

*Community assets in changing times: Exploring ownership, Covid-19 and the opportunity context*

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# **Community Assets in Changing Times: Exploring Ownership, Covid-19 and the Opportunity Context**

Carina Skropke

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in collaboration with Power to Change

June 2023

# Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.
4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.
5. The word count of the thesis is 101,567.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

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## Abstract

Community ownership of assets describes a situation in which a community organisation owns or manages physical assets, such as land and / or buildings, on behalf of and for a local community. Such activity, which has a long history in England, has seen a revival in recent years, as policymakers and academics explore its relevance for current social, economic and environmental challenges. Proponents argue that community ownership of assets is a means to revive community empowerment; autonomous and participative decision-making; addressing local needs and preferences; and generating well-being and community cohesion, as well as compensating for shrinking public/welfare services. This explains the recent policy interest given the prevailing impulse for fiscal austerity and shrinking the size of the state. In this context community ownership has been approached as a valuable alternative and desired outcome of shifting public responsibilities away from state control. But what is the significance and importance of ownership for the individuals involved? How does ownership and the accompanying responsibilities impact on the local contexts, organisations and communities, particularly during acute crises like the Covid-19 pandemic? Nine community organisations owning physical assets were studied, four of them in depth. Applying a critical constructionist grounded theory approach, the experienced realities of the actors involved were reconstructed to shed light on the dimension and importance of ownership. Rather than these experiences being centred on ownership as such, the study finds that it is one factor among many others. As a distinct characteristic, ownership is important to the various organisations and communities, however, it only becomes beneficial and feasible when situated with other resources and factors which feed into an opportunity context. The study introduced this concept of 'opportunity context' to enable a processual understanding of community ownership. The concept of the opportunity context is applied to analyse the impacts of the pandemic on these organisations that fundamentally rely on physical spaces to which access was denied; and to understand how the pandemic affected the various levels on which the respective opportunity contexts are shaped. The research reveals that approaching community ownership from a processual perspective allows a greater understating of how and why different outcomes emerge and are sustained. However, further investigations are needed into the roles of these assets in post-pandemic arrangements and how an optimal configuration of opportunities can be supported to design community ownership in ways which increase feasibility and enhance benefits.



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## List of Abbreviations

ABCD	Asset Based Community Development
ACV	Asset of Community Value
ASC	Adult Social Care
BIJ	Bureau of Investigative Journalism
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CCOD	Commercial and Corporate Ownership Data
CGT	Constructivist Grounded Theory
CIC	Community Interest Company
CIO	Charitable Incorporated Organisation
CLT	Community Land Trust
COF	Community Ownership Fund
CRESR	Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research
CSC	Children Social Care
EM	East Midlands
ETNA	East Twickenham Neighbourhood Association
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GL	Greater London
GT	Grounded Theory
IGT	Interpretative Grounded Theory
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
KIITC	Keep It In The Community
LAD	Local Authority District
LSOA	Lower Layer Super Output Area
Ltd.	Limited
MHCLG	Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government
MP	Member of Parliament
MSOA	Middle Layer Super Output Area
NW	North West
OA	Output Area
RUC	Rural Urban Classification
SOA	Super Output Area
SW	South West
UTLA	Upper Tier Local Authority
WM	West Midlands

# Chapter One – Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction

Community ownership of buildings and spaces has sparked my interest as a means of civic participation and how this can contribute to combating social difficulties. By redistributing physical assets back to communities these are equipped with the opportunities to rebuild communities, increase social cohesion, and co-create spaces which speak to local needs.

The existing approaches to assess community ownership of assets mainly focused on the categorisation and classification of organisations, the financial stability, or the political environment affecting the opportunities to acquire assets by community organisations. Yet, critical investigations of the practicalities of ownership by community organisations, how the actors involved experience ownership and why certain areas have higher incidents of community ownership than others were absent, although national policies encourage community ownership since early 2010s. I wanted to explore these issues to generate a better understanding of and contribute to support community ownership by understanding how and why it occurred where it occurred.

However, in the initial stages of this research, community organisations, ownership and activities were affected by the pandemic and by government regulations and policies in relation to it. Hence, rather than concentrating on the occurrence, the research set out to examine these two aspects: community ownership of buildings and spaces; and the effects of the pandemic.

Community ownership of assets describes a situation in which a community organisation owns or manages a physical asset, such as land and/ or buildings, on behalf of, and for a local community.

This thesis explores the role and meaning of the ownership of assets for the organisations and communities involved, how this is realised in different contexts and how the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the circumstances for these organisations and communities.

The phenomenon of community ownership is not new and has a longstanding history in the UK (Moore & McKee, 2012; Wyler, 2009), however, its political relevance and academic interest in it, have only recently re-emerged. Since the commissioning of the Quirk Review published in 2007 (Quirk et al., 2007), public discussions have flourished and attention given to legislative issues concerning the transfer, ownership and management of assets by community organisations. This has also been accompanied by academic investigation of these issues.

Proponents of community ownership of assets argue that it is a means to revive community empowerment and autonomous and participative decision-making that addresses local needs and preferences and generates community cohesion and well-being while at the same time, compensating for shrinking welfare service delivery. This explains the recent policy interest since 2007 in this phenomenon in the UK, given the dominant impulse to fiscal austerity and shrinking the size of the state. Community ownership can be seen as a means of generating or maintaining key benefits without public ownership or regulation of markets (Aiken et al., 2011; Aiken et al., 2016; Hobson et al., 2019; MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014; McKee & Moore, 2014; Moore & McKee, 2012; Murtagh, 2015; Quirk et al., 2007). Hence, there have been several attempts to systematically investigate the turn to community ownership.

But several features of this field of investigation impede a comprehensive understanding of it: the scattered nature of organisations engaged in ownership; the highly varying contexts in which community ownership is already in place; the lack of information concerning the geographical distribution of assets; the varying characteristics of assets and asset-owning organisations; and the barriers to community ownership in local contexts. The organisations owning physical assets take various forms, pursue various activities and emerge in various socio-spatial contexts.

In most instances, community organisations form to take on the responsibility for a physical space which can be used by, and for the benefit of the community and in the local context. For example, a community organisation might acquire the right to use or gain ownership of a building which is threatened with closure or withdrawal of public funding. This can involve a building which used to be publicly owned and functioned as a community hub, a venue to rent for local happenings or private celebrations and has changed its ownership from being council run to community owned. The right and opportunity to use the building for community purposes is being maintained and the

asset may continue fulfilling the needs and provide benefits for the community by taking over or taking control and managing the assets.

What this positive portrayal misses, however, are the associated responsibilities, duties, and sometimes liabilities, for the involved communities, that come with ownership. Particularly in areas of high deprivation and fewer available resources and during difficult times such as the Covid-19 pandemic, these responsibilities may put the costs and resources required beyond the reach of community organisations.

This thesis seeks to address some of these gaps in knowledge of community organisations owning assets, by setting out a series of objectives and research questions.

## **1.2. Approach**

The literature and academic investigations of the phenomenon of community ownership of physical assets in a UK context as a response to diminishing public and community spaces have treated community ownership as a distinct sector, classifying the existing organisations according to their size, growth, financial turnover and collaborations and partnerships, and tried to set the scene and create a coherent picture. Investigating the reasons for community ownership, the helping and hindering features, the running and management of ownership of assets have been focus of this research (Aiken et al., 2011; Nichols et al., 2015; Skerratt & Hall, 2011; Woodin et al., 2010).

However, the reality of the manifestations of community organisations is represented by its heterogeneity rather than by unifying characteristics, and whether and how ownership actually matters has not been one of the questions at stake.

To fill this gap, this research applies a multi-case study methodology highlighting the diversity of community organisations taking on ownership of physical assets in England, using a constructivist grounded theory approach to explore the experienced realities of those involved. By examining the participants' practices and perceptions and critically investigating the deeper meaning and dimension of ownership, the research aims to unpack the role and potential of ownership for future community development, and which benefits we can expect for communities regaining ownership over their local assets.

### **1.3. Contribution to knowledge**

The political environment of the past decades has been characterised by an increased level of privatisation and devolution of rights and responsibilities from the state to society. In this context, community ownership has been approached as a valuable alternative and desired outcome of the shift in public responsibilities and control (Cabinet Office, 2014). However, by questioning the importance of ownership to the actors involved, the research enables an alternative perspective to emerge and allows recommendations to be made, not only for policy makers, but in particular, for third sector organisations in the position of owning, or about to take on responsibility for, physical assets. Approaching the phenomenon from a critical constructivist view may add to understand the constructed realities and how different epistemologies derive different insights into the same issues.

The research contributes timely scholarship on the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts on the voluntary sector, particularly on those elements of the voluntary sector which fundamentally rely on the kinds of physical spaces to which access was denied during the pandemic. The research was undertaken during different stages of the pandemic and related restrictions - in the first Covid-19 Winter in 2020/21 and in the second Winter 2021/22 gathering data at two points in time. This enabled the documentation and analysis of the effects of the pandemic on the organisations, their communities, and their potential future in relation to their physical assets.

### **1.4. Objectives and Questions**

The absence of investigations into the experienced realities of asset ownership by community organisations beyond a sectoral and financial categorisation impedes a comprehensive understanding of how and why ownership works where it works: which circumstances are essential to facilitate long-term ownership, to generate well-being, community cohesion and co-created spaces which speak to the needs of those involved. Additionally, the pandemic altered the circumstances under which community organisations operate and own assets and affected the meaning of ownership of physical

assets. Hence, the research aim of this study is to explore the phenomenon of community ownership of assets in the changing times of the pandemic. The related research objectives are to:

- i) examine the contexts of community ownership of assets at the local level;
- ii) explore the role and meaning for, and the effects of ownership on, organisations and communities;
- iii) identify the effects of the pandemic on the organisations; and
- iv) explore potential roles for these organisations and assets in post-Covid-19 conditions, organisationally and socially within their communities.

To address the aim and the related objectives, the following main research questions and sub-questions are posed:

1. What is the importance of ownership of physical assets for the actors involved?
  - How does ownership impact on the organisations, their activities, and the community?
  - How does ownership affect place-, identity- and community-making?
  - Why and how can physical assets become liabilities?
  - Which other assets – besides the physical ones – are perceived to be essential to successfully taking on ownership?
2. How did Covid-19 change the opportunity context for organisations and related communities owning assets?
  - How did organisations react to the pandemic? What activities were performed in immediate response to the lockdown and containment measures?
  - What models were developed for maintaining and managing facilities and retain constructing these as assets?
  - What were the challenges?
  - Which roles could facilities of different kinds play in the emerging ‘new normal’?

## **1.5. Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is structured as follows. The second chapter provides the background to community ownership of assets in England and the UK, addressing the history and

origins of collective forms of ownership and reviewing the different definitions and applications. Having reviewed the limited but growing research on community ownership of physical assets, the different aspects are explored to deepen our understanding of the key concepts of ‘community’, ‘ownership’ and ‘assets’. Then the recent renaissance and current policy context is delineated and the emerging gaps in research are presented.

Chapter Three elaborates the compatibility and application of a constructivist grounded theory approach and conceptual framework by outlining the constructivist stance of this research. Key concepts of habitus, construction of space, the voluntary sector and hybridisation are introduced.

Chapter Four describes and justifies the research methods by summarising and explaining the constructivist grounded theory approach and the acknowledgement of prior knowledge and the researcher’s position. The case study design and the research process are elaborated alongside the adaptation and changes made due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The strengths and weaknesses of the chosen methods are reflected on.

The case study organisations are presented in Chapter Five. Each one is introduced in relation to its geographical location outlining the main findings of the background mapping exercise. This sets the context for each case, showing the uniqueness of each case’s setting so that their special characteristics are not lost in the subsequent thematic analysis.

Chapters Six and Seven report the case study findings on the insights into the meaning and importance of ownership by addressing the research sub-questions to unpick the phenomenon of community ownership of physical assets. The research questions explore different dimensions of the term of ‘importance’ and shed light on the various dimensions which are perceived as essential by the interviewees in regard to ownership. There are factors which appear to be more important than merely ownership and these are analysed, explored and unified in a theoretical assemblage emerging in the concept of the ‘opportunity context’. The concept of the ‘opportunity context’ is further explored in Chapter Seven.

Chapters Eight and Nine explain and highlight how the pandemic changed the situations community organisations owning physical assets found themselves in. First, in Chapter Eight, the immediate effects of the pandemic are described, how the community organisations adapted to the new circumstances, and how assets were used. In Chapter



Nine, the consequences of the pandemic in the short- to mid-term are delineated by making use of the theoretical concept of ‘opportunity context’ and which change operates to affect the action, reaction and maintenance of the social construction and perception of buildings as assets in situations where the use of physical spaces is prohibited.

Lastly, the Conclusion in Chapter Ten provides a summary and discussion of the findings and sets them in the wider context of policy and national developments and ongoing academic research. Recommendations, not only for policy but in particular for practitioners, are developed. The insights generated by approaching the issue of community ownership of physical assets from a critical perspective allows a complex view of how communities cope with the additional responsibility of ownership of physical assets. It is hoped that this contribution to knowledge, the understanding and reconstructions of how actors experience community ownership may influence future policy making and contribute to further academic investigation that can help to equip communities with necessary knowledge to successfully operate community assets.

# **Chapter Two – Community ownership of physical assets: a literature and policy review**

## **2.1 Introduction**

The following chapter reviews the literature on community ownership of assets in the UK in order to ground the study in the historical context and the political and policy debates related to it. This helps to understand the framing of community ownership by different audiences, and the expectations of asset owners engaged in this activity, after which empirical evidence of the realities of their experiences are presented. Firstly, however the international context is explored, highlighting the meaning and challenges of changes in property ownership on a global level and why the UK is no different from global trends.

## **2.2. The fight for property: an evolutionary perspective**

Ownership and property play a role in the different dimension of life, ranging from socially, economically, to politically.

“Ownership as an expression of democratic power, as those who own land ultimately decides what this is being used for. [...] This power of inclusion and exclusion is enormously consequential. The reason is obvious. We, as a society, need land for all sorts of reasons. We need it for leisure and pleasure [...] We need it as a place to exist politically: land provides space for collective, visible, political struggle and protest. We need land to live on [...]. And we need land to reproduce ourselves successfully as a society. This is not just a question of food production, it relates more broadly to the fact that land is an input, of varying degrees of significance, it is what economists call a ‘factor of production’, one of the essential ingredients that makes productive economic activity – and hence social reproduction – possible in the first place.” (Christophers, 2018, p. 29).

Hence, property and ownership of land and assets are issues of interest, and the practicalities and construction has undergone an evolutionary process. This evolution has been most concerned and characterised by shifts in dominant ideas about societal and civic order expressed by political developments, dominant political and philosophical ideologies, and ownership patterns.

Ownership is, according to Honoré, “one of the characteristic institutions of human society” (Hodgson, 2013, p. 227) and he describes distinct characteristics of ownership from the perspective of legal philosophy. Among others these characteristics are the right to: possess, use and manage an entity; the right to income from the thing itself; to the capital and to security. In order to own a thing, the subject must hold most of these elements in respect to the thing at stake. This subject, however, does not have to be an individual or single person but may also consist of couples or groups of individuals or abstract constructs such as corporations and states.

In early societies property belonged to villages and groups - those parts of the population directly accessing and using the land for their livelihood. Throughout Western history these land rights have been subject to changes through conquest and occupation. Particularly land ownership has become a primary concern of the state. In at least the last two millennia, nation states have been concerned with territory and land ownership, developing the legal and societal constructs to confer rights of ownership and access to their citizens. The state exercised its powers and wealth through property. Capitalist transformation turned land and property into commodities which could be sold and bought and thus became subject to the laws of demand and supply inseparable from wealth and class formation. The emphasis shifted from the use value of land to the exchange value (Christophers, 2018; Southerton, 2022; Wily, 2018).

“Whether ideology was communist, socialist, nationalist, or capitalist, a dominant shared strategy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was that community-based tenure must be extinguished in the interests of progress. Extinction of community tenure was advanced either through individualisation and market-led concentration of ownership, or by the mass reconstruction of rural land use in state-run collectives on national land” (Wily, 2018, p. 2).

The turn to neoliberalist philosophy in Western capitalist-oriented countries in the 1980s has also impacted on applied economic logics across the globe. Intellectuals such as Peter Bauer and Anne Krueger claimed that developing countries are similar to developed ones in the sense that they are all overemphasising public services and state interventions which generally comprise trade and global finances and negatively affect

economic growth and entrepreneurial development and progress (Eagleton-Pierce, 2019). But it can be shown that regions across the globe have been affected differently by their respective political and societal processes and whereas Latin America has particularly been shaped by land reforms and the emergence of collectives in response to changes in property conditions, Asian countries such as China have experienced reform of their own regimes through forced collectivisation (Chen & Davis, 2022).

China underwent a land revolution in the mid-1980s initiated by the Chinese Communist Party to increase its support among the poor parts of the population. Land owned by landlords was confiscated and transferred to state ownership, in rural as well as urban regions. Based on Marxist ideas and theories of value, land is only in combination with labour of value.

“The increased value of land in the capitalist system is perceived as an indirect exploitation of labour engaged in production. The income of landowners is a result of such exploitation. The termination of the exploitation of labour is to eliminate the private ownership which is regarded as a means for exploitation and then reduce the land value to zero” (Zhang, 1997, p. 188).

The late 1970s, however, also represented a phase in which the increased land use made land reforms necessary. New regulations were implemented which ended the collective and free use of land; land-use rights were then subject to fees. Nevertheless, most ownership still rests with the Chinese state, although the reforms generated a market for land-use rights in China, based on political decisions and powers rather than market rules (Zhang, 1997).

Latin America in contrast experienced land reforms after the Second World War, in particular, in response to the rapid growth of the population and the high concentration of land ownership in the hands of only a few individuals. Generally, the Latin American context is characterised by ethnic diversity and national dependency on trade in goods and agricultural products such as sugar, coffee, or tobacco. Different countries across the continent took different measures according to the respective political goals and regimes in power, but in many, cooperatives have been used as a means to ensure civic participation of economic production and gains. The Cuban government, for example, nationalised all foreign-owned land and transformed plantations into cooperatives. This aimed at preventing the creation of many small units which could have been unprofitable. The socialist regime in Chile obligated all landowners to join cooperatives to manage farmland. However, these developments were reversed by the military government in the 1973 (Britannica, 2022, e.g. Cuba, Chile). Generally, the reforms

across Latin America are perceived to have been insufficient; inequality remains persistent and neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 90s leaves states with limited abilities to carry out (re)distribution and protection of land. “Capital concentration, ‘land grabbing’, ‘foreignization’ of agriculture, environmental degradation, displacement and disempowerment of peasants and rural labour, conflicts with indigenous groups among others” (Von Bennewitz, 2017, p. 1796) describe the situation in many Latin American countries. Social movements and protests have emerged to counteract these developments. The social movements find increasingly support by national governments through public policies (Von Bennewitz, 2017).

Irrespective of the repression of collective ownership, this form of tenure has not disappeared. According to Wily (2018), the one of the reasons for the persistence of community claims to land and property is a reaction to decreasing land availability. Other factors are that the conversion of customary collective rights into privatised rights has not been as successful as claimed, and that collective ownership by consensus is still an accepted and deeply embedded logic, regardless of massive societal transformations through industrialisation and capitalism.

The large-scale study conducted by Wily (2018) exploring the global trends in collective land ownership has suggested interesting findings: many of the investigated countries have recently (the past 30 years) established a legal basis for community ownership as a lawful class of property. This trend has been observable in communist, socialist and capitalist countries, partly because the construct of collective ownership has benefits which usual systems of individual and absolute privatised property rights are not capable of delivering. The devolved nature of the practicalities of collective ownership on a very local level facilitates a more inclusive governance model which is urgently needed in the light of pressing societal issues in times of austerity.

Additionally, the closeness of the communities to their socio-economic and cultural realities allows the adaptation of rules and practices to changing needs. And yet, these ideas are so at odds with individualised rules, norms and values that they are difficult to implement.

Nevertheless, while community and collective approaches to ownership and property have been categorised as restraining capital accumulation, economic and technological progress, there are other advantages which cannot be produced or generated otherwise.

These forms of collectivism and mutual aid as a response to other ownership forms and in response to increasing trends of social exclusion and centralisation of wealth and

power have re-emerged across the globe, and the UK is no exception to this. The following discussion further elaborates on this trend, particularly as it is evident in the UK context, as this is the geographical focus of this study.

The history of land and property ownership in the UK has also been shaped by different shifts and trends which have supported an increased rate of privatisation over the last four or five centuries. Known as ‘the commons’, areas of privately owned land used to be freely available and accessible to the public. Used as agricultural land, fields for cattle, sheep and poultry or using the land’s natural products, the so called ‘commoners’ made a living from these areas. The enclosure movement however, extinguished the rights to use the ‘common’ land and took it back into private usage, usually for grazing and pastoral purposes. This movement began in the early twelfth century, was picked up again around the fifteenth century and continued thereafter until the mid-nineteenth century. The enclosure of land was implemented by informal and private agreements and more than 5000 Parliamentary Acts with the final Enclosure Bill in 1914 (Christophers, 2018, p. 81). This transformation process accelerated the transition from a feudal agricultural Britain towards urban industrial capitalism. It directed the focus away from the use value of land to how it can be commodified and exchanged – the exchange value.

During the late nineteenth century, the state began to expand its landownership, at first in the countryside for agricultural purposes and further accelerating this expansion for other purposes after the second World War. Influenced by Keynesian economic policy, the need for large infrastructure investments spurred the state to acquire land for energy production, mobility or housing. In particular, the large investments in social housing as a response to post war housing shortages was a crucial element in the post war rebuilding process, infrastructurally as well as socially (Christophers, 2018; Cooley & Ohanian, 1997; Stewart, 2005). At the same time, the co-operative movement emerged as a means to control property and share economic gains contrasting state and private ownership (Pearson, 2020).

However, a major shift occurred in the late 1970s when neoliberal ideology became prominent in response to emerging economic crises and socialist land redistribution in some countries (Cousins, 2019). This neoliberal shift promoted the transfer of publicly owned land and assets into private hands with far-reaching consequences (Home, 2009). One of the most significant forms of privatisation has been related to home ownership. The mass selling off of council-owned housing was initiated by the Thatcher

government by introducing the Right to Buy in the 1980 Housing Act. Although, many families were enabled to buy their houses under this scheme, the long-term effects today are disastrous (Beckett, 2015; Foster, 2018). Forty per cent of the houses sold in the 80s and 90s under this scheme are now being rented privately for higher rents than local councils would charge and therefore contribute to the accelerating housing market crisis. At the same time, local councils have not only lost rental income from council housing, but the shortfall in available affordable housing leaves them forced to pay for expensive short term accommodation (Foster, 2018). The cycle which should feed financial resources and investment into local areas has turned into giving away wealth from the public to the private sector. Hence, the public sector is not in a position to respond as it might to issues concerning land and property because it has been hollowed out financially (Institute for Government, 2020).

“[However] it is crucial, not to reify ownership status, to suggest that ‘public’ ownership always signifies one type of relation to the [asset] and ‘private’ always another type. As Massey insisted, the question of who owns the land is perhaps less important than how and why: What does land ownership mean and enable for the owner? If public land is privatised, the change may be of marginal consequence if the new owner behaves just as its predecessor did. Similarly, nationalising private land changes little if the state simply uses the land in such a way as to attempt to maximise financial returns. What matters, in short, is the rationality of the landowner. Is this rationality what we tend to think of as a public-sector, socially oriented rationality? Or is it more akin to a stylised, profit-oriented, private sector rationality?” (Christophers, 2018, p. 37 f.)

Profit maximising rationalities and the increasing trend of privatisation of public land and the privatisation of rights to access and use land and spaces has caused alternative forms of ownership – different from public or state and private ownership - to re-emerge and enable different rationalities to be put into practice: customary, communal or community ownership (Christophers, 2018; Home, 2009).

These forms, grounded in ideas of mutualism and collectivism, are a response to dominant rationalities which disadvantage the less well-off and do not operate for the benefit of the community or aim at redistributing rights and resources. The battles over reclaiming rights to these resources are not limited to housing but also address lack of public space for community development, political formation and demonstration, and lack of free leisure places, to name just a few (Minton, 2006). Community approaches are being used to rein in property speculation, gentrification and the concentration of land ownership, and are emerging at accelerating pace as privatisation progresses (Archer & Harrington, 2021). In “Land for the Many” (2019) a report to the Labour

Party, the call for community-based housing and land solutions identifies clear incentives: community ownership may be a “driver for change to our currently dysfunctional housing system [...] and offers a compelling alternative to current approaches” (Monbiot et al., 2019, p. 56).

Additionally, community ownership as a mechanism does not only halt privatisation processes, but increasingly replies to underinvestment in welfare service provision and steps in where the state fails to maintain access to crucial social infrastructure such as libraries and community venues (cf. Aiken et al., 2016; Hobson et al., 2019).

Throughout the centuries collective forms of ownership have endured and secured the access to resources for disadvantaged parts of societies. There is current need for institutional forms and collective action to sustain access and control of property and resources for the benefit of those who do not own private property and lack access to resources.

The following section elaborates on the historical developments of collective forms of ownership in the UK context.

### **2.3. History and origins of community ownership in the UK**

The history of common and collective ownership in the UK dates back centuries and is grounded in the ideas of communing and mutual aid.

Research has examined and summarised historical developments which have informed our current understanding and influenced contemporary implementations of the different types of shared, communal, customary ownership in the UK.

