community uses, and stipulating that, in the event that the acquiring organisation can no longer support the asset to provide these community benefits, the asset will be passed on to some other charitable or equivalent body, which will run the asset for that community. Kirklees council also sets down a limit on the amount of commercial activity that can be undertaken within the asset, in order to ensure that creeping commercialism is prevented in assets that have been designated as being 'community owned'. That limit is generally 30 percent of revenue but there is some flexibility in this figure, in order to allow larger, more expensive properties to earn enough money to cover their costs. One effect of the transfer for freehold is that there is no mechanism in place for the council to take back control of assets once they have been transferred.

Like Bradford – and in contrast to Calderdale – Kirklees actively pushes CATs to existing community groups. They embarked on their Community Asset Transfer journey in 2011 by offering incumbent leaseholders of assets owned by the council the opportunity to acquire the land or buildings they had already been running, and to manage them as a CAT. Most of these groups had been on shared responsibility leases, rather than full repair and maintenance leases, so the shift to community ownership meant some increase in liability for the group. This is not, however, such a large difference as it would be for groups in local authorities where the council retains full responsibility for building maintenance (such as most of the leases to community groups in Wakefield, for example). Unlike in Bradford, the majority of CATs in Kirklees have not been to parish councils or their equivalent but to organisations that are listed as charities or companies - either limited by guarantee or CICs. In some cases the community organisation is both.

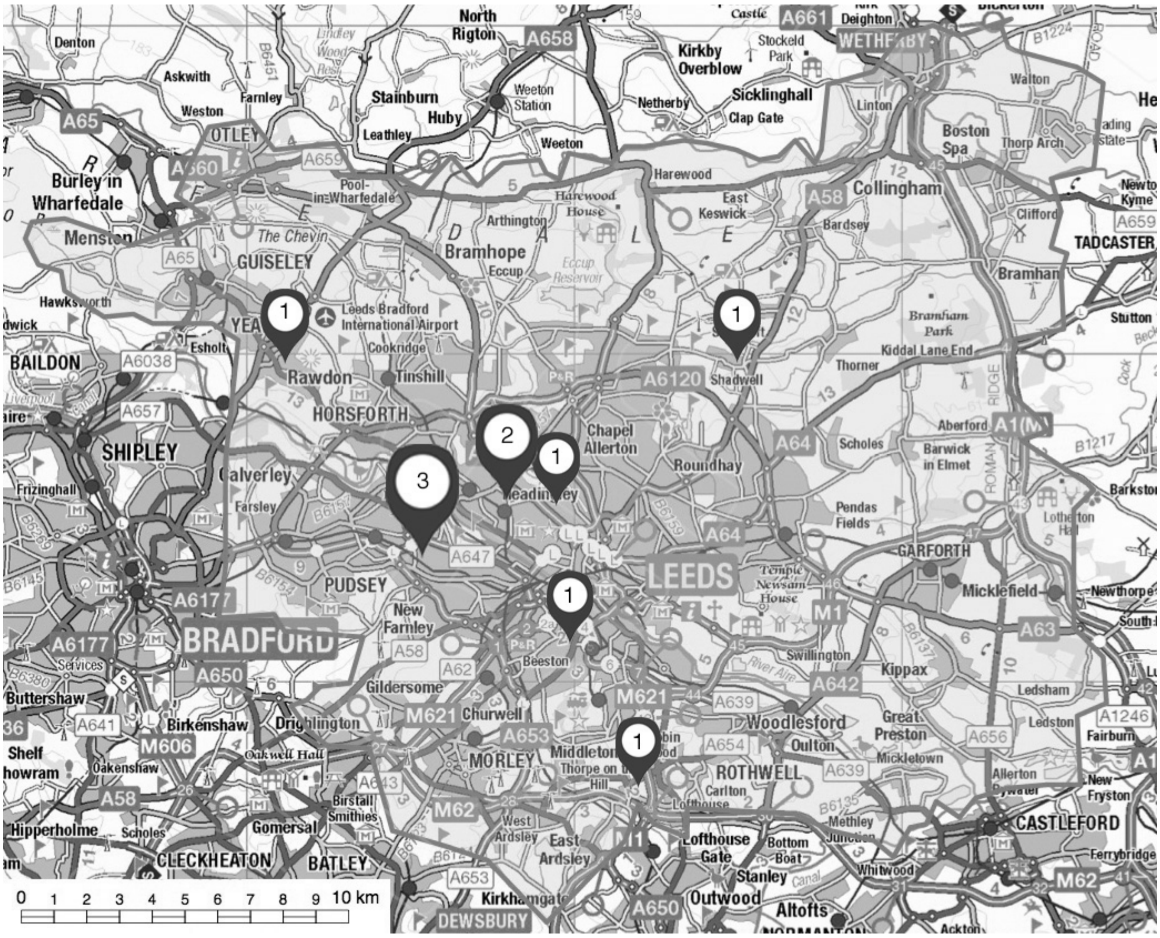
As with all the councils, the motives behind Kirklees' decision to support CATs are multiple, but financial considerations play a crucial part in the policy decision to reduce the assets owned by the council. The council is seeking to rationalise its building requirements in order to control its costs and one way in which it does this is by transferring costly assets. In spite of finance being such a central consideration for Kirklees council in undertaking CATs, they have put considerable resources into supporting groups through the transfer process. The property team work in conjunction with their colleagues in the communities team to prepare groups for the CAT as best they are able. The support is both in time given by council officers and in cash. Like Calderdale and Wakefield, the council offers small development grants (up to £5,000) to groups who can show that they need the money for upfront fees like legal costs and surveying. Unlike any of the other West Yorkshire authorities, they also offer a working capital fund equivalent to 15% of two years running costs for the site. The idea of these grants is to ensure that new (or newly independent) community organisations have a financial cushion to carry them through the transfer and into the early stages of their activities.

Kirklees also offers matched-fund loans of up to £200,000 to groups if these are submitted as part of their initial business plan. These are purely for capital developments and the group must show when it applies for the loan that it has a matching amount guaranteed by another funder. This is not always straightforward to achieve as capital funding grants and bank loans are generally only made available to organisations that are already in control of the property they are to be used to build, repair or extend. At the time of the interview, there were only two such requests for capital loans in prospect. Loans from local authorities are possible sources of funding in other districts but only Kirklees explicitly made the link with CATs.

The largest category (seven out of fifteen) of transferred assets in Kirklees have been community centres, sometimes with associated leisure, learning or enterprise functions. In addition, they have transferred three 'civic' buildings (public halls) and two lots of public conveniences. Although there are some larger CATs in the pipeline, the ones completed to the end of 2017 tended to be quite small. Where premises previously offering a council service have been transferred, only the buildings themselves were involved in the transfer. The services previously offered in those buildings, e.g. library provision, have been retained by the council. In the library that had been transferred at the time of the interview, the service was being delivered by the acquiring community group but under a Service Level Agreement from the authority. This is similar to an arrangement between Burley parish council and BMDC, under which Burley mows the verges throughout the village on behalf of the local authority. Kirklees retains the right to withdraw library services from that building in the future, should its strategy change. For this reason an acquiring group's business case needs to show, from the outset, how it will sustain financially if those services get withdrawn.

In common with both Bradford and Calderdale, the majority of CATs in Kirklees have happened out in the more rural (village and market town) parts of the authority. A couple have occurred in some of the more deprived northern parts of the district but the majority have been in the more affluent areas on the edge of the Peak District, to the south. According to council officer 'Gina' it is the areas with strong parish councils that show most proclivity to take over assets, but in the early phases of the policy, groups based on small community centres in less affluent areas were as likely to take up the challenge of managing the centres themselves. For larger transfers, however, she believed that having individuals within a group who had legal, business or marketing experience was a distinct benefit. This clearly marks areas of greater capability as being more likely to succeed in taking ownership of more substantial assets. This point will be picked up again in chapter 6.

CATs in Leeds



Map 5.e: CATs in Leeds
OS Map of Leeds City Council Area (Edina Digimap, 2018)
Markers indicate location of CATs, with numeral denoting number of CATs in the area

Leeds City Council has the longest and most detailed Community Asset Transfer policy of those seen as part of this research. Although the council is keen to stress that CAT is simply one potential approach that can be taken in asset management and disposal, the policy covers matters such as possible Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) implications for existing council employees who may face redundancy upon transfer, and a process for ensuring on-going service provision in the event of the acquiring community group not being able to continue to deliver. Most local authority policies do not mention these issues, possibly because of the varying functions these authorities perceive CATs to be fulfilling.

In spite of this comprehensive policy, however, Leeds does not consider CATs to be a central plank of its property management strategy. Council officer 'Carl' was at pains to stress that Community Asset Transfers is just one policy amongst many that are used to manage the borough's property portfolio and remain quite a rarity within the authority, with only one or two transfers being completed in any year. Councillor 'Philip' was also guarded in his support for CATs. He stated that the council's attitude to CATs is more reactive than proactive and that its value in more deprived areas is limited by a possible lack of 'business acumen' amongst residents in some of those communities.

He also challenged the underlying rhetoric of the Big Society:

> "I'm someone who always believed that the Big Society was in existence anyway. It didn't need David Cameron to tell us all about it because we've got people volunteering and people with a social conscience... Leeds has always had a thriving charitable sector. So the Big Society's always been there. We've had St George's crypt who'll help the homeless – we've always had it! So you don't need to get politicians involved with things, it politicises things." ('Philip', councillor).

In other authorities, CATs tend to follow either from a disposal notice on a local building, or from a decision by the council no longer to offer the service that building has been used for in the area. Similarly, a few years ago, much of the energy around CATs in Leeds arose from campaigns to save iconic buildings from disposal, demolition or disuse, but the authority's current policy emphasis is on ensuring that local people retain access to community-based facilities. As in Bradford, this can be where the council can no longer fund a particular service and offers the associated asset as a CAT e.g. a local library; or it can be a project instigated by a community group, who approach the council wanting to offer a higher level (or different type) of service from a building in council ownership.

Unlike other authorities, Leeds does not see its CATs policy presenting a conflict with its capital receipt budget. On the one hand, most of the properties they transfer under the policy are not assets that they would have considered for commercial disposal and, on the other hand, once the sales value of an asset has been written into the council's budget, they are unwilling to let it go as a Community Asset Transfer. This contrasts with the position in Calderdale, where the majority of CATs arise as a result of the council declaring that they are going to sell an asset and the local community forming an organisation to prevent that outcome.

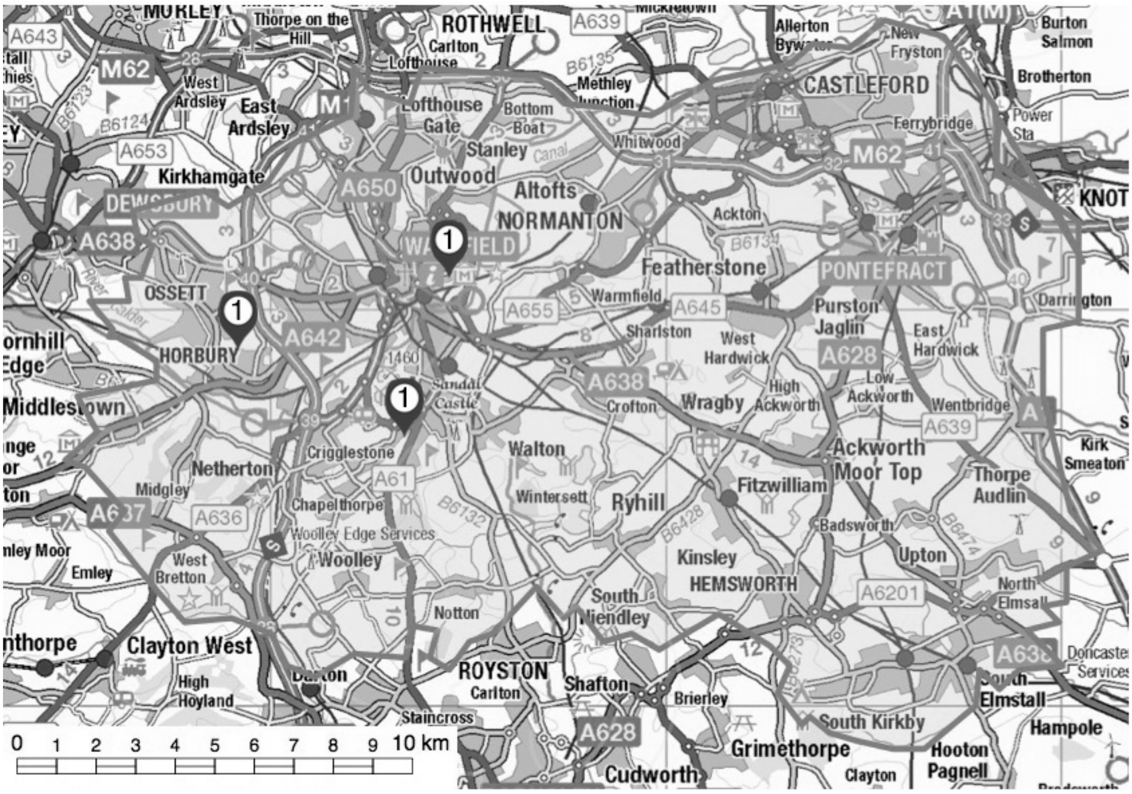
CATs (and their antecedents) in Leeds have been carried out in communities with varying levels of deprivation. Some of the poorer parts of the city, as well as some of the most affluent, have had often quite substantial assets transferred to them.

According to council officer ‘Carl’, deprivation did not necessarily form a bar to Community Asset Transfer. Echoing the thoughts of other interviewees like council officer ‘Gina’ in Kirklees and Locality representative ‘Judy’, he pointed out that these are often cohesive communities, which is perhaps the most important factor for success in a CAT. The council maintains links with community anchors in these less affluent areas and these often act as conduits for CATs and other community-led development programmes.

In addition, as both ‘Carl’ and community group trustee ‘Katherine’ explained, scoring high on the Index of Multiple Deprivations (IMD) is considered positively as part of the scoring mechanism when applying for funding from, for example, the Big Lottery.

10 CATs have taken place in Leeds and, in contrast to Bradford and Kirklees, the majority of these sit within the city envelope. It is notable that these assets are often situated in lower income areas of the city and this is probably explained by the fact that CATs in Leeds are more likely to have employment, training or educational functions than do those in other authorities. Five Leeds CATs can be classed as ‘enterprise hubs’, as against three such in Calderdale and one in Kirklees. An enterprise centre is listed on the Wakefield authority website, but further investigation reveals that this facility has been closed for some time.

CATs in Wakefield



Map 5.f: CATs in Wakefield
OS Map of Wakefield Mettropolitan District Council area (Edina Digimap, 2018)
Markers indicate location of CATs, with numeral denoting number of CATs in the area

According to the Wakefield Council website, there have been only six completed CATs in the district to date. On closer enquiry, however, three of these appear questionable: St Peter's Church at Stanley is a church hall now being used as the permanent place of worship for the local Anglican congregation, following the demolition of their previous, Victorian building in 2012. Although it does act as a local community centre, it appears to be wholly owned and managed by the Church of England. According to the South Elmsall Town Council website, the Westfield Resource and Community Centre closed in 2010. The parish council still appears to own (or at least manage) the building but it is not clear that it is currently in use. Sharlston Community Centre Land; appeared, at the time of the study, to be a piece of waste-land adjacent to the community centre. There is nothing to suggest that either it or the centre itself is run by anyone other than Wakefield Council. This means that Wakefield has only three transferred buildings currently being run by community organisations; a figure corroborated by council officials. This is a much lower number than for any of the other councils in West Yorkshire.

Wakefield Council has a CAT policy, laid down in its Asset Management Plan 2011-2016, which, whilst not overly positive in its response to the idea of transferring property assets back to community groups, did set out the ways, means and requirements for such transfers to take effect. Evidently, very few did. This can largely be explained by Wakefield council's perception that CATs are not necessarily the best way for local groups to utilise buildings in order to deliver social value to their communities. According to 'Robert', a councillor interviewed for this research, Wakefield makes use of regular, long-term (25-30 years) leases, and community groups actively prefer the security afforded by this form of tenancy, where the council remains responsible for repairs and maintenance of the assets, than taking the risk of fully transferred responsibility on themselves. As councillor 'Robert' put it:

> "Leases can go wrong but the majority of times when you pass a 25 year leasehold, I believe it's easier, it's cleaner, and they do tend to feel a lot more comfortable with the fact that they've got a lease but we're sat in the background effectively if anything really did go wrong."

Another reason why community groups in Wakefield might be more reluctant to undertake CATs than they seem to be elsewhere in West Yorkshire is that Wakefield insists that any property transferred under a CAT has to be offered to the market as part of the process. None of the other councils make this stipulation and, according to 'Helen', the council officer within whose remit CATs fall, discovering that they will have to compete against other groups who might want the building, puts many of them off proceeding. This is another example of the wide variation in interpretation that is found across this small selection of neighbouring local authorities.

Councillor 'Robert' also speculated that community groups were put off seeking transfers of council-owned buildings in the Wakefield area because of the nature and state of those properties.

> "Some of our buildings, the reason we're pulling out of them is because they aren't sustainable for us and they're old buildings. Maybe that's why we're not getting as many community groups coming forward, because they're looking and thinking: We don't want that!" ('Robert', councillor).

This, however, does not entirely explain the difference between Wakefield's level of CAT performance and that of the other authorities, as many of the buildings transferred right across the county are old and in relatively poor states of repair, as shall be discussed further in chapter 6.

Overall, Wakefield considers CATs to be a secondary tool in in its property management kit. 'Robert' described the council as "looking at their buildings slightly differently [from other councils]". This may be a reference to the fact that in 2016 Wakefield outsourced its property management portfolio (amongst other things) to French facilities management company, Engie (Mort, 2016). This partnership arrangement, as it is described in a Wakefield council cabinet report, aims to save the authority £10 million over the ten years of the contract and may be part of the reason so few CATs are being planned in the borough. Conversations with council officers across West Yorkshire have made clear that Community Asset Transfer is a time and resource hungry exercise for both town hall staff and community volunteers. In seeking to outsource this activity, Wakefield has acted to lessen its potential impact on the council's ability to pursue other activities it considers to be higher priorities. Kingston-upon-Hull City council has a similar partnership with property management consultancy, NPS Group, and, according to one interviewee, that authority transfers nothing at less than best value. It seems likely that commercial pressures in authorities where property and asset management are outsourced in this way make CATs less feasible or attractive.

Summary

West Yorkshire falls in to the 'most deprived' half of UK regions, as opposed to the 'least deprived' half. Deprivation across the county is, however, very varied, with pockets of affluence as well as areas with considerable poverty. This variation can be as large within a local authority district as it is between authorities. In fact, Bradford Metropolitan District Council covers some of both the most and least deprived areas in the county. This difference in deprivation experienced by different communities is perceived to lead to differences in the capability of communities to take advantage of CATs as a way to benefit themselves. Councillors interviewed for the study recognised the unequal nature of capability distribution among their constituents but this was not described as necessarily being a reason to avoid CATs. The representative from Locality went so far as to suggest that more deprived communities could gain significant value from asset transfers, even if they might need more support in achieving them.

The five local authorities all have policies regarding CATs. These set out the process by which applications will be dealt with and the steps community groups wanting to take on council assets will need to go through. Beyond this, the policies vary considerably in length and detail. There are also differences of emphasis in the ways in which CATs are conducted. Two of the authorities take a proactive approach to asset transfer, offering existing groups in their districts assets to acquire, usually because the authority itself can no longer afford to maintain these. The other councils are more reactive, responding to requests from community groups for CATs. The reactive position can be further complicated if the asset concerned is being considered for disposal by other means (i.e. commercial sale). In Leeds and Wakefield such assets are unlikely to be offered as CATs; in Calderdale, there is greater flexibility – although not without tension. None of the councillors interviewed expressed any hostility towards the transfer of assets from local authority control into that of community groups, although a couple were sceptical of their potential for enhancing community life. Others saw CATs as beneficial for the neighbourhoods where they occurred and took the view that the local community could better manage these assets than the council had.

Comparing the practices of the five local authorities brought out both similarities and differences in their approach to CATs. All authorities referenced budget constraints as a major factor in undertaking CATs. The fact that very few transfers of this kind had taken place before austerity policies began to impact on their finances suggests that this has been a primary driver of asset transfers in West Yorkshire. Although CATs were talked up in interviews, it appears that, from a council perspective at least, they do represent a form of austerity localism, transferring public assets and services out to third sector organisations as a cost-cutting exercise.