Woodin et al. (2010) summarise the history and development of communal ownership, and examine changing definitions and meanings over several centuries: they identify five types and variations of interpretations of community and mutual ownership. These are: charitable; common and customary; cooperative and mutual; municipal and state; and community ownership.

i) Charitable ownership is an arrangement in which the asset is locked into a certain purpose and use. It involves charitable or voluntary organisations which serve social,



religious or altruistic interests. This type of ownership has been in existence for centuries with the first mention of charitable law dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The legal form of charity is often taken up by organisations in response to taxation changes that favour charities (Woodin et al., 2010, p. 34 - 38).

ii) Common and customary ownership applies to the early ‘wastelands’ to which people had free access and usage rights. Today common or customary ownership may be by an individual or a group, but is available at a larger scale, such as national parks. In past times, these *commons* were essential for people’s livelihoods. However, this type of ownership has greatly decreased since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution due to the constant enclosure of land as an element of the accumulation of capital, rights and powers (Christophers, 2018; Woodin et al., 2010, p. 23-26).

iii) Co-operative and mutual ownership describes ownership by individuals who come together in order to form a stronger power position in relation to individual ownership, and capitalist relations of power in the market. Examples are consumer or housing co-ops. This type of ownership serves the needs of the membership group and is rather a use value than exchange or monetary value. This movement had a high phase in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and decreased in the 20<sup>th</sup> but is experiencing a recent renewal as community ownership has been receiving increasing attention (Woodin et al., 2010, p. 31-34).

iv) Municipal and state ownership concerns assets which are owned by the state on local as well as national levels, such as land and buildings, industries or public services. Often basic physical infrastructure and social services are owned and provided by the state such as education, defence and security; and in particular in England, health care. This type of ownership was most important after 1945 but since the 1980s the state has retreated from this type of direct ownership. This is a main driver of the interest in community ownership (Woodin et al., 2010, p. 38-40).

v) Community ownership is described as the largest and most varied type of ownership, in which the range of activities may vary from small to large scale – examples are allotments or community land trusts – and so do the types of organisations and activities. The origins of these forms of community ownership are social and political in nature and are historically grounded in communal living. The general idea and recurring theme is “to avoid the dangers of a single class of men controlling resources to which others had little access” (Woodin et al., 2010, p. 26). Diverse forms of community ownership have emerged for various purposes, ranging from short-termed initiatives

allowing social mixing and decreasing social divisions to longer-running community housing projects. The processes of land and buildings acquisition have been undertaken formally and legally, but also through spontaneous activities and squatting. Civil disobedience is one of the dimensions which is often neglected when discussing forms of community ownership due to its taking place mostly in small and rather informal settings which make an exact tracing of their history and development rather difficult. In the recent years, in particular in rural areas, community ownership has become a mechanism to maintain social infrastructure which used to be provided by the privatised market. Due to the lack of profitability however, it is now often necessary for communities to take responsibility or risk losing their remaining infrastructure (Woodin et al., 2010, p. 26-31).

All these above-described types of community ownership are not necessarily exclusive or fully distinctive. Woodin et al. highlight how interwoven the categorised approaches are: for instance, many initiatives which started informally have now become formal charitable structures. Community ownership organisations pursue not only an altruistic or social goals, but often combine different types of activities under different legal umbrellas, and this is a main characteristic of these types of organisations which take on the ownership of a physical asset.

## **2.4. Definitions and applications**

Despite the increasing interest, the discourse on community ownership has not reached common definitions among key terms. Whereas some terms are defined precisely, others remain relatively vague. On the one hand, this might be due to the diverse nature of these terms, having different meanings in different contexts, or the focus of research on different aspects rather than the clarification of terminology. On the other hand, this may also be a persistent phenomenon due to the ‘fuzzy’ nature of the contexts of community ownership in general. Bransden et al. (2005) describe the hybridity of the third sector, how distinguishing between different domains has become increasingly complex so that the blurred boundaries between domains and organisations impede a straight-forward definition and categorisation of organisations.

Hence, the contexts in which ‘community ownership of assets’ occurs, defining key terms applied in this field and the development of frameworks seem to become even more fuzzy rather than structured.

The next sub section attempts to address this problem of lack of definition.

#### **2.4.1. Definition of community in the context of ownership – the conflation of ‘community’ and ‘organisation’**

The following key terms are covered because these are most frequently used in the literature: community; organisations; assets; and ownership.

There is a vast of literature addressing the issue of ‘community’, defining and categorising different types at different levels and scales. Whereas some differentiate between communities of place, interest, action or practice, others identify different spatial categories such as urban, sub-urban and rural. From a communitarian perspective, definitions of community may cover communities of place, communities of memory and psychological communities (Bell, 2016). However, “there is a range of disputes over what kind of social relationships can be communities” (Mason, 2000, p. 17).

Community is a key term in reports, academic papers and research addressing the ownership of assets by organisations separate from state or private domain. However, a definition of the term itself is seldom addressed. Generally, literature often defines the key term ‘community’ in a spatial context, due to the physical nature of assets addressed. Aiken et al. (2011; 2016) define the organisations owning assets as being “located within a physical community, which may consist of a neighbourhood, village, town, or small island but only exceptionally a wider region” (Aiken et al., 2016, p.3) other publications address the issue of community in a similar manner (Hobson et al., 2019; McKee & Moore, 2014).

The term community is often confused with, and of course, is connected to, the description of organisations involved. The community organisations consist of persons performing activities from within, on behalf of and for communities, either for their wider community or for beneficiaries defined in relation to for example key

demographic characteristics. The existing literature on community ownership of physical assets, however, pays less analytical attention to the conceptualisation of communities, the separation between community and community organisation and the importance of relationships. However, the Quirk Review acknowledges that “each community has its own unique story – of landscape and heritage, of conflict and compromise, and of hopes and fears. Each confident community has the internal resources to generate its own energy to change and develop” (Quirk et al., 2007, p. 4).

The term ‘community group’ is also used in the literature, however, less frequently and seemingly interchangeably (Aiken et al., 2011; Aiken et al., 2016; McKee & Moore, 2014; Moore & McKee, 2012; Murtagh, 2015; Nichols et al., 2015; Quirk et al., 2007; Woodin et al., 2010). Murtagh (2015) uses the term ‘community group’ more often than other researchers to define the context of asset transfer in Northern Ireland, highlighting the particularities of the local context in relation to sharply segregated communities within spatial areas of Northern Ireland. The use of the term community ‘groups’ emphasises the existence of different communities within particular geographical areas in contrast to the broader, more general, term ‘community’. This appears to be important as “[in] large, complex [...] urban communities, ideal participatory democracies involving all residents are implausible” (Connelly, 2011, p. 934). Hence, community organisations, even if their governance structures are democratic and participatory, may only be able to represent groups within a certain context that might be called community. Both, Murtagh (2015) and Connelly (2011) identify the risk of “unrepresentative groups” (Murtagh, 2015, p. 214) taking over the organisation or projects and the “possibility of exclusion of groups within communities and the pursuit of sectional or personal interest” (Connelly, 2011, p. 943).

The identification of different groups within a local community raises questions of legitimacy: who is being represented by which actor? Who is part of the community or community group? Is the established community group taking over ownership accepted and legitimate within a broader social and local setting? What is being perceived as unrepresentative?

Hobson et al. (2019) identify legitimacy as a key factor in relation to the sustainability of community ownership of assets. Rather than explicitly addressing the issue of community groups and their claimed legitimacy, the analysis focuses on the legitimacy of the asset: “legitimacy is an evolving and performative process that produces and reproduces conceptions of community assets” (p.117). This may be deconstructed to the

level of community itself. Production and reproduction are social processes, determined and performed by those involved in actions concerning the asset; hence, production and reproduction of conceptions of the asset are based on legitimate actions by legitimate actors. The analysis concludes that there is “difficulty in ensuring different communities benefit equally from asset transfer, [this] is a challenge to the legitimacy of the very idea of asset transfer itself” (p.122). Although, being applied to comparing different conditions in different places (such as access to resources) this might also be valid for different communities/community groups within the same geographical area (see Murtagh, 2015; Connelly, 2011).

It is also recognised that assets are being perceived as legitimate if the engagement of a wider community is encouraged, and social inclusion is created by making use of the asset and active participation in its management (Hobson et al., 2019). In addition, legitimacy is also being defined by external stakeholders beyond the realm of community. These external stakeholders are decisively shaping the effectiveness and sustainability of organisations and their projects. A lack of legitimacy in the eyes of funders may terminate the overall organisation or project (Connelly, 2011). However, fulfilling external stakeholder expectations may not simultaneously address the needs, preferences and expectations of the community the organisation claims to represent.

The importance of defining the represented ‘community’ lies in its implications for the local context. Assets being transferred to a ‘community organisation’ for the purpose of fulfilling a ‘social good’ and ‘community benefit’, may only be realised by legitimate representatives, identified needs and preferences and appropriate activities. Assets managed by a ‘community’ organisation claiming to act for the wider good, in practice may end up only benefitting members of the organisation itself. The activities performed vary also in regard to the requirement of legitimacy. For example, a community organisation taking over the responsibility for a library to ensure continued public access to the facility and maintain services, might represent a lower risk of non-representative actors excluding other parts of the ‘community’ due to the clearly formulated public service being delivered by providing access to books and other educational materials. But another group taking over a community hall/centre may focus their services on a particular need and specific target group rather than addressing an overarching social purpose for a broader community. Hence, ideas of legitimacy, definitions of community, and their practical implications may also vary in different local contexts.

The nature of communities from the perspective of community ownership of a physical asset is most likely to be a ‘community of place’. In this study, rather than applying definitions and concepts which are not necessarily clearly distinguishable or applicable to all case studies, definitions and meanings are left to the participants and case examples allowing descriptions of communities to emerge.

### **2.4.2. Organisations**

The increasing political attention to community-based solutions for societal challenges re-emerged with the Labour Government (1997-2010) and its neo-communitarian agenda promoting active citizenship, strengthening civil society and solutions to societal problems being looked for in partnership with third sector organisations (Fyfe, 2005). Since then, several terms have been established to describe and frame the kind of organisations involved in addressing societal needs and compensating for increasing public cuts under the subsequent neo-liberal Conservative Government. One attempt to address local needs is the uptake of ownership of assets by communities. Various terms have been identified in the literature describing and framing involved organisations, ranging from ‘asset-based organisations’, and ‘multi-purpose organisations’ to ‘voluntary organisations’, to name only few examples.

In commissioning the Quirk Review “Making assets work” (Quirk et al., 2007) the Labour Government paid increased attention to a political area of interest, as well as initiating further academic investigations. The authors make use of several different terms to describe the organisations engaged in asset-ownership active in various different fields. Nonetheless, similarities are also identified: “The common feature of all such organisations is that they are independent and their governing board or committee includes a majority of community representatives, which we might define as people living in the area” (Quirk et al., 2007, p. 9). This definition provided by the Quirk Review has been taken up in a similar manner by others and has been extended by further characteristics that the types of organisations share.

“A community-based organisation was understood as an organisation located within a physical community [...] The main (if not exclusive) focus of the organisation’s work is to seek benefits for certain defined people or places in the

locality where it is based. It will have a governance structure independent of public or private sector organisations” (Aiken et al., 2011, p. 11).

Moore and McKee (2014) define community asset organisations similarly, but elaborate the description by taking into account further economic considerations which differentiates these institutions from classic for-profit market entities:

“[the organisations] will typically operate on an economic model that reinvests profits or surpluses to meet their objectives rather than distributing them to individuals for private gain” (p.522).

Although some shared characteristics have been identified which allow the identification of a common focus of these organisations, they inherently differ to an extent which impedes a comprehensive categorisation. Various factors that might contribute towards a common classification in the field of community organisations owning assets only seem to further increase the blurring boundaries. The lack of an umbrella term to designate organisations, the various existing legal forms for organisations pursuing social aims (ranging from limited companies to charities, trusts and community interest companies) (Social Enterprise, 2017); activities performed; organisational structures; and different governance arrangements increase the variance among these organisations. Aiken et al. (2008; 2011; 2016) have developed a broad categorisation of the identified organisations in order to generate an overview of the field of community ‘controlled’ assets across the UK. The research delineated the field as being a “spectrum of community-controlled assets with three main bands” (Aiken et al., 2016, p. 43):

- i) Stewards – small organisations, less financial resources available, no paid staff, dependent on volunteers, single asset; example: community hall
- ii) Community developers – medium organisations, performing services and generating income, several assets, paid staff and volunteers; example: community centre developing partnerships and representing several purposes
- iii) Entrepreneurs – large organisations, professional governance, social and business enterprises, large quantity of assets; example: large charities.

The activities performed by organisations owning assets vary depending on the organisations purpose, vision and mission, the local context, the organisations’ structure, size and, of course, available resources. In general, it is assumed that “[assets] allow communities to accumulate, build reserves and expand services that respond to local people’s needs” (Murtagh, 2015, p. 222).

“They may: rent out rooms or social spaces; let offices or retail units; offer welfare services to those in the neighbourhood; run local activities; campaign on local issues; provide resources for other local groups; encourage volunteering, employment and enterprise; provide a base for networking and advocacy; provide housing; manage parks, open space, sports, youth or play facilities; produce green energy; and undertake many other activities” (Aiken et al., 2011, p. 11).

Quirk et al. (2007) list several examples of activities being performed by organisations, such as running village and community halls or centres, building preservation trusts in order to maintain access to assets, multi-purpose settlements and social action centres providing space for other projects, and development trusts and community enterprises using the space for business activities

Aiken et al. (2011) emphasise the importance of the conditions surrounding the ownership of assets, particularly for smaller organisations and groups. Funding and generating income streams are decisive factors in establishing a sustainable basis for activities and services. Therefore, organisations need to balance their operations: the unprofitable (social) services mostly need to be subsidised by income-generating activities. The degree to which organisations are able to integrate and perform economic profit generation depends also on their professionalisation: it is likely to be more difficult for the smaller organisations to generate a stable funding basis.

The funding context has become particularly precarious in the UK since the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent austerity agenda implemented by the Coalition Government in 2010. Since then, the largest cuts have been imposed on local authorities, being left with only half of their budgets.

“The cuts to the Department of Communities and Local Government budget were substantial and sustained over this period, making these cuts one of the key drivers in restructuring local government and public service provision in Britain” (Gray & Barford, 2018, p. 542).

However, already-existing geographical inequalities within the jurisdictions of the UK were made worse by the situation, particularly in England. In contrast, a study by Skerratt & Hall (2011) showed that local authority funding was the most common funding source among owning organisations in Scotland in 2008. Hence, Scotland was able to avoid large cuts in public services in contrast to England, which lost the highest proportion of public spending among the nations of the UK (Gray & Barford, 2018).

The emergence of organisations addressing societal challenges is, on the one hand, grounded in the lack of state provision of social services, and on the other hand, stems



from previous government agendas such as ‘localism’ and the ‘Big Society’. But emerging organisations increasingly face a lack of funding and support, and therefore, are forced to adopt different approaches in order to operate.

“From the perspective of communities involved [...] mobilisation is often premised on reconstructing responsibility for local issues, moving from a passive role to one that actively shapes processes of local development and provision. This can be framed as a place-based response to the failure of the state or market to provide particular goods and services, as well as to issues of resilience and economic insecurity” (McKee & Moore, 2014, p. 525).

As discussed earlier, the literature identifies crucial characteristics of the involved organisations which differentiate these from other spheres of market and state. But rather than being completely separate, the organisations increasingly combine various features and “borrow from different traditions” and may be “described as ‘bridges’ between different traditions” (Aiken et al., 2016, p. 4). Organisations become increasingly hybrid. “Hybridity refers to heterogeneous arrangements, characterised by mixtures of pure and incongruous origins, (ideal)types, ‘cultures’, ‘coordination mechanisms’, ‘rationalities’, or ‘action logics’” (Brandsen et al., 2005, p. 750).

This hybridity is, among other things, reflected in the tensions organisations face, the contradictory values of different paradigms: commercial versus social aims; being a stewards of a particular asset versus using the acquired asset as basis for expanding organisational outreach; or co-ordinational tensions emerging from strategic decisions of roles of leadership to facilitate benefits for the local community versus involving the community in higher-level tasks such as development and management (Aiken et al., 2011; Brandsen et al., 2005; Hobson et al., 2019; Murtagh, 2015; Woodin et al., 2010).

In the context of community organisations owning physical assets, it becomes clear that there is no general type of organisation, rather, the name is a collective term to depict a situation of civil society taking on buildings for a wider benefit than individual gain. Also, the emerging attempts at classifications are found to be seldom applicable when organisational characteristics are explored in depth as the variety of these are difficult to summarise and generalise. Therefore, the research for this thesis does not approach this phenomenon and the organisations involved as a separate sector or a distinguishable organisational type. While these organisations do have the common characteristic of the ownership of a physical asset, rather than aiming to develop another classification, they are considered as non-profit organisations which appear in many legal forms with many different constitutions and purposes. This insight has substantially shaped the research and differentiates it from other investigations.

### 2.4.3.Assets

The term ‘asset’ may have multiple meanings describing different phenomena. For example, the Cambridge Dictionary (2019) provides general definitions of an asset being:

- a useful or valuable quality, skill or person
- something valuable belonging to a person or organisation (that can be used for the payment of debts)

The existing literature also identifies these different types of assets, addressing physical assets being owned by community organisations. Several authors use a similar scope of investigating the phenomenon of community ownership: Quirk (2007) addresses the “stewardship of land and buildings”; Aiken et al. (2016, p. 3) describe the “assets considered in [their] paper [as] buildings, land or small sustainable energy facilities”; Moore & McKee (2012 p. 522) also focus on “physical assets such as land and buildings”.

The Quirk Review distinguishes between two variations of physical assets being owned by communities: land and buildings; and housing. Although, housing is identified as a variation and form of community ownership, the Report excludes housing from the investigation of community ownership of assets. They state that they are “limiting the focus of [their] Review to non-housing assets” due to “the scale of programmes already implemented in this field” (p. 9). Others have implicitly followed their example, addressing mostly the first of these two categories – land and buildings (Hobson et al., 2019; Moore & McKee, 2012; Aiken et al, 2008, 2011, 2016). Although housing is often mentioned as an example and form of community ownership, the body of research available concerning housing is large and debates are complex. The focus on other examples of community ownership tend to exclude housing from their analysis. However, “at the same time, we recognised that we can learn from experience in the housing field” (Quirk, et al., 2007, p.9). Hence, the examples of assets mainly addressed by the literature include village or community halls, community centres, historic buildings, swimming pools, libraries, leisure facilities, playing fields, pubs, shops and sometimes housing.

Regarding the acquisition of physical assets, the literature identifies several opportunities by which community organisations take up ownership of land, buildings

or energy generation facilities. Aiken et al. (2011) identify two main routes for organisations: either as a response to a threat – the risk of losing access to a former publicly-run and available asset; or as a response to an opportunity – taking over ownership through endowment or gift. A more recent phenomenon is the transfer of physical assets of public institutions to community organisations due to the lack of funding to maintain public facilities.

Research into the community ownership of physical assets has identified several benefits and costs. Assets are generally perceived as positive for community organisations, as a contribution to the generation of income, or creating sustainable organisations. There are also other benefits for communities, such as a “sense of community identity and pride, the potential for increased social cohesion, increased confidence, skills and aspirations locally, improved access to services and activities [...], jobs, training and business opportunities; physical improvements to the area” (Aiken et al. 2011, p. 6). As well “there is evidence that such assets act as a neutral venue, bring communities together around mutually defined needs” (Murtagh, 2015, p.231).

However, barriers have also been identified. In particular, the issue of assets becoming liabilities for community organisations is emphasised by the literature: “Of course, the term “asset” could be misleading. In some cases, the building may require [expensive outlays], so carries with it liabilities” (Nichols et al., 2015, p. 74). Several causes of becoming liabilities are identified: the condition of assets at the point of acquisition; repair and maintenance costs; lack of professionalisation within the organisation to run activities and keep the asset economically viable; and lack of appropriate planning or absence of business plans (Aiken et al., 2011; Skerratt & Hall, 2011; Quirk et al., 2007). This may affect the ability of organisations to concentrate their resources on fully realising their social mission (Murtagh, 2015).

Physical assets may play a crucial role in recreating communities and realising benefits for local areas; however, these assets alone are unlikely to achieve the identified benefits without people making use of these assets and providing immaterial input. It is acknowledged that “such organisations can benefit from—and be critically dependent on—quite different types of resources, namely, the ‘very often underestimated’ social capital including informal relations, local trust and voluntary engagement” (Aiken et al., 2016, p. 4). Nonetheless, Aiken et al. (2016, p. 3) focus on physical characteristics of community ownership of assets:

“... as such, assets [buildings, land or small sustainable energy facilities] should be distinguished from those discussed in the literature on ‘asset-based community development’, where assets are understood in much broader terms as part of a community building process, including person skills and other resources—with land and buildings as just one part of the mix”.

This may be due to the nature and purpose of the research as an attempt to create a better understanding of the phenomenon and depicting its *status quo* rather than applying a systematic approach to analysing and identifying characteristics alongside the physical assets investigated.

The Quirk Review explicitly states that “the strongest assets of any community are its people; their character and their personal connections with the wider world” (Quirk, 2007, p. 4). Nichols et al. (2015, p. 74) also acknowledge that the transfer of assets generally has two components: on the one side, “the equipment and buildings necessary to provide specific services (material assets); and on the other side, the responsibility for managing institutions providing the respective services and delivering the services themselves (immaterial assets)”.

Nonetheless, a combined investigation of physical assets embedded within a system of immaterial assets is still rare. Hobson et al. (2019) highlight the importance of community capabilities in relation to communities taking over ownership of assets, referring to the diverse kinds of capitals necessary to facilitate sustainable and successful projects: social, natural, physical, human and financial capital. The study not only emphasises the different capitals, but the impact of capitals working together and generating ‘institutional thickness’, assuming that the greater the institutional thickness is, the more successful the organisations are.

Contemplating further identified benefits “of community management and ownership” Aiken et al. (2015) also shift attention from the asset itself to the activities performed by people in relation to the asset. These benefits include: (i) building community identity and cohesion; (ii) enhancing community capacity; (iii) enhancing democratic voice; (iv) improving service delivery; (v) developing mission; and (vi) community sustainability (p. 12). The physical asset contributes and facilitates these processes but immaterial assets eventually implement these developments. The differentiation of physical assets and asset-based development seems to be ineffective regarding the blurring boundaries of benefits.

Previous research has mainly focused on the physical assets concerned; however, other assets are assumed to make these spaces work for the benefit of communities. Hence, this study pays particular attention to assets beyond the physical realm in order to comprehensively unpack the practical experiences of community asset ownership in more detail than existing investigations, which have tended to uncritically portray community ownership of assets as positive in and of itself.

#### **2.4.4. Ownership**

Over time, the implications of the term ‘ownership’ have changed and continuously developed. Woodin et al. (2010) describe the different operationalisations of community and mutual ownership throughout different periods of history, summarise these forms and generate five types of common ownership: “common and customary; community; co-operative and mutual; charitable; and municipal and state ownership” (p. 5).

Whereas common and customary ownership may be described as the “original form of ownership” – as means to collectively ensure economic survival during feudal times, economic, societal and political developments, in particular the Industrial Revolution, have led to the emergence of co-operative and mutual ownership as a response to the poor conditions of factory workers in early capitalism, providing a democratic business alternative and collective caring. The importance of co-operative ownership diminished after the Second World War due to the increasing involvement of the state in welfare provision (see also Christophers, 2018). Similarly, charitable ownership declined due to the growing role of the welfare state. However, since the late 1970s successive British Governments have explicitly pursued a neoliberal policy agenda (small state – big society), including Labour 1997-2010, and charitable organisations have increasingly gained importance and taken over responsibility and ownership of formerly public and social services.

Community ownership has been in existence for over 500 years, although “beneath the radar of public discussions” (Woodin et al., 2010, p. 5). This form of ownership has been used to experiment with “alternative lifestyles, [...] support deprived communities] [and other experiments] initially at least, focused on community ownership of housing and public spaces” (Woodin et al., 2010, p. 5). Woodin et al

(2010) recognise that community ownership has recently re-emerged and describe this as “an engine of inventiveness which feeds into the wider society” (Woodin et al., 2010, p. 5). Because ownership by communities has been present for a long period, the ownership structures of community organisations vary in different contexts according to historical and local settings. Aiken et al. (2016) highlight the implication of geographical differences: in the Anglo-Saxon context, ownership is of great importance, whereas in European countries the *use* of assets may play a stronger role, irrespective of ownership structures.

In general, ownership has different dimensions which determine the rights and duties of the ‘owner’:

“the right to possess, the right to use, the right to manage, the right to the income of the thing, the right to the capital, the right to security, the rights or incidents of transmissibility, the absence of term, prohibition of harmful use, the liability to execution, and the incidence of residuary” (Honoré, 1961, p. 370).

In order to execute ‘ownership’, not all of these characteristics have to be fulfilled, and the boundaries between these dimensions are blurred. This is also reflected in the wider literature where different terms are used to describe different settings: ownership, management, control or responsibility. Some authors explicitly clarify their position and approach towards defining ownership, while other do not. Quirk et al. (2007) state that,

“In referring to “community management and ownership” throughout this report, we are not describing two hard and fast opposites, but rather a spectrum on which the variable is the stake in the asset held by the community organisation concerned” (p. 9).

In the context of community ownership in relation to the increased asset transfer of formerly public assets, often only parts of the notions of ‘ownership’ are present. But this is not a new phenomenon, Honoré (1961) already described a growing division between legal ownership and managerial power, referring to this as ‘split ownership’ (p. 372).

A guide commissioned by the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2008 under a Labour Government provides assistance for local authorities and community organisations concerning asset transfer and the options for ownership structure (DCLG, 2008). The guide distinguishes between three different legal arrangements: “(i) The right to use an asset; (ii) the right to appropriate returns from an asset; and (iii) the right to change the form and substance of an asset” (DCLG, 2008, p. 15). Here, the term ‘ownership’ is being differently interpreted in the context of

community organisations taking over responsibility for an asset depending on the legal setting of asset acquisition, which also affects the organisation's capabilities and liabilities. "We recognised that the greater the stake, the greater the financial and legal responsibility the organisation takes on, but also the greater the freedom to exploit the asset's potential" (Quirk et al., 2007, p. 9).

Aiken et al. (2011) indicate these variabilities in ownership structure in the title of their report 'Community organisations controlling assets: a better understanding': rather than using the term 'owning' they use the concept of community organisations 'controlling' assets. Their definition to clarify ownership structure is that:

"The ownership and management of assets by community-based organisations was understood as the day-to-day responsibility and accountability for the operation and use of buildings, land or energy facilities, whether owned by the community or occupied under licence held – formally or informally – by a third party" (Aiken et al. 2011, p. 12).

In their research they have identified different ownership settings such as full ownership, leasehold, rent or freehold. Whereas full ownership implies the greatest financial and legal responsibility for organisations, leasehold and rent limit these responsibilities and likewise the potential liabilities. However, as full owners of assets organisations may also achieve a "greater [...] freedom to exploit the asset's potential" (Aiken et al., 2011, p. 12).

Other authors often do not explain their definition of ownership arrangements and different terms and combinations are used. Skerratt & Hall (2015), Murtagh (2015), Moore and McKee (2012, 2014) identify ownership, management and control; Nichols et al. (2015) add the term 'delivery' to the spectrum of descriptions of communities taking control of former public leisure facilities.

It is of great importance to assess the different ownership arrangements in place when investigating case studies, as the ownership structure and legal arrangements have effects on the organisation's capabilities. Restricted ownership may limit the realisation of projects and activities due to constraints on the use of the asset; but constraints may also emerge due to high legal and financial responsibilities.

The practical implications of the application of the term 'ownership' are diverse and the constructivist research approach in this study will enable the unpicking of the dimensions of experience and the range of perceptions of those involved in 'owning'.

By investigating the participants' understanding of their own ownership status and context, the importance of ownership will be explored.

The debates and discussions about the different dimensions of community ownership of assets are intertwined with political debates and understandings of the phenomenon. The next section briefly summarizes the main political events which have led to the current state of implementation and realisation of community ownership of physical assets.

### **2.4.5.Renaissance and Policy Context**

The following section will first set out the policies as successive governments issued, followed with comment on the political contexts and motivations.

The rising interest in community ownership of assets is embedded in a larger context of decisive political changes. Recent developments fall into three different periods in which successive UK Governments pursued increased community empowerment or 'responsibilisation'. The period of a Labour Government between 1997-2010 is characterised by policies aimed at mitigation of inequalities by emphasising social infrastructure and concentrating on the skills and capabilities of individuals in order to devolve rights and responsibilities to communities. But also implemented forms of privatisation as Public Private contracts. The following phase under the Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition (2010-2015) was characterised by the 'Big Society' policy framework focussed on promoting and working with markets, still with some sense of a (conservative) social contract however much weakened. Since 2015 the Conservative Government has followed an accelerated agenda of devolution and levelling up (GOV UK, 2021) in a context of further marketisation or cutting of public services.

Beginning in 1998, this timeline does not aim to be complete, but rather, represents different steps through which the current landscape of, and knowledge about community ownership has been shaped.



Figure 1 – Timeline of the UK policy context



### 1997 – 2010 Labour Government policies

In 1998 the Labour Government focused on supporting the development of skills and social infrastructure alongside physical regeneration, and among other measures, initiated the New Deal for Communities scheme aiming to invest resources in key outcomes for the most deprived areas. The interventions aimed at place-related outcomes for health, education, and the reduction of crime and unemployment. Further different funding programmes were set up to support communities in many different ways (Batty et al., 2010).

In 2002, diverse funding sources were set up to support communities to acquire assets; for example, the Adventure Capital Fund was initiated to provide support for social and community organisations to become independent and sustainable through commercial activities and the acquisition of assets. This has been extended over several years and further developed, first alongside and then taking over the management of the Futurebuilders Fund in 2008 which was the first major social investment fund in England. In 2005, the Big Lottery fund provided £60 million for ‘Reaching Communities’ via distribution grants to organisations making a positive change in communities. This was followed by the 2006 Local Government White Paper outlining a programme for empowering communities; and the focus was further steered towards strengthening communities and their internal capabilities in order to realise benefits for their local context.

Along these lines, the joint action plan for Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association’s ‘Community Empowerment Programme’ was established, outlining three key dimension: increased participation; a changed attitude towards community empowerment; and improved public services and a better quality of life in order to “take forward a shared community empowerment agenda” (Communities and Local Government, 2007, p. 5). The 2007 Quirk Review is one outcome of the programme of the Local Government White Paper “to find ways to overcome barriers to more community asset management and ownership, taking account of the need to manage risks” (Waters, 2007, p. 1) and is one of the major sources and key publication to be taken into consideration when discussing community ownership of physical assets. In the same year, the Commission on Unclaimed Assets concluded that unused dormant bank accounts should be used to support community organisations in taking on essential social infrastructure such as buildings.

### **2010 – 2015 Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition policies**

In 2010 there was a change of government and the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition set up the Big Society agenda. The name indicates what the main intention was - small state and Big Society. In 2011, the Coalition Government announced the Localism Act which was the legislative implementation of the devolution of rights and responsibilities to lower levels of councils and communities. The various measures aimed to support local participation in local planning and decision-making processes. The long-term aim was to devolve more responsibilities away from central government

to local government by: i) granting new freedoms and flexibilities for local government; ii) implementing new rights and powers for communities and individuals; iii) reforming the planning system to make it more democratic and effective; and iv) reforming the planning system to ensure housing decisions were taken locally (DCLG, 2011).

The new rights for communities under the Localism Act came into force in 2012 when the Community Rights to Build, to Challenge and to Bid came into force. The Community Right to Build allows local organisations to realise small-scale local developments. This is part of the larger context of increasing local participation in planning and decision-making processes. These developments need to be approved by the local community through a referendum and the “Local Authorities have a duty to assist and advise community organisations, which are also free to involve partners such as developers or housing associations” (My Community, 2021b). The ‘Community Right to Challenge’ equips community organisations with the opportunity to express to the local authority in charge their interest in running a public service. This enables community organisations to take part in competitive tendering for the provision of public services. Finally, the Community Right to Bid empowers communities and community organisations to bid for assets being put on the market. An integral part of this Right to Bid is the ‘Asset of Community Value Regulation’ which requires Local Authorities to keep a list of assets considered to be of value to the community. An Asset of Community Value is defined as an asset which fulfils a social wellbeing or interest purpose for the community, and these may be nominated by the local community and / or by community-related groups and organisations. Once an Asset of Community Value (ACV) is registered, the local community will be informed as soon as it is placed on the market and the right to bid provides the relevant community with the necessary time to pull together resources and funding to buy the asset.

### **2015 – 2022 Conservative Party policies**

Since these policies have been in place, there have been fewer political debates around the issue of community ownership, but this maybe because of other major issues like the political debates, disputes, negotiations and developments around the Brexit referendum and its outcome.

In 2018, at this stage Conservative Party under leadership of Theresa May, ‘Keep It In The Community’ (KIITC) was initiated by Locality (a charity concerned with

devolution processes and the consequences for communities) as an online database of community-owned assets and those of community value and interest. The database enabled users to identify community-owned assets in their regions, register new projects or add further details to already existing ones. This contributed to a national overview of existing assets in community ownership and provides insights into what physical assets communities are controlling (My Community, 2021a).

In 2021, the ‘Asset Ownership Fund’ was set up as a response to the social and economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. The fund provided £150 million for supporting communities to take on ownership of physical assets which otherwise would be at risk of being closed and lost to the local area. It is part of a larger context of ‘levelling up’, a political agenda addressing national geographical inequalities aiming at spreading socio-economic, health, cultural and political opportunities equally across the UK (HM Government, 2022). The objective is to aid local economic recovery and empower communities to participate in improving their local spaces (GOV UK, 2021). The fund provided up to £250,000 of matching funding for which communities need to raise an equivalent amount. It was also acknowledged that there is a need for further financial resources to implement some capability building.

In 2022, still Conservative Party under leadership of Boris Johnson, the Government White Paper on Levelling Up identifies community ownership and the Asset Ownership Fund as an essential part of the policy response to the geographical inequality of opportunities in the UK and is mentioned alongside many other funds supporting economic, social, and cultural interventions aimed at levelling up.

### **Academic commentary**

The beginning of the above timeline falls into the period of the Blair Labour Government which claimed to end the ever-increasing trend of privatisation which prominently began with Margret Thatcher in the late 1970s. However, as investigations have shown, this has not fully been the case and the Labour Government continued privatisation processes, particularly by substituting public-private partnerships for privatisation claiming this gave increased government control (Parker, 2013).

Hence, all policy developments which are claimed to be interventions in favour of communities should be critically examined according to the motivation which has guided and still guides these political agendas.

As already mentioned above, the ‘Big Society’ agenda pursued by the Coalition Government played an important role in progressing community control and civil access to community resources. Although it was quietly dropped in 2015, there have been shifts in political agendas since then, continuing the trend of localism, devolution and shifting responsibilities from central government to local authorities and finally to local communities. However again, it is questionable which motivation guides these devolution processes, whether the vague Big Society ideology and progressive localism to create social justice and participation among civil society or austerity localism as a consequence of budget cuts (Fenwick & Gibbon, 2017; Findlay-King, Nichols, Forbes, & Macfadyen, 2018). Irrespective of the intentions, it is important to acknowledge the broader context in which the recent developments of community ownership are situated politically, economically, and socially. The academic debate also addresses the relationship between private, public and the third sector and its various characteristics in regard to the landscape of community-owned assets, the changing nature and responsibilities of civil society, public support for social concerns, and the role of the state in society and the privatisation of formerly public duties.

There are however emerging gaps in knowledge which will be explored in the following section and partly addresses by this research.

## **2.5. The gaps in knowledge**

Since the commissioning of the “Quirk Review” (Quirk et al., 2007) by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) as part of the ‘Strong and Prosperous Communities: the Local Government White Paper’, public discussions have flourished, and political attention has been given to legislative issues concerning the transfer, ownership, and management of assets.

There is an increasing body of literature concerning the issue of community ownership of assets, addressing various aspects such as: its democratic implications (Nichols, 2015); benefits, barriers and limitations (Aiken, Taylor & Moran, 2015; Skerratt & Hall, 2012); or investigating specific geographical contexts such as Northern Ireland or Scotland (Murtagh, 2015; Skerratt & Hall, 2011). In particular, investigations being

commissioned by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation often address the phenomenon of community ownership as a kind of ‘sector’, producing overviews of what is already in place; which organisations are involved in ownership;- mapping the different forms of community control; and assessing benefits and barriers, in order to generate insights for the development of schemes which provide assistance and support. However, the varieties of cases, organisations, types of assets and circumstances emerging when investigating the context of community ownership of assets hampers a coherent assessment. The different organisational and legal forms, purposes, activities, assets, sizes and scales, target groups and involved actors create an immensely scattered field. This is also displayed in the inconsistent terminology (explored above) and the key terms often seem randomly used and interchangeable.

To overcome these confusions, further research addressing the terminology would be necessary; the development of a coherent framework and drawing attention to the importance of a clear and structured terminology may lead to more consistent discussion, exchanges and insights.

Besides generating a consistent terminology, rather than addressing community ownership of assets as a single phenomenon, a different approach would be — to perceive assets and their ownership by community organisations as part of an infrastructure which is needed to build and support strong communities. Additionally, the spatial contextualisation of community ownership of assets is of great interest, as devolution processes lead to increasing differences between localities, as responsibilities and decision making is decentralised, and interpretation and implementation of policy varies. This geographical aspect of collective ownership has not yet been addressed, although it has already been identified as a field of interest by Moore and McKee (2014) as there is “an important need to better understand how the personal and social geographies of impact are delivered in, and influenced by, different spatial contexts and political frameworks” (p. 527). Considering the ownership of assets, the spatial contexts and local conceptualisations of community spaces may vary enormously, and the role of geography and spatiality is yet to be investigated.

What current research reveals is that community ownership of assets has only been researched in policy-related reports or studies commissioned by organisations and foundations supporting particular projects; and then mainly in terms of the practical dimensions of the operations and outcomes of policies or projects.

While assets are conventional factors of production among others (such as financial resources), in contrast to conventional economic calculation other factors of production and inputs can be provided from within the community without referring to the money economy. A systematic investigation of the potential role of assets within a wider network, for the use of assets and the benefits and limitations of the combination of various assets within a geographical area may contribute to further develop support to achieve and enhance social benefits for local communities.

## 2.6. Conclusion

There is a body of research addressing the topic of community ownership of physical assets from various perspectives. This review has focussed on literature in the UK context, and in particular the research investigates community ownership in England. It has identified key themes in the literature: historical development, context, and legitimacy.

The literature review has revealed that community ownership is highly diverse in all its key dimensions, rarely following a general institutional logic but combining various features and characterised by hybridisation.

Although community ownership has a longstanding history in the UK – in Scotland, in particular - regarding land ownership (Moore & McKee, 2012; Wyler, 2009), its political relevance has only relatively recently re-emerged during the period of the last Labour Government (1997-2010). The commissioning of the Quirk Review (Quirk et al., 2007) sparked public discussions and political attention was paid to legislative issues concerning the transfer, ownership and management of assets; alongside academic investigations of these processes.

The Quirk Review (Quirk et al., 2007) represents the beginning of the recent academic and political debate, investigating the potential offered by community ownership of assets to realise community benefits. Further major work has been undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, commissioning research addressing various aspects of community ownership, *inter alia* the historical development of community and mutual ownership, ownership and management and the current landscape of communities

controlling assets (Aiken, Cairns, & Thake, 2008; Aiken et al., 2011; Woodin, Crook, & Carpentier, 2010). Other authors investigate the local context of community ownership: for instance, Murtagh (2015) addresses asset transfer from public bodies to community organisations in Northern Ireland where transfers allow local groups to own public sector facilities. However, Northern Ireland lacks policies and legislative frameworks to enable progressive and inclusive development of communities and community cohesion. Hoffmann (2013) describes the Scottish context of community land ownership in relation to the Scottish Land Reform Act in 2003 which particularly supports community ownership of land as a “response to long-standing popular discontent about highly concentrated land ownership” (p. 289). There is also literature concerning success factors such as legitimacy (Hobson et al., 2019), democratic implications of community land ownership (Nichols, Forbes, Findlay-King, & Macfadyen, 2015), and challenges, complexities and implications for successful implementation for the organisations involved in community ownership (Skerratt & Hall, 2011). Another publication (Archer et al., 2019) investigates the economic circumstances faced by asset-owning organisations and asks whether ownership by social organisations is a viable model. Archer et al. identify reasons why assets come into community ownership and focus on financial health of, and the costs and benefits of ownership for, these organisations.

Although research interest in, and the practice of community ownership of assets is re-emerging, the variety of issues addressed is manifold. The review has examined the body of literature addressing the UK context and has revealed various issues which have influenced this study, its design, the methods applied, and the analysis performed.

There have been several attempts to classify the phenomenon; depict distinct characteristics which unify the communities and organisations involved in physical asset ownership; and identify a separate sector different from ‘the third sector’ in general. These attempts provide insights into community ownership and its costs and benefits; and contribute to developing a comprehensive idea of community ownership of assets in the UK. However, the voices of those involved are often used for certain politically incentivised publications. Commissioned publications highlight benefits and address emerging disadvantages, but scientific investigations of the perspectives of individuals involved are lacking.

Therefore, the present research has taken an approach which aims to explore the experienced realities of actors involved in the communities, in the organisations, and



ultimately, in the running of the physical asset. This approach takes into account the key terms and existing definitions and descriptions while at the same time, enabling ideas, perceptions and conceptualisations to emerge irrespective of pre-defined classifications. This will account for the different realisations and interpretation of the key dimensions and allow different contexts to have different implementations and manifestations of the key terms such as defining ownership and assets. The study takes into account these variabilities of definitions and interpretations and leaves space for those to be represented, expressed and analysed in order to explore the importance of the ownership of physical assets. This is facilitated by applying a constructivist grounded theory approach in combination with case study examples allowing an investigation of individual perceptions. By maintaining analytical freedom and flexibility, themes and concepts will emerge from the data, complemented by pre-existing knowledge and theories throughout the analytical process. This aims to allow the data to speak for itself rather than developing an additional classification scheme. Such classification might be valid for the cases chosen and aim at being generalisable but would not necessarily be applicable at a larger scale. Accounting for these variabilities via a constructivist grounded theory approach can not only allow freedoms for specific characteristics to emerge, but also help to find patterns and similarities across this diversity.

The following chapter will elaborate on the compatibility of applying a grounded theory approach while acknowledging and incorporating theories and concepts beyond the data analysed. The conceptual framework is introduced outlines the constructivist stance of this research and the key concepts and ideas which have shaped the study.

# **Chapter Three – Constructivist grounded theory and a conceptual framework: the creation of space and community owned assets**

## **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the ontological and epistemological backgrounds of the research and explains the study's approach to merging seemingly contradictory methodologies.

The fundamental idea of grounded theory is to use an inductive approach in order to allow patterns and theory to emerge from the data itself. It may appear contradictory to apply a conceptual framework within a grounded theory approach, but the compatibility of, and the interplay between, grounded theory as an applied research method and the development of a conceptual framework is discussed and elaborated in this chapter. I start by briefly describing the different strands in grounded theory, offering a definition of what is meant by conceptual framework in this study and then discussing how this has shaped the approach of this investigation.

## **3.2. Towards a constructivist perspective of grounded theory**

To understand this study's approach to grounded theory, the development and evolution of this methodology is described. The differences between the varying applications are explored and why a constructivist grounded theory is the approach of choice is explained.

The original account of Grounded Theory (GT) was developed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss in their book '*The Discovery of Grounded Theory*' (Glaser et al., 1968). In the book, a systematic approach to collecting and analysing qualitative data is proposed with the intention of generating theoretical explanation of social phenomena.

Instead of following a deductive research logic – until that point the predominant approach – the concept of GT offers an inductive approach to analysing data. Whereas an inductive approach is bottom up, starting at the specific forming general conclusions, a deductive approach is top down. The main assumption of GT is that by employing an analytical process that proceeds through repetitive coding stages, the researcher will be able to discover a theory emerging from the data. This coding process is an “iterative, inductive, yet reductive process that organises data, from which the researcher then constructs themes, essences, descriptions, and theories” (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

The idea of a coding procedure which is applied to the analysis of data and allows interpretational space for theories to emerge is applicable to all types of GT which have evolved from Glaser and Strauss’s beginnings. Where further developments of GT differ, however, is not only in the coding procedure itself, but in how the researcher’s position and the underlying epistemological and methodological assumptions are treated. The Interpretative Grounded Theory stance opposes the GT assumption of a neutral researcher and emphasises that the researcher indeed shapes the research and analytical process through existing prior knowledge and using this to interpret the data. The Constructivist Grounded Theory approach takes this even further. It assumes the researcher to be key in understanding the analytical process and outcomes: prior knowledge and philosophical, ontological and epistemological understanding of the subject of investigation are key elements in the research process as the researcher constructs an interpretation of the data.

The Table 1 summarises the key features of the different strands in greater detail:

*Table 1 – Key features of Grounded Theory approaches*

	<b>Classical Grounded Theory</b>	<b>Interpretative Grounded Theory</b>	<b>Constructivist Grounded Theory</b>
<b>Philosophical Influence</b>	(Assumed to be) free from influence	Interpretivism	Constructivism Pragmatism
<b>Role of Researcher</b>	Researcher is distant and detached	Engaged and actively interprets the data	Researcher constructs rather than discovers

<b>Prior knowledge</b>	No prior knowledge is brought to bear, in order to maintain open mind and not compromise the research process and quality of emerging theory	Yes, referred to as sensitivity and having insights into relevant issues	One cannot escape prior knowledge; examine and understand how prior knowledge influences the researcher and research
<b>Literature Review</b>	After analysis	Prior and during data collection, can be used for data comparison	No sequence prescribed
<b>Research Questions</b>	No set questions	Partially vague to maintain flexibility, becoming clearer during analysis	Influence how data is collected; can and should be altered if more significant or pressing questions arise
<b>Theory Creation and Verification</b>	Creation of theory is central; verification is by quantitative analysis of collected data	Development of formal theory is central; verification occurs through multiple perspectives confirming the same data	Constructed theory is an interpretation rather than a representation, theory depends on researcher's view and does not stand outside it.

Source: Sebastian, 2019, p. 4.

The classical GT stance follows a positivist logic in which the researcher is assumed to be free of any prior knowledge on the issue at stake, and being distant and detached from the research, in order not to impact on the ability to discover new relationships and theories. This discovery of new theory should not be compromised by set research questions or the themes of a literature review before the acquisition and analysis of data. Fundamental to classical GT is the *creation* of theory, not its verification. Hence, verification can only be achieved afterwards by quantitative examinations (Glaser et al., 1968; Sebastian, 2019).

This purist account, however, has been further developed and caused Glaser and Strauss to take separate routes concerning their ideas and understanding of grounded theory.

Rather than assuming researchers are free from any philosophical influence and not having prior knowledge on the issue at stake, the Interpretative Grounded Theory (IGT) approach recognises that the researcher is actively engaged in the research process when analysing and interpreting the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Sebastian, 2019). Prior knowledge is, in fact, perceived as beneficial to the research process and may strengthen data collection. IGT encourages reference to prior research at every phase of the research, emphasising in particular, the difference between an empty head and an open mind (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Kelle, 2005). Research questions are used to provide guidance for data collection and analysis but maintain flexibility in order to adapt and react to what emerges from the data. Whereas the classic account suggests that verification can only occur after the research is completed and that this should be performed through large-scale quantitative examination, IGT suggests verification through the interaction of multiple perspectives on the data throughout the research process (Sebastian, 2019).

A key difference between Glaser and Strauss's approaches emerged in relation to the epistemological position of the researcher: having no prior knowledge in order to discover theory emerging from the data versus prior knowledge being necessary for developing a theoretical sensitivity to be able "to grasp empirical phenomena in theoretical terms" (Kelle, 2005).

Further differences between versions of GT are particularly concerned with the coding process; this is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Based on IGT and the work of Strauss and Corbin, in 1995 Charmaz developed her approach of Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT). CGT is influenced by Constructivism and Pragmatism "and loosens grounded theory from its objectivist foundation" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 180). Constructivism is defined by Charmaz (2006) as:

"a social scientific perspective that addresses how realities are made. [It] assumes that people [...] construct realities in which they participate [...] . Constructivists acknowledge that their interpretation of the studied phenomenon is itself a construction (p. 187).

Whereas pragmatism highlights that "reality is characterised by indeterminacy and fluidity and is open to multiple interpretations [...] Meanings emerge through practical actions to solve problems. [...] Pragmatists see facts and values as linked rather than

separate, and truth as relativistic and provisional” (p. 188).

In a CGT stance, the researcher *constructs* rather than *discovers* and as a result, prior knowledge is inevitable in the process and fundamentally shapes the research through the researcher.

Literature reviews and the use of existing research and evidence should be incorporated throughout the whole research (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007). The prior knowledge acquired through literature reviews, on the one hand, can shape the researchers’ understanding of the issue at stake, and on the other hand, can shape research questions in advance. These will not only determine what to expect from the research output, but also determine the way data, and what data, is gathered. The constructed theory is not claimed to be an exact representation, but an interpretation based on the researcher’s perspective, knowledge, ideas and cannot be understood as being detached from the researcher (Charmaz, 2006; Sebastian, 2019).

To summarise, the different variations of grounded theory share some underlying assumptions which mostly concern the coding procedure. However the detailed elaboration, practicalities and the philosophical and epistemological assumptions are sources of great disagreement and divergence. Whereas the classical approach follows a rather positivist logic, the variation developed by Strauss and Corbin focusses on interpretative stance through subjectivity, and the constructivist approach aims to construct rather than represent. This reconstruction, as construction of experienced realities by the researcher, is influenced and shaped by the researcher’s prior knowledge, perception and experiences.

The following section addresses these influences in particular.

### **3.3. The influence of existing knowledge on the constructivist perspective of this research**

This research adopts a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach and the research topic of the importance of community ownership of physical assets is reconstructed through

the experienced realities of those involved. The subjectivity of these perceptions, in combination with my own interpretation and reconfiguration of the data, enables aggregation of findings beyond the individual to a meta-level which requires acknowledgment, not only of my personal interpretation, but also of prior existing knowledge to understand where aggregations and generated relations stem from. Hence, both the classical and interpretative approaches are ruled out and a constructivist approach is chosen.

By following a constructivist strand of grounded theory in which the key characteristic of the final output is dependent “on the researcher’s view, it does not and cannot stand outside of it” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130), it is necessary to outline this perspective and the key conceptual elements on which this study is based which is consistent with Kelle’s metaphor of a skeleton. As Kelle (2005) describes: “grand theories play the role of a theoretical axis or a ‘skeleton’ to which the ‘flesh’ of empirically contentful information from the research field is added”. Several key concepts have been identified as a basis on which to build a deeper study of community-owned assets. These key concepts are combined in a conceptual framework drawn from the underlying epistemological assumptions of this research.

According to Jarbeen (2009) “conceptual frameworks are products of qualitative processes of theorisation”, in which a concept “usually contains bits or components originating from other concepts and all relate back to other concepts [and] every concept must be understood relatively”. The conceptual framework may be best understood “as a network of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon”.

However, as grounded theory is applied on the assumption that the existing concepts are not sufficient to fully explain the phenomenon at hand, I aim to complement these concepts by adding different elements from different concepts.

On one hand, the concepts provide a theoretical orientation, but on the other, this does not preclude developing further conceptual elements and theory. The theoretical framework explains the researcher’s background assumptions drawn from ontological and epistemological positions, and the angle from which the research topic has been approached. The use of a conceptual framework does not aim to be comprehensive or to fully explain the phenomenon of community ownership of physical assets, but rather, functions as theoretical guidance and a representation of the researcher’s position.

Grounded theory is not contrary or mutually exclusive but complementary with a theoretical framework.

The emerging dimensions of interest are the understanding of: how space and place influence the characteristics and meanings of as community-owned assets as physical structures; how the social realm in which community ownership and different types of activities take place; the construction and understanding of the logics of ‘community’ and how these are affected by aspects of ‘ownership’.

These interests emphasise place-making by the individuals involved in managing and running community-owned assets and those engaging in the activities being provided, be it visiting or active co-creation. The aim is to reconstruct the experienced realities and practices to explore the meaning and role of ownership as distinct from instrumentalised arguments about finances, scarce resources or political agendas. Hence, concepts of space and place have been taken into account to understand and guide the meaning and importance of community-owned assets.

The following sections introduce key concepts used in this study to approach the issue of community ownership of physical assets and explore how these complement the researcher’s Grounded Theory approach to investigating community ownership of physical assets from a constructivist perspective.

### **3.3.1. The changing meanings of space**

Space and place are important concepts in geography. Although these terms have been used since geography emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a physical discipline, it was only in the 1970s that a philosophical debate developed which addressed the meaning and implications of these often-used words and was nurtured from various perspectives. In particular, human geography became concerned with the dialectical variations of space and place (Johnston & Sidaway, 2015).

Human geography as a spatial discipline became established after the Second World War and began to be concerned with the methodologies and approaches applied to traditional physical geographical questions. The focus of investigation moved from “the idiographic [...] towards the nomothetic” which describes moving from an



individualistic approach towards focusing on generalities (Johnston & Sidaway, 2015, p. 100). Hence, a shift in methodologies took place, from qualitative towards mathematical and statistical analyses to generate generalisations or laws. The spatial-science perspective sought to “describe patterns of spatial organisation [and] also account for these as consequences of the influence of distance on human behaviour” (Johnston & Sidaway, 2015, p. 166) using scientific methods and a mainly positivist approach regarding space.