The attitudes of the local authorities are further clarified by the ways in which interviewees from community groups spoke about them. These are discussed further in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Communities and Asset Transfers

Introduction

As well as interviewing officers and councillors in the five local authorities of West Yorkshire, the research involved interviews with representatives of community groups that had either gone through an asset transfer/acquisition or, in one case, were hoping to do so. 16 community group representatives were interviewed, all of whom had been involved, or were currently involved, in the transfer process. They represented a spread of different organisational forms and structures, different types of transfer, and different sorts of neighbourhoods. Table 6.a lists the sorts of asset these interviewees were involved with, although neither the assets nor the individual interviewees are identified by name or local authority area, in order to preserve their anonymity. This chapter sets out the main themes of these interviews, starting with a brief oversight of the sorts of organisations that have taken over the running of community assets across the county.

Table 6.a types of assets managed by research participants

Asset Designation	Asset Description
A	Former school, now a community hub, enterprise and training centre
B	Small local community centre, closed for some time
C	Former school, now a community centre
D	Small community centre with sports facilities
E	Former college, to become an enterprise and training centre
F	Swimming pool and leisure centre
G	Library and community centre
H	Playing fields
I	Village hall and children's play centre
J	Recreation ground
K	Car park
L	Park with sports pavilion and associated structures
M	Village green
N	Public conveniences
O	Community pub
P	Library and community centre
Q-T	Assorted parcels of open land

Source: Author

Organisations with CATs

In order to be eligible for a Community Asset Transfer, an organisation has to be a legally formed entity with a suitable governance structure. They cannot be companies limited by shareholding, or any other manner of profit-taking organisations. This leaves a wide variety of organisational forms and governance structures from which to choose, and across West Yorkshire there are 11 different descriptions used by organisations managing CATs, the most common being 'company limited by guarantee', of which there are 11.

The second most common designation for community groups with CATs is that of 'charity'. Sometimes this is in conjunction with being a company or trust, sometimes the only available description of the group is 'charity'. Being a Registered Charity offers many advantages to a community group, foremost amongst which is being able to access funding sources from which non-charitable bodies, even ones with the same avowed aims and governance structures, are barred from taking. Indeed so critical can it be that a group gain charitable status, according to Calderdale councillor 'Noel', that a community group with a CAT in his authority is threatened with failure because its application to the Charity Commission was turned down. If this group is unable to secure capital funding for its refurbishment of the semi-derelict building they have taken over, they will not be able to realise their objectives for the Community Asset Transfer and the building may revert to local authority control. The problem they have had is that all the funds currently offering grants for that sort of capital project, require recipients to be registered charities. Gaining this status is therefore critical to their viability. As 'Tim', a community group director in another organisation, put it:

> "We needed to be a charity in order to raise money, because nobody would give us money unless we were kosher. And as a CIO [Charitable Incorporated Organisation], we could give them a charity number and then start to raise serious money."

A smaller, but nevertheless, significant benefit of charitable status is exemption from business rates. This comes at the discretion of the local authority but can represent a substantial saving for larger premises.

Where there was less need for Community Asset Transfer holders to lay hands on large capital grants, charity status was seen as more optional. In interviews with community group trustees and directors, a pattern emerged of groups forming first as companies or trusts of some kind, and then applying to become registered charities subsequently. Some of those who had not registered to do so were put off by the perceived workload in both gaining and retaining charitable status, and by the likely increased expense of preparing annual accounts to the standard required by the Charity Commission. This was clearly more of a problem for smaller, economically more marginal groups than for the larger ones.

In conversations with members of community groups who had gone either through CATs or through the acquisition of an asset through the ACV process, the following broad categories emerged as the most significant to community groups undergoing these transfers:

- **Problems inherent in the nature of the asset itself** – whether it is fit for purpose from the point of transfer; whether there is an existing revenue stream available to support the group's activities; whether the premises are suitable to accommodate permanent anchor tenants; does the service provided on the premises require specialist personnel or restrict use in some way;
- **The support of the local authority and other external bodies** – how easy the process was made; any financial or training support received; the relationships the group had or has with individual councillors;
- **Accessing funding and the financial issues facing community groups** – where and what types of funding were available to the group before, during and after completion of the transfer; how easy or otherwise it is to access that funding; what costs need to be borne in order for the group to sustain; sources of ongoing revenue and the challenges of raising that;
- **Issues of group membership and capacity** – the number of active members in the group and the age profile of these members; the time commitment required in order to progress through the CAT itself and then run the building and the group; the need for skills and knowledge to complete the transfer and where that had come from; conflict and change within groups, both in the matter of the group's sustainability and in regard to the differing requirements of the transfer period and subsequent management of the asset;
- **The level and nature of local support for the project** – does the wider community know or care about the CAT; and in what ways does the transfer benefit the local community; does the building have sentimental or practical value to local people and do they make use of it once it is transferred;

- **The influence, if any, of social deprivation in the area on the success of the group** – how are CATs distributed across different neighbourhoods with differing deprivation profiles;

Each of these dimensions will be considered in turn.

The Nature of the Asset

Of the ten different community organisations interviewed for this research, all had made or were planning to make significant investments in the asset they had taken over. In four of the cases this was to upgrade existing facilities to make them more appealing to users or to enable a broader range of uses and users to enjoy the facility. In the other six the works were more basic: essential repairs to secure the fabric of the building; updates to utilities to bring the building into compliance with health and safety legislation. In two cases, the group planned complete demolition of the structure that had been on site, and its replacement with a brand new building.

Although Locality's 'Save Our Spaces' campaign emphasises the idea of community acquisition of local assets as being "to save our much-loved publicly owned buildings and spaces" (Locality, 'Save Our Spaces' campaign, 2018) the idea of preserving an iconic local landmark was only mentioned as being part of the motivation for CAT in two of the groups studied. Other interviewees were either ambivalent about the building they had taken over, or considered it a liability. As community organisation vice chair, 'Victor' put it: "if you'd had £10,000,000 in your back pocket, you'd probably flatten this place and build another one. We didn't have that luxury." Council officer 'Carl' in Leeds had also seen a shift over time in the way asset transfers were used:

> "Around the time of the Quirk report, community asset transfer just used to be about let's save this building; whereas now it's not about that. It's about working with local authorities to ensure that communities can continue to benefit from the facilities."

Even where a community organisation has taken control of an iconic or landmark building, this may not be an unalloyed benefit. Bramley Baths was converted to its current use from an old mill, in the Edwardian era. The original mill chimney, a Grade I listed structure and local landmark, remains part of the building complex and is built of 19th century bricks, each of which is stamped with the maker's mark of a brickworks, which ceased to exist decades ago. If, or when, the chimney needs repair and these bricks need replacing, the new ones will need to be fired specifically for this use, with authentic materials and a replica of that long-defunct maker's stamp. For a community business whose revenues come mostly from selling swimming lessons, dance classes and gym sessions, this would be an impossible cost to cover. Leeds City Council recognise this and the executive board report for the transfer of the Baths acknowledges the risk posed by the chimney, and leaves the way open for the Friends of Bramley Baths to come to the council in such an eventuality to ask for help in funding the repairs. As a Leeds council officer put it: "the risk for us is actually no different [from when the council was managing the building directly]." Much of the Baths' charm and character is derived from its status as a heritage building, and this was undoubtedly a motivation in seeking to retain this facility, rather than replacing it with a modern swimming pool and leisure centre, but its history and significance carry a level of risk that needs to be spread over broader shoulders than those of the community group alone.

As well as representing a very real cost for community groups, however, built assets can also be a major source of revenue for organisations who are focussed on delivering needed services to their local communities. For organisations like that of charitable trust founder 'James', the built asset may not be the focus of their activities but it is a critical component in their business model as they seek to deliver their social mission while remaining independent of outside interference or control.

Types of assets transferred and their uses

Table 6.b: Origin of transferred assets in West Yorkshire

Origin	No of Assets
Still used for original function	35
Converted from educational use	6
Converted from industrial/commercial use	6
Converted from other institutional use	10

Source: Author

Table 6.b, above, makes clear that the majority of transferred assets are still broadly being used for the purpose for which they were originally built. In the case of sports facilities, leisure centres and public conveniences, this is unsurprising, as the design and form of the building or space is not typically amenable to other uses. That 23 out of 44 of the built assets transferred (leaving aside open spaces, for the moment) have

been retained for broadly similar uses to those they were built for, however, suggests that it is the functions these properties have performed in their communities which are valued enough to be retained, at least as much as the building itself.

Table 6.c: Age of transferred assets in West Yorkshire

Age	Roof type	No of Built Assets
Pre-WW II		27
Second half of 20th century	Flat roof	10
	Pitched roof	5
New build		2

Source: Author

Table 6.c shows very clearly the skew in building ages among the transferred assets of West Yorkshire. 27 out of 44 transferred buildings, or 61 percent, pre-date the Second World War. Of the remaining 17, ten are mid- to late-twentieth century buildings with a flat-roofed construction. Only two are classed as new buildings, constructed in the 21st century. The reason this is important, is that older (pre-World War Two) buildings have higher costs associated with them. They will not have been built with modern insulation fitted, and their construction (i.e. rubble-filled or cavity walls clad in stone or brick) makes it harder to retrofit such insulation. Other utilities such as heating systems and plumbing may be antiquated and inefficient; electrical wiring may need replacing. The ten flat-roofed buildings from the second half of the 20th century may be of more recent construction but they are inherently unsuited to the wet Yorkshire climate. Sooner or later a flat roof, exposed to the Northern English rain and snow, will leak. All interviewees with flat-roofed buildings (of any vintage – some of the older assets share this feature) reported problems in making – and keeping - their buildings water-tight.

This study has focused principally on built assets but table 6.d makes clear that a significant proportion of assets transferred across West Yorkshire are open spaces (13 out of 57, or 23 percent) rather than buildings. Again, a number of these form part of the transfer to Burley parish council, which took over the running of the local park, car park and other parcels of open ground around the village. It should be borne in mind that the CAT figures do not show how much land, formerly in use by schools and other local authority-controlled bodies as playing fields and other sports facilities, has been sold off for redevelopment as commercial housing or retail space. CATs are only one means by which local authorities dispose of both built and land assets.

Table 6.d: Primary uses of transferred assets in West Yorkshire

Community centre	22
Open land	11
Enterprise hub/training centre	7
Library	7
Sports and leisure facilities*	5
Public conveniences	3
Museum	1
Land for housing development	1

**The Piece Hall in Halifax has been included in the 'sports and leisure' category, even though strictly speaking it is a mixed-use space, incorporating commercial, retail and leisure uses.*

Table 6.d breaks down the transferred assets in West Yorkshire by primary use-type and shows clearly that the largest category of CATs involves community centres. When secondary uses are added to this, the number rises, as community libraries, enterprise hubs and leisure centres often also describe themselves as community centres in addition to their primary designation. Even in an age of instant digital communication and social media relationships, people value physical places where they can come together and socialise with their neighbours. Even where the actual mix of services on offer is somewhat different from what might have been available in the past (fewer bingo evenings, more 'wellbeing' services), the role of a community centre or hub within a neighbourhood is to provide a gathering place for local people and activities. This, rather than the building itself, is what interviewees describe as their motivation for undertaking the CAT and seeking to preserve the asset for the community.

> "I've got four children and six grandchildren, and I want to make sure that my kids've got somewhere to go; and when my grandchildren get to that age of hanging around shops, well they've got somewhere to go." ('Vicky', community group trustee)

> "There'll be a Community Café. It won't make any money but, you know, it'll be somewhere where people who are isolated can go, and will be encouraged to go." ('Katherine', community group secretary)

Relationships with the Local Authority

There is often a discrepancy between how officers in the local authorities talk about their engagement with CATs and how the people involved in community groups see them. All the council officers interviewed expressed a positive, if sometimes cautious attitude to CATs, declaiming the benefits to be gained on both financial and community grounds from making these transfers. All believed themselves to be broadly supportive of community groups wishing to take over the running of an under-utilised or redundant asset.

Interviewees from community groups, however, had more ambivalent views of the councils' roles in their transfer experience, ranging from descriptions of the council as slow and overly bureaucratic in its responses, through complaints of indifference and lack of support, to accusations of outright hostility. Interviewees from one group described their sense that one of the officers dealing with their transfer was opposed to the whole idea of CATs as a matter of principle. 'Vicky', a trustee in a different group, was asked whether the council had been helpful to them in getting the project through. "No", she replied, "I have to say. It was: 'we'll get round to it. Yeah, We understand. Yeah, I'll send someone along to a meeting'." She felt that the group was dismissed by council officials as being of lesser importance than other things going on in the local authority.

Council officers themselves are not unaware of these issues. 'Michael', an officer in Calderdale, said:

> "The groups are pretty opposed to the council to begin with, because they've come as a result of disposal notices… The general public feel that you're selling the crown jewels so ordinarily they've got their backs up initially, so when they come to speak to us, it's hostile."

In another authority, 'Elspeth', the chair of a community group with a large community centre, recalled how, once the transfer had gone through, the council officers who had been attending group meetings up to that point, disappeared: "So the minute we took it over ourselves, they've gone. We were just left." As 'Susan', the secretary in the same organisation pointed out: "They would come to the meetings but they were paid by the council to come." Once the council had no further responsibility for the asset being transferred, it was no longer part of their role to engage with the group who were now managing it. This may be considered perfectly reasonable, as the whole point of CATs is that the community groups are taking over full control of the asset, but it is apparently not always clear to community teams that the people who are present in the earlier part of the process (and who may often seem to be the most knowledgeable about that process), are likely to be withdrawn quite suddenly once the leases are signed.

Confusion is another criticism levelled at local authorities by community group interviewees. Not only do they report a lack of clarity in what is expected of them as potential acquirers of council assets, the accusation is made that the councils themselves do not know what they are doing and that there has, at least historically, been a lack of clear process. Community group secretary, 'Katherine' reported a meeting the local council had held with a group who had earlier tried to take over the management of the asset her organisation had just acquired: "They were given very short shrift by the council because they hadn't done all this stuff, but nobody had really explained to them what was needed". 'Eloise', secretary to another community group said: "I think the issue is that it [the local authority] keeps changing - and I'm sorry to have to say this about my local authority - but it does keep changing the goal posts". 'James', founding director of a community charity, spoke of the need for coherent frameworks for the local authorities to work within and to guide community groups through the process more efficiently.

These criticisms of the councils were, however, mixed in with regular comments about the help and support of particular individual councillors or council officials who are either personal contacts of one or more of the community group board or who were themselves actively involved in pushing the project and are members of the board. Thus councillors (and individual officials) were lauded as heroes in some narratives of Community Asset Transfer, even as the council body to which that individual belonged was regarded unfavourably or dismissed as irrelevant or obstructive.

Interviewees from community groups often expressed ambivalent views about the help and support they have received from their local authority. Although there were repeated expressions of frustration at the slowness of the process or the apparent lack of understanding of their circumstances by officials with whom they interacted, there were also regular references made to the important roles played by individual councillors and officers both during the transfer process and in subsequent developments of the asset. Five of the community groups studied have councillors, former councillors or council officers as trustees or members of their boards, and these are often credited with opening doors for the group and with bringing a better understanding of the council's requirements and expectations to other board members.

> "And she's [the local neighbourhood coordinator] very personally involved in it. I think without her involvement we wouldn't be where we are now. So in a way that's council help. But actually I don't think it is. I think it's her and her skills and her personality." ('Katherine', community group secretary)

> "If he [the council officer responsible for overseeing CATs] sees an e-mail from the neighbourhood coordinator or from our councillor, he will open that. If he got an email that said 'Vicky', and he doesn't know who I am; he isn't going to open that when he's got so much to open that morning, is he? He's going to go for the ones that he thinks are important." ('Vicky', community group trustee).

In spite of their frustrations, interviewees were sympathetic to the difficulties faced by the councils during times of prolonged budget cuts and on-going austerity but they were critical of a lack of imagination in the way they saw their local authorities dealing with those problems.

> "What policy does is give you a rigid framework which council officers follow to the hilt because they don't want to be pointed a finger at if they do it differently. This stops innovation... Councils are very rigid in operating their processes, and when you do that, it's very difficult to convince somebody to do things differently." ('James', community charity founder director)

> "One of the things we learned is that councils work through process. So if there's a process set up, they can sit there with their checklist and go through it, but if there isn't one, it just goes round, and round, and round. It's treacle!" ('Ryan', community group chair)

> "And as I said, the council were just making it difficult all the way and there was a generally a feeling that what the council really wanted to happen to this building was that nobody would take it over." ('Katherine', community group secretary)

Funding and Finance

Community group interviewees were unanimous in their perception of finance as being the key issue for the success of their Community Asset Transfers. Although not all groups were struggling financially at the time of the interview, most had at some time been concerned about liquidity or about raising money for their projects. Even groups with positive cash flow and no financial problems, spoke of the need for careful management and planning in order to cover costs and enable future developments. The nature of these costs, and the means available to the groups to meet them, did, however, vary depending on the sort of asset they had had transferred, and the size and nature of the group itself. In order to be sustainable for the long-term, community groups need reliable sources of funding, and this was an ongoing preoccupation for all group directors interviewed.

> "We know that stage one will cost us about 1.2 million; stage two will cost about two million." ('James', community group founder director)

> "It's a very much a day to day situation and constantly looking at what your revenue is; what I need for this particular item and, as I say, you can very often get something that suddenly comes along you had not planned for, and you just have to try and work your finances out so that you can just about squeak through." ('Eloise', community group secretary)

Where the acquired assets are in need of modernisation or repair (a significant proportion of those seen), there may be a need for capital funding up front, before the building can be considered usable. Even once a building is operational, it will still require money spending in order to maintain, insure and keep it safe for users. Utility bills, tests of fire and electrical equipment, health and safety inspections, all cost money, and the organisation has to have some form of revenue in order to meet these obligations.

This is where groups in receipt of properties that are functioning at the time of transfer have a significant advantage over those that are not: they will have income from the first day of business. The point was made by Bradford councillor 'Will' that sports facilities transferred to clubs, even in poorer working class neighbourhoods, can count on the players' subs as an immediate source of income. Of the community groups interviewed, four were in that position: a group with a sports facility, one owning a community pub, one with a small community centre, and one with a village hall and library. The amounts of money coming in from activities in these premises were typically small, but they were available to the group from the first day of the transfer and proved vital in keeping the projects afloat in the early days.

For the groups taking over buildings that were not operational at the time of transfer, there was usually a need to find external funding in order to bring the premises into a fit state of repair to be used. Community group director, 'James', for example, spoke of the building his organisation took on and the work it required before it could be opened to the public:

> "Everything you can name in that building was illegal! The electricity was shot, the gas was shot, the fire system was shot, the roof leaked in about nine places, the floor left something to be desired, toilets were broken and the security was non-existent... We took possession of the building, soon to discover it wasn't even insured! You can imagine my nightmares! We can't run the building like that, it has to be safe, legal and warm, so we spent around forty grand making it safe, legal and warm from our own reserves."

'James' organisation was at least in the fortunate position of having some existing reserves and revenue, so the emergency work on the building could go ahead straight away. In some cases, the group acquiring the property intended to change its use, meaning that a certain amount of re-modelling would be needed, and for interviewees such as 'Katherine', 'Susan' and 'Victor' the first priority, before the transfer had even gone through, was to find funding sources to enable them to complete quite extensive building works. It was important that these funds were identified before the transfer, as local authorities need to be convinced that a community group taking over an asset will have access to the necessary finance in order to deliver its business plan. 'Ryan' explained: "We then set out to raise the money to build that building, in parallel to going to (the council) to try and get the building transferred." Detailed business plans are required by all the authorities who undertake CATs, and groups need to be able to state clearly where their funds will be coming from.

For groups who do not have existing revenues or cash assets, the initial funding for Community Asset Transfer projects generally comes from large funding bodies such as the Big Lottery Fund, Sports England, Garfield Weston and others. As set out in chapter 5, some of the local authorities do make small grants available to help community groups with their transfers. These payments typically go towards professional fees or early bills that need to be met before the asset is earning. Community group secretary 'Eloise' spoke of a small grant from her council that was used to cover the cost of the first year's building insurance premium. In some cases, such as Hebden Bridge Town Hall, local authorities will step in to support a community group struggling to raise the money it needs to bring the project to fruition, but this tends to be in the case of larger assets, which have already been transferred, and where there is a perceived high risk of failure if the group does not get some additional support. In districts where CATs are seen to be an important part of the local authority's development plans, there is a greater willingness to step up in this way, in order to protect what are seen as flagship, or anchor community projects. Councillor 'Noel' described how his local authority had stepped in to support a struggling CAT project in a deprived part of the district: "They have had major issues and we helped to rescue it – hopefully! – about six to eight months ago. The council were very involved in them getting £900,000 of loans and grants from big charity groups."