From the late 1960s on, as a response to these mainly positivist approaches, research on the level of the individual increased remarkably via *behavioural* and *humanistic* approaches in geography. Whereas behavioural geography investigated the impact of external factors on the behaviour of an individual, humanistic geography approached the individual as continuously interacting with its environment and vice versa (Johnston & Sidaway, 2015). In particular, the humanistic approach opened up the discipline of geography to morality and ethics, and a “flood of fresh ideas from social sciences” (Johnston & Sidaway, 2015, p. 195). This was further addressed in the debates in the discipline of geography in the 1970s. A ‘new era’ of politicised geography emerged and particularly addressed the concepts of time and space, different methodologies and analytical perspectives, as well as the development of *radical* ideas and theories.

Since the integration of new methodological approaches, pure cartography was replaced by spatial analysis. “Space was no longer the stable foundation of reality, but rather its meaning depended on the object of research; [absolute space emerged counterpart to relative space ]” (Lehtovuori, 2016, p. 17). Nonetheless, the concept of space stayed rather physically than socially influenced. Early geographers approaching space as a spatial science concentrated mostly on geographical structures, patterns, distance and locations, treating space as a continuous variable.

However, influential geographers such as Haggett, Morill and Abler (cited in Johnston & Sidaway, 2015, p. 104) developed different spatial schemas for describing societal interactions, seeking to answer the basic question of “Why are spatial distributions structured the way they are”, and searching for a general understanding and laws of order (Johnston & Sidaway, 2015, p. 104). Tobler (1970) developed a ‘first law of geography’ as an attempt to generate a basic understanding of geographical arrangements. His assumption was that “everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things” (Tobler, 1970, p. 236). This hypothesis

was very influential for some time, but it is unable to account for all circumstances, particularly for instance, in relation to developments in information and communication technology. The changes in communication have enabled very different network formations to emerge: nonetheless, it is still valid, that “complex geographic processes and structures can emerge from local interactions” (Miller, 2004, p. 284).

Several tools for spatial analysis have since been developed, acknowledging and emphasising the importance of geo-spaces and taking up the ‘first law of geography’ as the focus of their spatial analysis. Spatial analysis and Tobler’s first law of geography (“everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things”) are also concerned with time in relation to space in the context of a shrinking and fragmenting social world, extending the field of geo-spaces with the dimension of time. Although communication was expected to function as a substitute for space and encounter (particularly since the increase in information and communications technology (ICT) and growing accessibility), experiences show that an increase in communication is paralleled with an increase in transportation and mobility as well. Hence, spatial nearness, irrespective of technologies allowing communication from any location, is still important and physical location still matters.

Due to the rise of humanistic geography and its influence on the discipline of geography in general, the relationality of space has gained increasing attention. Acknowledging the complexity of space as a result of the inter-relationality of social practices has caused a further shift in the perception of space. Although systematic approaches towards the recognition of complexity were already being developed in the 1920s, the revival of complexity has only emerged in the late 1960s. Systems analysis emerged in the field of geography and in 1969 David Harvey was the first to adopt this approach and apply key aspects (Johnston & Sidaway, 2015). His findings have led to an abstraction of systems in general, a theoretical framework which acknowledges reality’s complexity and infinite linkages by setting out the main characteristics and connections: i) a set of elements within a system; ii) a set of links between these elements within a system; and iii) links between the system and its environment (Harvey, 1969, p. 448). Although, this approach seemed very promising and attracted wide attention, the emerging complexity of this model hindered a major rise in this field as it was not easy to apply and very few researchers took it up in practice and was later declared as not successful (Johnston & Sidaway, 2015).

Although different branches of the geographical disciplines and approaches derive strikingly divergent theories and perceptions of space and place, a main distinction between these interpretation-rich and vague terms can be made: whereas place is generally bound to a specific location and “is a materialisation of social forms and practices as well as affective experience”, space is a broader, abstract and universal concept, associated with the cosmos “or a metaphorical space” rather than a specific location: however, “the ways people, place and space work together to form one another are complex, varied, and dynamic” (Giesecking et al., 2014, p. 10).

Different disciplines, such as geographical disciplines or wider fields like sociology or anthropology, approach the substance of space and place from various angles, utilising different points of entry into the field; different scales for evaluating the concepts of space and place; and different ways of investigating the creation and re-creation of space and place through human involvement and actions. The importance and contribution of human agency in this process is shared by various theorists across various disciplines such as Marxist geographers David Harvey (after pioneering the quantitative revolution, Harvey gave that away in favour of Marxism, see *Social Justice and the City*) and Henri Lefebvre, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and many others.

In her book, *For Space*, geographer Doreen Massey (2005) argues that:

“if space is rather a simultaneity of stories-so-far, then places are collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space. Their character will be a product of these intersections within that wider setting, and of what is made of them. And, too, of the non-meetings-up, the disconnections and the relations not established, the exclusions. All this contributed to the specificity of place”.

This general theoretical explanation is followed by a concrete example:

“To travel between places is to move between collections of trajectories and to reinsert yourself in the ones to which you relate. Arrived at work I re-join debates [and] teams meeting [...] pick up where I left off the last time I was ‘here’. Back [at home] I go through the same process again. Another place, another set of stories. [...] Places not as points or areas on maps, but as integrations of space and time; as spatio-temporal events” (Massey, 2005, p. 130).

Massey derives a definition of space by contextualising her ideas in the field of geography and embedding them in the debates, introducing three main propositions concerning the creation and nature of space:

- i) “Space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny”;

- ii) “Space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity”; and
- iii) “Space as always under construction. Precisely because space on this regarding is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed” (Massey, 2005, p. 9)

Whereas space and time used to be perceived as oppositions – space perceived as the static and closed counterpart to time as dynamic and the sphere of change– she insists that space and time are no contradictions at all. Massey acknowledges that these are distinct but argues that they are co-implicated. Hence, time is an integral part of space considering the “temporality of a dynamic simultaneity“, and time depends on the necessity of change which is produced “through practices of interrelation” (Massey, 2005, p. 55). Each moment in time has a distinct set of multiple interacting trajectories.

Massey’s theories and perceptions of space are rather difficult to place in a given branch of geography. Whereas she emphasises the inter-relational characteristics of space and a humanistic account of the social creation of space, she also integrates terms such as ‘material’ practices (“Space and place emerge through active material practices”(Massey, 2005, p. 118)) and embeds the analysis within a materialistic context. In Clarke’s Obituary for her, “Doreen Massey (1944-2016): making geography matter”, he states “she was always thinking with and against others ” (Clarke, 2016, p. 358).

Massey’s understanding of the inter-relational nature of space, and of places as collections of stories of these interrelations is important for the constructivist approach taken in the current research. As the evolution of the understanding of space and place has progressed and moved beyond the physicality of the Earth’s surface, so has the meaning and importance of physical spaces moved beyond these static boundaries of surfaces as well; and the aim of this study is to explore how physical spaces are at the same time, socially constructed by those actively involved by collecting stories that shape local contexts in each of the community-owned spaces.

This understanding of the dimensions of space and place enables comprehension of how different localities develop the way they did and do, emerging from the interrelations

between people and location and from the multiple stories and trajectories that take place at the same time. People fulfil various roles and pursue various goals and activities at the same time, simultaneously and alongside each other. Through people's performance of these activities and pursuit of these goals, space forms and places are generated. Embedded in the physicality of the buildings the organisations own, interactions and interrelations are manifested in material practices that do not limit possibilities because space is a process and never finished, never closed.

This concept may provide the philosophical background to reconceptualise space and place, questions concerning the social dimensions of these interrelation and collected stories emerge. Nonetheless, a sociological concept of the creation of space has as well been taken into account to further explore the human agency in community ownership of physical assets.

### **3.3.2. 'Habitus' and the diversity of spaces and experienced realities**

Sociologists have also been concerned with the conceptualisation of space, place (and time), many from an agent-based perspective, addressing an individual scale and aggregating this to society. What appears to be particularly relevant to this research is the unfolding of inter-relationality which Massey describes. How do actors enter different relations, in which contexts, how do these evolve, and with what outcomes and consequences? These questions, among many others, emerge in relation to the community ownership of physical assets: what constitutes these places as distinct from others; how does the dimension of ownership play into existing interrelations; and what kinds of new relationships does this create?

The understanding of these complexities may be elaborated by taking into account sociological ideas of how space and place are generated and constructed. Pierre Bourdieu gained international attention and significance in the social sciences for his work, particularly for his concepts of *habitus* and *field* (Bourdieu, 1996).

Bourdieu proposes that human behaviour is determined and shaped by given factors and influences which constitute a structure. This structure provides the individuum with a certain layered socialisation and endows it with different forms of capital. Bourdieu

distinguishes between economic, cultural and social capital; economic capital describes the material resources in terms of money, investment and property; cultural capital is the immaterial capital an individual may accumulate during life time, such as education; and social capital is the connection of an individual to others which may be beneficial in certain circumstances, such as being associated with decisive groups or persons may lead to a higher position in society (Bourdieu, 1989). The distribution of these forms of capital varies for every person, each pool of capital consisting of the three capitals in different shares. These differences lead to differences in the individual's perception of the world – dispositions - in taste, in identity: “social identity is defined and asserted through difference” (Bourdieu, 2014, p. 140).

The structure imposed on individuals, which leads to different dispositions, is called ‘habitus’. Habitus is the principle by which humans generate, on the one hand, classifiable practices and work, and on the other hand, the ability to differentiate those practices or products. Hence, habitus is

“not only a structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organises the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalisation of the division into social classes” (Bourdieu, 2014, p. 139 f.).

Bourdieu grounded his theories within a structuralist, agency-structure perspective in which he assumes the *habitus* is generated by the past and present societal structure which is imposed on the individual. Each individual is predisposed by the surrounding social conditions surrounding and these are internalised from the very beginning. Bourdieu argues that social identity and position, taste and lifestyle are created by the inherited habitus which is differently constituted for every person (Kirchberg, 2007). Nonetheless, individuals belonging to the same class are similarly predisposed due to their shared internalised structure: “Through taste, an agent has what he likes because he likes what he has, that is, the properties actually given to him in the distributions and legitimately assigned to him in the classifications” (Bourdieu, 2014, p. 141). Resulting from this, people pursue different activities and everyday practices and engage in different settings. Bourdieu suggests that the social space in which people act and live consists of different fields, taking over “the concept of the field from Gestalt theory, in particular the work of Kurt Lewin” (Hilgers & Mangez, 2015, p. 3).

Fields are understood as components of the social world, the arenas of different practices. The available capitals define the fields a person engages in (which practices a

person pursues, such as sports, music, food, politics, etc.) and which position they take within the field. Rather than taking an inter-relational position arguing for the generation of space and individual behaviour by relations the different agents have among different groups or field, Bourdieu proposes that the “structural position in social space shapes habitus, which shape concrete relations” (Bottero & Crossley, 2011, p. 103). Hence, the structure entirely defines an individual’s opportunities and possibilities. Nonetheless, the different fields are not static, but in constant struggle between different agents and different interests. Agents and institutions active and involved in a field may collaborate, but may also compete as power sources creating and solving disputes. Individuals are positioned according to their status (resulting from their available capitals) and according to their perceptions and preferences and mindsets.

“A field is a field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they will take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of the relation of forces that is constitutive of the field” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 39).

To examine these concepts more closely, it is helpful to follow Webb (2012) and break down the different parts. ‘*Field of forces*’ describes different sites in which power is performed in settings with specified boundaries; *agents occupy* positions which describes how an individual gains a specified social position within a field by different capitals and hence habitus; and *aimed at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces* depicts individuals in competition within a field pursuing their interests as best as possible.

Further considering space, Bourdieu distinguishes between social and physical space, but which are in close interrelation. On the one side, he describes the human being as a biological being, and on the other side, an individual is a social agent “constituted in and through their relation to social space” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 11). The biological aspect is regarded as physical bodies as occupying a certain place. This is meant in absolute terms, referred to topology and location. Whereas physical space is visible, social space is the invisible sphere of relationships which are in turn retranslated into physical space: “This means that all the distinctions proposed about physical space can be found in reified social space” (p.12). The assumption is that individuals belonging to the same class have a similar habitus, similar taste, a similar composition of capitals and hence share a similar position in physical space, too. The less they share, the more remote they are from each other physically. Bourdieu’s conclusion from this relation is that spatial

distances may be directly translated to social distances. “Thus, the spaces defined by preferences in [practices] are organised according to the same fundamental structure, that of the social space determined by volume and composition of capital” (Bourdieu, 2014, p. 143).

A main critique of his concepts of habitus and field are the lack of explanations of causes of change. How do fields change? How do power relations change? How can individuals move from one to another field or positions within the field? How can an individual change beyond the pre-determined habitus?

In contrast to Massey’s understanding of space, Bourdieu aims at explicitly defining what he observes and pursues a rather nomothetic approach in his theory. Although both concepts, Bourdieu’s and Massey’s, address space, they approach it from different perspectives. Nevertheless, the understanding of the community ownership of physical assets in this research has been shaped by both these accounts.

Bourdieu’s conceptualisation and explanation of the physical and social world allows the categorisation of individuals, activities, practices and perceptions. However, this approach misses the possibility for change. The case of community-owned assets in particular, exemplifies this lack of an account of change in Bourdieu’s work. In many cases, community organisations form in response to external conditions and take on ownership of physical assets even though the actors involved in running a community organisation do not necessarily have the capitals, experiences and knowledge to successfully own a building on behalf of, and for a community. In Bourdieu’s account of habitus, many of these endeavours should not be possible from the very beginning as individuals are not sufficiently predetermined to engage in and access new fields and fulfil all the roles required.

However, the inter-relational dimension of Massey’s conceptualisation of space and its creation through interaction, and the consideration of the multiple trajectories which co-exist and the enabling possibilities through interaction, enables an account of how change happens via these interactions embedded in material practices. By the notion of space as never finished, never closed, habitus and fields become dynamic and open to change, shaped and influenced by interrelation and interaction. This does not represent a neat application of either Massey’s understanding of space or Bourdieu’s explanation of the organisation of space, but rather highlights how the study uses both concepts to understand space in the case of community organisations owning physical assets.



To integrate the insights gained from these concepts, the next section explores the third sector as the domain and *space* in which community organisations owning physical assets are located, and how opportunities for different trajectories to emerge and grow beyond the structuring influence of habitus can lead to hybridity.

### **3.3.3. The third sector as the interface of conflicting logics and the emergence of hybridity**

The third sector has many names and is described in varying terms such as voluntary sector, non-profit sector, or social economy, just to name a few. All these terms describe phenomena ranging from non-governmental organisations to formal volunteering groups or informal grassroots movements.

The emergence of the third sector has been described by Etzioni (1973, p. 13) (who first coined the term) as “a third alternative, indeed sector, [which] has grown between the state and market sector. Actually, this third sector may well be the most important alternative for the next few decades, not by replacing the other two, but by matching and balancing their important role”. This view has been shared by many scholars. Halfpenny and Reid (2002) have described the recognition and emergence of the third sector in the UK as particularly due to “the 1979 to 1997 Conservative Government’s antipathy to state provision of goods and services [...] founded on the belief that giving free reign to markets drives up the quality of whatever is traded” (p. 534). In this view, civil society should meet its needs by engaging with providers from the private domain rather than state entities. The neo-liberal strategy puts the voluntary sector in charge of caring for individuals and families who are unable to meet their needs by their own resources. Accordingly, the third sector may be perceived as a construct in response to state and market failure (Brandsen et al., 2005; Halfpenny & Reid, 2002). “In other words, the voluntary sector fills gaps, provides alternatives – some more fine-tuned than is possible in universalised provision – and identifies new needs and new means of service delivery” (Halfpenny & Reid, 2002, p. 538). Community ownership of physical assets represents the meeting of shortfalls and inadequacies of the state or market forces to secure community buildings and public spaces to be maintained and accessible free of charge.

Hence, the third sector is described as the non-profit and non-state sector so that the third sector largely defined in relation to other sectors from which its logics differ and may not be in alignment with. Different types of third sector activities appear not to have many characteristics in common, and they are usually classified by what they are not rather than what they are. The organisations and activities do not belong to the ideal typical categories of market, private or state, but rather represent “hybrid forms that mix elements from these idealtypical domains” (Brandsen et al., 2005, p. 750).

The third sector is in itself a contested construct which is approached in many different ways and theorisations. Corry (2010) identifies two different views: the American and European view which attempt the third sector as an object. In the American view, the third sector is a discrete sector defined by certain qualities, whereas the European view represents the third sector as hybridity in terms of the mix of logics which may be found in organisations and practices. The second view defines the third sector as a societal process rather than an observable thing. These epistemological approaches unfold in various attempts as well ranging from systems theory to discourse-theoretical accounts.

“An ontological approach to the third sector assumes its existence as a singular and meaningful category, defines it as clearly as possible, and then gets on with the job of investigating what it is, how big it is, perhaps what the causal relations between it and other sectors are, and so on. This has the advantage of simplicity, facilitating the massing of empirical and statistical data” (Corry, 2010, p. 12)

The term ‘sector’ suggests this domain has a distinct set of logics and practices and “make up a whole” which largely ignores how manifold realities are. As a simplistic approach to categorise complex realities this is nonetheless a helpful tool to navigate and orient. Based on this orientation it may be possible to acknowledge increasing complexities.

“So far, the increasingly hybrid and changeable nature of organizations and arrangements in the three domains has been treated as a complication that frustrates presently dominant analytical concepts. Alternatively, it could be regarded as a *feature* of these organizations and arrangements” (Brandsen et al., 2005, p. 759).

Hence, acknowledging hybridity, not as a difficulty but as an opportunity, may improve the conceptualisation and understanding of the third sector. Skelcher and Smith (2015) provide a comprehensive attempt towards theorising hybridity by analysing institutional logics in the case of complex organisations and actors’ identities in non-profits. And similar to the critique above, they conclude by

“[hypothesising] that different combinations of logics are generative of different forms of hybridity. Thus, discussions of hybridity [...] are liberated from the constraints of having to think of the world in terms of the state–market–community triptych. Instead, a robust theoretical platform can be introduced from which it is possible to develop, test, and analyse different models of hybridity.” (Skelcher & Smith, 2015, p. 444).

In practice, the combination of different institutional logics may take different forms and infuse organisations and practices to varying degrees. A non-profit aiming at improvements for the local community may run surplus-generating activities to fund various projects; or individuals working in non-profit organisations may learn different languages in order to effectively and successfully communicate with external stakeholders, such as funders; or informal groups may be forced to formalise in order to be eligible to enter a different (Bourdieu-ian) field which promise access to urgently needed resources.

These examples highlight how various logics are combined in one endeavour to pursue certain goals. These logics may not always be in accordance with each other but rather cause continuous conflict possibly resulting in evolution and progress.

Mullins and Acheson (2014, p. 1608) summarise and further develop these approaches of understanding and investigating hybridisation as follows:

“Hybridisation is sometimes considered as a purposeful adaptive response by organisations to a turbulent environment, for example by charities moving to more market or trading based methods of income generation (Smith 2010). The importance of external drivers arising from change in the public policy and funding environment is also increasingly recognised (Harris 2010). What is less well researched are the complex processes whereby organisational adaptation occurs in an incremental way in specific contexts”.

In this account, hybridity becomes a process which is crucial for third sector organisations, particularly for community organisations owning physical assets. The external conditions and varying contexts the organisations and people involved find themselves in, create and require continuous adaptation and the accumulation of change. Feeding in the abstract idea of Massey's construction of space as based on interrelation and interaction, the ever-changing circumstances and contexts create increased interaction and relations. This facilitates the emergence of different trajectories which co-exist simultaneously within actors and within organisations. The process of hybridisation may allow individuals to grow beyond their initial habitus by being

exposed to various challenges and to accumulate increased adaptation, knowledge and change.

Therefore, these organisations develop over time and a different explanation of hybridity, and the combination of different logics becomes possible:

“focusing on dynamic processes of hybridisation rather than static descriptions of hybridity, ... setting these processes in a broader social and political context and ... [focusing on] underlying change mechanisms such as competing organisational logics, trade-offs between social and commercial goals [...]” (Mullins et al., 2012, p. 410).

The last section of this chapter synthesises the concepts discussed and shows how, in combination, they have influenced the understanding and conceptualisation of community ownership of physical assets in this study.

### **3.4. The theoretical understanding of space and place in the case of community ownership of physical assets**

The research adopts a constructivist grounded theory approach in combination with a conceptual framework derived from combining different theoretical concepts and theories. The application of grounded theory as an inductive research method does not exclude applying existing knowledge but rather, pre-existing theories and concepts are complementary when adopting a constructivist grounded theory approach. The aim is to (re)construct the experienced realities of the individuals involved in running and managing community owned assets, of those attending and using these assets, and others associated with the projects, in order to investigate the importance of the dimension of ownership and how this shapes the local context of these organisations.

Rather than a deductive application of hypotheses, this (re)construction is based on empirical data and an inductive research methodology to allow insights, connections and theory to emerge from the data. However, the process of (re)construction does not operate independently from the researcher and their pre-existing knowledge, understanding of, and approach to, the topic of interest. Hence, the researcher’s ontological and epistemological stance impacts on the interpretation and construction of the data collected and its analysis in this research.

The various concepts which have influenced the research have been presented in this chapter to reflect and explain how the study approaches community ownership of physical assets. The concepts discussed started from a geographical point of view of the construction of space and place and moved to consider a sociological stance to categorise human agency and then reflected on how to substantiate this in relation to the third sector.

Massey's processual account of space and place represents a conceptualisation of how processes of inter-relation and interaction between individuals generate spaces and places. Space is a sphere of multiplicity, in which different trajectories may emerge and co-exist. These space-generating processes are embedded in material practices and are never finished, never closed (Massey, 2005): hence, space is under continuous construction. In the case of community-owned assets, these localities come into being through human interrelation and interactions occurring and developing in the materiality of these physical premises. These interactions generate space and by collecting the stories places form. The asset becomes community-owned by community members interacting with each other in these material contexts. Through continuous use and the space which is generated by interaction, the physical asset is under steady construction in its social dimension.

Although this conceptualisation allows many trajectories to emerge and facilitates the explanation of different developments in different localities irrespective of equal or similar conditions, it leaves an abstract and vague theorisation on a micro-level. Massey (2005) emphasises that the dimension of interactions may appear at the micro as well as meso- or meta level, nonetheless, it can be argued that these different levels of interactions need complementary concepts which facilitate the reflection of practiced realities, especially at the micro-level of community owned assets.

Considering Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus in addition to the generalised idea of the continuous creation of space via human interaction, allows an understanding and classification of these interactions via an agent's habitus, as well as localising these interactions in different fields of social space. The idea of habitus serves as an explanatory account of how individuals behave and act and how patterns persist and reproduce social structures. The habitus serves as a structuring and a structured structure while the various forms of capitals individuals are equipped with determine how problems are solved, programmes are designed, interactions take form. In sum, habitus focuses on how practices and perceptions are organised and how this organising of

practices and perceptions is already an internalisation of structure and its reproduced cycle.

Community owned assets are created and maintained by those involved in running and co-producing, helping, or using the premises and providing services. The organisations are faced with various tasks and roles they have to fulfil, and through these they enter different fields. The capitals, physical as well as non-material capitals, equip and position the agent in these fields. However, in the case of community organisations owning physical assets, the fields these embark in are often controversial and different from what individuals and organisations initially undertook to participate in. By taking on the responsibility for a physical asset, the contexts in which these organisations work may change as new demands and tasks are posed. The fields they engage in may not be only of philanthropic or social benefit but need to be involved in increasingly competitive fields such as applying for funding, commissioning or acquiring urgently needed resources in order to maintain the asset. Bourdieu's logic of fields determines the agent's behaviour as "[prioritising] strategic, calculating or instrumental action" (Macmillan, 2011, p. 24) to improve their own position.

However, as Rob Macmillan (2011, p. 23) argues:

"Simply getting more money in or having a higher profile than competitors may not be the only thing that counts for third sector organisations, or it may need to be seen in context as a proxy or intermediate step in enhancing the capacity to achieve what the organisation is for".

Hence, Bourdieu's conceptualisation does not account for alternative missions or purposes than maximisation of the agent's position within a field. Nonetheless, organisations and agents, on behalf of, or in the interests of, these organisations, do engage in different fields when necessary, aiming at improving their position. These fields may vary depending on the actions necessary, be it the field of economic activity, public representation, or community. By engaging in all these varying dimensions, the organisations, their practices and the individuals involved all combine different logics. not only in their actions, but also in their backgrounds, perceptions, and experiences.

The conceptualisation of the third sector is inherently hybrid as shown by the fact that it is mainly understood and defined by what it is not. And although fields, characteristics and conditions may be described in great detail, "what is less well researched are the complex processes whereby organisational adaptation occurs in an incremental way in specific [...] contexts" (Mullins & Acheson, 2014, p. 1608). The process of hybridising

an organisation's activities not only requires individuals to grow beyond their own habitus, but also to enter different fields by being exposed to different tasks.

The processual dimension of hybridity is facilitated by the continuous construction of space based on interrelations and interactions which enable multiple trajectories to emerge. By combining the idea of 'never-finished' space with putting it into practice by classifying and navigating the idea with the concepts of habitus and fields allows the processes of hybridity to be explained and acknowledges that such organisations enter various fields and positions simultaneously. The new insights, ideas and inspirations created by the experiences of 'hybridity' increases individual expertise and knowledge and may change the predetermined habitus.

The processual nature of hybridisation has active effects on place and space making by community organisations owning assets. In practice different logics, ideas, backgrounds, aims and goals are combined which highlights the importance of the social dimension.

Although we still need descriptive and simple models to accommodate concepts and theories, the combination of habitus and field, added to a constructional perspective on space and place, and assisted by a processual understanding of practiced realities in the realm of the third sector sets the scene for this research.

This chapter has provided an overview of the evolution of grounded theory and the epistemological assumptions constructivist grounded theory is based on. It has shown how constructivist grounded theory can be complemented by a conceptual framework which supports an approach to the construction of experienced realities while simultaneously providing theoretical orientation. The aim of the conceptual framework is not to provide an overarching concept or theory which can be simply applied to the object of investigation, but rather serves as a conceptual guidance to how this research has approached the phenomenon of community owned physical assets.

By combining the abstract idea of how space and place are created, constantly changed and under construction through interrelations, with an exploration of practiced realities through Bourdieu's field and habitus, the emergence and persistence of hybridity becomes tangible.

These concepts share the common idea of dynamic and processual mechanisms. Rather than aiming at creating descriptive, set categories, combining different elements provides the theoretical basis on which the empirical data will be analysed.

The following chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research methodology applied in this study, exploring the methods for the preliminary background study, data acquisition and analysis, research ethics and limitations of the study.



## **Chapter Four – Research methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction – the timeliness of the research and the accompanying difficulties**

This chapter outlines the methodology applied in this research and elaborates the processes behind arriving at the findings of the study.

Initially, the research was planned prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and began in May 2019, using standard assumptions under normal conditions. The context and circumstances, however, decisively changed in March 2020 as Covid-19 emerged as a global disease which developed to become a pandemic and impacted on the feasibility of the intended research focus and methods. Hence, the chosen focus and methodology are the result of a continuous process of adaptation, dependent on the then valid rules and regulations for undertaking social research and travel arrangements. In particular, the travel restrictions, and hence, limited accessibility to the participating organisations, communities and individuals have shaped the chosen research strategy.

The original research focus was to explore the geographical distribution of community organisations owning physical assets and a background study was performed in order to generate preliminary insights into the scope of community owned assets in England. This helped to refine and further define the study's focus and initial set of research questions. During the first months of the pandemic and the first recognisable effects in the form of closings shops, schools, offices and borders, it became obvious that civic life would not be back to normal as soon as was hoped. The initial research plan and methodology turned out not to be feasible regarding the conditions of the pandemic. When I began to realise the size and length of the pandemic and its impacts and consequences, I decided to shift focus from the geographical distribution of asset-owning communities towards the meaning of ownership of physical assets for organisations and concerned communities in light of the fundamental changes to how their buildings and premises could be used. The unique opportunity to study this unparalleled and all-encompassing change of normal practices and standard routines

gave impetus to use the study to document the developments of the pandemic in the specific context of community ownership of physical assets.

A particular challenge was not only to find organisations willing to devote their already strained and scarce resources to participating in this research, but as well, to establish alternative means by which participation in the study would be possible. Hence, developing a functioning and feasible research methodology has been the product of steady adjustments to the circumstances the organisations of interest and my own abilities and possibilities as a researcher during the periods of distancing measures and severe travel restrictions.

What has been developed is a detailed study of community ownership, based on constructivist principles, and applying a case study approach deploying a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods.

The chapter proceeds as follows: first, drawing on the previous elaborations on combining grounded theory and a conceptual framework, the paradigm of the research in the form of ontology and epistemology is elaborated, followed by the research design, describing and justifying the chosen case study approach. The chapter then discusses the research methods, covering the background study, the data collection and analysis and ethical considerations, as well as a reflection on my positionality as the researcher throughout the research process, the limitations and a summarising conclusion.

## **4.2. Research Paradigm**

According to Blaikie and Priest (2019) social research, the design and methodologies rely on fundamental decisions about the logic of inquiry and research paradigms which are constituted through ontological and epistemological assumptions. In order to understand the decisions made concerning the key structure of the research approach, the logics of inquiry are briefly outlined, followed by a summary of the chosen research paradigm and method of constructivist grounded theory. The research paradigm allows me to acknowledge philosophical ideas which have shaped the research and its outcomes and may be characterised by two distinctive features: ontology and

epistemology. Whereas the former refers to “the researcher’s beliefs about the nature of reality”, epistemology describes “how we come to know what we know” (Killam, 2013, p. 8). Both these accounts may allow understanding of how the researcher approaches knowledge and aims to answer socially related research questions. The third element of the research paradigm is the chosen research methodology.

#### **4.2.1.Subtle realism**

The logic of inquiry in social research guides which types of research questions can be asked and provides a point of orientation between various design-related decisions to be made. This research follows an abductive logic of inquiry as the aim is to “understand social life in terms of social actors’ meanings and motives” (Blaikie & Priest, 2019, p. 112). Whereas in a deductive logic a conclusion is guaranteed, “and inductive reasoning requires that the evidence that might shed light on the subject be fairly complete, whether positive or negative, abductive reasoning is characterized by lack of completeness, either in the evidence, or in the explanation, or both” (Butte College, 2023)

Representing a subtle realism stance of ontology, I follow the assumption that research always “involves subjective perceptions and observations” and there cannot be absolute and universal certainty about the findings (Edward & Margaret, 2004, p. 455), as subtle realism recognises and acknowledges that “all knowledge is based on assumptions and purposes” and consequently, the representation of reality cannot be treated as independent of the perspective from which it is approached (Hammersley, 1992, p. 52). Therefore, this research aims to reconstruct and represent the participants’ perspectives of their experienced reality of owning a building for and on behalf of a community. By emphasising the participants’ perspectives, the study aims to enable an investigation of the meaning of ownership for those actors involved, whether and how the ownership of a physical building matters to the organisations and communities involved. This approach to knowledge allows various perspectives to emerge and highlights how any given situation may be experienced differently by the different actors involved to unpick the dimensions of what is being promoted by government as a highly positive development for local communities.

#### **4.2.2. Constructivist epistemology and grounded theory as research strategy**

In alignment with the ontology of subtle realism, this research adopts a constructivist epistemology. As stated above, epistemology describes how we know what we know. There are several ways in which knowledge can be achieved, and the epistemological stance of constructivism assumes that knowledge is a reproduction of what is known by those affected and that these experiences are reconstructed by the researcher. Although the research is, of course, aiming to represent what participants have experienced and reported, it is important to acknowledge that the reproduction of these experiences can only be understood in combination with the researchers' own influences, ideas, perceptions, and background knowledge (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2017a).

Hence, a constructivist approach, in line with constructionist epistemology, emphasises the influence of the researcher on the interpretation and (re)construction of experienced realities. However, whereas the constructionist epistemology pays particular attention to the interaction, communication and conversations through which knowledge is created, the constructivist emphasises the influence of the researcher on the data.

Both accounts rely on conversation and interaction: however, a constructionist approach emphasises increased participative methods and highlights co-creation of data and insights. However, the present research is obliged to acknowledge that due to limited possibilities, a constructivist epistemology has been applied.

#### **4.2.3. Constructivist grounded theory**

The research strategy has been designed to enable an investigation of the phenomenon of ownership of physical assets by communities. As explored in chapter three, Grounded Theory is a systematic, inductive research method which aims to derive a middle-range theory. Originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) the methodology has its roots in Pragmatism, Symbolic Interactionism and was derived from a rigorous systematic quantitative background. Since then, different strands of Grounded Theory emerged. Whereas Glaser focused on the initial idea's, Strauss further

refined his approach in his works with Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The resulting categories – Classical Grounded Theory and Interpretive Grounded Theory – differ in their philosophical influence and approaches to the data and field, “as [CGT] philosophically aligns with positivist thinking (or is not defined by any paradigm, according to Glaser), IGT emphasizes interpretivism through individual perspectives” (Sebastian, 2019, p. 7).

Based on these theoretical fundamentals, Kathy Charmaz, who was a student of both Strauss and Glaser, has further developed the Grounded Theory approach which “recognises that the data and the analysis of the data emerge through interaction between the ‘viewer’ (researcher) and the ‘viewed’ (subject of the research), with the researcher aiming to present an interpretive representation of the understandings of the research subjects” (Farragher & Coogan, 2020).

Hence, the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach by Charmaz (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007; Charmaz, 2017b) represents a methodological approach which takes into account the researchers biases, rootedness in prior knowledge and that the researcher rather constructs than discovers.

The outcome of a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach aims at developing a middle-range theory which is constructed by the researcher’s interaction with the researched in the field. The theory is an outcome of a systematic, interpretative process in which data is co-generated with the participants and are interpreted in respect to the researcher’s position, perspectives, experiences, values, and interactions (Charmaz, 2008).

“Constructivist grounded theory offers tools to study temporality. This method allows us to trace our assumptions about time and actions concerning it, in addition to mapping change over time at micro, meso and macro levels of analysis” (Charmaz, 2017b, p.38).

Accordingly, theory is constructed by the researcher rather than discovered and hence, the theory is dependent on the researchers view and cannot stand without it.

In order to reconstruct experienced realities across different contexts, and the organisations and individuals involved, the research design combines different methods further elaborated in the following section.

#### **4.2.4. Research Design**

The research aim of this study is to explore the phenomenon of community ownership of assets in under the conditions of the 2020 – 2021 pandemic in England. The related research objectives are to: examine the contexts of community ownership of assets at the local level; explore the role, meaning and impact of ownership on organisations and communities; identify the impacts of the pandemic on these organisations; explore potential roles for these organisations and assets in post-pandemic conditions. The aim and objectives were structured by the ontology and epistemology of this research, and hence, a mixed methods approach was required. An initial background mapping exercise served as the basis on which the qualitative methods were chosen and applied, and the research design consists of different elements of empirical data collection and subsequent analysis. The stages build on previous research literature and theories and the analytical processes have been conducted iteratively.

The study combined a quantitative investigation of local geographical areas in terms of the socio-economic -political context, and a qualitative investigation of local manifestations of community ownership of assets and how these contexts acted and reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whereas the exploratory background mapping served as an orientation tool to navigate around the landscape of community ownership, the case studies provided crucial insights into “relationships and processes within social settings. [Relationships] tend to be interconnected and interrelated, [and] to understand one thing it is necessary to understand many other things and, crucially, how the various parts are linked” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 53). Hence, the case studies are of great importance to gain insights into the organisations on the ground and investigate the research questions.

The phenomenon of community ownership of physical assets was first approached by a background study which aimed at setting the scene in England. Based on the insights of this background mapping, a preliminary idea of the occurrence and key characteristics of contexts where communities own land and or buildings emerged. On the basis of these preliminary insights and the emerging importance of context and circumstances, a case study approach was chosen to explore the phenomenon of community owned physical assets in detail.

In the following sub-sections, each element of the research steps is discussed in detail, beginning with the background mapping, followed by an explanation of the chosen case study approach and a description of the timing and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on methodological research decisions.

#### **4.2.5. Background study**

The geographical distribution of community ownership of physical assets has been a neglected issue in the existing literature. Although McKee & Moore (2014) identified the dimension of spatiality, geographies, and contexts of community ownership as a field of interest, there has not been extensive research into the spatial factors related to community ownership and the effects these factors might have. This may be due to the lack of data on community-owned assets as there is no central register. Hence, a background study was performed investigating the geographical distribution of community-owned assets in England by analysing the available data and investigating various related dimensions of community-owned assets and characteristics which shape the spatial context. This is elaborated in detail in Chapter Five.

Although the background study provides valuable preliminary insights into the spatial distribution, the quality of available data and the level of investigation did not allow a deeper exploration and understanding of the experienced realities on the ground. As the focus of this research is on, first, the meaning of ownership for the organisations and communities involved; and second, on the impact of the pandemic on local contexts, a quantitative investigation was not suitable. Hence, different qualitative approaches were chosen and combined to enable a comprehensive investigation of experienced realities. There are elaborated in the next section.

#### 4.2.6. Mixed method research design

There are manifold research design opportunities by which to investigate social phenomena. Social research can be organised and structured in different ways, ranging from “experimental versus non-experimental, case study versus cross-case research, or qualitative versus quantitative” (Neuman, 2014, p. 25).

The nature of the ontology, epistemology, aims and objectives of this research are best explored by applying qualitative methods, as these intend to reconstruct the experienced social reality of the participants, focus on interactive processes and events, and are situationally constrained, and involve the researcher. Whereas quantitative methods are described to aim to concentrate variables and measure objective facts, and to be value free and independent of the context (Creswell, 1994; Neuman, 2014); and appear in measurable and countable outputs, a qualitative inquiry does not report by numerical indicators. Nonetheless these methods and processes are as systematic as quantitative ones in their approach.

In qualitative methods, data collection and analysis follow a systematic steps and processes which vary depending on the methodology applied. There are various approaches present in qualitative research, some of which are overlapping and are difficult to differentiate. In deciding what qualitative methods to apply, a number of different options were considered. The following Table summarises these and evaluates not only the differences in approaches, but also explores critiques and rationales of each.

*Table 2 – Summary of common methods of qualitative analysis*

<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Critique</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
<b>Content Analysis</b>	Content analysis is the most common approach for analysing qualitative data such as open-ended interviews or focus groups. It is used to summarise and systematically order the content by quantifying the	Content Analysis is a descriptive tool which may not account for causal relations, for this further methodology needs to be applied. Although, it represents a robust and safe	This research may peripherally make use of Content Analysis as this approach covers generally wide applications. However, as the research seeks to develop theory, the



	qualitative information (Maier, 2018).	methodology there is only focus on words and communication (Maier, 2018).	descriptive nature of Content Analysis is not sufficient. Also, the data will not be quantified and therefore the use of Content Analysis was rejected.
<b>Narrative Analysis</b>	<p>Narrative Analysis looks at how people tell stories in order to structure their lives – this is the central assumption of Narrative Analysis.</p> <p>Narrative Analysis operates within a three-dimensional space of inquiry: interaction, continuity and situation. The data (e.g. texts, journals, transcripts, field notes, etc.) is analysed within this inquiry space to investigate how people create meaning in their lives (Clandinin, 2006; Figgou &amp; Pavlopoulos, 2015).</p>	There are no fixed tools and this is a disadvantage because the interpretation of the data depends heavily on the individual researcher.	Although this research investigates how people generate the meanings of their own realities, it also aims to investigate the issue of collective ownership of community-owned assets, rather than the participants' attitudes to their lives in general. Therefore, Narrative Analysis was not assessed to suit the research.
<b>Discourse Analysis</b>	There are several variations of Discourse Analysis and approaches employed in social, cultural and communication research: critical discourse analysis, discursive psychology, and Foucauldian discourse analysis. All of these variations draw on structuralist and post-	The decision to apply Discourse Analysis depends on the epistemological and ontological orientation of the research, and this requires an assessment of which of the different approaches to Discourse Analysis is	<p>Although, Discourse Analysis is of great value for this research, the focus on language alone is not sufficient.</p> <p>This limitation has been addressed by taking several other data sources into account which go beyond language per se (i.e.</p>

	<p>structuralist linguistics and approach language as social interaction (Phillips, 2018)</p>	<p>appropriate at a very early stage.</p> <p>Another critique is the focus on linguistics and underplaying of other contextual semiotics such as symbolic communication in form of signs or gestures (Phillips, 2018).</p>	<p>social media, pictures, videos, maps).</p> <p>Therefore, Discourse Analysis was assessed as an unsuitable methodology.</p>
<b>Grounded Theory</b>	<p>Originally developed by Glasser and Strauss, Grounded Theory uses a bottom-up approach by systematically analysing data in terms of aggregated stages of coding which eventually lead to and theory emergence (Glaser et al., 1968).</p>	<p>Grounded Theory requires impractical distance and independence of researchers from the data in the research process (Thomas &amp; James, 2006).</p> <p>There is also huge disagreement within the literature about the definition of what constitutes Grounded Theory.</p>	<p>This research investigates the real-life phenomenon of community ownership of assets as they adapted to the conditions of the pandemic. This involved two rounds of interviews aiming to capture changes in meaning-making, actions, perceptions and experiences, as well as allowing data saturation.</p> <p>Grounded Theory requires repeated re-entering the field to further gather data on analytical issues which emerge after the first part of that analysis. The aim is to generate a data-based middle range theory, and was considered to be the best method for this research.</p>

Summarizing, table 2 above provides a broad overview of the most common methods of analysis in qualitative research, the limitations of each and an assessment of their suitability for this research. Grounded Theory, and in particular Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007), was considered to be the most appropriate analysis method, because “meanings, actions and events are emergent and thus novel meanings and new actions can arise. [...] CGT has the distinctive feature of providing methods to study action and process as well as meaning” (Charmaz, 2017b, p. 38).

The research questions about the importance of ownership of physical assets for the actors involved and how the pandemic has changed the opportunity context for the concerned organisations and communities address the participants’ experiences, the meaning behind ownership, the actions performed in relation to the assets and the change caused by the pandemic. Therefore, the choice of Grounded Theory in relation to this case study is a consequence of ontological and epistemological conditions and the context in which the research questions were developed. By contrasting other methodologies, the decision was validated and found to be the best-suited approach.

As part of the case study and secondary research, social media posts were collected and classified to keep track of the organisation’s activities during the pandemic, if and how they have been active during lockdowns and Covid responses, and how did they keep in touch with their beneficiaries and local communities. However, these posts were not systematically analysed as such, but have informed the background knowledge about the organisations, the local context and helped to generate a more complex impression of the local circumstances of the buildings and organisations.

The final research design is composed of a quantitative background mapping exercise which provided an overview of issues of distribution of community ownership in England, and the contextual differences between the locations of assets. This was initially planned to be followed by four case studies across different locations which were accompanied followed over the course of twelve months with two interviews, one in the beginning, the second after twelve months; in the interim, diaries written by participants to record changes over time especially in relation to impact Covid-19 had on the operations of the organisations, as well as on the dimension of owning an asset for and on behalf of a community.

By emphasising the qualitative and empirical fieldwork, the research seeks to find explanations in practical situations from which to generate theory. Regarding the insecurities and unforeseeable and unpredictable future developments at the time, a Grounded Theory approach was well-suited to facilitate insights based on exploration and to generate new theories concerning new emerging topics and ideas (Denscombe, 2010). The research investigates and aims to shed light on the differences in: how ownership is experienced; why organisations became engaged in ownership in the contexts of their own histories; and how these organisations reacted in response to the pandemic.

### **4.3. Research Process: From quantitative analysis to qualitative case study research**

The research process may be described as an iterative procedure of various steps and stages. In alignment with the methodological choice of Grounded Theory, iteration has been key in developing thoughts and theories, validating early findings and refining routes for further investigation.

The background study provides a quantitative introduction to the phenomenon of community ownership of physical assets prior to the pandemic, based on statistics and a numerical investigation of the geographical distribution of community ownership.

This basis fed into the qualitative research stage, as it was used to further develop and refine the research questions and to navigate the scattered landscape of this manifold phenomenon.

The next section describes the background study, while the practicalities such as the data and software used to explore the contexts and visualise these in form of maps, and describe the complex geographical levels which were applied can be found in the Appendix. The following section provides a description of the case selection strategy and the adjustments that were necessary due to pandemic related interruptions and difficulties; the conducted interviews; the interim survey; and finally, the follow up interviews.

### **4.3.1. The practicalities of the background mapping**

The background study was a first attempt to generate a national overview of community-owned physical assets in England as there is no central registry to date.

The data used was based on a data set of the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research (CRESR) which was created for an investigation of the financial stability of community organisations owning assets (Archer et al., 2019). The dataset is now hosted online by the Plunkett Foundation and is publicly accessible under the name of ‘Keep It In The Community’. The dataset records both registered community assets which are in community ownership and those of community value.

The information was acquired for a research project commissioned by Power to Change and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in mid-2018. The main purpose of the project was to generate a national overview of community ownership of physical assets and their financial viability and economic impacts. The Report describes the rapidly growing rate of community ownership and records mainly stable financial circumstances, but also notes vulnerabilities and emphasises areas where more support needs to be established in order to strengthen and facilitate ownership by communities (Archer et al., 2019).

Among the insights in the Report is a dataset of assets which are highly likely or probably to be in community ownership. The number of assets identified in England in 2018 was 8,856. In making use of this data for the present study, further preparation was necessary, and two entries had to be rejected as the information provided was incomplete and not verifiable. The remaining 8,854 entries were cleaned, and their location was verified by allocating coordinates to postcodes in the form of Latitude and Longitude. The data was also allocated to the British Ordnance Survey National Grid geographical reference system. Similar to Latitude and Longitude, in this system Easting and Northing are a given numeric grid reference which is used to define a location on a map using the Coordinate Reference System OSGB 1936 / British National Grid, EPSG: 27700.

The data provided by CRESR contains several data fields: names of organisations owning assets; addresses of organisations and of assets if different from the organisational address; postcodes; type of assets; type of ownership; whether the local community is the primary beneficiary of the asset; and whether the boards of these

organisations are formed of mainly local residents. However, not all information was provided for all database entries.

To allocate a precise location to all assets listed, it was necessary to further clean the given postcodes. Some were incorrect due to typing errors or being too short or not existing. The verification and identification of location was performed by online research in three steps by means of the organisation's name: first a Google search; second a search via Mutuals Public Register (Financial Conduct Authority); and thirdly via the Charity Register.

The final dataset is the basis of information used in the background mapping. However, not all entries were verified by a separate online search due to time and resource constraints. The final dataset is, therefore, a cleaned Excel table containing entries of physical assets in England which are highly likely to be in community ownership. (The detailed practicalities of geography, administrative boundaries and software used are given in Appendix 1).

This analysis provided preliminary insights into the national landscape of community-owned assets which is further explored in Chapter Five. For the background study and the changed research focus, the Local Authority District (LAD) level was used for visualisation purposes and preliminary insights. The lower levels of analysis based on the cases and context specific situations and locations, however, will be of greater importance for this research and the questions of interest.

The case study selection strategy developed was based on the contextualisation of the geographical information of community-owned assets by applying different numerical characteristics. This is further described in the following section.

#### **4.3.2. Case selection strategy**

This section describes the initially planned strategy which could not be carried out fully due to the pandemic. However, it describes the intended methodological approach although not all proved to be useful in the actual research during Covid-19.

The initial case study selection strategy was primarily based on geographical indicators, location, and distribution. However, the Covid-19 pandemic changed the research focus and increased the complexity of the research circumstances.

Rather than seeking organisations not covered in the CRESR study, the decision was made to focus on organisations which had already been subjects of a research project addressing community ownership of assets.

This decision was made due to several circumstances.

The research would be change-oriented and would therefore explore how organisations cope with current circumstances. The benefit of approaching case studies already investigated was that an existing and reliable base of data had been acquired before the pandemic. This facilitated a comprehensive comparison of organisational status before Covid-19 emerged and after the first phases of the pandemic. This would save time and resources during the research project itself as necessary qualitative information was already available.

The data used to perform the preliminary background mapping is based on different sources and procedures to estimate the numbers of community-owned assets and the database was

“developed by combining data from a number of sources, including funder monitoring and application data, the charity register, the community-led housing database and [...] surveying. Additional searches were conducted in the five areas to supplement this, with the aim of improving the accuracy of asset mapping. This entailed internet searches, analysis of the Land Registry’s Commercial and Corporate Ownership Data (CCOD) and conversations with key local infrastructure organisations in the areas” (Archer et al., 2019).

Although the main priority was to ensure a stable and reliable data foundation, not all 8,554 entries were manually reviewed. Therefore, there was still the possibility that organisations did not fulfil the requirements to be regarded as a community organisation owning an asset, the organisation did exist anymore or was not available or accessible due to other circumstances. Hence, approaching the organisations which were part of the first study ensured an effective and efficient access to organisations and information.

To maximise data richness and ensure access to organisations and information, it seemed to be the most fruitful opportunity to continue an investigation of such organisations owning assets for which an information base had already been established. The information and data obtained included: location; when the

organisation was founded; legal structure; description of the organisation's activities; the key assets; information about staff and volunteers; and several financial indicators (income, expenditure, annual grant income, etc.).

The aim of the case selection strategy in this research was to investigate a range of different cases for several reasons: the variation among organisations and contexts where physical assets are owned by communities are manifold and cannot easily be classified or categorised and therefore, I wanted to hear as many voices and perspectives as possible. Additionally, as the idea of developing an empirically grounded middle-range theory is to derive generalisations and a variation in cases may increase the representativeness of the sample. "The goal of case selection is to capture the full range of variation along the dimension(s) of interest. [Although] the inclusion of a full range of variation may distort the actual distribution of cases across this spectrum", it nonetheless provides comprehensive insights from various combinations of dimensions" (Gerring, 2016, p. 100).

From the large number of examples collected in the Archer Report, the 27 case studies used to assess the financial health of communities were selected to represent a range of different situations. These were further classified and additional information relating to geographical location was added. The dimensions taken into account are:

- Deprivation
- Density
- Rural/Urban geographical context; and
- Type of asset

The categories established for each of the dimensions are: Low, Low Medium, Medium, Medium High, and High and are clustered as follows:

*Table 3 – Overview of classified dimensions*

Category	Low	Medium Low	Medium	Medium High	High
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Deprivation <sup>1</sup>	10-9	8-7	6-5	4-3	2-1
Urban/Rural	E1	D1	C1	B1	A1
Asset density (asset per 1000 inhabitants)	1	2	3-5	6-8	10-14

Regarding density, the categorisation was made by different mathematical means. The median number of community-owned assets in the nearer neighbourhood - Middle Layer Super Output Area (MSOA) - was three and this was used as a basis for the categories in which the following colour codes are applied:



Concerning Urban/Rural the green colour code refers to rural whereas the category 'high' refers to urban.

The type of asset will be considered separately as classifying these in the above stated categories does not serve any practical logic.

The 27 cases are summarised and coloured according to their attributes: one further organisation is included which took part in this research but not in the CRESR study:

*Table 4 – Summary of cases and categories*

ORGANISATION	Region	Deprivation	Density	Urban /Rural
The Big Venture Community Centre	WM	High	Low	High
Bilston Town Football Club	WM	High	Low	High
Gatis Street Adventure Playground	WM	High	Low	High
The Workspace (All Saints Action Network)	WM	High	Low	High
Foodbank and Transport assets (The Well)	WM	High	Low	High
Croxteth Sport and Wellbeing Centre	NW	High	Low	High

<sup>1</sup> The numbers describe the decile of deprivation according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation. The highest decile of deprivation is 1 and stands for the 10% most deprived small areas in England (MHCLG, 2019a).

Eldonian Village (Eldonian Community-Based Housing Association)	NW			
Kensington Library	NW			
The Rotunda	NW			
Squash Community Centre	NW			
ETNA Community Centre	GL			
Katherine Low Settlement	GL			
Landmarks Art Centre	GL			
Affordable Housing Units	GL			
Richmond and Kingston Accessible Transport - RaKAT)	GL			
Maurice Chapel Way Housing Scheme	EM			
Devizes Canoe Club	SW			
St. John's Place	SW			
Coningsby Community Hall	EM			
Blackberry Way Housing Scheme	EM			
Tisbury and District Community Minibus	SW			
Wilton Hill	SW			
Community Shop (Ashton Keynes Village Shop)	SW			
The Peterborough Arms	SW			
The Old School (Lover Community Trust)	SW			
Belchford Community Solar Project	EM			
Mareham le Fen	EM			
Kirkgate Arts	NW			

Insights which can be drawn from this visualisation are:

- There is no deprived area with a high density of community owned assets;
- Higher density occurs mostly in rural areas; and
- There is one average case with medium values in all three categories – the Maurice Chapel Way Housing Scheme

Cases of particular interest are those assets being marked by extremes, such as assets surrounded by many other assets in shared ownership, or the only assets in community ownership in a certain area. The cases were chosen to be different from each other in these different categories, with the Type of Asset being considered to avoid only investigating single types, for example, community halls.