The widespread reliance on grant funding can be problematic for Community Asset Transfer groups. If they are applying for the funds ahead of the signing the lease on their asset, they are faced with a level of uncertainty about the timing of the transfer, and even the possibility that it may fall through at the last minute. This can cause problems because some of the funds include clauses limiting the amount of time for which the money will remain available to the group. 'Katherine' described the stress of having to go back to one of her group's funders to ask for an extension on the capital grant they had received because the lease on their building had yet to be signed by the council. Other tranches of funding are time-limited at the application stage, and groups who have intended to apply for a particular fund and have written this into their business plans, may find that, by the time they are in a position to make an application, the fund has closed or shared out its allocated cash, and there is no equivalent pot elsewhere for them to apply to. Council officers are aware of these pitfalls but their resources are stretched in trying to process Community Asset Transfer applications and leases through their systems, and they complain that groups are unrealistic about the time a transfer is likely to take.

> "They always take a lot longer than the groups expect. So when they put their business plans in, they always expect to achieve things within the first two years - substantial things - and in reality they never do. We always tell them to allow themselves more time to do these things." (Calderdale council officer, 'Michael')

Parish councils can receive money via a precept levied as part of the council tax payment of parish residents. This is used in order to run devolved services or functions they undertake on their own initiative. The parish councillors set the level of the precept, which is based on the parish's assessment of its requirements for the coming financial year, divided equally between all properties in the parish in council tax band D or higher. There are legal constraints on what parish councils can do with the precept, but the Localism Act increased the flexibility available to them in this regard, under the new 'General Power of Competence' afforded to local government bodies (Local Government Association, 2013). Not all parish councils do raise funds through the precept in this way, but the possibility exists, should they so choose. Furthermore, up to a sum of £2,000,000 a year, the precept is not subject to the cap on council tax rises that limit the increases local authorities can impose on taxpayers. For parish councils that have taken on CATs, this means that they have a source of possible finance for maintaining their premises, offering services and delivering community benefits without necessarily needing to apply for external sources of funding. It does, however, raise the problem of potential inequalities between areas, as it will be easier for a parish council in an affluent neighbourhood to finance itself this way than for one in poorer surroundings, a fact acknowledged by 'Evan', a parish councillor in a well-to-do area: "People generally do not complain, if they know what the precept is. And that makes a big difference to us in terms of what we can fund." This difference is further emphasised by the unequal distribution of parish councils across the country. Many local areas simply do not have a parish council and therefore lack access to any of the possible benefits these could bring.

Loan finance is another possibility for community groups. 'James' described the various sources of loan finance that were available to his group and the different rates charged by each:

> "So for assets, funding comes from social investment [funders], from the banks, or from local authority money, which they borrow from the government... Social investment loans are mostly between 6 and 9%. Why would you do that?... And then the banks are a law unto themselves – you need to negotiate. They could go from 3% to whatever they can get away with. And then you've got council borrowing, which can vary from 0% to 4.5%. So that is very key to sustainability and the development of the asset." ('James', charity group founder)

As the above makes clear, it would take a group considerable time and effort to find itself the best available deal from borrowing, even if its assets are considered valid as collateral. Assets held on leasehold will only be considered in this way by lenders if there is a long-enough unexpired period on the lease to cover the duration of the repayment period. There is a potential risk involved in taking out a commercial or bank loan, as interest repayments need to be factored in to the organisation's budgets and it will need sufficient revenue to ensure that it can cover that debt over its entire term - allowing for the possibility that interest rates may not stay at current levels. This may further influence the choice of lender, as groups may feel that there is less risk involved in taking out a fixed rate loan at higher initial interest than a variable rate loan that is cheaper in the short-term. At the time of the research, Kirklees was the only West Yorkshire authority to offer a possible capital loan, specifically for CATs, dependent on the group matching the amount requested from them with money from another funder. Once again, this type of funding is only really available to groups with reliable sources of income.

As well as simply funding the running of the premises, community groups with CATs are seeking to provide community benefits through their activities and work. Sometimes these activities are self-financing – a community centre offering space for hire to local groups to run classes or meetings can generally set its room rate at a level to ensure its sustainability - in other cases, they are not. Where a group is seeking to add social value to their neighbourhood by providing access to mental health support or maintaining local library services, for example, they need sources of revenue from elsewhere to underpin those. As will be discussed later in the chapter, the asset itself may be the source of revenue to enable social value to be created. Where this is not the case, groups may hold fund-raising events, sponsored activities and community appeals to raise money for the building, on the basis that without it, they would not be in a position to offer their services to the community.

Nor is it just community centres and libraries that are faced with the need to broaden their revenue base in order to survive. Interviewee 'Paul', director of a community-owned pub in Calderdale, made the point that while it was the pub's history as a real ale pub that prompted local people to try and save it, in order to have a viable future, it needs to change its offer in order to attract new, younger, and less local, customers:

> "We're extending it to be more than a pub, with offering tea and coffee and cakes and crumpets. We promote events involving local people. One of the rooms is used as a gallery for local artists to hang their paintings on the walls – that's a free exhibition space. We've got lots of other local groups who meet in there. We need to increase daytime trade, that's why we offer coffee mornings and such." ('Paul', community pub director)

Group Membership and Capacity

Through interviews with directors of community enterprises and members of local councils, it became clear that CATs were often embarked upon and led by very small groups of people; sometimes this involved just a single individual, supported by a couple of friends. Although Boards and membership of groups grew subsequently, once the asset was up and running and providing services for the community in a more visible way, the work and risk involved in the transfer itself fell on very few people, the majority of whom were volunteers, acting in a part-time capacity. This has a number of implications for the group and its long-term success. For one, the small number of active members in groups going through CATs means that they are unlikely to possess the range of skills needed to cover all aspects of the transfer. Typically groups needed access to skilled tradespeople and professionals as well as to individuals with business knowledge, in order to complete the necessary building checks and the forms required by both the local authority and any funding bodies they might be applying to.

Another problem faced by very small groups is the viability and sustainability of the group going forward: if, for any reason, one key member of a three or four person team is unable to continue, are the others able to pick up that extra workload? In the instances where a single individual is the principal driver of the project, there is a serious risk that it will simply collapse without them. As well as being a major risk for the groups themselves, it is also a real concern for councils making transfers. As councillor 'Will' from Bradford put it, explaining why his council had decided against supporting a particular bid for an asset: "when we started diving under the skin of it a bit, it was just two or three guys, so how functioning is that organisation?"

Another question mark over small groups taking on assets for the benefit of their local community is whether they truly represent the will of that community. As discussed above, in order to be sustainable as a community asset, the property will need the support of local people to come and use it. Whether this becomes a serious threat to the success of the CAT in the longer term will depend on the types of use envisaged for the asset, and on the personal ability of the members to engage local people and market the resource to them. Once again the skills and capacities of the individuals involved are crucial in ensuring community engagement.

The need for specialist knowledge, skills and experience that may not be present in the immediate community explains why a significant proportion (20 percent) of community group representatives interviewed were not members of the communities in which the transferred asset was located. These were individuals who had got involved either with the transfer, or with community activities in areas of higher than average deprivation, out of a sense of social responsibility and consciousness. Two of these people specifically mentioned that their involvement had come about through contacts at their church. A number of other group trustees and directors mentioned church-going in interviews, although they did not explicitly link this to their involvement in the asset transfer. In a predominantly secular society, the proportion of community volunteers self-identifying as members of a faith group was notable.

The importance of having access to people, whether home-grown or coming in from outside the community, who have relevant skills to undertake the transfer and manage what are often complex projects thereafter, was understood and widely acknowledged. As 'Vicky', trustee in a group seeking to re-open a community centre on a deprived former council estate put it: "I think if we'd been a group of people from the estate, no, we wouldn't have been able to do it." In her interview, 'Vicky' was fulsome in her praise of 'Katherine', the group's secretary, who had been key in securing the CAT from the local council and in raising money from assorted funding bodies to effect the necessary building work and repairs needed to bring the building back into use. 'Katherine' is not resident on the estate in question but got involved following her retirement, and after working with another group on the same estate to fund an earlier project.

A phrase heard repeatedly during interviews was: "I had recently retired", and this brings up another central issue around community group membership. Volunteering in any capacity needs the input of personal time, and this is clearly more possible for people who are not combining their voluntary roles with either full-time employment or child-care. In going through the process of asset transfer, which interviewees agreed was lengthy and time-consuming, the need to have active members who could devote such time and energy as the project requires, is a key factor for success. Organisations with existing personnel, or who are able to employ or hire people to manage the transfer for them clearly have a substantial advantage over the sorts of smaller groups who are totally reliant on voluntary labour. Reliance on the labour of active retirees is not, however, necessarily seen as a problem by the groups to whom it applies. In communities where there are retired individuals with skills and knowledge applicable to the project of transferring and subsequently managing an asset, people take pleasure and pride in making a continuing contribution to their community through their involvement. And although issues of sustainability and succession planning are always there for small organisations, the age of active members in community organisations is not necessarily seen as a threat to their long-term viability. As 'Tim', a community group director, put it: "There will continue to be retired people in the village so I don't see why it shouldn't be sustainable in its present model.” As long as there is a ‘turnover’ (his phrase) of retired people willing to get involved with the group’s activities, he sees the organisation as having durability.

Community group interviewees who had been through the CAT process spoke repeatedly of their frustration at the time it had taken to complete their transfer. Many blamed their local council, or at least the bureaucratic nature of local government generally, for delays and slow response times. This may not be entirely fair, however, as ‘Paul’, the director of a community pub in West Yorkshire, reckoned it had taken that cooperative organisation “about two years from start to finish” to acquire their pub from the private owner. Council officers from all five local authorities interviewed, also gave two years as an approximate average length of time CATs in their district took to complete. Based on her experience, ‘Judy’ from Locality stressed that time taken to complete the CAT process varied significantly depending on the nature of the asset and the resources available to the acquiring group but she again gave an average time taken for the transfer process to be around two years. It would therefore appear that it is as much the complex nature of larger or commercial property transactions as it is the inherent bureaucracy of council processes that determines the speed of transfers.

Neighbourhoods with CATs: Community Engagement

The engagement and support of the local community is crucial to the success of a Community Asset Transfer. Not only must the organisation running the building have a clear understanding of the benefits they will be bringing to the area, they will need local people to embrace what they are doing and participate in activities and programmes, be it as volunteers, tenants, users of the space or as trustees.

The extent to which a community group was successful in engaging local residents to interact with them and with the transferred asset was a key determinant in the apparent long-term viability of a CAT. Bramley Baths, held up by Locality as the ‘poster child’ of Community Asset Transfers (Locality, 2018b), turned itself around from a barely open, loss-making proposition under council management, to a vibrant and popular local amenity, with extended opening hours, a full programme of activities for different sections of the community and a range of imaginative social and cultural events using the space on an *ad hoc* basis. It is a clear advertisement for the things community groups can accomplish when they bring local populations on board in rejuvenating an asset and improving its value to the community.

Another example is the re-invigorated (and much expanded) Hebden Bridge Town Hall, which, with its gallery foyer, community café and rentable office space, has become a real focal point for the town's populace. In the aftermath of the catastrophic flooding of the Calder Valley at the end of 2015, the building acted as a hub for rescue and clean-up efforts: teams of volunteers met there for deployment and to pick up tools and equipment; people who had lost homes and possessions were fed and watered there; and it became the collection point for donations of food, clothing and other necessities over the days and weeks following the disaster. The transfer of Hebden Bridge Town Hall into community hands had not been unproblematic, with repeated need for the local authority to step in and rescue the project when its finances were jeopardised, but it is now established within the town as an important part of community life.

> "So that's [the story of Hebden Bridge Town Hall] a really positive story but the fact is that that project has had to be re-financed twice over. So that was a good example of an extremely well supported local community project that is very successful but has all the problems that were endemic." ('Noel', councillor)

For community volunteers, interviewed for this research, the connection to the community, and a sense that they were able to serve and support it were important motivations in undertaking the CAT and their continuing involvement with the group and the asset. 'Susan', the secretary of a community group, which had regenerated a former school to be a multi-functional community centre, spoke of the satisfaction she got from meeting and getting to know the people who came to the centre regularly. 'Elspeth', chair of the same organisation, added:

> "The beauty of a lot of the groups that we set up, like the Youth Club or the Friendship Group, these people choose to come every week. They're getting something out of it. They're benefitting from coming to the centre. And the Youth Club kids definitely feel ownership of the building – they think they own the place!" ('Elspeth', community group chair)

Not all CATs are in such a fortunate position. 'Eloise', secretary of a community organisation with a small community centre in an out-of-town location, told of the trouble their association had in trying to attract new members and diversify its user groups. She saw the problem as partly being the location of the building, and partly being an inability on the part of the group to get a clear message out to the community about what the association was doing: “I think the problem has been, first of all we're not on the main road, and secondly getting the actual message out there has been a very difficult one”. She expressly linked this difficulty in raising awareness of the centre and its activities with the potential problem of ensuring the group’s long-term future and the success of the CAT: “Oh that's still a question [Is the organisation sustainable?], even after five years to be honest. Because until we get some more younger people through the door we would always have an issue.” What she described as a ‘missing section’ of the community simply never came into the centre, and were largely unaware of what it did or who ran it. Its status as a Community Asset Transfer was unknown in the neighbourhood and appeared irrelevant to local people, who did not see the building as part of their lives. This is not to say that ‘Eloise’s’ community centre was un-used. She listed all the different groups who made regular use of the facilities:

> “We have church, Boys Brigade. We have playgroup, pilates. We have all sorts: social, recreational club, badminton club, Women's Institute, cinema club, luncheon club, dance. And three football teams all use the building.” (‘Eloise’, community group secretary)

‘Eloise’ also made the point that the centre draws in users from outside the immediate area. This brings us back to the points raised in chapter 2 about the nature of ‘community’ and whether it is reasonable to consider ‘neighbourhood’ as the sole (or even the primary) measure of a community. The mothers and toddlers in playgroup mostly live in the area around the centre, but do they feel strongly that they are part of the same community as the young men in the Boys Brigade, who converge on the building from a wider geographical area?

The sustainability of community groups is dependent on their ability to recruit new members once the transfer is complete. This is important both in order to ensure continuity and longevity to the group, but also because the skillsets and personality types required in order to run and expand a local organisation with communitarian aims are somewhat different from those that are needed to work through either the paperwork and application stage, or the planning and development stage. In the case of the association of which ‘Eloise’ was a member, the small board who had successfully managed the transfer and kept their centre open for the local community, found that they lacked the skills or resources of time and cash needed to market themselves and thus take the CAT to its next level. There was an acknowledged need to draw in new, active board members and some were eventually recruited, but this created other problems as the vision and priorities of the incomers differed somewhat from those of the original board.

Another community interviewee, 'Victor', contrasted the enthusiasm of the small group of local people who had come together to convert a former school into a community centre and enterprise hub, through a prolonged and difficult CAT process, with the struggle to engage the wider community:

> "Engagement is always a challenge. I don't think we've ever subscribed to this idea of 'build it and they will come', you know. That's a fallacy, as much as you want to be asset-based, your approach to involve a community with an agenda, that takes huge amounts of resources, and a very, very long time." (Victor', vice chair of community organisation)

'Victor' believed that their CAT was winning round local people to come in and use the centre, but, as the quote above makes clear, this was an uphill process and required continuous hard work and resourcing to achieve. Providing meaningful social benefits in circumstances such as these becomes a challenge, not least because the organisation's mindset has become focused on survival: the need to pay the bills and keep the lights on. The building and its needs, takes centre stage in the organisation's thinking and becomes almost its *raison d'etre*. Psychologically, shifting gear to focus fully on providing social and communal benefits can be difficult.

> "I think that there's a measure of a folly to think that once you're paying the bills and once everything is hunky dory, you can focus on what you really want to do. Because what you end up doing is just more of the stuff you've done before. You've been ploughing that furrow for five years so I think it's very difficult thereafter to jump out of it." ('Victor', community group vice chair)

All the community interviewees were asked in what ways the CAT had benefitted, or would benefit, the local community. For some, the answer was completely about the intended function of the asset: a former community centre was being re-imagined as a hub for delivering a variety of ancilliary health services; a disused college building will become a specialist enterprise centre, bringing employment and offering training in sustainable food production and green building techniques; etc. For others the benefit was about preserving local amenities, typically those previously offered from the building such as library services, sports facilities or a place for local community groups to hold their activities.

A couple of interviewees took a more transactional approach to the value of their asset: 'James', the founding director of a Yorkshire-based charity, described how his charitable organisation was able to deliver social value to the local community because the asset they managed gave them a steady and reliable income stream from long-term anchor tenants, ensuring that they did not have to depend on less predictable sources of finance such as grants or fund-raising events. For him, the CAT was a means to an end, rather than the benefit *per se*.

> "The assets allow me to plan the services that are needed in the area, not what is dictated by the grant money... So what I'm saying is the asset income helps us unlock loads of stuff, but it needs to be done right." ('James', charity director)

The asset is therefore important as a funding mechanism, ensuring that the organisation has a sound financial base from which to deliver the services it sees as being needed in the community. Not having to depend on external funding gives the organisation greater sustainability and allows them to plan for the future.

Neighbourhoods with CATs: the Effects of Deprivation

As discussed in chapter 5, West Yorkshire falls into the 'most deprived' half of British regions but a more detailed view of the situation reveals large differences between different areas within the county. The mix of urban centres and rural/small town districts results in a patchwork of poverty and affluence, sometimes in very close proximity. This can make measuring deprivation or inequality difficult in any particular location as the indicators of wealth for that precise spot may include adjacent communities with very different deprivation rankings.

Schuurman et al. (2007), base their critique of indices of deprivation on the difficulties of keeping such an analysis valid at different spatial dimensions. They refer to the concept of the Modifiable Areal Unit Problem, or MAUP, first recognised by Gehlke and Biehl in the 1930s, and described by Schuurman et al. as 'the problem that occurs when inferences – based on spatial analysis – change when the same data are analysed using either variations in administrative zoning or through different scales' (Schuurman et al., 2007, p. 596). What the latter point means, is that when a single data set, is analysed at different scales, the results obtained will vary. This point can be illustrated by the example of Space@ Field Lane, a project to restore a local community centre in the middle of a council estate in Calderdale. The

Field Lane estate sits on the edge of Rastrick, a relatively prosperous small town, only 0.6 percent of whose households have four or more indicators of deprivation (ONS, 2011). The IMD data, measured at the smaller, Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) level, however, ranks the address of the community centre as being in the 6,644th (out of 32,844) most deprived LSOA in England (DCLG, 2015). And even this is not a true picture of local deprivation because the estate sits across, but does not fill, two different LSOAs, so the deprivation figure for each LSOA includes better-off rural neighbours as well as the residents of the estate itself.

This also makes clear the second part of the MAUP, namely that the geographical areas used for analysing deprivation (and other census) data, is decided for administrative or other statistical reasons that are not always congruent with popularly accepted neighbourhood boundaries. The Field Lane estate can be discerned on a map as having a distinctive form and layout, distinct from the surrounding area. Its inhabitants share broadly similar socio-economic circumstances, but the zoning boundaries of the LSOAs within which the estate is situated ignore the reality of the place and of its community. In this way the somewhat arbitrary setting of boundaries between Output Areas at any scale, or between electoral wards in other measures of place-based deprivation, distorts any place-based measure of social or economic capacity at the neighbourhood level.

There are other critiques of IMD, including that of Deas et al. (2003), who argue that the focus on individual and household deprivation overlooks the importance of neighbourhood effects on the replication and concentration of deprivation effects. Deprived neighbourhoods, they argue, are more than just the sum of the deprivation of people living in them and therefore need policy interventions that address these area issues as well as those (as are generally met in policy on reducing deprivation since the end of the 20th century) of individuals or households (Deas et al. 2003). If deprivation is to be addressed at the neighbourhood scale, however, it becomes even more important, as MAUP makes clear, to establish what that neighbourhood consists of and where its boundaries are to be drawn.

Table 6.e lists all the Community Asset Transfers (CATs) that had occurred in West Yorkshire up to the end of November 2017 and various measures of deprivation in the locations where those CATs have taken place. As the table clearly shows, CATs have happened in very deprived areas as well as in the most affluent parts of the county. The Tramshed in the centre of Keighley is, according to its IMD ranking, in one of the 0.2 percent most deprived parts of the country. In contrast, Shadwell

library, north of Leeds, is located in a community ranked in the top 0.5 percent *least* deprived. In spite of this spread, the majority (34 out of 57) of CATs in West Yorkshire are located in LSOAs that tip into the ranks of 'least deprived' (an IMD ranking of 16,423 and higher) in spite of the fact that the county as a whole, and all of its constituent authorities, sit within the 'most deprived' half of the country.