The selection of the types of assets of particular interest focussed on community ownership with active community engagement on an ongoing basis and forced to adapt their management and use of their asset due to the pandemic. This is because the research interest is in the innovative potential of exceptional circumstances which lead different initiatives to adapt and develop alternative *modi operandi*. Therefore, housing-related community owned assets were excluded. While these housing involves a continued engagement, and concerns a stable community, there was no need to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic, as living in an asset is not affected by containment measures. But nevertheless, residents were constrained in their uses of their dwellings and facilities and some housing was modified to allow distanced access. It was rather, that the structures and functions of the management boards did not have to change significantly, apart from meeting on Zoom. Hence, the following assets were excluded from the case study selection: Affordable Housing Unit, Maurice Chapel Way Housing Scheme, Blackberry Way Housing Scheme, and Wilton Hill, and Eldonian Village. Housing has important qualitative differences from other types of assets and the aim of this study was to focus on those assets with public space.

Another project to be excluded was the Belchford Community Solar Project due to the lack of continued community engagement. The organisation owns and maintains a solar energy production facility and profits are shared among local resident shareholders or reinvested locally to support social actions. However, after the initial share issue there is no continued community engagement.

Another basis for selection was to exclude London based organisations. London based organisations were excluded due to the unique economic and demographic characteristics of the capital meaning it is non-comparable across other localities in England. Hence, the research concentrated on assets outside London.

With these exclusions decided, the next step was to identify the contrasts explored in the tables above:

There was a significant set of cases located in deprived areas, but which had a high density of other assets.

The Squash Community Centre and the Rotunda are in a medium category regarding density, and both are located in an urban and deprived neighbourhood.

There are three cases characterised by low deprivation, low density and located in an urban context. These are the ETNA community centre, Affordable Housing Units and the Landmarks Art Centre.

The second set would be a rural location with high density of other assets and varying deprivation levels. There is one case characterised by a rural location and high density of other assets and a medium high deprivation – Mareham le Fen, while the Old School Lover Community Trust has low deprivation, rural context, and a medium high density of other assets.

*Table 5 – Summary of initial set of cases*

ORGANISATION	Region	Deprivation	Density	Urban/Rural
The Big Venture Community Centre	WM	High	Low	Urban
Bilston Town Football Ground	WM		Low	
Gatis Street Adventure Playground	WM		Low	
The Workspace (All Saints Action Network)	WM		Low	
Foodbank and Transport Assets (The Well)	WM		Low	
Croxteth Sport and Wellbeing Centre	NW		Low	
Kensington Library	NW		Medium	
The Rotunda	NW		Medium	
Squash Community Centre	NW		Medium	
Devizes Canoe Club	SW		Low	
St. John's Place	SW	Medium	Low	Rural
Coningsby Community Hall	EM	Medium	Medium	
Tisbury and District Community Minibus	SW	Medium	Medium	
Community Shop (Ashton Keynes)	SW	Medium	Medium	
The Peterborough Arms	SW	Medium	Medium	
The Old School (Lover Community Trust)	SW	Low	Medium	
Mareham le Fen	EM	High	High	

The Rotunda and Mareham le Fen represent the main category which can be found in the data: a community/village hall. The latter represents the most prevalent type of this asset – a rural community hub; nonetheless, the case of Mareham le Fen is exceptional also because the neighbourhood is characterised by medium-high deprivation and a high

density of assets in community ownership in the same MSOA. The Rotunda, on the other hand, represents another interesting case, as it is a community hub in an urban context with a medium density of other community assets. Each case is located in a different English region - The Rotunda in the North West, Mareham le Fen in the East Midlands.

In order to cover the other remaining regions, cases in the South West and West Midlands were chosen taking care to avoid tripling of community halls. Therefore, in the South West, the Ashton Keynes Village shop was selected, and in the West Midlands, the foodbank and transport asset. This choice was made based upon the assumption that irrespective of lock downs and closures, these organisations continued some activities to serve and support community members. Additionally, these asset types represent recent history in regard to the community shop and an increased importance and need concerning the foodbank and transport organisation, The Well.

The final selection of four cases with their characteristics is shown in Table 6:

*Table 6 – Initial case selection*

Category Case	Deprivation	Density	Urban/Rural	Region	Founded
The Rotunda	High	Medium	High	North West	1986
Mareham le Fen	Medium High	High	Low	East Midlands	2001
Ashton Keynes Shop	Low	Medium	Medium Low	South West	2010
The Well	High	Low	High	West Midlands	2006

Table 6 above visualises the differences between the chosen cases. The information on the founding date of an organisation reflects the different histories behind those initiatives.

This approach aims at identifying the most varied cases on the basis of aggregated data which is however limited due to potential changes because of the pandemic, such as actuality and representativeness. The contexts in which the organisations are situated may differ from that of higher aggregated information, the lived realities may not be represented by aggregated statistics, and although aiming at carefully classifying and justifying the case selection, it is possible that qualitative characteristics may be of more importance than categorising organisations based on their location and related dimensions. However, the aim was to develop a sound, transparent and comprehensible approach towards a case selection.

All four organisations were contacted and invited to participate in this research as part of the case selection sample. However, response rates were slow, and time constraints increasingly became a challenge, and the situation did not look as it would improve when the second Covid-19 wave began in October 2020 when the invitations were sent.

The outlined methods were what I set out to do, however as the next section shows I was not able to fully implement these.

#### **4.3.3. The impact of the pandemic in practical terms**

The pandemic and its disrupting effects on organisations defeated the practicality of the above presented case selection strategy. Due to the timing of the recruitment process of potentially participating organisations, the initial set of chosen organisations was so constrained in terms of available resources that their participation was not possible. Whereas one organisation had not responded at all, the other apologised but declared that their capacities were fully concentrated on helping their local community and they did not have spare resources to devote to this in research.

Hence, in early October 2020 after repeatedly getting in touch with organisations and from establishing some contacts, it became clear that the third sector and the organisations of interest were under high pressure due to the nature of the crisis. The research plan of recruiting four case studies which fulfil certain background

characteristics and were, on the one hand, willing to devote internal capacities, and on the other hand, had enough resources to do so during the pandemic, turned out not to be feasible. Although two of the initial set of organisations responded and took part in this study, the other two did not. Due to time constraints and the expected slowed-down recruitment process, the strategy was changed, and a snowball-type of contacting was performed in order to increase the likelihood of reaching organisations willing to participate. This turned out to be more successful as nine organisations responded and in five cases I was able to have conversations with more than one person. Four of the five organisations offering more than one perspective were chosen as key cases which are explored and described in greater detail in the next chapter (Chapter 5).

Due to the uncertain circumstances and the unpredictability of how the pandemic and related consequences might develop the participating organisations were not able to make commitments for a whole twelve-month period. Although all were keen on participating, the unpredictability did not leave the organisations in a position for long-term and time-consuming obligations. Hence, instead of focusing on only four cases and inviting participants to keep diaries, the research design changed towards aiming for two interviews per participant in each case. However, this also turned out not to be feasible due to time constraints and hence, only one key interviewee per case was interviewed twice.

Ideally, there would have been more than two persons from each organisation in order to increase insights into the cases and to validate some of the experiences among various actors in the same context. This was not possible for all contacted and interviewed organisations. Those organisations from which two or more persons were interviewed became main case studies, and the others fed into data acquisition, and were contacted for a follow up interview. This was due to time and resource constraints.

The initial aim of discussing the dimension of community ownership not only with organisational representatives, but especially with members of the community, either volunteering or those using the organisations' activities and services, also turned out to be extremely difficult during the times of lockdown. Even though the organisations were invited twice, or more and organisational representatives were reminded to disseminate the recruitment materials in the form of an introduction letter and explanation of the research to other organisational members as well as community members, the response rate was very much lower than was hoped for (for the materials see Appendix 2). Another barrier was the issue of distance and detachment when

contacting and conducting interviews virtually. Without the opportunity to introduce myself and getting familiar with the local contexts and persons, I felt there was less interest and motivation to participate in the research.

Despite of the difficulties, the research was able to access a sufficient number of organisations and interviewees. Table 6 summarises the organisations which participated in this study:

*Table 7 – Final case selection*

Category Case	Deprivation	Density	Urban/Rural	Region	Founded
Alt Valley / Croxteth Sports and Wellbeing Centre	High	Low	High	North West	1986
Ashton Keynes Shop	Low	Medium	Medium Low	South West	2010
Bilston Town Football Ground	High	Low	High	West Midlands	2013
Coningsby Community Hall	Medium	Medium	Medium Low	West Midlands	2006
ETNA	Low	Low	High	Greater London	1985
Gatis Adventure Playground	High	Low	High	West Midlands	2013
Kirkgate Arts	Medium High	Medium	Medium Low	North West	1995
The Rotunda	High	Medium	High	North West	1986
Wilton Hill	Medium	High	Low	East Midlands	2012



#### **4.3.4. Qualitative data acquisition**

For acquiring the qualitative data, a case study approach was used. In case study research, a particular real-life phenomenon is explored on the basis of specific cases where a phenomenon occurs (Norander & Brandhorst, 2018). Yin (1981) highlights, that case study research allows the investigation of a contemporary phenomenon, as well as the context it is embedded in. Although a general critique of this approach is the lacking generalisability due to the in depth information based on a single or small number of cases (Norander & Brandhorst, 2018), the research aims to compensate this by representing a variety of cases as explained above.

The qualitative the data for the research was acquired by conducting a first interview, an interim survey and a final follow-up interview. To compensate for the lack of physical presence and visits to the case sites, and in addition to the interviews, social media was used to complement the picture of the local case study organisations owning physical assets.

#### **Interviews**

Prior to the interviews, the participants were contacted via an email sending an introductory outline of the research interest and focus. In addition, a separate, more formal explanation of the research aims, objectives and questions were provided together with a consent form describing the activity the interviewees were being asked to participate in, and how the shared information and data would be treated.

These materials (Appendix 2, 3) had to be read by the participants and the consent form signed before the interview to ensure conditions and participation were understood and fully voluntary. At the beginning of each interview, the participant was asked whether they had questions or if there were any other concerns they would like to raise.

Due to the pandemic and related restrictions, particularly regarding travelling, meetings and face-to-face encounters, the interviews were conducted online via digital communication software, 19 interviews were conducted via Zoom, one interview via Skype and three interviews via telephone. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees for transcription purposes only.

The qualitative data for this study was mainly acquired by conducting semi-structured interviews. The choice of semi-structured interviews was made in order to generate deeper qualitative insights and while providing a guidance for the interview itself to ensure covering all important topics even if conversations developed in different directions; and at the same time, and facilitated by the use of non-directive questions, ensuring enough freedom for the interviewees to talk about issues and themes which appeared important to them (Bryman, 2016; Denscombe, 2010; May, 2011). This enabled iterative and systematic data collection which allowed rich insights to emerge without losing focus (Marshall, 2015).

The interviews took place between October 2020 and February 2022, during the second period of lockdown and the first Covid winter.

These first interviews were conducted with 18 participants from nine different community organisations owning physical assets, of which 11 were female and seven male participants. In the case of five of the nine organisations, I was able to talk to two or more participating individuals and four of them became the key case studies of this research (see Chapter Five). The key case study participants were contacted for a second, follow-up interview which place between November 2021 and January 2022, under remaining Covid-19 restrictions.

In total, there were 23 interviews, including those of the second follow-up interview, and the duration of the conversations varied between 35 and 180 minutes. I generally aimed for 60 minutes per interview but the variations in length depended on the interview situation online, the amount of detail given by the interviewee and in how far the interviewed person could connect the discussed themes and topics to their local context.

Sample size and number of interviews are difficult to determine as every research project is different and an exact number of necessary interviews is not easy to define. The amount of gathered data becomes sufficient when further interviews do not provide any additional information (Gerring, 2016). Although the cases, organisations, individuals, and particularly contexts and the impacts of Covid varied, the insights into owning a physical asset for and on behalf of a community and the effects the pandemic had on the organisations' situations were sufficiently sketched by the number of interviews conducted.

Due to the length, depth, and complexity of the interviews, processing the data became increasingly time consuming. Hence, a very practical decision had to be made: the limits on time and resources prevented including any further cases and did not allow follow up interviews with all participants. Instead, participants from the key case studies were contacted to provide updates on their organisation and the community's development through the course of 2021. The procedure by which the data was analysed is explained in the next section.

### **Interim survey**

The questions in the interim survey resulted from the qualitative analysis of the first interview data. It was largely designed to capture quantitative data, but with an additional open response question.

Comparing 18 different perspectives from nine different contexts brought up many common themes and concepts in the data, however, the urgency, accuracy and emphasis of contextual issues did vary between the different contexts. In order to maintain anonymity and consent and to comply with the approved ethics procedure (see below), the survey remained completely anonymous without the opportunity to retrospectively identify the respondent. Hence, the interim survey did not necessarily provide data which could be used to further identify themes or concepts, but rather served as a validation of the analysis process of the constructivist grounded theory approach. But interpreting the data based on my own thoughts, ideas and understandings may not necessarily have been in alignment with the respondent's interpretation. Nevertheless, by being careful about my own influence on the research and the data, the interim survey served as a verification of the issues at stake, in this case the contextual importance of different challenges and liabilities, how the participants would rate the different categories (working with external stakeholders, challenges arising from local/national policy, regulation and legislation, challenges faced in trying sustain the organisation financially, challenges faced in trying sustain the organisation's services, challenge of building trust locally, challenge of making uncomfortable decisions, challenge of meeting the different requirements of running your organisation) on a scale from 1 to 10 in which 10 described a characteristic as very challenging and 1 not at all.

The survey was performed using Qualtrics, an open survey software which provides standard surveying practices, providing opportunities for anonymous responses, and IT solutions to visualise questions and scales.

In total 17 responses to the survey were recorded which far exceeded the expected return. Due to the lack of physical presence and opportunities for personal contact, I expected fewer people to respond, assuming that motivation and the sense of obligation to do so might have been lower because personal connection was not possible. However, this turned out to be a mistaken fear.

Given the opportunity for an open response, some respondents provided information about the further challenges and liabilities they experienced in their local context, but others left the open response box blank. Overall, the responses highlight how different the contexts and experienced realities were but identify common themes irrespective of the variations.

### **Social media**

Social media posts from various platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were taken into account as a means to gain non-physical access to the local sites. In particular, social media helped to keep track of the organisations' activities and to verify the information provided during the interviews.

Instead of requesting the participants to keep diaries and asking for already-scarce resources to be spent on the research, the posts on online platforms allowed insights which verified provided information and further allowed me to follow the organisations' activities during the pandemic. The forced digitisation of nearly all third sector organisations during the pandemic massively increased my personal opportunity to keep track of, and have access to the local sites, even if only passively and remotely.

The qualitative data was processed in an iterative, analytical procedure which is outlined in the next section.

## **4.4. Analytical Process**

In contrast to other qualitative methodologies, CGT is an inductive research approach which does not begin with a certain theory or assumption, but rather, starts with a particular research problem and explores what emerges in order to address this problem and related questions (Bitsch, 2005). To unpick the dimension of community ownership, the experienced meaning and importance and how the pandemic changed the opportunity context requires to insights emerging from the data rather than applying theories or assumptions.

Therefore, data was gathered in various forms which allowed participants to develop their own concerns and points of interest, for example, through questionnaires with open-ended questions or interviews. Open-ended questions enable a participant to spontaneously describe their own experiences and perceptions. The data gathered was then analysed, not in accordance with pre-defined concepts, but in accordance with the themes emerging from the data itself. These emerging themes and concepts are the basic unit of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Through several cycles of coding these basic units were aggregated and moved from a descriptive set of concepts to a higher, more abstract set of categories.

In order to arrive at the theory-developing stages of analysis, several steps had to be performed simultaneously. In Grounded Theory, data gathering, coding, and analysing needs to be approached as simultaneous tasks which inform each other. By this continuous comparison of codes, derived concepts, and aggregated categories and by exploring their relational nature, the codes, concepts and categories are integrated into a coherent explanatory model (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012).

### **4.4.1. Using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software**

When using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), the researcher does not transfer the analytic process to a computer-based software; rather, the tool is used to make the steps in the analysis more rigorous, robust, and transparent. CAQDAS offers several options to help the researcher exploring the data by organising,

structuring, categorising, summarising, and visualising data. More complex searches within the data are possible, such as word and text combinations, the search for attributes or matrix searches to identify links between emerging categories (Bringer et al., 2006). However, CAQDAS is mostly best described as data management tools rather than analytical software: the software itself is not able to perform any qualitative analysis - “The software cannot think for us, but it can help us see what we've been thinking. In short, while theory cannot be generated by formula, new technologies have more to offer than we sometimes recognize” (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 361). In this research, NVivo was used as a data management software. “Analysis within grounded theory [is described] as the constant comparative method. This [includes] comparing incidents within each category, comparing categories to each other, clarifying the developing theory, and writing a coherent theory” (Bringer et al., 2006, p. 257).

This process may be described in different discrete steps, however, the coding cycles are not discrete but performed iteratively throughout the stages of the research. The use of CAQDAS has facilitated ordering, structuring, categorising and analysing the large amount of qualitative data gathered from the conducted interviews.

#### **4.4.2. Analytical steps**

As described above, the analysis was performed in stages and while the order presented below indicates a chronological approach, the discrete steps were performed in cycles, iteratively and sometimes overlapping.

##### **Step i. Transcribing**

The transcribing of semi-structured interviews, additional information gathered concerning the organisations and contexts and notes taken throughout the conversations was performed in order to import the data into CAQDAS, in this case NVivo. Due to limited availability of automated transcription software, the data was manually transcribed. The process of transcribing not only converted audio files into text, but as well enabled a deeper level of engagement with the contents of the interviews.

By manually transcribing the interviews I was able to re-read and re-think the conversations, the concerns raised, and themes and topics discovered and discussed. The transcription fed into the analysis process as engagement with the data formed early ideas, and reflections on the interview process enabled adjustments for further interviews. The transcription of the interviews covered intonations, pauses, laughing, etc. Due to the interviews being conducted remotely, the speech had to be prioritised and physically observable observations of non-verbal gestures such as body language could not be meaningfully recorded.

### **Step ii. Open coding**

Initial or open coding was the first analytical step. I broke the data down into sequences describing what was in the data in form of line-by-line coding and attached labels to the information provided. Open coding generally stimulates comparative and generative questions to guide the researcher (such as *What?* and *how?*) (Mills et al., 2022). Given the amount of data to be analysed and coded, open coding was not performed neatly line by line, but rather topic related. Hence, I condensed the information in text into codes per topic raised rather than line by line.

### **Stepp iii. Focused coding**

Focused Coding served as a step to clean the emerging codes, eliminate duplicate codes and or conflating similar codes. During this stage I made use of the most frequent or significant codes to order and synthesise the data. I re-ordered and grouped initial codes and organised these into a structure which was suitable for further analysis. This stage aims to refine the coding focus and reduce the number of codes.

### **Step iv. Axial coding**

The next stage was axial coding in which hypothetical relationships between categories of data are proposed. Categories were related to sub-categories and these relations were tested against the data. By investigating these relations, I aimed at depicting the conditions under which events, actions and interactions emerged, the context they were embedded in, and the related consequences.

### **Step v. Theoretical coding**

In the stage of theoretical coding, I identified core categories which represented the central phenomenon under study, in this case community ownership of physical assets. All other categories stand in relation to the core category in forms of conditions, strategies, or consequences.

These coding steps are theoretically discrete and separable from each other. In practice however, it is rather difficult to depict which of the analytical coding actions refers to which stage, particularly as coding, re-structuring, refining, collapsing, relation-building among codes and emerging concepts and aggregated themes in the data, are an iterative and cyclical process which could not be performed chronologically. In particular, analysis and further data acquisition were undertaken simultaneously and informed each other along the process.

### **Step vi. Analytical memos**

After the later stages of the iteration of the four stages of coding, I began writing analytical memos against the higher-level codes. These memos summarised the categories and contents and proposed analytical findings. They served as a foundation for writing the findings chapter, and as a way of keeping track of the analytical process.

For example, by descriptively elaborating on the different influences ownership has on the participating organisations, I was able to distil the main dimensions which are shared by them. Whereas *growing* has been reported by all, the impacts on activities has been varied. This however will be reported in detail in chapter six.

### **Step vii. Fusion of Cycles One and Two**

I performed the steps explained above in two cycles. One round of data-gathering between October 2020 and February 2021 which served as the basis of the analytical cycle (Cycle One). The findings derived from Cycle One fed into the second round of data acquisition (Cycle Two) and refined and further shaped the questions of interest for the follow-up interviews and saturated the data to develop theory.



### **Step vii. Synthesising**

The final step was the synthesis of memos and the fusion of the two analytical cycles to formulate a coherent and systematic statement about the theoretical findings and frame the discussion.

This analytical process resulted in a rigorously developed coding hierarchy which formed the basis of the findings chapter of this thesis. The detailed hierarchy can be found in Appendix 6. The process allowed me to deeply engage with the data and content, explore in detail the participants' experienced realities and develop an empirically grounded reconstruction of the phenomenon of community ownership of physical assets.

## **4.5. Ethical Considerations**

Conducting social research and participating in personal exchanges with people requires the researcher to be particularly aware of ethical considerations in order to carry out the research in a way that is not only safe for the researcher, but in particular, in the best interests of the participants while contributing to knowledge production in general. In accordance with Sheffield Hallam University's requirements, a separate ethical research approval process was followed to ensure the research adhered to highest ethical standards and complied with the University's guidance for good research practice.

The following sections explores the most important dimensions of the ethical considerations crucial for this study; anonymity and informed consent; data protection; and discussion of sensitive issues.

### **4.5.1. Anonymity and informed consent**

The data gathered was anonymised to ensure confidentiality and secure the privacy of the participants. Hence, names and any other identifiable information have been removed, and participants were allocated a pseudonym. However, the local context was disclosed which makes identification possible due to the small local settings. This was

communicated to the participants and informed consent was obtained for disclosing the organisation's name.

In general, informed consent was achieved by providing a Participant Information Sheet and a separate Consent Form to all participants. Both documents outline the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, the role of the participants, information needed, and the research process. This ensured that information provided about the research was accurate and balanced and explained in ways meaningful to the participants. Declaring informed consent hence also meant that participation was voluntary and that the participants had not been deceived or coerced into contributing to the study.

#### **4.5.2. Data protection**

As the research was conducted remotely and mostly online or at least digitally, data protection has been of increased importance, and was considered particularly carefully. Data storage and management procedures are in line with the Data Protection Act (1998), EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and the University's Data Protection Policy, to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants.

The data was collected via phone, Zoom and Skype and was recorded either by recommended and allowed software such as *Jabba* or by using an encrypted Dictaphone. Digital files are stored on the University's Research Store, and local copies of generated files on my personal device were directly disposed of at the end of the research. The use of encrypted equipment ensured data security and the confidentiality and anonymity of those involved in the research. After data was collected and securely stored, this level of data security was maintained: during the transcription process the audio files continued to be kept securely and the files were destroyed after the interview had been transcribed. The transcribed interview was stored securely on the University's Research Store as along with all other research-related documents involving data from participants.

Notes and other physically existing documents were kept in a lockable cupboard to which only the principal researcher has access. The documents were disposed of by a

shredding machine as soon as they were digitalised, and the digitised version stored at the University's Secure Research Store.

Similar preparations had been developed in case there was an opportunity to conduct face to face interactions and interviews with participants. However, as explained, this has not been possible.

#### **4.5.3. Discussing sensitive issues and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the interview situation**

Ethically sound research should never have any negative effects, particularly not for participants. However, as real-life interactions sometimes are not fully predictable it was necessary to also consider possible negative side effects of the research.

Potential negative consequences of participation in this study could have been emotional stress caused by the topics of interest in this research. As already identified, the pandemic related questions might have caused emotional reactions due to personal experiences of Covid-19 and its consequences as everyone has been affected in various dimensions.

By making the participants aware of the topic beforehand that the pandemic would be covered during the interviews, it was hoped to limit any stress that might have arisen. If someone indicated their personal emotional distress due to the pandemic and chose not to talk about Covid-19 related topics, they were not chosen for the study.

Sometimes emotional involvement had not been indicated before the topics emerged, and some interviewees expressed their own emotional situation (rather than an organisational perspective): how they personally were affected, what the impact had been on their situation. The interviews allowed time for these issues to be talked about. I was prepared to provide emergency contact information and tried to make myself familiar with the local support context.

However, it was not necessary to provide any emergency information, often because the person I was talking to represented a part of the local help and emergency response themselves. Nonetheless, situations did occur which required me to carefully guide

conversations through sensitive and emotionally distressing topics. Particularly during the Winter lockdown in 2020/2021, the interviews provided participants with a rare opportunity to have conversations with somebody beyond their really close Covid-19 restricted bubble. Hence, although first aiming to discuss ownership-related concerns, the conversations often immediately turned towards Covid-19, the current situation, and its effects. I felt that the interviews also provided an opportunity for being listened to for those who usually listen to others about their needs and concerns. For the participants I spoke to, being confronted with cases of people who were in desperate need, facing isolation and (mental) health problems were sometimes overwhelming. However, I felt honoured that respondents were opening up to me and able to jointly reach a level of closeness in these situations which allowed them to share their emotions. Listening and recapitulating the interviewees' situations was the way I was able to offer the support needed in these circumstances.

## **4.6. Limitations of the research**

The research was limited in many ways, not only in regard to the time and resources available to me as a PhD student, but also because of external circumstances, not least because of the pandemic.

Conducting social research in times that lacked social interaction has been an exceptional challenge. Communicating via video conferencing software rather than meeting in person not only interrupted for the overall working routine but has particularly impacted interview situations with participants.

I was able to contact enough people able and willing to have a conversation via digital means or phone, but the practicalities and insights which complement spoken words, such as surroundings, premises, venues, body language and other encounters and observations, were limited. Technical interruptions and my own early hesitations may have meant that conversations began rather haltingly. Nevertheless, this has contributed to increased learning of how to solve technical problems, obtain licenses for software, find different channels for communication, and how to adjust to different interview situations while always being in the same place – at home.

This leads further to the limited scale of the sample and the limited number of people I was able to contact and interview. Although aiming for comprehensive insights into the different perspectives of community ownership of physical assets, I was only able to interview the organisational side of ownership as I could not reach participating community members without being physically present. Repeatedly inviting organisational representatives to distribute the recruitment materials to their communities did not yield to any further participation beyond those speaking on behalf of the organisations directly involved.