As well as considering IMD rankings, table 6.e also lists markers of deprivation at ward level. These larger scale measures help situate the CAT within its broader community context. This is important because the assets transferred may not be for the sole use of people residing in the immediate vicinity. Thus, for example, the Piece Hall in Halifax town centre, forms a place of business and employment for people from across Calderdale, as well as being a tourist destination, drawing in visitors from around the county and beyond. Its role as a showpiece for the regeneration of the town effectively sets it apart from its surroundings and negates any local socio-economic influence that might otherwise be expected from a building in a Ward two thirds of whose households show at least one indicator of deprivation. The same holds true of those larger CATs across the county, whose dominant function is employment, training or enterprise.

Table 6.e: West Yorkshire CATs and Measures of Deprivation in the surrounding areas

Name	Ward	Percentage with no indication of deprivation (ward)	Percentage with 4 indicators of deprivation (ward)	IMD ranking for postcode LSOA (out of 32,844)
The Tramshed, South Street	Keighley Central	25.39	1.81	60
Piece Hall	Halifax Town	33.66	0.92	1,237
Elsie Whiteley Innovation Centre	Halifax Town	33.66	0.92	1,237
ThreeWays Centre	Ovenden	33.24	0.9	1,360
Duke Of Edinburgh Centre	Bowling and Barkerend	22.6	1.61	1466
Bramley Lawn	Bramley and Stanningley	37.76	0.83	1,476
Hillside Enterprise Centre	Beeston and Holbeck	30	1.5	1,719
Lightwaves Leisure Centre	Wakefield East	28.92	0.81	2,336
Chickenley Community Centre	Dewsbury East	34.87	0.97	3,952
Illingworth Gaol and Stocks	Illingworth and Mixenden	37.2	0.5	4,622
Paddock Village Hall	Greenhead	36.72	0.94	5,147

Greenwood Youth & Community Centre	Windhill and Wrose	37.08	0.73	5424
Old Fire Station, library and swimming baths	Sowerby Bridge	41.93	0.82	6,061
Tenants' Hall Enterprise Centre, Middleton	Middleton Park	28.8	1	6,296
The Space @ Field Lane	Rastrick	41.8	0.6	6,644
Bowling Park - Lodge Admin Offices	Bowling and Barkerend	22.6	1.61	7,005
Standbridge Lane Community Centre	Wakefield south	42.52	0.31	7,344
Soothill Community Centre	Batley East	29.25	1.38	7,576
Woodhouse Community Centre	Hyde Park and Woodhouse	34.9	1	7,763
Bramley Community Centre	Bramley and Stanningley	37.76	0.83	7,970
Howden Clough Community Centre	Birstall and Birkenshaw	43.54	0.51	10,440
Wooldale Community Centre	Holme Valley South	54.91	0.28	13,810
Hebden Bridge Picture House	Calder	48.97	0.38	13,828
Meltham Carlile Institute	Home Valley North	51.19	0.14	14,266
Blackshaw Head Rock	Calder	49	0.4	17,216
Headingley Enterprise and Arts Centre (HEART)	Headingley	54.92	0.58	17,456
Luddendenfoot Civic Institute	Luddendenfoot	48.78	0.25	17,748
Hebden BridgeTown Hall	Calder	48.97	0.38	17,858
Marsden Mechanics	Colne Valley	47.9	0.34	18,466
Horbury Community Centre	Horbury and South Ossett	43.81	0.37	18,493
Holme Toilets	Holme Valley South	54.91	0.28	18,541
Land for the Calder Valley Community Land Trust	Todmorden	42.1	0.6	18,788
Clayton Library (formerly ACV)	Clayton and Fairweather Green	35.82	0.63	20,784
Hunsworth Community Centre	Cleckheaton	43.01	0.44	21,360
Golcar Scout & Community Centre	Golcar	44.16	0.58	21,787
Bramley Baths	Bramley and Stanningley	37.76	0.83	21,843
Holmfirth Toilets	Holme Valley South	54.91	0.28	22,836
Holmfirth Civic Hall - manager not part of CAT	Holme Valley South	54.91	0.28	23,224
Burley Library (formerly ACV)	Burley-in-Wharfedale	60.17	0.12	24,351

Denby Dale Community Library	Denby Dale	51.5	0.14	24,752
East Bierley Playing Fields	Birstall and Birkenshaw	43.54	0.51	25,685
Queen`s Hall & Children's Play Centre	Burley-in-Wharfedale	60.17	0.12	27,428
Peel Place Recreation Ground	Burley-in-Wharfedale	60.17	0.12	27,428
Main Street, Burley in Wharfedale - verges 003 &007	Burley-in-Wharfedale	60.17	0.12	27,428
Main Street, Burley in Wharfedale - Car Park	Burley-in-Wharfedale	60.17	0.12	27,428
Grange Park & Bowls Pavilion & The Round House (Burley Grange)	Burley-in-Wharfedale	60.17	0.12	27,428
Burley Recreation Ground	Burley-in-Wharfedale	60.17	0.12	27,428
Ian Clough Hall & Baildon Library (formerly ACV)	Baildon	50.95	0.4	27,438
Rawdon Community Library	Guiseley and Rawdon	55	0.1	27,956
Skelmanthorpe Council Offices (community library)	Denby Dale	51.5	0.14	30,337
Wood Head Beck	Burley-in-Wharfedale	60.17	0.12	32,338
Lewis Buildings Land & land on Rushy Beck and Woodhead Beck	Burley-in-Wharfedale	60.17	0.12	32,338
Holme Grove Land & garden land to rear of 3,7,9 and 9,11,13 Greenfields Way	Burley-in-Wharfedale	60.17	0.12	32,338
Burley House Field - Village Green	Burley-in-Wharfedale	60.17	0.12	32,338
Shadwell Library, Arts Centre and Café	Harewood	56.3	0.1	32,653
The Green Public Open Space	Burley-in-Wharfedale	60.17	0.12	n/a
Public conveniences (formerly ACV)	Burley-in-Wharfedale	60.17	0.12	n/a

Ward level data derived from datashine.org interactive census map. LSOA level data derived from indices of deprivation explorer, DCLG mapping application.

Summary

This chapter focuses on the experiences of community organisations who have gone through the CAT process and the factors that shaped their ability to take over the running of an asset. The findings of the research are grouped into six categories, discovered through interviews with community group members and from analysis of secondary data about the types of asset transferred across West Yorkshire, and their locations.

The first category to emerge from the study refers to the quality of the asset itself. Against an initial expectation that CATs are sought in order to preserve much-loved heritage buildings for local use, it became apparent that many of the properties transferred were architecturally uninspiring and in poor condition. Although some were considered by their new managers to be important neighbourhood landmarks, it was generally the activities housed within the buildings that were valued, rather than the structure itself. In some cases, the buildings were more of a liability than an asset to the group: they required extensive repairs or cost a lot to maintain and run. Most of the transferred assets functioned as a community hub in some way, suggesting that locations for social gathering are more highly regarded among local communities than might have been expected.

Having compared the policies and practices of the five local authorities in West Yorkshire in chapter 5, and gained an insight into the ways in which councillors and council officers perceived CATs, it was revealing to uncover the views of those local authorities by community group members. Interviewees from the local authority side were generally positive about asset transfer and described themselves and their councils as broadly supportive of them. Interviewees from the community side were less convinced by their local authority’s benevolence. There was considerable frustration expressed about slowness, bureaucracy and confusion of process. Support, where it been forthcoming at all, was seen as inadequate and difficult to access. Locality received more praise than councils for their help during the transfer process. On the other hand, individual councillors and council officers were mentioned by some participants as having been helpful (and even instrumental) in getting the project through the CAT application process. Community interviewees made quite sharp distinctions between these helpful individuals, to whom they were very grateful, and the council as a whole, which was often seen as a hindrance to them.

Funding and finance were a dominant theme arising from interviews. Building costs, discussed above, formed the largest part of these conversations, but there were also issues around sustainability, using assets in order to provide social value to a community, and the challenges of fund-raising. Fund-raising posed a particular challenge for smaller, volunteer-led groups, who existed in a more precarious, hand-to-mouth way than their larger, more commercial counterparts. It was notable that larger transfers seemed better able to attract emergency support and funding from their local authority than smaller ones did. The higher public profile of these big, landmark projects meant that the authorities were unwilling to let them fail. The availability of finance is one of the major resources discussed at length in chapter 7.

At an early stage in the research, a representative of Locality had suggested that community organisations were more likely to be successful and sustainable if they had a large and active membership. It became apparent during interviews that this is was the case and that the active engagement of group members was an important factor to success. It was also apparent that the capability sets of those group members were significant. Having knowledge or skills appropriate to the needs of the CAT process, or to managing the asset subsequently allowed the group to proceed much more smoothly and enabled them to save money on hiring specialists. The other resource needed within community groups was time. The majority of those interviewed were retired people who were able to devote time to the project, which they would not have had, had they still been working.

If a community organisation is genuinely to provide value to the neighbourhood where it is situated, it must have the backing of the broader local population. A small group of individuals offering a service nobody wants cannot be construed to be adding benefit to their community. This was well understood by interviewees, who were all passionate about improving their area in some way. Some groups struggled with how best to fulfil this, and others found that their energies were so taken up with financial and other mundane management issues that they were in danger of not getting to that point. This can result in original members of the group leaving after the initial transfer phase, as different skills become needed by the group. In contacting organisations to request interviews, several declined because the people who had been part of the original CAT had since left the organisation and there was no-one left who could answer questions about it.

The chapter concludes by looking at the issue of deprivation in West Yorkshire, as it pertains to communities with CATs. Census data on deprivation at IMD and ward level is analysed to look for patterns of transfers. Although there are CATs in areas of high and low deprivation, it is clear that the majority occur in more affluent parts of the county, presumably because these are the areas with more of the resources discussed above. A distinction is made between larger, employment-focused CATs and smaller single use, community centre/library assets. The former typically draw upon a wider catchment for their employees, users and funding, while the latter are reliant on the capability of people within the immediate vicinity of the asset. This analysis is developed further in the following chapter, where the themes from the community and local authority interviews are mapped against the capabilities frameworks discussed in chapter 3 and a new framework is proposed specifically to take account of these findings.

Chapter 7: Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter, the data described in the previous two chapters will be interrogated through the prism of the theoretical frameworks that were considered in chapter 3 and in relation to the broader social, economic and political environment in which asset transfers take place.

The methodology chapter considered a number of models and frameworks suggested by earlier researchers, seeking to explain the relationships between empowering chosen outcomes for communities and the levels of capability exhibited by those communities along various dimensions. From an examination of these models, it was mooted that either a simplified variant of Kleine's Choice Framework (Kleine, 2010, 2011), potentially incorporating aspects of Emery and Flora's Community Capitals model (2006), or a hybrid measure, combining the indices of Austin (2015) and Perrons (2012) might be suitable tools for analysing the results of this study. Having now gathered the data, the alternative models are considered in turn to ascertain how far they can explain the findings of the study. Kleine's Choice Framework is found to have greater analytical power to interpret the different sorts of information discovered, although with some limitations. A variant on the Choice Framework is therefore suggested in order to improve its explanatory power in the context of Community Asset Transfer.

Interpreting Interview Data

At first sight there appears to be a mismatch between the frameworks previously considered and the present research, because those frameworks are all looking at the capabilities of individuals, rather than at groups or organisations. All mention 'health' as a prime requirement for people to be able, in Sen's terms, to exercise 'functionings' and build capability. The concept of 'health', however, takes on different connotations when thinking about groups of people or organisations. The 'health' of an organisation, in common parlance, is generally taken to be a reference to its resilience, governance, performance and financial security. The physical and mental wellbeing of individuals within the organisation is considered as part of that, mainly insofar as it has a bearing on the functioning and productivity of the organisation as a whole. In analysing data from the fieldwork carried out in this study, it became apparent that organisational health was an important resource for groups going through CATs and a way of assessing this was therefore sought in the literature. Gagnon et al. (2017) list nine measures that form the organisational health index. These are a sense of direction, the ability to innovate and learn, strong leadership, a level of co-ordination and control, possession of capabilities and expertise, motivation to achieve success, a safe and pleasant work environment, governance structures that ensure accountability, and a focus on the external environment. These are general features needed by all organisations if they are to succeed and they can be considered to be part of the requirement for community groups with CATs just as they are for commercial or public sector organisations.

It is possible, thus, to shift the understanding of 'health' from the personal aspects originally intended in the Choice Framework, the Community Capitals Framework or the development indices, to focus on organisational health. Governance structures and their importance, resilience and sustainability, as well as financial security, all came across as significant during interviews with both community group respondents and those from local authorities. The same shift, from personal to organisational, can generally be applied to the other elements of the models. When discussing the frameworks, therefore, it will be the 'health', 'knowledge', 'social capital', etc. of the community group as a whole, which will usually be meant, rather than the attributes of particular individuals within it.

This change from the individual to the collective is unproblematic for most of the resources under consideration: community groups are organisations with defined legal identities and therefore able to hold material and financial resources in that capacity. The idea of 'organisational knowledge' is also widely recognised and generally held to be the sum of the information, skills and learning available to an organisation, from its systems and personnel (Knights and Wilmott, 2007). 'Social capital' is likewise a term that is applied to communities and groups of people, as well as to individuals (Mangialardo and Micelli, 2016). The seven capitals of the CCF are all understood to belong to the community as a whole, although Emery and Flora (2006) recognise that some of these capitals – cultural and human, specifically – are attributes of individuals put to the service of the community (Emery and Flora, 2006). An example of this occurred in the present study, when an interviewee from a community group in a disadvantaged area stressed that the group would not have been able to secure its CAT, had they not been able to draw on the skills and knowledge of their secretary. "'Katherine' has been amazing! Without 'Katherine' we wouldn't have got this money. Seriously, we owe 'Katherine' so much!" (Community group trustee, 'Vicky')

Considering the previously proposed models in turn, the development indices proposed by Perrons (2012) and Austin (2015), identified health, wealth and connectedness for Austin; and health, knowledge, standard of living and employment for Perrons, as the significant factors in wellbeing. These factors are not, however, sufficient to account for all the matters raised by respondents in this study. Access to funds, knowledge and social networks are important for groups seeking to undergo the asset transfer process, but they are far from being the only resources needed. Nor does either of these indices situate the individual/group under consideration within broader socio-economic or political contexts. This study therefore requires a larger framework in order fully to explain the observed findings.

Skerratt and Hall's study of village halls in Scotland (2011a, 2011b) used Emery and Flora's Seven Community Capitals (2006) as its organising framework. These seven, overlapping, capitals (natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial and built) describe the resources necessary in order to build capacity in a community (see figure 7.a). As with the Austin and Perrons indices, the emphasis is very much on factors internal to the individual or the community, and it takes no real account of external factors, which will either support or limit the possible use that can be made of any capitals possessed. This limits its explanatory potential in the current case. The model remains of interest, however, because the descriptions of the seven capitals highlight slightly different aspects of capacity from those set out in both the development indices and Kleine's Choice Framework. 'Human capital', for example, as it is expressed in the community capitals model, is effectively an amalgamation of the 'health' and 'knowledge' resources described in those other models, with the addition of something she terms 'motivation', which does not appear in any of them.

'Political capital' is one of the three capitals Skerratt and Hall (2011a,2011b) found most important in their study and is another term omitted entirely from both the Choice Framework and the indices. Political capital can be defined as the ability a group has to influence the distribution and use of resources for its own benefit. It relates clearly to social and cultural capitals but brings an emphasis on political influence that is not as fully surfaced in other models. The interpretative framework for the data in this study will incorporate this element from Emery and Flora's model (as explained in chapter 3), as it is not explicitly mentioned elsewhere.

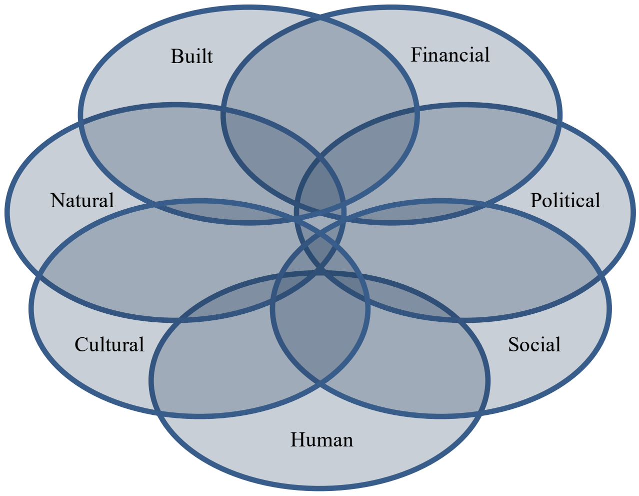


Figure 7.a: Emery and Flora's Seven Community Capitals (2006) (see chapters 2 and 3 for more details)

In analysing the interviews conducted for this present study, it became clear, that in order to understand the potential of Community Asset Transfer as a tool of community empowerment, Kleine's Choice Framework presented the most complete model of those examined previously. The Community Capitals Framework of Emery and Flora, like the indices of Austin and Perrons, deals with capabilities and resources available to individuals or within communities. Only the Choice Framework (and Alsop and Heinsohn's 2005 framework, upon which it was built) includes factors external to that individual, or places both of these into relation with the dimensions of choice and the achievement of desired outcomes. This is important here because the situation of Community Asset Transfers involves both the community group and the local authority, and both are subject to the broader structures of policy, politics and expectation within which they must operate. Furthermore, Kleine's Choice Framework's expansion of the details within the categories of Agency, Structure, Empowerment and Equality Outcomes, allows data captured in interviews to be mapped with some clarity into the model, allowing the researcher to understand how the different parts of the machine work together; which are the most significant; and ultimately whether the Community Asset Transfer process really does increase the empowerment of local groups and people.

It will be noted that none of the frameworks discussed makes explicit reference to the idea of social innovation. In part this may be because of the nebulous and disputed nature of the term (see chapter 2): notions of capability, community and inequality are intangible enough in themselves, without the added complexity of another volatile concept. While the provision of social value and the idea of effecting changes beneficial to a community do arise in the interviews carried out for this study, no-one referred to social innovation directly, nor did it emerge as a theme during the analysis of the interview data (see table 3.d, p.65). Although the idea of social innovation was important in developing the initial conceptual framework for this research, the fact that it did not show through clearly in the analysis of the findings means that it was considered acceptable to use frameworks that omitted the term.

When working with the Choice Framework, Kleine says that the correct way to use the tool is by starting with finding the desired outcomes, and working back from there to assess whether the capabilities necessary to achieve them are present in the individuals (or groups) wishing to do so (Kleine, 2010, 2011).

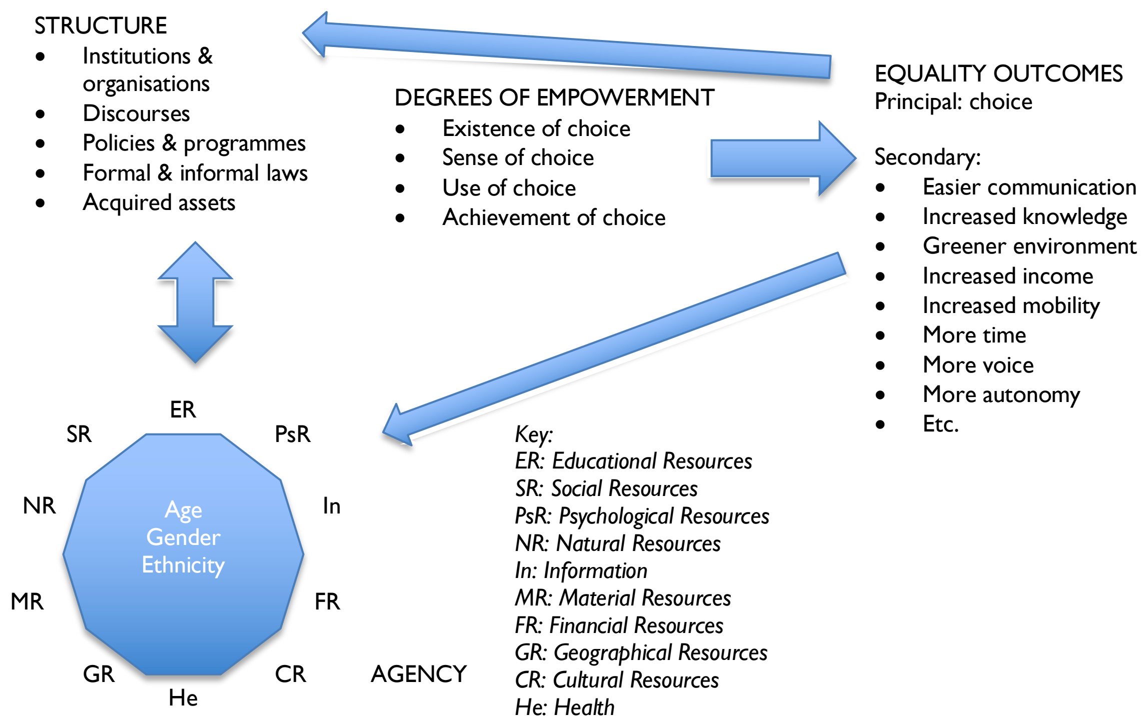


Figure 7.b: Kleine's Choice Framework, 2010 (see chapter 3 for details)

The principal equality outcome sought is always taken to be choice, as choice equates to freedom and empowerment to achieve desired objectives. The framework suggests that the degree of empowerment found in a community will reflect how well that community is able to exercise choice to deliver its desired outcomes. This appears to be a reasonable position to take, because without the freedom to exercise meaningful choices in order to achieve such outcomes, the group or the individual concerned cannot be said to possess true autonomy. In the case of community groups seeking to take control of local buildings, there are possible question marks about the extent to which the degrees of empowerment are each available in any particular case.

The example of the public toilets in Shipley (mentioned in chapter 6), which could not be transferred away from direct local authority control, illustrates some of the problems here. The authority (Bradford Metropolitan District Council – BMDC) is unable to continue to fund public toilets in the borough and is therefore planning to close them unless they can be taken over by parish councils. Shipley has no parish council and therefore cannot take over the running of the toilets in its area. Any desire local people may have to preserve this facility is thus thwarted by the lack of a mechanism to make it happen. In the terminology of Kleine's Framework, choice exists in theory because BMDC is willing to transfer the asset. A group with the means to do so, meaning one with the ability to manage and finance the asset from its own revenues, such as a parish council, would understand that it had the choice to take over the asset. But that choice can only be achieved where those conditions are met. Where they are not, as in this case, the effective lack of a choice mechanism will thwart the achievement of choice, thus reducing the community's capability.

Secondary outcomes sought among community groups taking over assets on CATs include the desire to give back to the community, the preservation of services or amenities, including the building itself, for local people, and creating opportunities for social and economic improvement locally. In order to achieve these outcomes, the degree of empowerment experienced by community groups will depend on multiple factors:

- Does the group know that they have the right to request the transfer;
- Do they have a belief that that possibility is available to them as a group in their particular circumstances;
- Is there an asset suitable for the purpose for which they wish to use it within their area, and is it potentially available for transfer;
- Is the group able to achieve that choice through the effective deployment of the resources at its disposal?

The extent to which a group can answer these questions in the affirmative will determine how much choice it can exercise and, following Kleine's contention that the ability to exercise choice is positively correlated to empowerment, the degree of empowerment it therefore possesses.

The extent to which a community group is thus empowered through its ability to make meaningful choices will depend in each case on the nature, quality and amount of resources available to it; amounting to what Kleine terms 'Agency'. The extent to which any group or individual can be said to possess agency in any given situation will be constrained or enabled by the degree to which they possess each of the ten resources she identifies. Not every resource may be needed for any specific choice to be made, but she considers these ten to be foundational to empowerment: financial resources, social resources, information, educational resources, material resources, psychological resources, natural resources, geographical resources, cultural resources and health.

As will be discussed later in the chapter, the Kleinian resources that were most evident in this research were **financial** and **social resources**. This is in line with the findings of Skerratt and Hall (2011), and of Austin (2015) and Perrons (2012), all of whom identified financial security and social connection as important factors in achieving either wellbeing (for Perrons or Austin) or successful management of a village hall (for Skerratt and Hall).

Sometimes it is very clear whether a resource is available to a community group: in the case of council assets coming up for disposal, the extent to which people in the surrounding community are aware of that disposal, or of their right to request an alternative - in Kleine's terms, their access to **information** - is generally measurable. Thus 'Yvonne', one of the interviewees, spoke of the loss of a building in her community that had been sold by the local authority without local people being fully aware of what was happening. Even while describing the anger and disappointment felt at this perceived loss of a public amenity, 'Yvonne' cited this example as the catalyst for local people forming groups to preserve and retain buildings and services locally: "We tried to fight it but they [the council] wouldn't listen and they sold it at auction and we didn't realise quickly enough… We vowed we wouldn't let that happen again." The lack of information in the earlier case had led to members of the community becoming better informed (improving their information resources in the language of the framework) against similar occurrences in the future. Furthermore, this suggests that even where relevant information may not be easily obtainable, it can be found once a community group knows where to look for it. Working that out and having the time and opportunity to undertake that information gathering depends on other resources the group must have at its disposal, such as educational, social and temporal resources. Temporal resources – having the time available to do the things that need doing – are not mentioned in

Kleine's Framework but were discovered to be an important factor in achieving CATs. They have been added to the adapted version of the framework and will be discussed further, later in this chapter.

Kleine lists **educational resources** as one of the ten components of Agency, but she does not define it further or discuss its separate importance as a factor in making empowered choices. Whilst it is reasonable to believe that having access to a level of education sufficient to undertake the complex requirements of a Community Asset Transfer is a major benefit (if not a prerequisite) for community organisations, education *per se* was not brought out in interviews for this study. This may be because of a social reticence to raise the matter of differing levels of educational attainment within a community or the group, or it may be that education is not seen as crucial in itself. Instead, this element of Kleine's concept of Agency was subsumed in interview under broader 'informational' factors and the idea of 'skills'. Interviewees repeatedly mentioned the need for a range of skills to be present in the group if it were to get through the CAT process. Some of these skills were professional or technical: lawyers, architects, electricians and plumbers; others were general management skills: marketing, bookkeeping, writing business plans and filling in risk assessment forms. Buying in expertise is an option for more affluent community groups but not practical for those in more deprived areas: "It's catch 22 unless you can get someone who does it on a no win, no fee type thing, It's money. Poverty doesn't have money." ('Vicky', community group trustee). Interviewees talked of, sometimes steep, learning curves to acquire the necessary skills: "I didn't really know what it was about – it wasn't the sort of thing that I was used to. I've never done funding bids or anything like this." ('Susan', community group secretary)

Information is often described as lacking, especially information pertaining to the costs of running buildings. Community interviewees in more than one local authority area explained that they struggled to write sensible business plans because the council did not hold budgets for its properties on a building-by-building basis. The local authority may have a blanket deal with a utility company, for example, to service its entire property portfolio and the bills for that are presented in aggregated form. 'Eloise' was one of several participants who reported this as a problem:

> "We kept asking for the individual breakdown for gas and electric and water and things like that and it just wasn't provided to us. So that was very hard, to work out what we would need to keep the building running... It took a lot of guesswork." ('Eloise', community group secretary)

Given this conflation of the two resources, Perrons' (2012) notion of 'knowledge' seems the best term to use to sum up the nature of this resource.

Access to **material resources** such as whether there is a suitable building available for a group to take over, is also relatively simple to assess. If there are no buildings in the group's area, owned by the local authority and suitable for the use they have planned, there is, *prima facia* a problem in achieving their desired outcomes. This may not be insurmountable for the group, but it may indicate that Community Asset Transfer is not going to be the best mechanism for achieving their goals. They may, for example, be better off renting in either the public or private sector, or joining forces with other organisations to share space or other resources. Councillors and council officers also made the point that groups' expectations of the sorts of buildings that might be available to them are sometimes unrealistic and that asset transfer was only one option among many for community bodies to take over properties in their area:

> "They basically want either a shop or an office right in the middle of [the town] and anything else just doesn't fit what they want. Unsurprisingly, we don't have any of those coming up that we want to give away." ('Helen', council officer)

Not all of the resources noted in the framework were so clearly revealed in interviews with either community groups or council officials. Organisations taking over assets via CATs are place-based community groups, so the question of **geography** is moot. The fact that assets can only be disposed of to groups, rather than to individuals also means that personal resources such as **health** (in the way the framework means it) and **psychological** strengths are less prominent. Personal problems of, or between, individual directors were occasionally mentioned in interview as explaining why one or other director pulled out of the project or was no longer able to fulfil their previous role, but the collective nature of the projects meant that other individuals stepped in to take over those roles. One community trust had a member whose activities in the group had been curtailed following a cancer diagnosis, another had recently suffered a mass resignation from its Board, following disagreements about direction and policy. Where a key person dropped out for personal reasons during the Community Asset Transfer process, this might act as a delay to completion, but the insistence on robust organisational forms for groups even to be considered for CATs generally mitigates against this being a fatal problem to the process.

Cultural resources failed to show through strongly in the CATs studied here. This is not to imply that they are not present – all groups belong to the cultures they inhabit – but that there was no clear expression of particular cultural strengths or weaknesses emerging from the interviews conducted. This may be because culture exists at an unconscious, almost subliminal level in much of our social interaction. We are immersed in it like fish in the sea and therefore fail to notice its effect on us until we are removed from it. And this effect may be exacerbated by respondents and interviewer sharing broad cultural beliefs and assumptions, further disguising the extent of our submersion.

It has been noted in chapter 3 that open spaces form the largest category of Assets of Community Value (ACVs) registered in England, after pubs. 23 percent of CATs in West Yorkshire were of land assets of various types (see table 6.d), including playing fields and community parks. While these could legitimately be considered to be **natural resources** within Kleine's Framework, as the objects of the transfer, they are also **material resources.** For simplicity's sake they are considered purely in the latter terms in this study.

The structures within which CATs operate form the final part of Kleine's framework. As discussed in chapter 3, these structures are the formal and informal frames of reference within which people operate. They both limit and enable the different types of agency an individual or a group can employ in order to reach their desired outcomes, and they are also reinforced or undermined by the behaviours of groups and individuals so doing. Kleine identifies a number of potentially relevant structures:

- Institutions and organisations
- Policies and programmes
- Formal and informal laws
- Acquired assets (this heading includes access to and availability of these assets and their affordability, as well as the possession of capabilities needed to use them).
- Discourses

(Kleine, 2010)

These are discussed in turn below, with examples from the empirical analysis.

All these structural components have been found to have impacts on the ability of community groups to undertake CATs in a sustainable way and many of these have already been discussed at some length in chapter 6. Thus key **institutions** with whom groups need to interact as part of the Community Asset Transfer process are local authorities and individual actors within them. As has been discussed, both formal and informal interactions with local councillors and council officers have a significant effect on community group interviewees' perceptions of the ease, or otherwise, of completing the Community Asset Transfer. Also the **policies and programmes** promoting and supporting CATs are decided and implemented at the local authority level, giving rise, as has been noted, to variations in interpretation and adoption rates for the concept of CATs across different authorities.

At the national level, policy is more strongly set with regard to Assets of Community Value (ACVs) and the right to bid, than with CATs themselves, but it is the local authorities who have the statutory duty to approve nominations for ACVs and to maintain the register of all those in their districts. The lack of statutory requirements around CATs means that there is ultimately more **informality** (as well as more variety) in the ways in which these are managed by councils, as opposed to the use of more **formal laws** *per se*. (Informality in this context is taken to mean more ad hoc decisions about practices and processes for implementing CATs, as well as perceived expectations and norms of the behaviour of the local authority by citizens and national government.) This in turn has resulted in local authorities modifying aspects of their policies and processes over time in order better to support community groups as they work through the Community Asset Transfer process. This learning behaviour on the part of the local authorities in West Yorkshire is a clear example of Kleine's assertion that there is a two-way exchange of influence between the structures within which community groups operate and the groups themselves (Kleine, 2010, 2011). Variations in the degree to which a local authority is prepared to engage in dialogue in this way is one of the forms of inequality found between community groups, as refusal to engage restricts a group's ability to deploy political resources to further their empowerment. In this regard, the outsourcing of Wakefield council's asset management services places groups in the district at a disadvantage because the company, which manages council property in the district, has no remit to pursue CATs. The reason for outsourcing in this way is to save money for the authority; social benefits that could be derived from alternative arrangements are not a priority.

The notion of an **acquired asset** as part of this list of structures surrounding community groups seems, in the case of groups seeking to take over property under CATs, to collapse back substantially into the idea of the material (just as the idea of natural resources mentioned earlier did), and possibly financial, resources, which help give the group its agency. As well as the availability of buildings and finance, their affordability and accessibility are core to the possibility of transferring premises to community control. Whether the group possesses the capabilities needed to make use of these assets depends on their other resources and the degree of empowerment they can muster. While Kleine is clear that the elements of the Choice Framework overlap and interact with one another, in this instance, a case can be made for simplifying the model somewhat by only counting assets once, either in the 'structure' part of the model, or as part of the resources available to a group, that give it its agency.

The final structural element of Kleine's framework is the idea of **discourse**. This is perhaps the most abstract element in the model and the most difficult to pin down in the empirical data because it is rarely explicitly discussed by any of the actors themselves. In the context of CATs, the most relevant levels of discourse are around socio-political perspectives of the place of community actors in providing social value, and the economics of austerity. Asset-Based Community Development was only explicitly referenced twice by interviewees in this research, but it clearly underpins much of the thinking on the subject and colours the repeatedly expressed beliefs in the benefits of community actors operating their own facilities and delivering public services. Almost all council officers and councillors interviewed asserted that local people knew better what they wanted than the local authority could do. In addition, several mentioned that CATs could give a sense of ownership to local people, who would then feel empowered to do more with the asset than the council had been able or willing to. One officer expressed the view that a community group might simply be able to use an asset to deliver local social value better than the council could. "I genuinely think that communities are in the best players to operate those types of community services in their area." ('Richard', council officer).

All the council officers interviewed for this study acknowledged that the need to make budget cuts and scale down local authority spending was a major part of their thinking when designing their CAT policies and in deciding whether to allow assets to be taken over by community organisations. The decisions they had taken were diverse, with certain authorities favouring market disposal mechanisms to raise capital funds, and others preferring asset transfers in order to retain properties in the public sector, albeit no longer under direct council control, but all were clear that austerity was a significant factor in arriving at those decisions. It thus appears that this economic policy, and the political philosophy underlying it, is the largest component of the discourse around Community Asset Transfer. The broader implications of austerity policies for the functioning of local authorities, and the ways in which some have sought to mitigate and work around the constraints these have imposed upon them, have been previously discussed in greater length in chapter 4.

Reframing the Choice Framework

Findings from this research provide partial support for Kleine's (2010) Choice Framework. Some of the resources identified by Kleine are the same ones found to be important to community participants in this study. Also, the structural features of the Choice Framework are echoed in aspects of the role played by local authorities in the CAT process. On the other hand, some of the findings are not entirely consistent with the Choice Framework. As has been discussed above, considering the exercise of choice from a group, rather than an individual, perspective means that not all the resources from the original framework are relevant to this form of asset transfer. There are also things that have been found to be important in this study, which do not appear in Kleine's Framework: the availability of time as a resource is one; the inclusion of action as a necessary component of agency is another; the role of the local authority as an actor, as well as being a feature of the group's structural environment, is a third. These are discussed in detail below.

In light of the limited degree to which empirical evidence in the case study area supports the Choice Framework, a revised version can be constructed, taking these discrepancies into account, and thereby creating as full an understanding as possible of the role of CATs in community empowerment. In addition to these changes, the framework will need to be re-interpreted to be applicable to community groups, rather than simply to individuals. Although other researchers have adapted the Choice Framework to fit their own study parameters (see, for example, Attwood, et al., 2013), no evidence has been found that it has previously been changed in this way. This change in emphasis from individual to group makes the presence or absence of certain factors within the framework more or less significant, as shall be seen.

In the Choice Framework, the agency of the individual is considered to be in a reciprocal (though not necessarily equal) relationship with what Kleine, following Alsop and Heinsohn (2005), terms 'Structure', see figure 7.b. Included under this heading, are items that make up what, in organisational research, is generally termed the ‘external environment’. This external environment can, moreover, be broken down into the broader, Political, Economic, Social and Technological (PEST) environment (Morden, 1999) and the more proximal, more directly influential environment of the local authority within which the community group operates. The reason this distinction is made is because of the difference in the relationship a community group has with its local authority and the one it has with the national or international environment - specifically a group’s ability to influence and make changes to these latter. The idea of Structure suggests that there is mutual influence between the actor and the environment but a community group’s ability to affect the broader political, social and economic world is very limited, whereas its influence on the policy, processes and behaviour of the local authority may be significant.

In fact, the local authority should properly be considered an actor in its own right in this situation. Although the primary focus of this study has been on the experiences of community groups taking over publicly owned assets, the attitudes and behaviours of the councils (most of which remain the landlords of the transferred assets) are key influencers of those experiences. The authorities in West Yorkshire spoke about the learning curve they had travelled along as they undertook more CATs over time. Finding what worked for them and for the groups coming forward to take over assets led to changes being implemented and policies revised in a number of cases. There is thus reciprocity in the relationship of the community group and the local authority, even though there remains an imbalance of power.

It is also true that local government is subject to the larger environment as an influence and a constraint on its own decisions and behaviour. As discussed in chapter 4 and mentioned above, there is an effect of national government austerity policies in determining how keen councils are to embrace Community Asset Transfer as a way to sustain service delivery in a landscape of tightening budgets. Local authorities are also bound by legal and policy requirements emanating from national government and (for the time being at least) the European Union. They stand as interpreters, disseminators and gatekeepers of policy and procedures for implementing ideas such as the Big Society, Localism and Community Empowerment. Community groups wishing to go through CATs or nominate ACVs, are obliged to follow the rules and processes set by their local authority, and to abide by the decisions these come to. That a different authority might have come to a different decision, or have different ways of proceeding from theirs is no benefit to them, except in so far as they can make their authority aware of it and seek to influence change from within. This ability to influence change in local authority thinking is an example of Emery and Flora's (2006) idea of political capital, as discussed above, and has been added to the Choice Framework as an important resource for community organisations to possess.

From interviews with community groups and conversations with councillors and council officers, it is apparent that the elements of the external environment that most directly impinge on community groups undertaking CATs are those set out in table 7.a.

Table 7.a: How external environments impinge on community groups

Area of external environment	Ways this impinges on CAT groups
The policies and practices of the local authority regarding asset transfers	Differences in policy and practice directly affect whether a group will be able to take over an asset, and on what terms. This varies from authority to authority.
The attitude of the local authority to Community Asset Transfer as a benefit to communities and an appropriate means to deploy council resources	Some authorities push CATs as a way to reduce their overheads without losing community assets, others show little interest in CATs and their response when approached by community groups varies from positive to suspicious.
The help and support available to the group from both local authority and other agencies	Different authorities offer different levels and types of support to groups. This ranges from advice and consultancy services from external agencies, to Q&A events with the local council, to financial help with grants and loans.
The availability of buildings or land assets suitable for the use the group intends within their local area	The assets available for disposal vary substantially; even where there are properties available, they may not be suitable for the purpose desired.
The legal framework of the Local Government Act, 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 and the Localism Act of 2011	This is the legal framework within which CATs and ACVs occur.
The impact of austerity economic policies on local government finances and service provision	A local authority's willingness to embrace CAT as a tool depends partly on whether it believes it can afford either to maintain the asset itself, or to forego the capital revenue from disposal.
The extent of a belief in the power and appropriateness of local people taking control of aspects of service provision in political and wider circles	There are mixed perceptions among councillors as to the ability of community groups to succeed in managing assets and delivering services previously offered by the authority.

Source: Author

Kleine's concept of 'Agency' incorporates ten different resources needed by an individual (to varying degrees) in order to achieve their desired 'Equality Outcomes'. In returning to the framework from the perspective of the data gathered in interviews for this research, it is clear that not all ten of these resources are of equal importance for Community Asset Transfer acquiring groups, and also that some resources of significance to these groups (such as the notion of political capital noted above) have been missed.