What constitutes a case in case study research is subject to discussion. As Swanborn defines: “A case study refers to the study of a social phenomenon carried out within the boundaries of one social system (the case), or within the boundaries of a few social systems (the cases), such as people, organisations, groups, individuals, local communities or nation-states, in which the phenomenon to be studied enrolls in the case's natural context [...]” (2023). Although the research aimed at exploring the contexts by considering data from various sources within the respective organisations, the limited access to different stakeholders did not allow to fully pursue this. This left the research with a partial insight into the cases, characterised by the organisational perspective on ownership. This was aimed to be compensated by for example taking into account social media and online interactions of the respective communities. Nonetheless, considering the broad definition of what may constitute a case it is still valid to call the sample as such.

If I had entered the field earlier, this could have provided more opportunities and a different timing concerning Covid-related developments. With hindsight, beginning recruitment in early summer 2020, rather than September, could have had the advantage of using the ‘summer break’ of Covid-19.

This would probably also have influenced the selection of cases. The timing of contacting and recruiting organisations could not have been more problematic than at the beginning of the Winter outbreak of Covid. Although I was still aiming for a most varied selection, the criteria applied might have considerably changed due to the pandemic at lower geographical levels, statistics might have changed since the last Census and the impacts of crises, such as Brexit, Covid, the Ukraine war, has changed living conditions and experienced realities.

Choosing organisations which already participated in CRESR research limited my choice of potential participants and at the same time, in some cases conflated the

participants' perceptions and understanding of the difference between the research projects. The former research project (Archer et al., 2019) was concerned with the financial viability and stability of community-owned assets in England. Hence, the dimension in which interviewees thought of ownership were economic and financial in nature and the idea of performance, in particular using the interview situation as an opportunity for advertising the organisations, their activities and their professionalism in carrying out the responsibilities they take on. Therefore, it was a particular barrier to unpick the meaning of ownership for the organisations and their communities beyond these characteristics.

Nonetheless, by using semi-structured interviews and the coding procedure I was able to unpick underlying themes in the data. This was a resource intense procedure, not only transcribing more than 30 hours of audio, but also repeatedly coding and re-coding sentences and sections of the interviews. This was also a limitation in regard to the number of interviews I was able to conduct. Initially I aimed to have at least two interviews per person which turned out to be unfeasible because of my own limited resources.

My own resources, particularly in relation to my positionality in this study, are delineated in the next section.

## **4.7. Positionality and Reflexivity**

The positionality of a researcher relates to how the researcher views the world based on ontological and epistemological assumptions (as outlined in Chapter 4.2). This in turn is determined by “an individual’s values and beliefs that are shaped by their political allegiance, religious faith, gender, sexuality, historical and geographical location, ethnicity, race, social class, and status, [and] (dis) abilities” (Holmes, 2020, p. 1). Hence, the positionality of a researcher is a configuration of characteristics unique to each individual researcher.

Reflexivity in turn, relates to continuous self-analysis which “involves a self-scrutiny on the part of the researcher; a self-conscious awareness of the relationship between the researcher and an ‘other’” (Bourke, 2014). Hence, the process of reflexivity is to

recognise my positionality and further acknowledge my own power, biases and privileges.

Being a white, female, German researcher has equipped me with many privileges and opportunities which have influenced my perspective and approach in this research; having enough resources myself has allowed me to enter a certain intellectual and personal position. Considering my personal and educational background, I may be perceived as an ‘outsider’ to the research context. “Insiders are the members of specified groups and collectives or occupants of specified social statuses: Outsiders are non-members” (Merton, 1972, p. 21). However, there may be a “lived familiarity” regarding my own background and that of my participants (Holmes, 2020).

As an outsider I often encountered interest in my own perspective on the UK context of the voluntary sector, community buildings and the overall structure in comparison to continental Europe, whereas simultaneously as an ‘insider’ in terms of similar backgrounds I also encountered an underlying connection and a shared recognition and understanding of realities.

The combination of both had benefits for my own research as the participants did not expect that I had better or more inside knowledge than they possess, hence, ‘obvious’ information was articulated assuming I might not be aware of because of my nationality, while at the same time being able to ask more insightful questions because of my prior knowledge of the context; I was not too close to the context which allowed some participants to also to make provocative statements, but close enough to produce an understanding of the situation and context.

There were many instances of recognising similar interests, political beliefs and assumptions about relevant issues which I tried not to elaborate or concentrate on.

However, establishing a relationship with participants means that the researcher should not just extract data and information, leaving participants feeling used, but establishing relationships, having conversations and sharing experiences.

For example, has my affiliation with Power to Change influenced the research process? Declaring that my research project is co-funded by Power to Change led some participants to form certain assumptions about my position within the research and appeared to contribute to the use of the interviews as an advertising opportunity as described in 4.7. Whereas others did not recognise this at all and treated me and our conversations as a welcome distraction from Covid-19 routines and an opportunity to

have a meaningful chat about their concerns. In some instances, my affiliation with Power to Change led to initial contacts but it might also have prevented participants from sharing uncomfortable insights.

As positionality is fluid and dependent on the situation, I felt that I was being perceived differently by different persons.

## **4.8. Conclusion**

The chapter has presented the methodological approach taken in this research study by presenting the minor quantitative and main qualitative process of exploring the phenomenon of community-owned physical assets on the basis of the experienced realities of actors involved. By framing the research in a constructivist subtle realist paradigm, the study recognised that data can be interpreted differently, as knowledge and experienced realities are socially constructed and there is no abstract, objective truth.

The methods applied have been under constant revision and reconfiguration throughout the different stages of the research. Conducting social research, investigating physical spaces which are used to create, generate, maintain, and experience community during a time in which using these spaces was prohibited was particularly unfortunate timing and a difficult challenge. Hence, the weakness of the conducted research and in particular, the methods has been the lack of physical access to the field. This missing interaction, exchange and encounter had to be compensated via digital means and the methods applied aimed at generating the best possible insights and qualitative data.

Alternatively, there would have been the option to pause and postpone the data acquisition phase and wait till physical access was possible, for example throughout the summer of 2021. However, as the research focus and questions have changed and moved towards exploring the pandemic and its consequences for community organisations owning physical assets, it would have been a disadvantage to wait for ‘better’ times. Also, other circumstances impeded postponement, not only personal circumstances, but in particular, the uncertainties of future developments in regard to the pandemic itself.



The following chapters present the empirical data obtained. The next chapter (Chapter 5) explores the background study of the landscape of community-owned assets in England and related preliminary insights, introducing the cases and contextualising these geographically. This is followed by the findings - Chapters 6 and 7 - which concentrate on the meaning of ownership and Chapters 8 and 9 which examine the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on these organisations and their assets.

## **Chapter Five – The Pre-pandemic landscape of community-owned assets: introducing the cases**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The geographical distribution of community-owned physical assets in England has been very little researched. Although, areas such as spatiality, geographies and local contexts of community ownership have been identified as fields of interest (McKee & Moore, 2014), and Aiken et al. (2011) performed a factor analysis of which the geographical area was one of the key dimensions regarding community-controlled assets. Their analysis revealed that organisations with high levels of staffing and high rates of staff turnover are largely located in urban areas and organisations with low rates of turnover and low staffing levels are mostly rural which helped to form generic clusters for further classification and categorisation of their data. However, the lack of data on ownership conditions and the absence of a central registry has hindered further investigations.

In order to set the scene for this research and to geographically contextualise the community ownership of assets, a background mapping exercise was conducted. Relevant dimensions and characteristics of community ownership were investigated in relation to how spatial contexts were shaped, drawing on existing literature describing factors which have been found supportive or obstructive and theoretical derivations. Based on this analysis the case studies of this research were chosen.

The chapter first briefly elaborates the background mapping exercise and proceeds to presenting the main findings describing the geographical distribution of community-owned assets in England. Following this, the case studies chosen in this research are introduced.

## **5.2. Mapping the pre-pandemic landscape of community-owned assets**

Exploring the geographical distribution of community-owned assets and the correlations between the extent and type of asset and other localised variables provided insights into factors which facilitate community ownership and those which hinder communities from taking on these additional responsibilities.

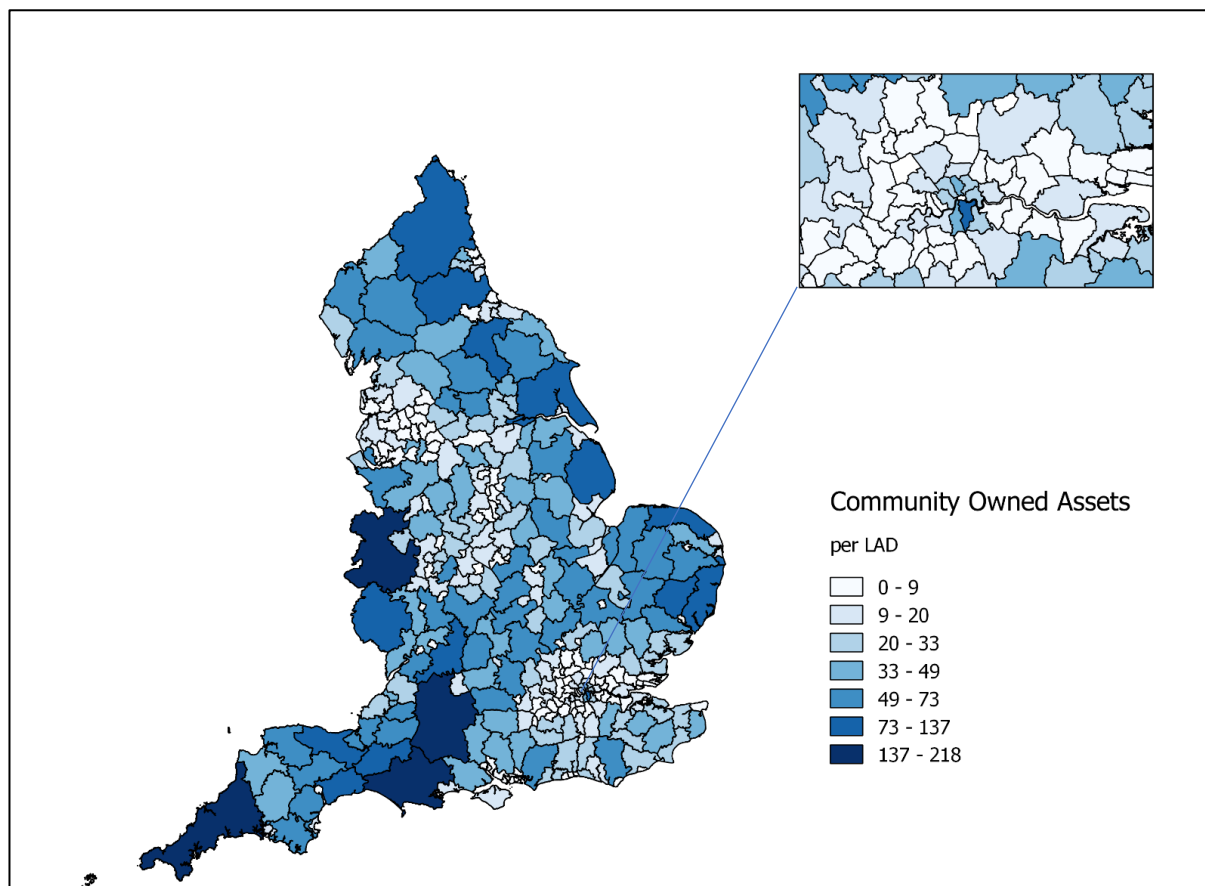
In order to examine the geography of assets in community ownership, the data provided by Archer et al. (2019) (see Chapter 4.4.1) was used and translated into visual material like maps and graphs using data on certain localised variables relating to demography, the local economy, political leadership and cultural factors.

However, these identified dimensions are neither clearly separable nor are their impacts isolated and causal; what emerged early on was the understanding that treating dimensions and characteristics in an isolated way can be insufficient because it neglects the effects of other interrelated, interdependent and mutually(re-)enforcing dimensions. Concerning the time constraints on this research study and the focus on issues of experience and perception, the mapping exercise did not aim to provide an accurate representation of reality, nor a comprehensive in-depth quantitative analysis. Rather, mapping provided an insight into the systematic complexity of community ownership, the influencing factors, and the observation that in practice the interplay of various factors and conditions are of vital importance in influencing whether communities manage asset ownership or not. These insights also highlight what remains unknown and is yet to be understood.

To compare the geographical data on assets with quantitative data on the local context, various secondary data was collated on a shared administrative level, either Local Authority District (LAD) or Region (in the case of volunteering data is only available on a regional level). I looked at demographic variables relating to the local population, retirees, young adults, and education; the economic variables of income, unemployment, land and house values and charitable funding; statistics on volunteering and listed assets of community value for cultural aspects; and for the political arena, indicators of austerity and public asset disposal rate were taken into account. (Detailed explanations can be found in Appendix 1).

These visual comparisons in form of maps provided first insights into the distribution and factors correlating with community assets.

*Figure 2 – Map of community owned assets per Local Authority District*



The main findings are: 1) Community ownership seems to be a rural phenomenon; 2) those areas with a higher proportion of community-owned assets are in a better financial state than those areas with least community owned assets; 3) Land and house values are lower in areas with higher proportion of assets; 4) areas having higher number of community owned assets are less affected by cuts per person in terms of fiscal revenue as well as service spending

Firstly, community ownership seems to be a rural phenomenon. The data indicates that less populated areas are the main beneficiaries of community-owned assets. Secondly, the data reveals that areas with a higher proportion of community-owned assets are in better financial states than areas with the lowest numbers of community-owned assets. The financial circumstances may indicate that community ownership is a phenomenon occurring among communities having more resources, irrespective of the nature of

resources. Additionally, land and house values are lower in those areas with a higher proportion of community-owned assets which enhances the likelihood of communities being either able to buy an asset, or that the local government have less incentive to sell assets with profit generating interests. The assumption that economically better-off areas are more likely to have a community-owned asset seems to be supported by the findings concerning austerity measures: those areas having a higher number of community-owned assets are less affected by cuts per person in terms of fiscal revenue as well as service spending.

The mapping exercise revealed certain features of local contexts that merited more detailed investigation through case study research. These included the rural/urban status, the asset density (asset per 1000 inhabitants per Local Authority District), and the level of deprivation.

### **5.3. The findings and rationale for case study selection**

The following sections summarise the main findings of the mapping exercise and present the associated case studies as examples of contexts where organisations own physical assets for, and on behalf of, their communities.

The case selection not only aimed to represent the standard situation of the spread of diversity in the community asset field but intended to investigate variations in contexts to explore how and why organisations and communities take on ownership of physical assets. The cases therefore represent different characteristics, from very rural to urban, deprived to wealthy, single to multiple assets. As described in Chapter 4, the goal of case selection is to capture the full range of variation along the dimension(s) of interest. “[Although] the inclusion of a full range of variation may distort the actual distribution of cases across this spectrum”, it nonetheless provides comprehensive insights from various combinations of dimensions” (Gerring, 2016, p. 100).

The Table 8 summarises the participating case studies which will be presented in more detail in the next sections.

*Table 8 – Summary of the case studies and characteristics*

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Type of asset(s)</b>
Ashton Keynes Village Shop	The asset is a community shop providing retail type of assets, selling everyday goods and services, such as groceries and postal services.
Acts of Random Caring CIC	The asset is a large greenspace area and an attached building serving as a community hub., educational facility and hosting other organisations such as a nursery.
ETNA	The asset is a community centre in one of London’s suburban neighbourhoods, providing affordable spaces for local organisations and charities and local community groups and residents.
Alt Valley	Alt Valley owns several buildings across different neighbourhoods of Liverpool, such as libraries, sports and community centres.
Wilton Hill	The asset is an apartment building providing rental housing for people having a local connection.
Bilston Town Community Football Club	The asset is a stadium, attached sports facilities and a building hosting a club bar and meeting spaces.
Kirkgate Arts	The asset is a community centre which predominantly serves as a cultural institution providing theatre classes and other entertainment offers. It also hosts the local heritage collection.
Rotunda	The asset is a large complex of Georgian buildings providing educational services while hosting other institutions as well, such as counselling offers and a nursery.
Coningsby	The asset is a typical village hall, providing a venue for local groups and events.

### **5.3.1. Community-owned assets appear to be a rural phenomenon**

The mapping exercise showed that community ownership predominantly occurs in rural areas. Comparing the occurrence of community-owned assets in the different categories

of the Rural - Urban Classification (RUC) it can be seen that with increasing levels of population, the share of community-owned assets decreases.

Nearly three quarters of all community-owned assets (73.5%) are located in rural LADs, - although only 43.8% of all LADs are classified as rural - whereas the areas categorised as urban only contain 26.5% of community owned assets. Although rural LADs may also have urban structures at lower administrative levels, community ownership of physical assets appears to be a predominantly rural phenomenon. This also reflects the proportion of village halls in the data set, as these are largely rural in location. Most community-owned assets are in located in rural areas and serve a minor part of the population – 56.3% of all assets serve only 21.52% of the population.

To provide insights into issues of rurality, a number of rural case studies were selected for deeper study. Ashton Keynes was selected as a case study for this purpose, but also to meet other data requirements, providing insights into retail-based assets, alternative ownership structure, staffing and assets that have been in community ownership for longer than ten years.

## Ashton Keynes Village Shop – rural and wealthy

**Limited and Community Benefit Society – owns the building – single asset – paid staff and volunteers – surplus generating activities – older than ten years.**

*Figure 3 – Picture of the Ashton Keynes Village Shop*



Located in Wiltshire in the Southeast of England, Ashton Keynes is a rural Village with 1,337 inhabitants (in 2017) and characterised by the past gravel industry and hiking routes.

Source: Ashton Keynes Village Shop, 2022 .

The Ashton Keynes Village Shop is a community-run retail shop selling everyday items and offering additional services such as postal services and package drop off and pick up. Wiltshire is among the wealthier LADs in England and Ashton Keynes is a rural village in an area that has been historically shaped by the gravel industry. Today the area is well known for hiking routes.

### The asset

The Ashton Keynes Village Shop was founded in 2010 and took over from the last remaining local shop in Ashton Keynes which was attached to the former owner's private house. The owners had planned to retire and wanted to sell the shop and house



together, but no buyer could be found to take over the house with run the shop because the shop was not profitable. The community stepped in and created a new business.

After discussing various options, it was decided the best solution was to build a new shop as an annex to the local village hall, rather than integrating it into existing infrastructure such as the local pub.

Although newly-built, the shop was not larger than the former venue. But since the turnover increased during and after Covid storage has become an issue and the community is generally interested in expanding the shop, either in the same or another location.

#### How did the asset come into community ownership?

As soon as it became obvious that the shop was expected to close as no one could be found to take it over, discussions emerged locally about how to save the shop. The Rural Community Council was the crucial intermediary which put the community in touch with the Plunkett Foundation<sup>2</sup>.

With their financial help, and support from various other sources, plus local support in form of the sale of community bonds, the community managed to afford to construct the new shop, which functions not only as a commercial operation, but also as a space of encounter and social interaction.

The process from the closure of the original shop to the re-opening under the leadership of the community took from August 2010 until December 2011. Since 2011 the shop has been run from the annexe to the Village Hall.

#### Prior to the pandemic

Before the pandemic, the shop had five members of staff, six management committee members, and six regular volunteers helping with everyday tasks and working shifts in the shop. By 2018, employing a professional manager with more than 20 years' experience helped improve the business aspects of the shop and its financial position. The management committee and manager of the shop have always been open to feedback and recommendations from their local community. Hence, different services

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<sup>2</sup> The Plunkett Foundation is a national charity promoting community businesses to support rural communities in the UK (Plunkett Foundation, 2023)

have been integrated into the shop such as package drop-off and pick-up and postal services, and the services have been under continuous adjustment to increase customer satisfaction. For example, the new shop manager expanded the range of locally produced goods offered in the shop.

#### The immediate impact of the pandemic on the community-owned asset

The pandemic significantly changed the context for the local shop and led to a major increase in uptake of the local shop's products and offers. Whereas prior to the pandemic people did some small additional shopping, during the pandemic many people did their whole weekly shop here.

At that time, the Village Shop hired a new manager which turned out to be very beneficial in combination with the increased flow of customers and trade. The turnover of the Ashton Keynes Village Shop in October 2020 (after seven months of pandemic restrictions) was already 20% over that of the year before and expected to further increase during the winter months as measures to slow the spread of Covid-19 continued. Although the turnover reduced again after the immediate pandemic-related crisis in January 2022, the shop is an exception compared to other local village and or community shops. Whereas the average of village shop's turnover is around £167,000 per annum, the shop in Ashton Keynes produces a turnover of more than £700,000 in 2021, although at the time of research, this was expected to decrease again.

As retail and convenience services had been considered essential during the pandemic and consequently the Village Shop was allowed to continue business and activities nearly as normal, with only minor changes to the spatial organisation of the shop and limits on the number of people allowed to enter the premises at the same time to ensure containment measures were kept in place.

The pandemic also caused a decrease in the number of volunteers running the shop. As many of the regular volunteers were retired or over 60, they were particularly vulnerable to Covid-19. Hence, the former six volunteers were reduced to two during the first Covid Winter in 2020 and only one volunteer remained in 2021. After the pandemic restrictions were lifted, the shop increasingly struggled to recruit the former volunteers back or find new volunteers.

To explore potentially contrasting experiences and perceptions in an urban setting, the next key case study is an example of a community-owned asset in one such urban

context. In contrast to the Village Shop, the Gatis Community Space in Wolverhampton has no retail-based model but is dependent on grant funding and generating income streams with their assets from other activities such as training or hiring out space. The case was chosen to provide insights into different staffing structures, ownership arrangements and as an organisation of less than ten years operation.

## Acts of Random Caring – deprived and urban

**Community Interest Company – leasehold of the premises – single asset – more than five employees -volunteers – fulfils several types of services – in operation for less than ten years**

*Figure 4 – Photo of the Gatis Community Space*



Located in the West Midlands, Wolverhampton is a Metropolitan Borough with 263,700 inhabitants in 2021.

Source: Gatis, 2022.

The Gatis Community Space is a site offering various opportunities for different activities to the local community, including from a garden, playground and community centre. It is an example of a community-owned asset located in an urban environment and deprived context, hence at the other end of the spectrum from Aston Keynes Village Shop. The organisation's official name is Acts of Random Caring CIC, however the site itself is known as Gatis (former name of the adventure playground) and will be used to refer to the organisation and the space.

### The asset

The Gatis Community Space is comprised of a former publicly run playground with an attached building. The building consists of offices, storage rooms, a large community hall, a smaller hall and a catering standard kitchen. The outdoor space accommodates a venture playground, a community garden, a little wooded area and a playing field.

The asset is not only used by the organisation Acts of Random Caring but hosts additional organisations and projects such as Bernardo's children charity and the Real Junkfood Project. The asset serves multiple purposes, offering various spaces on site.

### How did the asset come into community ownership?

Formerly a Council-run adventure playground, this community space was falling into despair and by 2014 eventually closed down, with the possibility of the site being sold and used for other purposes such as housing. However, as the site had been in community use for many decades, a group of five local residents came together already in 2013 to prevent the closure going ahead. The group was granted six months permission to use the grounds and develop a business plan, along with setting up a Community Interest Company (CIC)<sup>3</sup> to run the space. Although the founding members did not aim to start a new organisation, the need became clear and Acts of Random Caring have been running the site under the legal umbrella of a CIC since 2015.

Strictly legally, the asset should have been transferred to the organisation via an Asset Transfer Process from the Council of Wolverhampton to the ARCCIC in 2013. However, this formal transfer of ownership still had not been fully completed when the fieldwork for this research was completed in early 2022, and the arrangement is still a long-term lease for 35 years (as of 2023). The organisation is aiming for a full asset transfer, but Random Acts of Caring does not yet feel that terms of the formal transfer of ownership are as good as they need to be in order for the organisation to take on full ownership and full responsibility for the building and grounds.

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<sup>3</sup> A CIC is a legal form for Social Enterprises. These pursue a community benefit purpose by performing economic activities, the dividend and interest payments are limited, and the organisation's assets are locked. The shareholders are entitled to extract determined parts of financial profits out of the organisation's economic performances (GOV UK, 2023).

### Prior to the pandemic

Prior to the pandemic, the ARCCIC had three staff, more than 100 volunteers and five Directors. The organisation was in constant development and change and continuously providing new services, projects and activities which served to bring together the local community and help those economically disadvantaged.

Achieving a long-term leasehold for the grounds and building has allowed the organisation to settle in locally and acquire different grants and funding for various projects which they would not have been eligible for without the guarantee of long-term occupation of the site. Although, the organisation feels that leasehold ownership is a disadvantage compared to having full title.

Nonetheless, ARCCIC was able to attract the local community and increase local participation in the day-to-day activities, as well as carry out strategic planning for the future. Much effort was invested in decreasing mental barriers to accessing the premises and encouraging participation not only by using provision of a variety of different activities on site but also by providing opportunities to take part in decision-making about future projects and activities.

### The immediate impact of the pandemic on the community-owned asset

As the activities on the grounds and in the building were not considered as essential under government Covid restrictions, the Gatis Community Space was forced to close during periods of lockdown. Even though the Real Junkfood Project was support for those in need of food, these activities were not allowed. Hence, the premises had to be fully closed which led to a shift in providing services online. This created an increased workload for organisation's members as existing and new services were adapted to new needs during the pandemic. Weekly online meetings were held with Directors, staff and key volunteers. Community support and continuous evaluation of the situation was of great importance for the organisation and the pandemic meant that administrative and communicative efforts had significantly increased and led the organisation to advertise Director roles. In February 2021 the organisation counted nine directors and 10 self-employed staff responsible for different projects and tasks.