A New Model: the Community Asset Transfer Framework

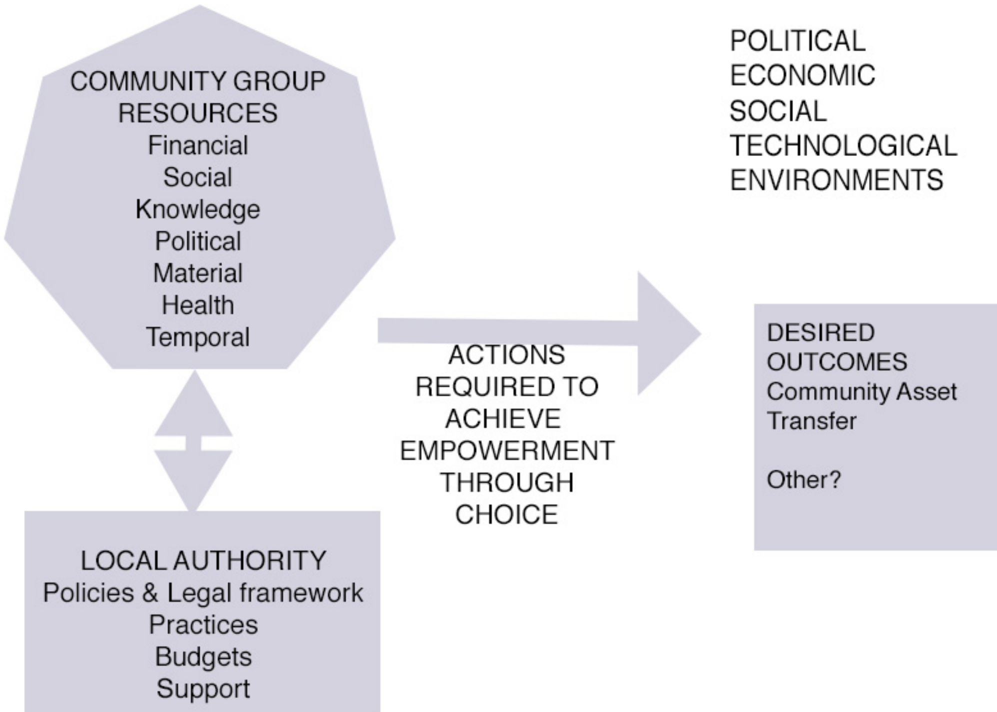


Figure 7.c: Community Asset Transfer Framework

The Community Asset Transfer Framework (CATF) is an adaptation of Kleine's Choice Framework, using elements from Emery and Flora's CCF (political resources) and Perrons' Regional Development Index (knowledge resources). It was felt that the framework needed to be adjusted because it did not consider empowerment from a group perspective, only from a personal one. This change in viewpoint brought home the need for a slightly different set of resources needed by a group in order to exercise choice and achieve desired goals. The group resources in the CATF are considered to be organisational resources, recognising that not all members of the group possess all of them equally but that they are deployed collectively in order to achieve a common aim. The addition of the 'temporal resources' is an entirely new feature of the CATF, recognising that the pursuance of an asset transfer is time consuming, and will need a group with sufficient time wealth among its members if it is to succeed. CATF also distinguishes the local authority as both a part of the external environment of the group and also as an agent in its own right, with desired outcomes of its own, and existing in relation to the community group along multiple axes. The other elements of what Kleine terms Structure have effectively been pushed up a level as they form the broader environment in which everything else occurs. The final addition to the original framework is in bringing forward the requirement for action as a crucial component of agency. It is in *acting* to achieve a chosen goal that the group effectively becomes empowered. The development of the CATF is discussed in detail below.

From the analysis of the interviews conducted for this research, and the thematic codes described in chapter 3, it is concluded that there are seven broad sets of resources a community organisation needs to possess in order successfully to complete a Community Asset Transfer with a viable future. These are:

- **Financial resources**: the means to sustain the organisation and the asset;
- **Material resources**: typically, the property asset itself plus any equipment used;
- **Social resources**: strong and enduring bonds within the group and networks, relationships, and the ability to form new contacts with people and organisations of interest outside it;
- **Knowledge resources**, broken down into informational and educational resources: access to information and the ability to integrate; filter and analyse that information to make it useful to the organisation;
- **Organisational Health resources**: good governance; the ability to manage internal conflicts; having a large enough pool of members/volunteers to make it sustainable;
- **Political resources**: access to power and ability to influence decision-making; and
- **Temporal resources**: time.

Financial resources are crucial to the success of a Community Asset Transfer project at every stage of its life. ‘Finance and funding’ was the most talked about subject in interviews conducted for this study. All interviewees discussed concerns and strategies for covering costs and sustaining assets and services at some length. It is not surprising that all interviewees mentioned finances, particularly as there was a question in the interview protocol specifically about them, and given the centrality of providing a business plan in order for a CAT request to be approved. It remains notable however, how apparently central issues of funding and solvency are to the experience of community groups with transferred assets. Raising and spending money seemingly occupies more time and thought than any other aspect of Community Asset Transfer. Financial resources are therefore taken to be critical to the possibility of a group being able to make the choices necessary to acquire and maintain a community asset and provide a service to their local area.

This may not automatically disadvantage poorer or more deprived neighbourhoods. As mentioned in chapter 6, certain forms of grant funding give added weighting to applications from such communities. It does, however, limit their potential for fund-raising within the local population, and may also imply less knowledge in these places of how and where to apply for such funds. 'Katherine', a community group secretary working with a group in a deprived neighbourhood, related a conversation she had had with a fund-raising body. She had queried why no local grants had been made in favour of this poor neighbourhood and was told that no-one from the area had applied. Applicants from around the more affluent parts of town had put in bids for various projects but none had come from the more deprived areas where, arguably, the resources could have been used to greater effect.

For this reason, **knowledge resources**, made up of access to information, and to educational abilities at a level sufficient to undertake the CAT process and sustain the group into the future, are also critical factors in empowerment. Many groups have complex capital, development or strategic requirements in order to achieve the mission of the group or to improve the asset they are acquiring. As has previously been noted, the application process for CATs involves business planning, fund-raising and forming a body with a robust and appropriate governance structure. All of these need a level of knowledge within the group or an ability (intellectual and temporal) to acquire that knowledge. Knowledge resources like these can be bought in, if the group has funds, or may be offered as part of a support package by an external organisation, be it the local authority, a membership body such as Locality, or through a network of community groups who have gone through the process themselves and can offer 'mentoring' in CATs to similar groups. This was an idea suggested by 'James', the founding director of a charitable community organisation:

> "They could set up a mentoring process with someone like us, or other groups who have been through it, and they can mentor. Or possibly hold the asset for them. Or maybe do facilities management for them. But nobody is bringing those solutions to people."

Accessing this kind of support, as the quote from 'James' suggests, requires the organisation to know that the help may be there for them. They would need at least a general idea that it exists and where to go, in the first instance, to find out how to access it. Communities or groups with fewer networks into local infrastructure may find themselves disadvantaged in being able to find that support. Access to informational resources is thus partly dependent on social resources.

Social resources include both internal social reinforcements within the group - the bonds that give it strength and resilience, and the networks it has and can sustain with external people and organisations. These external contacts need to be with the local community, for whom the group is acquiring the asset, and with broader networks such as relevant departments within the local authority, local councillors and politicians, or funding bodies, banks and so on. Being able to generate publicity, either through local media or, increasingly, via social media, is key to attracting new group members, asset users and potential funders to the project. The importance of this network was summed up by 'Judy' from Locality:

> "The most successful ones we've seen have been the ones with the big membership. Not just relying on a small group but involving the broader community. Not just relying on six or seven individuals because that's a strong way of engaging people in feeling that they own it."

As was noted in chapter 6, a group's access to local politicians was frequently mentioned as having benefitted them in achieving their asset transfer. The influence this gives such groups is an instance of the **political resources** at their disposal. There are other ways in which community groups can deploy these resources, such as mobilising local people to support their efforts and lobby their councillors or Members of Parliament; placing stories in the local news media or social media seeking to put pressure on politicians; and attending events held by local authorities or by other bodies like Locality where they can express their views and share their experiences of CATs. At a Community Asset Transfer event hosted by Bradford council (BMDC) in 2018, for example, community organisations at different stages of their CAT journeys were able to meet councillors and council officials to ask questions and raise concerns about the process and its problems. Having held a number of these events, BDMC was revising its policy and increasing the levels of support it offered to groups undertaking CATs.

Gagnon et al. (2017) offer nine measures of a healthy organisation: a sense of direction, the ability to innovate and learn, strong leadership, a level of co-ordination and control, possession of capabilities and expertise, motivation to achieve success, a safe and pleasant work environment, governance structures that ensure accountability, and a focus on the external environment. Of these, the following were most raised in interviews and can be considered to represent the most important **organisational health resources** of community groups: does the group have a proper system of governance (leadership, accountability, co-ordination and control); does it have a sufficient number of engaged people willing to share the workload (capabilities, expertise and motivation); is it able to tap into the culture and values of its local community in such a way that that community will support and sustain it and its work for the foreseeable future (sense of direction, outward focus). In addition, the health of a community group can be considered to include whether its financial model is robust and sustainable; and whether it has mechanisms and goodwill enough in place to resolve internal conflicts.

Conflict and tensions on their boards were seen to be having a negative impact on two of the community groups studied in this research; in one case, leading to the resignation of a number of board members at a crucial stage of the CAT process. Interviewees from this charitable community benefit society talked about how tensions had arisen initially because the form of governance that had been chosen by the board was felt to be undemocratic by certain of its members. Disagreements about the direction of the project were fuelled by these underlying problems and ultimately, half the board walked out. Proper governance and financial credibility are among the characteristics of community groups sought by local authorities when making transfers. Councillors from Leeds and Bradford stressed the importance of only allowing transfers to groups that met appropriate governance requirements, and that had a large enough membership to look sustainable in the long term. This study uncovered a wide variation in organisation types among CAT groups but all conformed to a recognised model for some form of community or social enterprise, with appropriate governance structures to match.

The other three features listed overlap strongly with elements of social resource as discussed above. A community group's resilience depends on its ability to sustain ties internally and externally, and to reflect the values and expectations of its target members and customers. In order for a community-based organisation to flourish, other parts of that community must feel that it in some way belongs to them, that it is somewhere they are welcome and that it serves their interests in some way. Councillor 'Noel' expressed reservations about one of the transfers in his area, saying:

> "There's an element of satisfaction in saying I'm part of this community group that runs this amazing centre. But to what extent have they managed to make the community feel that this facility is for them?"

A CAT group will need to make its community feel that the asset is 'for them' if they are to endure.

The most significant **material resources** of community groups are the transferred assets themselves. As discussed in chapter 6, these assets represent a double-edged sword for groups and the important thing, as was advised by a representative of Community Action Bradford, during a Community Asset Transfer event held by BMDC in November 2018, is to "make sure you're taking on an asset rather than a liability". Where the asset allows the group to generate revenue and be self-sustaining it makes a positive contribution to the group's financial resources. Buildings can, however, be a drain on both finances and time, as evidenced by many of the interviewees in this study. Typically, though, a group could not achieve its broader aims without premises to operate from, so the materiality of the built and land assets involved is significant as a resource type in its own right as well as by the effects it has on financial and temporal resources.

Temporal resources are not specified in Kleine's model but they come sharply into focus in the present study. The emphasis from community group interviewees on the time they had personally devoted to the Community Asset Transfer process; the stated problems in local authorities about how to move CATs through under-resourced internal systems in a timely and efficient manner; the predominance among interviewees and community Board members of people at or past the age of retirement, all suggest that availability of time is a critical resource for successful CATs. Although the issue of time availability of group members was less often mentioned than the time taken for the process to complete, respondents did talk about the length and complexity of documents that needed to be completed both to satisfy the local authority of their competence to run the asset, and to apply for grant funding. Community group secretary 'Katherine's' bulging folders of correspondence, statistics, cash flow projections and funding applications spoke volumes about the time required in order to create a successful CAT.

Many of the resources found to be important in this study echo those reported in Findlay-King et al.'s (2018) study of leisure centre and library transfers. Support and specialist help were identified as key resources most often missing when volunteer community organisations took over the management of complex assets, and that the state of repair of buildings was often a point of concern. As well as noting that communities with high levels of internal social resource were more likely to embark on the transfer process – let alone complete it – their work made clear the serious time commitment required from community volunteers in order to achieve transfer and subsequently to manage the asset sustainably. Their paper quotes directors and volunteers in transferred sports facilities working seven-day weeks and late into the night in order to ensure the smooth running of their centres (Findlay-King et al. 2018, p.165). They also note the importance of a friendly and supportive attitude towards asset transfer within the council itself: "local political support and goodwill made asset transfer easier for voluntary groups" (p.164). As was found among groups in the present study, their case studies included one where a "prominent local politician" was a member of the voluntary group concerned, much to that group's benefit.

The 'Degrees of Empowerment' in Kleine's framework are described as parts of the notion of choice. The choice has to exist but the individual also has to know of that and to be able to make their selection realistically, given their circumstances, in a way that makes it actualisable. The model seems to suggest that Equality Outcomes are simply the effect of exercising such actualisable choices, but this leaves out a crucial component to achieving any desired outcome: action. It is by acting in accordance with choices made that individuals achieve agency. The possession of key resources may be a prerequisite for an individual to be an agent but it is the deployment of those resources in the interest of reaching chosen goals that characterises the individual as an agent of change, and thus supports that individual's increased empowerment. In the chapter of the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* on the subject of agency, Schlosser (2015) states that "agency denotes the exercise or manifestation of the capacity to act". Much of the discussion of this subject in contemporary philosophy is about whether agency requires intentionality or rationality, but the requirement for action is never questioned.

Action requires both willingness and ability. The willingness aspect can be interpreted as the desire to make a choice as per the framework. The ability to act will depend in part on the resources available to the individual or group and on the relevant circumstances prevailing in the external environment, but neither ability nor willingness is sufficient on its own to bring about positive action. Nor is action merely a single, voluntary movement toward the desired object. The larger and more complex the outcome sought, the greater the number and likely complexity of the actions needed to bring it about. This is clearly seen in the reports of community group interviewees about the length and complexity of the process they had to go through in order to be granted the transfer of their chosen assets. As 'Ryan', the chair of a community group put it: 'Tim' [another of the directors] had to write an incredibly detailed business plan, which had to go through several iterations… It was extremely tedious and long drawn-out." In this context, sustained and multiple actions by different members of the group are the only way an expressed choice can be turned into the desired outcome. The notion of 'Action' is therefore added to the framework to fill this omission.

The revised Community Asset Transfer Framework (CATF), figure 7.c above, shows the inter-relationship of the community group, with the resources it needs in order successfully to pursue an asset transfer; the local authority, which sets policies and processes within which that transfer must take place; and the broader external environment, which forms the backdrop for all the decisions taken, choices made and actions that lead to Community Asset Transfers happening. As well as influencing one another, both the group and the council are actors exercising choices that empower them to achieve the desired outcome of Community Asset Transfer through actions appropriate to their role within the transaction. There is a feedback loop built into the model: the experience of achieving the desired outcome of a Community Asset Transfer plays back to both the community group and the local authority as information from which they will learn for future interactions and decisions. Charity director, 'James', for example, noted that his organisation had gone through a "steep learning curve" and were keen to build on their acquired knowledge by undertaking more asset transfers in the future. They were already in negotiation with the council to acquire their next asset.

Although the local authority was earlier spoken of as part of the 'Structure' context of Kleine's Choice Framework, in the revised CATF the authority is shown as a body in reciprocal relation to the community group as this seems better to reflect the fact that choices and resources of the council are important in either enabling CATs or hindering them. The authority has its own agency, and must be considered to be what Smyth and Checkland (1976) would term 'actors' – the A component of their CATWOE analytical tool - in this context; as well as being an environmental influence on the community group. The reality is a messy, unequal relationship whereby the choices available to community organisations are constrained and controlled by the local authority of which they are a part, but where positive social and political relationships on an individual as well as on an organisational level allow sometimes for real partnerships around Community Asset Transfers. At the same time, the authorities are fulfilling their own agendas. They have outcomes they seeking to achieve, making choices and taking actions to achieve them. The Community Asset Framework reflects this reality.

CATF is an academic framework representing the findings of a relatively small-scale piece of research. It highlights the complex web of factors and resources that need to be in play, and working in alignment, for a community group to successfully go through the Community Asset Transfer process. The number of different variables involved makes it clear that the subset of local communities across England who would easily be able to use CATs as a tool for self- or local-empowerment would be quite restricted. Possession of all seven resources (in varying amounts, at different times), in a supportive environment, with an 'on-side' local authority and the ability to freely exercise the choices available to them in order to achieve their desired outcomes, is a tall order, and one many groups will struggle to fill. CATF does, however, offer the potential to become something more: a tool community groups can use to help them recognise any gaps in their resource profile, enabling them to seek relevant help and support from external bodies in order to plug those gaps and improve their likelihood of success in using asset transfer to add social value to their communities and reduce inequalities between local areas.

Implications for Community Asset Transfers

Implications for Local Authorities

Local authorities are key to the operations of Community Asset Transfer. Because CAT policies are set at local level, rather than at national level, it is these local policies and practices that determine the number and nature of asset transfers that take place in an area. The attitude of a council towards CATs was mentioned in all but one of the interviews conducted for this study, with over a hundred separate references made. Although the perceptions of attitude by individuals within councils may differ from those in community groups, respondents to this study considered it to be one of the most important matters to talk about. It is clear, therefore, that councillors need to be aware of their own significance in determining whether their authority will support CATs, and what provision they are willing to make to do that. Of the five authorities in West Yorkshire, two kept CATs as just an option for asset disposal, rather than viewing them (as the other three did) as a pro-active mechanism for retaining buildings or services. This attitude may act as a brake on community groups coming forward to seek CATs, and reduce the likelihood of them occurring.

There is a recognition among local authorities that top-down, centralised administration is not the only – or necessarily the best - way to deliver services to local communities. However, that need not translate into a belief that transferring council property to the control of community groups is the best way. While statutory service provision is unaffected, certain discretionary services, such as local libraries, community halls, and children's centres are frequently the objects of disposal notices, removing those facilities, and the services they delivered, from the reach of previous users. Supporters of Community Asset Transfer argue that it is an optimum solution to retain those facilities for the common good, but this view is not universally accepted. The argument that this form of disposal privileges more affluent communities over their more deprived neighbours is valid. Although this study shows CATs occurring across a spread of areas, interviews conducted in poorer places found that there was a level of reliance on people from beyond the neighbourhood to undertake those aspects of the transfer that the locals were either unable or unwilling to do themselves. There is a clear ethical tension here: between the responsibility to offer quality services and suitable provision for all, regardless of circumstances, and the possibility that by returning facilities to community hands, scarce resources may then be focused on more needy groups in society. The choice of whether to follow a community-led path and push for local groups to take over the running of their own assets, to achieve whatever goals they believe best serve the people of the area; or whether to ensure that all public services and buildings are available to all at all times in order to ensure a level of fairness in society, is ultimately a political one.

The relationship between local authorities and community groups seeking asset transfers is complex. The council is often cited as a source of frustration by community group interviewees but is also acknowledged to be, in many cases, a primary source of information, funding and other support. Community interviewees made the observation that there is a mismatch between the process-driven, budget cycle-dependent behaviour of governmental bodies and the more spontaneous nature of life in a small organisation, with short-term goals and requirements as well as long-term ambitions. It is appreciated that local councils are acting within difficult resource constraints, but interviewees in community organisations offered a number of suggestions to improve their experience:

- Slim down processes to make them faster and more responsive;
- Offer more support with unfamiliar aspects of the transfer such as business planning and fund-raising;
- Ensure that, as far as possible, a group's point of contact within the council remained the same and was an individual with sufficient knowledge and authority to keep the project progressing or to cut it off before too much time had been wasted;
- Have all salient information about the asset (running costs, fire and electricity safety certificates, etc.) pulled together for acquiring groups to use when creating their business plans;
- Possibly introduce first-time CAT groups to others with experience who could offer guidance.

Given council officer 'Michael's observation about how much time it took for the council to process CAT applications through their various phases, this latter approach, of creating local CAT networks, perhaps with designated CAT mentors, would provide support for community groups seeking CATs, without over-burdening stretched council resources any further than need be.

As well as the operational types of support mentioned above, some financial support for the early period of the transfer would be most appreciated by community groups – especially those with little or no existing revenue stream and immediate bills to pay. It may seem counter-intuitive to suggest offering money to a group taking over an asset, when the very reason for disposing of that building is that the council could no longer afford to maintain it, but there is a logic to ensuring that a group taking over an asset will be able to afford at least to get the project started. Given that ultimately all but a handful of the assets transferred are done so on a leasehold basis, the council would be using the money to invest in its own property and avoiding the loss of public amenities, which are otherwise unlikely to return to the area. A small community centre studied in this research continues to survive today, in part because the local authority gave them a loan of a few hundred pounds in their first year as a CAT, in order to pay for their building's insurance. The offer of three or six months running costs for a building could provide a small organisation with the cushion it needs to set up and start to generate funds from other sources (it would literally buy them time), and the council concerned would still be making an overall saving on the annual budget for the property. As mentioned in chapter 5, Kirklees council does make available small grants of this type, offering both 15 percent of the average previous two years running costs of the site and development grants of up to £5,000 to help groups with upfront capital requirements.

Implications for Community Groups

It is unfortunate that applications for asset transfers are frequently the result of a council announcing the closure of a local service or the disposal of a property for redevelopment, as this sets up an antagonistic dynamic between the authority and the community group from the outset. And yet, as community interviewees repeatedly commented, connections on the council or in council offices made a considerable, favourable difference to the progress of their transfer bid. Political resources have been identified as important components of agency for groups, and the ability to exercise influence is greater where more channels of communication to power are open and positive.

The seven resources identified in the Community Asset Transfer Framework have all been found to be significant to the successful transfer and sustainable future of organisations undertaking asset transfers. The precise degree to which one resource may be more important than another will depend on the circumstances of the group, the nature of the asset being acquired and broader external factors, of which the attitude of the local authority may well be the most influential. The need for different resources may come into focus at different times. As has been suggested, the skills and organisational qualities needed to complete the transfer process are likely to be different from those needed to engage local community support, generate continuing revenue or provide local social value. This may mean that the nature of the group itself has to change through time, and this in turn may necessitate changes of personnel. This process of change can be uncomfortable for the group, and conflict can arise. This is a normal pattern of organisational development and, as long as the group is healthy, with robust governance structures and internal social bonds capable of dealing with those stresses, it can come through this 'storming' phase of its development without losing its focus on its mission (Huczcynski and Buchanan, 1991, p.175).

Community groups considering undertaking the CAT process may find the Community Asset Transfer Framework useful as a tool to assess whether they are ready to do so. Having established what their desired outcomes are, a brief audit of the external environment and of their local authority's attitude to CATs can tell them whether the situation they are in is favourable. From there they could ascertain whether they possess the range of resources necessary to succeed in achieving their outcomes and, should there be gaps, they can think about how to plug those. As an early planning tool, the Framework would then prompt them to set out possible actions they might take in order to move through their choices to achieve those outcomes. The feedback mechanism enables plans to be revised and refined as needed.

Implications for Government Policy

The lack of statutory reporting, or even of a standard definition, of CATs by local authorities means that it is well-nigh impossible to assess how wide-spread or how useful this form of disposal is. Although the West Yorkshire evidence would suggest that asset transfers are becoming more popular with local authorities, with the rate at which they occur picking up over the last eight years since the Localism Act, they do not seem to have any significance to national government. Council officers admit to making up their own rules and deriving their policies on the subject from a mix of other authorities documents and the particular circumstances of their situations. This means that any possibility there is for CATs to be a tool of empowerment for communities is compromised: groups wishing to undertake transfers are at the mercy of the views of their local authority as to whether or how they can proceed. Researchers seeking to analyse the effectiveness of the approach in reducing inequalities, preserving local services or empowering neighbourhood bodies face a serious struggle to find useful data to evaluate. And anyone objecting to the redistribution of public goods in this way lacks the information required to challenge it. Recognising the existence of Community Asset Transfer as a real social trend, happening in local authorities across the country, and setting out clear definitions and guidelines for how it should happen and the role local authorities need to play in that, would be a good start. Making it a statutory requirement that local authorities add CATs to their registers of ACVs (something that would not be too onerous, given how few actually take place) would enable sensible comparisons to be made and useful data compiled about numbers, types, longevity and success factors. From this lessons could surely be learned to make the process easier for groups seeking to acquire local assets and more transparent as to who benefits from such transfers.

Summary

This chapter has considered how the data gathered from interviews with community group members and representatives of local authorities in West Yorkshire might be interpreted using one or other of the frameworks set out in the methodology chapter. Kleine's 2010 Choice Framework, although developed in a very different context, has been found to have the most explanatory value here and so a variant of that framework has been created.

The Community Asset Transfer Framework suggests that seven inter-related resources (akin to 'functionings' in Sen's capability approach) are important in allowing community organisations the agency needed to interact with their local authority and act in pursuance of their desire to take control of an asset and provide value to their community. These resources vary somewhat from Kleine's, with the addition of political resources, as described in Emery and Flora's (2006) Community Capitals Framework, and the translation of 'information' and 'education resources' into 'knowledge resources' as per Perrons' (2012) Regional Development Index. The category of temporal resources is an original addition to the framework, discovered as part of this research.

Another new feature of CATF is the translation of the Choice Framework from an individual to a communal perspective, considering the capability sets of groups rather than of individuals. This shifts the emphasis of certain resources, such as health, knowledge and social resources, from personal to organisational. Simultaneously, psychological resources fall out of the framework because they are too closely connected to ideas of the person. Natural, geographical and cultural resources are also omitted from the CATF because they never arose as considerations during the research.

The Framework also highlights the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the groups and the council from which they are taking over the asset. It makes clear that local authorities not only have a duty of care to residents to ensure that only community organisations with suitable resources in place should be granted CATs, but also that those organisations will only succeed if they receive support, understanding and a degree of flexibility in approaches taken to the process of asset transfer. The Framework further makes clear that local authorities are themselves actors in the process and they need to recognise which are the outcomes they desire, and the choices they have in how to attain those outcomes.

Finally, some of the implications of the research for local authorities, community groups and government policy are set out, along with suggestions for ways in which these might make use of the findings of this study. The potential for using the CATF as a tool for community groups considering CATs was laid out in outline.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

Introduction

This study set out to examine inequalities between English communities through the lens of Community Asset Transfer. It investigated whether this form of local government disposal results in any change in the inequalities experienced by individuals in different communities. Having considered the evidence from the policies and practices of the local authorities in West Yorkshire, the chosen region of investigation, and the testimony of members of community organisations and local authorities, it concludes that Community Asset Transfer can only work as a tool to empower deprived local communities if it is part of a bigger picture of support and capacity building.

The research focused on Community Asset Transfers (CATs) in West Yorkshire. It has sought to go beyond the political rhetoric of handing back control of local services to local people, and instead attempt to understand the patterning of empowerment offered by these transfers and its relationship to wider place-based inequalities. In order to address this issue, it has considered the broader theoretical literature on capabilities, social capital, social innovation and asset-based development. These have been mined to discover models and frameworks that might be suitable frames of analysis for the findings of this study, relating to CATs. Kleine's Choice Framework (2010) and the Community Capitals Framework of Emery and Flora (2006) both proved useful in developing a new analytical tool for that purpose.

As well as being understood in this broader context, the study also sought to place CATs into the political and regulatory context of the UK. This is important because the use of CATs by local authorities can be framed as part of the drive to localism, and as a response to the pressures of austerity brought to bear on those authorities. Notions of localism and austerity have become conflated into what Featherstone et al. (2012) call 'austerity localism', a term which identifies localism as part of a wider neo-liberal agenda to reduce the size of the state and which pushes for local services to be provided by the private sector and voluntary groups. For Bowden and Liddle (2018), local authorities have been squeezed out, losing control of local policy agendas with both private sector and third sector bodies having an increased presence and visibility in developing local policy and providing locally based services.

In spite of much criticism of localism from academic theorists (Bailey, 2012, Clarke and Cochrane, 2013, Featherstone et al., 2012, Rolfe, 2015), the idea of bottom-up, grassroots community development remains popular with researchers doing more empirical work, especially in international development, where ideas of community self-help are seen as viable and sensible routes for particularly deprived communities to move out of extreme poverty and entrenched cycles of hardship (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005, Emery and Flora, 2006). Findlay-King et al.'s (2018) paper on CATs in the leisure sector sought to establish whether these transfers could be considered to be examples of progressive localism, even set against a backdrop of austerity politics and diminishing public expenditure.

Their conclusions were mixed. Although the transfers they observed did not meet the radical aims of subverting neo-liberal austerity, they did provide genuine benefits to communities and real empowerment to the groups who had undertaken them. They concluded, however, that groups with existing high levels of social capital, operating in more favourable markets, would always be more successful than those lacking such resources. This is especially true of smaller, volunteer-led groups with limited resource bases, which struggled to remain viable and continued to depend on local authority support and other forms of funding (grant and social finance) to enable them to succeed; as was described in Forbes et al.'s (2017) paper derived from the same study, but with a specific focus on libraries.

This research led Findlay-King et al. to suggest that there was a need for greater support for community groups like these if existing Community Asset Transfers were not simply to become a mechanism for entrenching existing inequalities (Forbes et al., 2017, Findlay-King et al., 2018). This conclusion is corroborated by the results of the present study, which found that smaller organisations struggled financially and had problems of human resourcing. Many of the CATs that featured were heavily dependent on time-rich members with the skills, knowledge and political connections to carry them through both the process of transfer and the subsequent management of complex assets. The research in this thesis confirms the need for external support to be made available to community groups if CATs are truly to be instruments of egalitarianism.

Research Goals and Methods

The aim of the research was to assess the extent to which Community Asset Transfer provides a mechanism for empowering local communities and thereby reducing place-based inequalities. Linked to this were five related questions:

1. In what ways does Community Asset Transfer (CAT) empower communities where it takes place?
2. What are the most important resources needed by community groups seeking to take control of local assets of community value? Can these be assessed using capabilities models and frameworks?
3. Are the acquiring groups able to manage the assets into the foreseeable future, given the resources available to them? What else might they need? What sorts of risks are involved? Who carries them?
4. From the perspective of the local authority, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using asset transfers in this way?
5. What are the implications of this research for the practice of local authorities in regard to CATs?

The first three of these questions address what community groups need in order to make a change to themselves or their communities, which will result in positive forms of social innovation, including the reduction of various inequalities experienced within or between neighbourhoods. Following Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) and Kleine (2010), the notion of inequality reduction is considered through the lens of whether greater empowerment has, or can be, achieved by those communities. The fourth and fifth questions reflect the importance of the local authority as an actor in the achievement of CATs and their role in creating the possibilities for volunteer-led organisations to make and act upon meaningful choices in order to achieve these desirable outcomes.

To address these research questions, the study involved an initial desk-based research phase, as a precursor to the analysis of primary qualitative data as part of a case study of West Yorkshire. The desk-based phase of the research involved a review of both the national policy context and of the policy documents for the five local authorities in the case study area. Alongside this, national government measures of deprivation across West Yorkshire, drawing on Index of Multiple Deprivation data, helped to understand the variable socio-economic context of the neighbourhoods in which CATs had emerged. Primary data was gathered from a series of in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face interviews with members of community groups with experience of the asset transfer process, and with councillors and council officers who were responsible for the policies and practices pertaining to CATs in their local authority.

Wherever it was possible to find contact information for a community group with a transferred asset, it was contacted and asked for an interview. In addition, council officers, councillors, and Locality representatives, suggested names of people to contact in particular groups. In total, 30 people were interviewed, 16 of them members of community groups representing 10 different CATs; the others being representatives of local authority bodies and Locality. Interviews were semi-structured, following set questions but allowing respondents to expand on points of significance and to tell their stories in their own words.

The interview data from the local authority respondents was analysed in the context of the information found about their policies, and this enabled a comparison to be made of the practices of the five West Yorkshire authorities. Interviews with community group respondents were transcribed and analysed thematically, using an inductive technique, looking for issues raised across multiple interviews. The themes identified were then compared with those previously discovered in the literature and a framework – the Community Asset Transfer Framework (CATF), figure 8.a below - was devised as a way to represent how the knowledge gained from the study mapped into existing theories.

Because the sample size of participants is small, there are issues of replicability and reliability in the findings from this study. Interviews were sought with all community groups with publicly available contact information but only a limited percentage of these responded, and of those several could not or would not take part because the circumstances of the group would not allow it. This means that the individuals who did take part were effectively self-selecting, potentially introducing biases in the output of the study. The validity of the CATF can best be assessed by seeing whether it addresses the concerns of other groups with transferred assets, or who are mid-way through the process of transfer.

Significant Findings

From 2010 to the end of 2017, a total of 57 Community Asset Transfers had occurred in West Yorkshire. These were not spread evenly across the county, with most transfers having happened in Calderdale and Bradford, and fewest in Wakefield. There was no clear county-wide pattern matching the presence of CATs with more affluent communities, based on ward level measures of deprivation or IMD ranking, but generally more CATs had taken place in peripheral areas than in the urban centres. West Yorkshire shows wide variations in the levels of deprivation experienced by its residents but overall the county falls into the more deprived half of the country. The Bradford Metropolitan District Council area has the most extreme variations in deprivation across the five local authorities and is also more deprived in aggregate terms.

Considering each of the local authorities in turn, and comparing both their policies and their practices around CATs, similarities of attitude emerged from interviews, but there were also some striking differences, most notably in the interpretation of the rules around Community Asset Transfers. The attitudes of council respondents to CATs were generally positive. Interviewees repeatedly expressed the belief that local control of assets and service provision would result in better targeted services, more in tune with local requirements, delivered more efficiently, and representing better value for money than the council could achieve. There was acknowledgement that some areas would struggle to take forward asset transfers as these neighbourhoods lacked the capabilities needed to complete the process and manage the asset subsequently. Examples were given of particularly deprived places, with high levels of social problems and more transitory populations, which, it was said, would never really be able to benefit from this form of transfer. It was not, however, seen to be a universal problem: deprived areas with strong roots and levels of community cohesion - areas with high levels of social capital (Putnam, 1994) - were able to overcome other capacity problems and successfully take over running their own local assets. These groups sometimes needed additional help or support from outside the community itself, but they did benefit from access to funding streams that were specifically targeted at neighbourhoods with high IMD rankings. Nobody who was involved with CATs at any of the local authorities perceived any reduction in inequality as a result of their use. Several CATs had social aims that should ultimately lead to such reductions in their communities but respondents suggested that it was too early for these projects to have demonstrated this sort of impact.

All but one of the local authorities named finance as the primary force driving them to pursue asset transfers. Budget cuts experienced by local government since the start of the decade have left them struggling to cover the costs of both buildings and services, and this has led to sustained programmes of asset disposal and cuts to non-essential services across the UK (Gray and Barford, 2018). The spatial inequalities created by this austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012) come from both the disproportionate impact of service loss on deprived areas with higher needs, and the likely difficulties faced by residents in these neighbourhoods in recreating the services they need because of capability problems experienced in the community (Deas and Doyle, 2013). Bradford, Calderdale and Kirklees had all moved to a pro-active use of CATs to preserve assets and services across their districts and to enable them to focus increasingly limited resources into those parts of the authority perceived to be most in need of public support. This distinction is recognised by people in more affluent neighbourhoods: interviewees from a well-to-do community group in this study commented on the fact that they would never get anything from their authority, meaning that they needed to take control of their asset themselves if they were to retain the amenities and services it represented.

Leeds uses the transfers as one disposal tool among many. It recognises the value of community groups in augmenting the council's offerings but does not necessarily consider management of property assets as necessary to that. Wakefield makes very limited use of CATs, preferring a system of long-term leases and the out-sourcing of council services as a mechanism for reducing costs. Of all the local authorities taking part on this research, they spoke the least about the value of community groups in mitigating the effects of budget cuts and were keen to highlight the ways in which the authority itself was still investing in the development of leisure facilities to replace older premises that were being closed down.

Among the more visible differences between the West Yorkshire authorities were the differences in the definitions and regulations they used for Community Asset Transfer. Calderdale did not include sports facilities on 30-year leases in its definition of CATs, and insisted that community groups taking over assets had to find 'additional' benefits to offer their communities. In Wakefield, when a community group requests that an asset be granted to them as a CAT, it is put out to market, meaning that groups other than the one making the initial request can bid to take it over. Kirklees prefer to transfer their assets freehold, rather than leasehold, and the provision of whatever service the property previously offered is moved or withdrawn, rather than passed over to the new owner. Bradford has adopted what could be termed a 'push' strategy for CATs, offering premises to parish councils in order to keep these facilities open to the public. Leeds uses community anchors as a conduit for CATs but is largely reactive in its strategy, waiting for community organisations to approach it to take over the management of an asset, rather than promoting it.

Table 5.b (see p. 110), which compares the CAT policies of the five authorities, also highlights differences in the average length of lease offered by the authorities, and in the type and level of support officially available to community groups going through CATs. This policy description, however, disguises the level of informal support found to be flowing from council officials and others to help groups get through the CAT process. Instances of this were described repeatedly during interviews. One community group chair spoke of "picking up the phone" to the leader of his local authority, a friend of his, in order to by-pass the institutional bureaucracy of the local authority department he was dealing with. A trustee of another group, expressed the view that their CAT project would not have proceeded as quickly as it had done, if not for the presence on the group's board of both a local councillor and a council officer.

Interviews with members of community organisations, all of whom were trustees, directors or in some other way responsible for delivering the asset transfer and managing the property subsequently, uncovered six broad areas of significance to respondents.

The first was the quality of the assets themselves. More than one person during the course of the study raised the notion of the building being a liability rather than an asset. Many of the properties transferred are old, and even the more modern examples often have flat roofs or other building faults. As well as the ongoing costs of repair and maintenance that these older properties require, some need extensive repairs and upgrading before they can be opened to the public. A number of the CATs visited as part of this study had been closed for years, and lack of use had resulted in decay and dereliction. Making such premises safe, secure and accessible is expensive, and it needs to be done straight away, before the group can begin to earn money from the asset. Some buildings will always struggle to pay their way. For these the business model adopted by the acquiring organisation is critical: a revenue stream is needed to pay for the upkeep of their premises as well as delivering the social value they wish to bring to their communities.

A second area of perceived significance was the variation in levels of support available to community groups from local authorities and other organisations. Groups themselves see such support as profoundly valuable. Even though there was frustration expressed at a perceived lack of 'official' support from the local authority, informal relationships with individuals in the council, or the presence of councillors on the boards of community organisations, were frequently praised as having been important factors in working through the bureaucracy and detail required to achieve the transfer. Respondents also spoke highly of the help they had received from Locality, where this had been available to them. As a national membership organisation, with considerable experience in supporting groups with asset transfers over many years, Locality bring expertise and practical assistance to small organisations who may be struggling to set up suitable governance structures, prepare business plans or look for funding. Not all groups have access to this resource, however, depending on whether their local authority is willing to commission Locality to provide it, or whether the group has the resources itself to pay for membership or a consultancy intervention.

A third, and widely held, area of concern expressed in interviews related to money. Whether it was the cost of running the buildings or the difficulties of securing regular revenues to pay the bills, finance was the number one issue for community group respondents. Some groups were on a more secure financial footing than others but all faced a continuing need to raise money either from grant funding, renting out space or fund-raising activities. None of the groups were profit-taking organisations (by law they are not allowed to be) but some were in a position where they could leverage their building to give them a cash surplus to spend on delivering community services. Others lived hand-to-mouth, taking room bookings that just about covered their costs and simultaneously enabled local people to make use of the space. For these, any sudden large item of expenditure presented them with a serious (and in some cases potentially existential) problem, as they would typically not have funds in reserve to cover it. This is where the freedom from local authority control tips into real risk: a standard lease with the council would include provision for the authority to pay for big-ticket items like a boiler breaking down. CAT groups do not have that security to fall back on. One group in the study had exactly this problem and found itself needing to go back to its local council for an emergency loan to cover this unexpected cost. Small, volunteer-led groups without cash reserves (as many of the CAT groups are) are especially vulnerable to such unplanned expenditure. Another of the participating groups had been flooded out during a catastrophic flooding event in the valley where they are situated. Although their insurance paid some of the costs of replacing equipment, and they were eligible for grants to offset items such as the installation of flood-barrier doors, the building was forced to close for several months after the event, with the loss, not merely of income for that period but also of regular users of the building, who found alternative premises. Recovery from enforced closures is particularly difficult for small groups whose profile in the community may be lowered or damaged as a result of them.

Fourth, what may be termed the social capital and organisational health of groups was also important to their long-term survival. Smaller groups in particular were heavily reliant on volunteers to sit on their boards, manage their facilities and supply day-to-day labour on site. In the smallest groups studied, the same handful of individuals was carrying out the lion's share of all of these tasks. Being able to attract active new members is crucial to the long-term survival of volunteer-led groups, with or without a CAT, and the best way to ensure that is to raise the profile of the group in the community so that people are aware of it and appreciate its relevance and value to themselves. In theory, ownership or management of a key building in a neighbourhood should achieve this, but the group still needs the skills and capacity in its members to leverage the potential advantage that the asset can bring. This means that groups whose members possess a range of business and social skills will thrive best. As such skills are not evenly spread through the population, areas where such skills are in poorer supply will once again be disadvantaged.

A fifth area of significance relates to the role played by the neighbourhood socio-economic context in facilitating or constraining the establishment or operation of a CAT. The effects of local deprivation on CATs may be more apparent in terms of quality rather than quantity: on the form and type of transfers that take place rather than on the absolute numbers. The centre of Halifax, for example, is among the most deprived parts of Calderdale but it has two Community Asset Transfers. Closer analysis, however, reveals that both of these are large properties, transferred to groups with more corporate structures: the Elsie Whiteley Innovation Centre is a former mill building, which now functions as an enterprise centre; the Piece Hall is a heritage building, refurbished at public expense, which has been re-developed as a cultural and retail hub for the whole town and beyond. Neither is dependent on the social, human or other resources of the people who live in the areas immediately surrounding the building. This pattern is repeated across the five authorities: where CATs have occurred in more deprived neighbourhoods, they are typically larger premises with an enterprise or training focus, and they are professionally run and managed by paid employees, rather than being dependent on volunteer labour. These centres bring benefits to their local community through the opportunities they provide for training and employment but they are doing so as substitutes for some form of state provision of services, rather than as an act of empowerment of local people through the CAT itself.

How These Findings Address the Research Questions

1. In what ways does Community Asset Transfer (CAT) empower communities where it takes place?

On the question of how CATs empower their local communities, it appears that, for the most part, transfers allow people to retain valued buildings and services, which would otherwise have been lost as a result of local authority budget cuts. As with Findlay-King et al.'s study (2018), groups with CATs have genuine autonomy in decision-making about how they manage their asset, although most also have either Joint Working Agreements (JWAs) or Service Level Agreements (SLAs), specifying their responsibilities to the council as landlord. Local people are actively encouraged to join in with group activities and to make use of the asset. Those who choose to become group members are able to influence decisions and the future direction of the group. Individuals in the community who do not join the group are mostly excluded from this process, thereby forfeiting any power they might have had to make changes. In this way, the use of CATs typifies a shift from the democratic control of common goods to a 'clubification' or covert privatisation of public assets (Nichols and Forbes, 2014, Standing, 2016). The exception to this is where the asset has been transferred to the control of a parish council, as local people have the right to challenge decisions made by these bodies, and to stand for election to them, if they feel strongly that they disagree with decisions made. In the Community Asset Transfer Framework (CATF), figure 8.a below, empowerment is achieved through the actions undertaken by the group, which enable them to transform choices into their desired objectives. Changes in the extent to which a group is able to exercise such choices, and to act upon them, determines whether it has achieved any further degree of empowerment from the CAT process.

2. What are the most important resources needed by community groups seeking to take control of local assets of community value? Can these be assessed using capabilities models and frameworks?

Analysis of interviews with community group members (typically directors, trustees or secretaries of community organisations) identified seven broad resource areas of importance to groups undertaking CATs: financial resources, material resources, knowledge resources, social resources, political resources, organisational health resources and temporal resources. Of these, financial resources are critical. Groups spoke about the struggles they had in raising funds, in finding capital to upgrade and maintain their buildings, and in developing long-term revenue streams that would allow them to both keep the lights on in their facilities and to provide meaningful social value to their communities. For some cash-starved groups, this pursuit of funds appeared almost overwhelming, the prime focus of the organisations' energies and activities. Respondents lamented the frustrations of not being able to do more of the things they wanted to do to benefit their neighbourhoods, and spoke of elevated stress levels and sleepless nights.

Knowledge resources are also important in enabling groups to manoeuvre through the lengthy and sometimes tortuous transfer process. Groups are expected to complete detailed business plans for their asset, and funding applications require the completion of long, multi-part documents. In addition to the skills needed to clear these hurdles, groups would also need to know where to go and who to contact in order to get support, appropriate professional services and other valuable information. The need for these contacts also brought up the importance of social resources to acquiring groups: having access to networks with whom to pool and share knowledge of this sort can speed up and simplify the transfer process for a new or inexperienced group. Strong community roots and reach will help to ensure the growth and survival of the group and the asset, once it is transferred. These connections represent a form of the 'bridging' social capital as discussed in chapter 2 (Kearns, 2003).

Political resources can be considered a specialist sub-set of social resources but are pulled out as a separate strand in the CATF because of the perceived importance to community groups of being able to influence local authority thinking and actions in support of their goals. As well as a rather abstract, top-level influence over policy through the learning process within councils themselves, it was noted in interviews that authorities had stepped in to support struggling groups with cash and guidance on more than one occasion. One respondent, the vice chair of a community charity, which took over the running of a large and dilapidated asset, summed up both the ambivalence and the commitment of his local authority when he said: “It took them [the council] a long time to get to the stage they reached last year, where they said: OK, it’s obviously not working so let’s see if we can throw some support your way and try and make this work.”

Organisational health is also related to social capital: the relationships within the group need to be strong (‘bonding’ capital) but it also implies the need for proper governance structures, procedures and planning for the future. Organisational health replaces personal health in the CATF (figure 8a, below) as being the more relevant measure of longevity for a group. Gagnon et al. (2017) offer nine measures of a healthy organisation: a sense of direction, the ability to innovate and learn, strong leadership, a level of co-ordination and control, possession of capabilities and expertise, motivation to achieve success, a safe and pleasant work environment, governance structures that ensure accountability, and a focus on the external environment. Their analysis suggests that these are factors in both the short- and the long-term success of organisations. Although community groups are not typically commercial bodies, and they will exhibit different cultural values, sustainability continues to depend on maintaining these resources within the group (Gagnon et al., 2017).

The availability of assets for transfer is clearly a material requirement for CATs, but one that is beyond the control of the group. Use of political resources to influence the authority into ceding them a property may come into play here but there is no guarantee that suitable publicly owned buildings exist or will be forthcoming. Groups in need of property assets for their projects could seek to obtain them through the ACV route, but this may still not be successful, and is likely, in any case, to require them to find substantially larger financial backing, in order to purchase a property on the open market.

Temporal resources were identified as significant in going through the CAT process and in managing the asset post-transfer. Larger organisations, with access to finance, are in a position to be able to hire managers and other staff to do this work, but smaller, volunteer-led organisations, without these advantages, need a pool of individuals who can devote the considerable amount of time required to fulfil the various roles needed. This need for time-rich volunteers explains in large part the predominance of retired people on the Boards of Trustees of these smaller organisations.

Referring back to the frameworks and models discovered in the literature, Kleine's Choice Framework (2010) and Emery and Flora's CCF (2006) were found to be the most useful for analysing the findings of this study. Both were sufficiently detailed to encompass the complexities identified from interviews, and each specified multiple resource types that were valuable in achieving community goals. Kleine's Choice Framework had the further advantage of setting these resources into a larger, structural context, which reflected the situation of CAT groups and their relations to local authority and other organisations. The resource types discussed above were worked into a new model, based on this, with additional components from the CCF: the Community Asset Transfer Framework (CATF). CATF sets community groups and local authorities into the broader Political Economic Social and Technological (PEST) environment and describes their respective requirements for achieving desired outcomes through the use of internal resources and the ability to act in pursuance of choices freely made to those ends. The local authority can act as either a brake or a support in the achievement of a community group's aims.

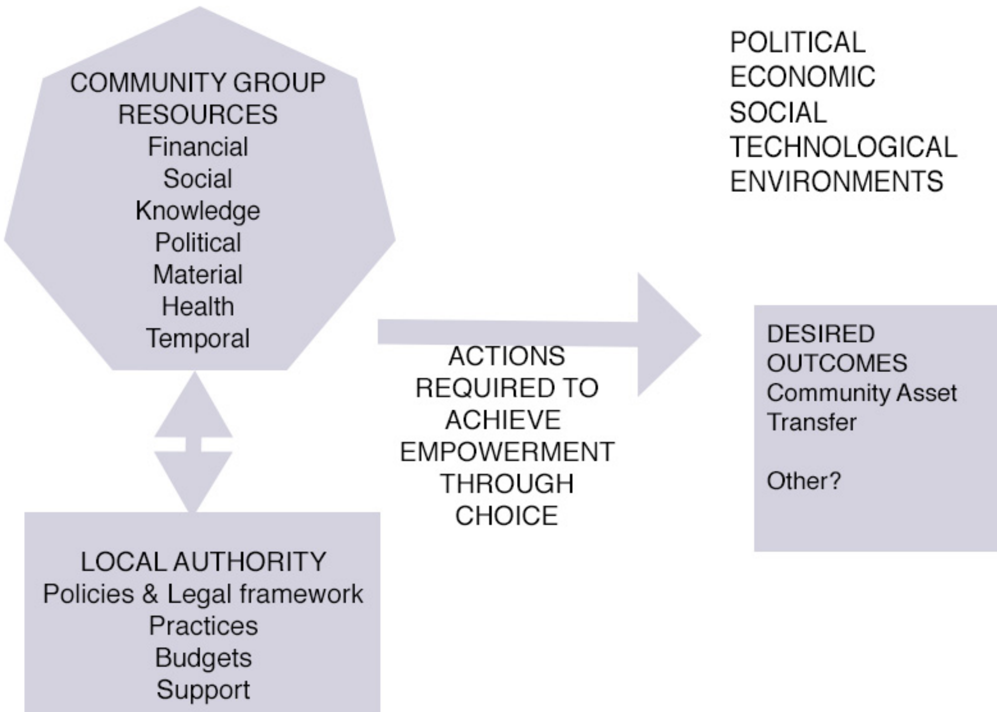


Figure 8.a: Community Asset Transfer Framework (CATF)

3. Are the acquiring groups able to manage the assets into the foreseeable future, given the resources available to them? What else might they need? What sorts of risks are involved? Who carries them?

Future sustainability was found to be problematic for some groups, especially those with small, purely voluntary workforces or buildings in need of substantial capital spending. Although lack of knowledge was a problem faced by groups during the transfer process itself, once they had taken over the asset, obtaining the necessary funds to keep going, and ensuring that they had engagement from the local community to support the venture both through usage of the asset and volunteering to cover the work needed on it, were the major challenges they faced. The support of the local authority was perceived to be of particular importance in ensuring the long-term success of the transfer.

Perception of the risks involved varied. In some cases, the financial risk was considered most significant. In others it was the potential loss of local amenities or even loss of face and reputation that were viewed as important. Local authority interviewees typically said that the council carried the risk of CATs failing, leading to buildings being returned to their control. Given that a major motivation for CATs among local authorities was the need to reduce overheads in order to balance their budgets, the failure of a CAT would potentially mean that expense being brought back in-house. This would be the biggest practical risk for the Council. Politically, the risk of having pursued a failed policy, or of having backed the wrong group to take control of an asset, could pose a larger risk, especially for those authorities in which the ruling party had very small majority.

Community respondents, understandably, spoke more about the risks to them and to their communities. Legal responsibilities and financial requirements were the biggest items they mentioned as risk factors. Other risks, such as loss of local amenities, services and community cohesion were also mentioned. These concerns were typically the motivation for taking over the asset in the first place, so it is to be expected that they would be seen as the principal dangers of failure.

4. From the perspective of the local authority, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using asset transfers in this way?

Local authorities admitted that Community Asset Transfer was used in their district as a way to reduce their costs at a time of deep cuts to budgets. They also expressed the view, however, that local communities benefited from having these assets passed back into community hands, citing greater efficiency, cost savings and the ability to serve local needs better than the council could, as the principal benefits offered. Councillors and council officers also mentioned the availability of alternative funding streams for community organisations that they, as governmental bodies, were unable to access. Even in Wakefield, where CATs were viewed with more suspicion than in other authorities, it was acknowledged that giving community groups (particularly sports clubs) longer leases allowed them to apply to bodies like Sports England or the Big Lottery for help with capital projects or equipment purchasing.

The main downside to CATs, from a local authority perspective, was the time it took for them to get through the process. As well as the need to continue to pay for items like security and insurance while the asset remained under their control, there were tensions between the needs for capital income from asset disposal and the desire to retain buildings and services for local people. Local authority participants were sanguine about the risk of failure of a CAT, explaining that if one group ceased to exist, the asset would simply get transferred to another with similar community aims (assuming such a one could be found!). The authority itself was not perceived to be facing any significant risk.

5. What are the implications of this research for the practice of local authorities in regard to CATs?

Community interviewees confirmed that a positive and supportive attitude from the local authority – perhaps in conjunction with the involvement of one or more councillors or council officers directly into the organisation – was paramount in securing an asset transfer. Offering help and support, internally or via external bodies, was especially valued. In cases where tangible help was given, either financially or through training and legal support, this was said to have been critical to the success of the Community Asset Transfer. If a local authority decides that it does want to pursue CATs as a strategic choice, rather than merely as one tool among many for asset disposal, thinking about the forms and level of support it can offer represents the best path to achieving successful transfers. For groups taking over assets that do not have any initial revenue generating capability, 'pump-priming' working capital grants or loans are particularly valuable in the start-up phase of the project. This echoes some of the findings of Skerratt and Hall's study (2011), which found that community groups taking on village halls were in stronger positions to succeed if they had funding and other support.

The other major headache facing community groups was the complexity of the process for achieving transfers. One interviewee criticised the use of standard commercial leases for CATs, suggesting that these are overly complicated and include irrelevant clauses. This issue has been recognised in Bradford, where the authority is seeking to create a simplified lease template for CATs, which will hopefully minimise the need for legal fees on the part of acquiring groups. Any streamlining of the process is likely to be welcomed by community groups going through it, and will ultimately benefit the authorities as well, in speeding up the transfers.

The CATF offers the possibility of developing a tool which can be used by both local authorities and community groups to assess the readiness of a group to undergo the CAT process, and whether asset transfer represents the best way for that group to achieve its preferred outcomes.

How This Study Contributes to Knowledge

This thesis began by noting that Community Asset Transfers in England have received little in the way of research attention. This study acts both to confirm previous findings but also extends them. Unlike both the Findlay-King et al. (2018) paper and the Skerratt and Hall (2011) study, it looks at a range of different asset types and forms of community organisation. It also places Community Asset Transfer in the broader social, political and economic environment surrounding it and frames its questions around the possibility of empowerment and the reduction of inequalities. The present study therefore shines a light onto a policy tool promoted by national government and other agencies, which had not been subject to previous critical scrutiny. The contribution to knowledge has empirical, conceptual and practical dimensions.

The empirical contributions of the study relate to the practical realities of the process of Community Asset Transfer, as experienced by those going through them. The differences between local authority attitudes have been explored, and the ways in which that variation impacts on the experiences of organisations taking on public assets has been probed. Although it is framed within an academic context, the CATF (Figure 8.a) has the potential to be developed into a practical tool to aid community groups considering embarking on the asset transfer process. It invites such groups to think clearly about what their desired outcomes are, whether the environment in which they operate (particularly that of the local authority of which they are part) is supportive of Community Asset Transfer as a means to achieve those outcomes, and whether they, as a group, possess the resources necessary to effect the choices they make. Finally, it highlights the necessity for groups to devolve their choices into planned actions, in a rational and coherent manner. It is proposed that such a tool could be developed and offered to local authorities and other agencies working with CATs, either as self-help checklist to give to groups seeking transfers, or as the basis of more engaged intervention or support in delivering asset transfers.

The conceptual contribution of the thesis is rooted in the development of the Community Asset Transfer Framework (CATF), building on Kleine's Choice Framework and other capital development models. Drawing on empirical insights from the case study research, the study's contribution in conceptual terms is to refine the original framework, adding new elements and transposing the idea of empowerment through choice from an individual, to a group setting. Although Kleine does not explicitly follow this route in the original Choice Framework, the translation of individual into communal values is entirely congruent with the capabilities approach (Fainstein, 2014). The concept of temporal resources is entirely new. This is the idea that there is a need for sufficient time to be available, to a group or to an individual, in order for them to make use of other resources at their disposal when seeking to achieve their desired outcomes. It was an emerging theme in interviews but appears to have no parallel in other studies.

The CATF also departs from Kleine's Choice Framework in recognising the local authority as an actor in empowerment of the community group, rather than it merely being part of a larger structural environment in which the group operates. This alteration allows the framework more properly to describe the system within which CATs take place. The soft systems methodology developed by Peter Checkland and refined by David Smyth (Smyth and Checkland, 1976) states that it is necessary to have a clear understanding of all the actors involved in a human activity system in order to make sense of its dynamics and resolve complex problems. The role of the local authority and the relationship the community group has with that authority are central to the group's experience of asset transfer and therefore the inclusion of the authority as an actor in the framework increases its explicatory value.

The CATF is therefore important in terms of concept, but it also has important practical potential. The tool was conceived and developed to help community organisations and local authorities evaluate the fitness of a group to undertake a transfer; to audit the environment in which they are seeking to do so; and to frame an action plan to allow them to succeed in their stated mission. Utilising the tool also provides the scope for local authorities to improve practice in relation to CATs. Understanding the different approaches taken by local authorities, and the diverse circumstances and experiences of CATs, gives local authorities the opportunity, if they so choose, to amend their policies and practices to make the CAT process simpler and the outcomes more sustainable.

Future Research Directions

The present study is based upon a single region of England and experiences may differ in other local contexts. Further research could usefully seek to validate the findings of this study and confirm the importance of the factors identified in ensuring CATs can be of use in the empowerment of place-based communities. The findings of this study could also be compared with any larger scale, quantitative work, looking at CATs across the whole country, or even against international examples of asset transfers or asset-based development. The frameworks upon which the CATF is based are international – Kleine's research was based in Chile; Emery and Flora's CCF was derived from their work in Nebraska – so although it focuses specifically on the role of asset transfers in England, CATF should be capable of being deployed in other settings.

Although the study concludes that more deprived areas are likely to struggle to implement Community Asset Transfers unless they are able to attract external support, a number of CATs in neighbourhoods with high IMD rankings are noted. As discussed in chapter 5, these assets are generally bigger premises with employment and enterprise functions, rather than small-scale community spaces. There is thus an emerging distinction between CATs as tools of empowerment for small, volunteer-led community groups and the role they might play in broader regeneration and community development schemes. Further investigation of CATs in this latter context could usefully add to the body of knowledge on community-led regeneration.

One unexpected finding of the study has been the role parish councils play in both enabling and mitigating the more deleterious aspects of austerity-fuelled budget cuts in local authorities. Whether working on their own initiative or at the behest of their local authority, parish councils turn out to be significant players in both the nomination of Assets of Community Value and the securing of neighbourhood assets and services through Community Asset Transfers. Their ability to raise funds through the precept, rather than being reliant on grant funding or the sale of space or services to make ends meet, means that they are better placed than other community organisations to sustain local amenities via these mechanisms. Local authorities in England are still subject to a cap (six percent for those authorities providing social care) on raising council taxes, and must hold a local referendum if they wish to impose taxes above that level. Parish councils are not restricted by this cap, effectively creating a 'back door' for the retention of assets and facilities in public control (Sandford, 2019b). This situation provides potential for further investigation. Further research could assess how parish councils work with and against other tiers of government, and how they relate to questions around localism, local democracy, community empowerment and place-based inequalities.

In Conclusion…

The aim of the study was to discover whether Community Asset Transfer was useful as a tool to empower communities and reduce place-based inequalities. Ultimately, it was found to be a useful tool for local authorities to reduce their overheads while mitigating any attendant loss of service provision, but it cannot claim to redress social inequalities. It is simply too limited to do much more than enable volunteer-led community groups to stay in place and provide social spaces and support to their neighbourhoods. Having said that, Community Asset Transfer can meet the criteria laid down by Cajaiba-Santana (2014) for a social innovation: where the decision to undertake a CAT is taken by a community group, seeking to make a (positive) change to its local environment, for the benefit of people living and working in the vicinity, it may be considered socially innovative. Furthermore, the findings of this study clearly indicate the importance of the interplay between different agents, larger structural components and social systems, as he suggests need to come into play in order to effect genuine social innovation (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014).

Everybody interviewed for this study was positive about the benefits they saw Community Asset Transfer being able to deliver to groups who were in a position to do it. There was, however, a note of reservation expressed by the councillors spoken to: not every community in their district would be in a position or have the capabilities needed to get through the CAT process or to manage an asset subsequently. Retaining amenities and the services they provide within a neighbourhood is seen as a good thing – especially where local authorities are unable to maintain those facilities themselves; and local participation in, and engagement with, the provision of valued social goods can result in better-tailored service offerings and the strengthening of community cohesion. Unfortunately, however, the baseline resources needed by community groups in order to effect this change are substantial, and places where those things are in short supply are in danger of missing out on these benefits without considerable help and support both before and after the transfer.

Community Asset Transfer can therefore only truly be considered a tool of local empowerment for those communities who already possess, to some degree, the seven resources identified, residing in areas with supportive local authorities and a supportive political and socio-economic environment. Its ability to reduce inequalities and offer real empowerment to people living in neighbourhoods lacking such resources is often much more limited. This can be summed up in the words of one community group secretary: "It seems like you can get things done - get money and things - if you already have them, but not if you don't."

"For whosoever hath, to him shall be given" (Matthew, 13:12, KJV).

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