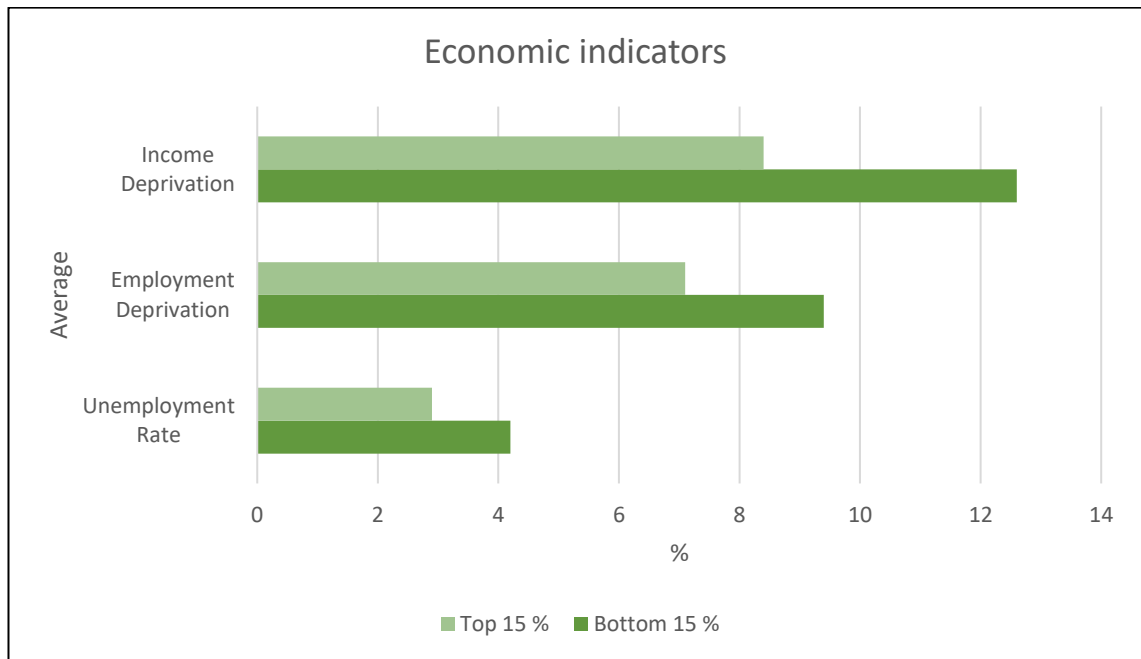
The Gatis Community Space was fortunate in not only having a building with closed rooms used for socially distanced activities but having large outdoor spaces which at times of eased restrictions, allowed activities and events to be organised outdoors. However, this was not possible during strict lockdowns.

### **5.3.2. There are more community-owned assets in wealthier areas**

The data analysed indicates that community ownership of physical assets is more frequent in wealthier areas than in more disadvantaged areas. In LADs with the most community-owned assets, the population is less affected by unemployment and income and/or employment deprivation.

For this analysis in particular, the 15% (48 LADs) with the most community-owned assets were compared to those 48 LADs with the fewest assets in shared ownership. The top and bottom 15% of LADs are ranked by asset per capita in order to account for variations in size. The full details may be found in Appendix 1. In the LADs with the most assets per capita, 8.4% of residents were on low incomes and in receipt of benefits/tax credits. This compared to 12.4 % of residents where assets were fewest per capita. The average employment deprivation was 7.1% for the wealthier areas compared to 9.4% for the lowest LADs (MHCLG, 2019a). Both numbers are derived from the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) which describes the proportion of population which is income or employment deprived. Income deprivation refers to “people on low incomes who are in receipt of benefits and tax credits” (MHCLG, 2019b, p. 23). Employment deprivation characterises the “proportion of working-age population in an area involuntarily excluded from the labour market (for example due to unemployment, sickness, disability, or caring responsibilities)” (MHCLG, 2019b, p. 17).

Figure 5 – Economic indicators for the bottom and top 15% LADs



Exploring of the relation between deprivation / wealth and the infrequency/prevalence of assets, I included a specific case study to examine this further.



## East Twickenham Neighbourhood Association – wealthy and urban

- Charitable incorporated organisation – leasehold – single asset – three paid staff
- volunteers – commissioned services – older than ten years

Figure 6 – Photo of the ETNA centre



The ETNA centre is located in Twickenham, a very affluent area on the Thames, suburban neighbourhood of London.

Source: ETNA, 2022.

The East Twickenham Neighbourhood Association (ETNA) Centre is a community centre in one of London's affluent suburban districts and offers a community place in a context of high land and property prices. Richmond upon Thames is one of the wealthier LADs in England but has a low density of community-owned assets.

### The asset

The asset is a large Victorian building hosting various organisation, charities and groups in seven offices, six meeting rooms, a large hall, a newly renovated kitchen, a front yard, and a sensory garden. Located in the highly expensive Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames, the Centre is one of the last remaining local community spaces providing affordable workspaces, notably to charities and social/community businesses. Providing community space and allowing and facilitating local participation is linked to a long history of community engagement in the Centre and Borough.



### How did the asset come into community ownership?

The building was previously owned by the local authority and used for Council offices until 1984. When the Council moved to new offices and the building became vacant, local residents were keen on initiating a community centre. They managed to achieve a short-term leasing agreement on an annual basis which ran until 2016.

The annual contract caused major administrative complications and created ongoing insecurity over whether the annual contract would be renewed each year. This led the current team to take action to negotiate a 15-year lease with the local authority in 2016 – until 2031. However, the organisation aims for an even longer period of contractually agreed leasehold to secure the community centre and to be eligible for greater numbers of funding opportunities.

### Prior to the pandemic

Prior to the pandemic, ETNA had four staff, eight trustees and some volunteers helping to organise events and activities in the Centre. ETNA's main activity is to provide space for the local community and allocating these spaces to local charities and groups. As the Centre was initiated by local residents due to the lack of local services and insufficient transport opportunities in the 1980s, the purpose of the building and organisation is still to provide required support in the neighbourhood. Hence, the building not only hosts charities, but also a nursery and a Real Junkfood Project. Together these form a supportive network around ETNA in which ETNA provides the spaces but also offers support to the charities and groups aiming to become charities in terms of administration, branding and marketing, and generally supporting increased capacity in the local third sector and facilitating other organisations to thrive. ETNA facilitate local participation by taking into account local needs and wants, and ensuring the use, adaptation and design of the space can help address these. Twickenham is highly developed, with expensive real estate and little opportunity to create new or purchase existing spaces. It is divided between super rich with pockets of deprivation and therefore a spatially and financially contested location, ETNA provides an opportunity for the community to break down barriers between different groups and to facilitate civic engagement and exchange.

### The immediate impact of the pandemic on the community owned asset

Similar to the Gatis Community Space, the ETNA Centre was forced to fully close during strict lockdown. At the time of Covid spreading across the country, the organisation had just begun a comprehensive renovation of the kitchen space in the building and planned a later transformation of the former parking lot into a sitting area and sensory garden, providing alternative spaces which were allowed to be used in times of eased restrictions. However, these renovations were delayed which put additional financial constraints on the organisation. Like all the organisations studied (except the Ashton Keynes Village shop), the disruption of the pandemic and the lack of income negatively affected the organisation.

Whereas the ETNA Centre is located in a wealthy neighbourhood, the next key case study is embedded in a much more economically deprived context. The case was chosen to provide insights into the community ownership of multiple assets.

## Alt Valley – deprived and urban

–Charitable Trust – Limited Company by Guarantee – owning – multiple assets – employees – no volunteers – hybrid services available – older than 10 years

Figure 7 – Photo of Alt Valley headquarter, the Communiversity



Alt Valley is located in the Northeast of Liverpool and owns several buildings across the city.

Source: Alt Valley, 2022.

Alt Valley is a community trust, an organisation which pools together to fund community projects, which aims at improving the well-being of people living in the Northeast of Liverpool by offering various services to the community ranging from libraries and sports centres to business support and adult education and training. Alt Valley is another urban area - Liverpool – but unlike Richmond upon Thames, is characterised by high deprivation. This example is therefore in contrast to both the first two main cases.

### The assets

Alt Valley Community Trust owns various buildings which are used flexibly and sometimes change roles and purposes. At the time of the interviews, there were nine assets, three of which were libraries - the Croxteth, Dovecot Mac, and Breck Road Libraries. The other assets were community centres in Norris Green, Ellergreen, and

Dovecot. The organisation held two sports centres in Croxteth and Walton, one of which is a college (the Communiversity).

Since the interviews took place there has been disposals of certain assets but the organisation still has three libraries and three community centres, but only one remaining sports centre.

All assets are used for community purposes and host different for the local community, ranging from adult education, skills and training services to community activities and wellbeing-related programmes. In addition, they offer day care and nursery services and run a farm. Irrespective of their particular function, the assets are always a physical point of contact with the overall organisation and also serve as an entry point into Alt Valley's programmes, and guidance for those seeking direction to local services.

#### How did the assets come into community ownership?

Alt Valley's journey began in 1983 when a group of concerned residents occupied a school which was due to be closed by the local authority. Worried about the substantial lack of social and educational infrastructure in their neighbourhood, the group managed to maintain the school and provide education independently. For three years Alt Valley -at that time, the Croxteth Community Trust – ran the school and since then the organisation has grown from their initial educational base, first the school, later on the Communiversity (pictured above), into a larger network of varied activities and buildings across the North and East of Liverpool, taking on further and different responsibilities. Some of the buildings they currently own had been purchased and are owned outright, while loans for the purchase of other buildings are still being paid back putting significant pressure on the organisation. Becoming a specialist organisation and taking on assets at risk of becoming derelict and lost to the community, Alt Valley is now an owner of community assets for an on behalf of the communities. Often contacted by the local Council, Alt Valley takes on buildings which are not profitable for the local authority and are hence being sold or closed. In order to hinder further privatisation of publicly accessible space, Alt Valley jumps in and develops solutions to maintain buildings without losing the community aspect and purpose of the building. However, this does not necessarily mean that all buildings taken on by the organisation are held in their own portfolio, but rather that assets are being set up which can be then run by the involved communities or groups themselves.

### Prior to the pandemic

Before the pandemic hit, Alt Valley community Trust used to work practically on the ground in the respective neighbourhoods of their assets across the city to embed their activities in the local context and ground their work in the community. According to the organisation's perception, their spatial presence, facilitating interaction and establishing close contact with the local neighbourhood had always been the key to the success of the organisation taking on buildings and becoming an expert in saving and maintaining buildings for communities in Liverpool.

By having this variety and spread of buildings, Alt Valley developed a densely-knit network to empower those in need, developing solutions in partnership and collaboration. Education has been, and still is a central to the organisation's strategy, the buildings are not only used to deliver education, and adult education in particular, but used to re-establish links across local communities.

### The immediate impact of the pandemic

Like many voluntary organisations, the impact of the pandemic on Alt Valley was that the buildings they own had to be closed during times of strict lockdown measures. In contrast to many other organisations, however, Alt Valley had to do this on a larger scale and across multiple assets, being responsible for nine buildings. As many buildings had been purchased with loans, and not all of them had been paid off, the pandemic placed an immense burden on the organisation, particularly those assets that were used to generate income streams for the overall organisational activities. The costs continued, including loan repayments, maintenance costs, electricity bills, insurances, and staff salaries. Although financial support programmes helped the organisation to get through the immediate phases of the pandemic, the lack of income and the continued expenses placed additional burdens on the organisation.

The administrative burden increased with the stricter rules and pandemic-related regulations and as explained for other organisations, Alt Valley was faced with the urgent needs of the communities in which their buildings are located and sought to provide what was needed. Hence, services shifted online, support schemes were developed to help people with food, education, financial difficulties, and a comprehensive network of pandemic response was set up across the various buildings.

The buildings needed more resources devoted to them during the pandemic, including for example ensuring social distancing. In addition, some buildings needed alteration to become infrastructural points of support for storage or to facilitate food delivery systems.

The pandemic did not only affect the physical nature of the buildings also had significant influence on the organisation. At a management level, the organisation took the opportunity to re-evaluate their structure and set up, identifying areas they had taken note of previously without actively pursuing but were now confronted with by taking on additional responsibilities. Although this was equivalent to even heavier workload, the opportunities created by being disrupted and disconnected from their normal daily routines was experienced as enriching and positive in terms of the organisation and its activities.

### **5.3.3. Areas with higher counts of community-owned assets are less affected by austerity**

Austerity as a political instrument may be implemented in many ways and austerity in the form of fiscal restraints has led to complex changes in different contexts and placed specific constraints on community ownership. The following sections look into asset disposal, cuts in fiscal revenue and cuts in service spending, and compares the geographical dimensions of each in relation to the incidence of community ownership.

#### **Asset disposal by public bodies**

As outlined in Chapter 2, increased privatisation of public assets, land and or buildings, is in part a consequence of shrinking public budgets. Austerity measures not only affect cuts in service spending per person and fiscal revenue, but also the portfolio management of public bodies, and they incentivise the disposal of physical assets in public hands to generate returns for the public purse.

The narrative concerning community ownership of assets that suggests that formerly publicly owned assets are being given back to their respective communities (Local

Government Association, 2012) may also lead to the assumption that community-owned assets are more frequent in areas where assets have been disposed of by local governments. However, this is not confirmed by the data for the administrative and geographical level of LADs<sup>4</sup>. As the more disadvantaged LADs in England have a higher share of the population, the financial obligations of these bodies increase in proportion. This might indicate that these local authorities tend to sell their assets in order to generate profits rather than just minimising portfolio costs.

Available data concerning the actual numbers and figures of privatisation is limited. Britain does not have a nationally consistent methodology to track changes in asset ownership, particularly concerning land and buildings, neither for public entities, nor regarding private ownership. Christophers' book *The New Enclosure* (2018) is of great value in contributing to an informed civil society as it is the first book comprehensively addressing disposal practices by the central government since the Thatcher era.

Christophers' contribution was not the only one, and since 2010 and the pursued implementation of austerity, there has been an increasing interest in governmental practices and reforms. In 2019, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ) published a report analysing disposals of physical assets by local governments between 2014 and 2018. The Report revealed that thousands of public spaces have been lost as a result of the council funding crisis.

“The Bureau of Investigative Journalism has compiled data on more than 12,000 public spaces disposed of by councils since 2014/15. Our investigation found that councils raised a total of £9.1 billion from selling property. The findings lay bare the spiralling impact of eight successive years of austerity, leaving services shut and buildings closed. Councils have been forced to take ever more desperate measures to stay in the black as their funding from central government has been cut by about 60% since 2010” (Davies, G. et al., 2019).

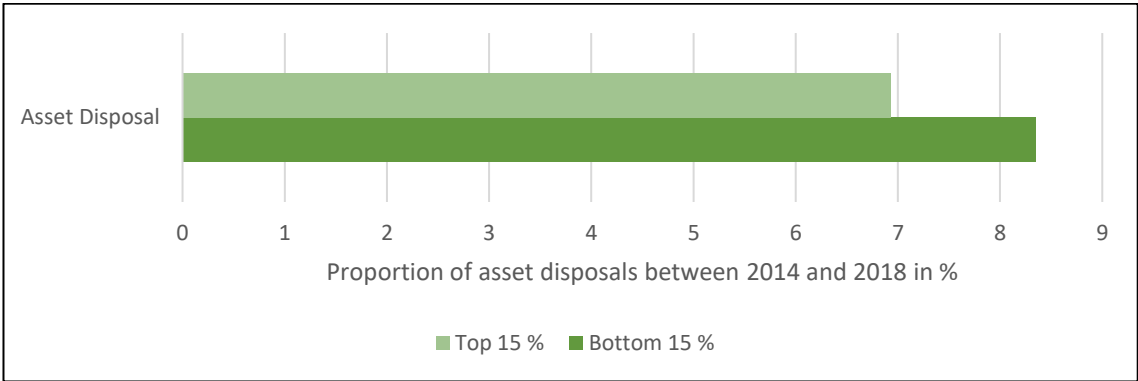
In Cornwall for example, 350 public assets were disposed of within 4 years; 131 of these transfers are described as “devolution”, meaning these were often sold to smaller councils or parishes. Another example is that of Manchester: within these four years, 707 asset disposals are known, but with limited information (no postcode, no information to whom the asset was sold, price, etc.). The whole data in the report has only eight entries for confirmed transfers under the Community Asset Transfer scheme, although, the scheme has been praised for its huge impacts on the empowerment of

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<sup>4</sup> This may change at lower geographical and administrative levels due to the relation between population and the financial responsibilities of local governments.

local communities (Murtagh, 2015; Nichols et al., 2015). In total, the BIJ estimates that councils raised about £9.1 billion by selling assets. Birmingham City Council alone sold 334 properties, raising £49 million – “more than any other local authority” (Davies, Garteh et al., 2019).

Figure 8 – Asset disposal of top and bottom LADs



Source: Davies et al., 2019

The LADs with most community-owned assets are on average not as affected by public asset disposals as the bottom LADs. Whereas in the top LADs, 721 sales of formerly public assets were recorded, the bottom LADs disposed of 869 in total between 2014 and 2018.

The assumption that community ownership may function as a tool to combat the effects of austerity might not be confirmed at this level. Although a lot of assets might come into community ownership because of austerity effects in the first place, those places most affected by austerity measures did not seem to be benefitting the most from disposed assets.

To explore the issue of the prevalence of existing assets and extent of LAD disposals, I selected two case studies which exemplify different contexts.



### **Wilton Hill – high density, low asset disposal**

**–industrial society – freehold – multi asset – no paid staff – volunteers – housing**

Wilton Hill is a Community Land Trust (CLT) in a rural village in Lincolnshire. The CLT generated ten new affordable homes for rent for people having a connection to the village and local community. In this case, community ownership was a measure to respond to a lack of social housing and to develop a legitimate solution by co-operation and co-determination of the local community. This is perceived to be of particular importance in the rural context. The CLT owns the land and properties and charges small rents: these are used for community benefit and surpluses are mostly directed towards the local village hall.

Although being located in an area which on a LAD level has a high density of community owned assets, the asset disposal rate is low.

### **Bilston Town Football Club, low density and average disposal**

**registered charity – leasehold – single asset – no paid staff – volunteers – leisure services**

The Bilston Town Community Football Club in Wolverhampton is a community-owned club which also owns the grounds, the buildings and stadium. As a for-profit club, it experienced severe financial difficulties in the 2008 financial crisis and subsequently in 2010, a group of volunteers took over the running of the Club and in 2013 it became a community-owned charity. This enabled the organisation to distance itself from its former difficulties and maintain the Club by securing a long-term leasehold on the football ground from the City Council. With the exception of the Club's players and associated employees, the charity does not have paid staff and the whole organisation is run on by volunteers.

The Council of Wolverhampton has an average rate of asset disposal and a low density of community-owned assets. Hence, The Bilston Town Community Football Club is a special example in this geographical area.

### **Cuts in fiscal revenue and service spending**

This study investigated cuts in fiscal revenue and service spending as a further dimension of fiscal austerity measures. The interest was to explore whether greater cuts to fiscal revenue and service spending lead to a higher number of community assets as public services and facilities being outsourced to the voluntary sector and communities.

In order to assess and compare further austerity measures across England, an additional geographical and administrative level needed to be taken into account, the Upper Tier Local Authority (UTLA).

UTLA fiscal revenue is derived from different sources: central grant funding, formula grant, specific and special revenue grants, retained business rates and council tax. The highest share of revenue comes from council tax (48%), followed by retained business rates (29%) and lastly from central grant funding which amounts to 23% of an Authority's overall fiscal revenue between 2019 and 2020 (Harris et al., 2019).

However, these numbers vary among the different types of UTLAs and their geographical location. Whereas the most deprived regions have lower proportion of income generated by council tax, in the least deprived UTLAs, council tax represents the highest share of income. The same is also valid for the proportion of central government grant funding: grant funding is approximately £300 per person for the most deprived areas compared to £150 for the least deprived (Harris et al., 2019, p. 20).

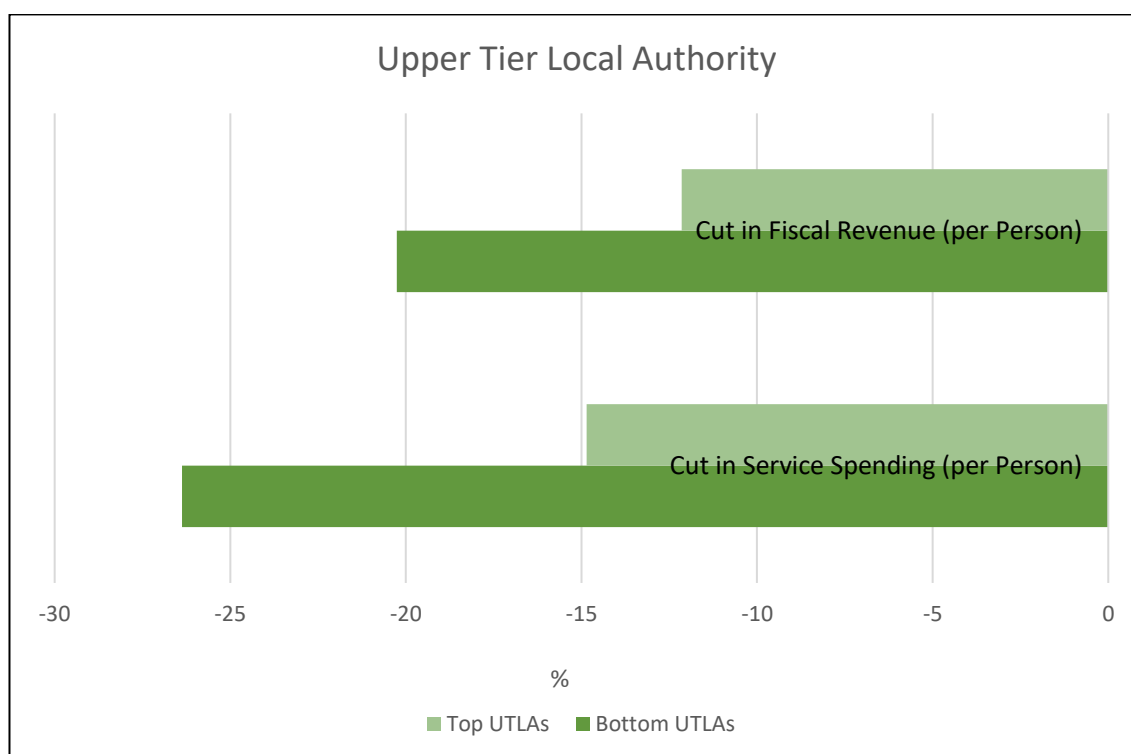
The net service spending (from which education, national parks, police, fire and rescue services are excluded) comprise expenses for adult social care (ASC), children's social care (CSC), environment and regulation, transport, public health, central, culture, housing and planning. ASC spending is the highest cost factor with an average of 38%. However, the most deprived councils spend less on ASC (measured as a share of the overall service budget) and more on CSC and public health.

“A slightly larger proportion of their overall budgets [is allocated] to planning, housing, and transport, although there is especially large variation across councils for these services. These patterns will reflect differences in the needs of local populations and in the prioritisation placed on different services by local politicians and voters” (Harris et al., 2019, p. 20).

There have only been two UTLAs with an increase in service spending in 2019: the City of London (41.7%) and Ilse of Scilly (6%). The highest cuts were implemented in Slough (-50.7%) and Salford (-49.9%). Service spending cuts can affect various provisional conditions and can drive asset disposal by public bodies or increased voluntary provision of previously government provided services.

The top and bottom 15% of Upper Tier Local Authorities are 23 UTLAs with the most and the least assets in community ownership in relation to the population. (The list of top and bottom UTLAs may be found in the Appendix 1).

*Figure 9 – Cuts in fiscal revenue and service spending per UTLA*



Source: Harris et al., 2019.

The UTLAs with a higher share of community-owned assets are less severely affected by austerity cuts than those UTLAs with least numbers of community-owned assets.

The graph describes a situation which is financially worse for the bottom UTLAs than for the top. The average cuts in fiscal revenue amounted to -20.26 % per person and -26.37% cut in service spending per person for the bottom UTLAs in 2019.

Nevertheless, the top UTLAs recorded significant cuts in budgets as well: -12.15% in fiscal revenues and -14.85% for service spending on average.

Although it has been assumed that the higher rates of cuts in service spending and fiscal revenue could lead to higher rates of community-owned assets as effects of austerity measures on public provision, this is not supported by the data. It rather supports the second key finding of this study, that community ownership is more prevalent in more affluent areas.

### **Kirkgate Arts – top UTLA less affected by cuts in service spending and fiscal revenue**

**–registered charity and limited company – leasehold of the building – single asset – one employee – volunteers – educational and leisure services – older than ten years –**

Kirkgate Arts is a local community venue in Cockermouth, Cumbria, mainly providing arts-related services and activities for the local community. Focussing on entertainment programmes and activities, Kirkgate Arts is a cultural centre where the community can enjoy films, theatre, music, shows for children and adults and community events. The building also hosts the Cockermouth Heritage Group and provides the venue for regular exhibitions. In supporting local talents through their theatre and young theatre group, personal development is enhanced and collective and joint learning, community activities and cohesion are encouraged.

The building has become a centre for the whole village and the organisation has a leasehold for the building. It has an auditorium and a bar area which are both used to also host exhibitions, talks or readings and lectures.

#### **5.3.4. Areas with community-owned assets do not receive more charitable funding than others**

The availability of charitable funding has decisive effects on the realisation of social initiatives as most organisations are reliant on financial contributions. Although some are engaging in surplus-generating activities, for small and medium organisations these usually do not sufficiently cover the increasing expenses in relation to maintaining a physical asset.

The competition for charitable funding has significantly increased in the context of austerity because the public cutbacks in social services and other areas have increased the dependency of organisations on charitable funding sources (Whitehead, 2022).

A higher concentration of charitable funding being spent in a particular geographical area might also indicate a high need for alternative financial resources, due for example, to a greater concentration of public cuts in the area.

Data on charitable funding at a local level was obtained from the 360Giving website. All datasets were checked for funding being granted in 2019 in England and including information on postcodes, all other entries had to be deleted as verification of location was not possible. The available data was limited as not all organisational information provided was up to date. Eventually, 70 organisations had at least some published data on grants provided (although, sometimes the datasets did not cover the whole year)

In total there were – according to the limited data available – 11,654 grants, with a total amount of £452,009,540.90, with an average amount of £38,785.79 grant, but this number varied among the different LADs.

In addition to looking at the total amount being awarded to organisations; it was useful to look at the funding granted per capita per LAD:

The highest amount of grant per capita is in the City of London area. This is due to the low number of inhabitants and the comparatively high amount of grant funding.

Grant funding for those LADs containing the least numbers of community-owned assets is higher than the grant funding being awarded to organisations located in LADs with the most community-owned assets. For the top LADs, the share of grant funding amounts to 5.7% of the overall funding being granted in 2019, whereas the bottom LADs received 9.9%. Over half of the overall funding amount (54.92%) was granted to

organisations located in LADs which are categorised as being *Urban with Major Conurbation*, whereas the Local Authorities classified as *Rural* received roughly a fifth of the overall funding (19.25%).

The proportion of grant funding exceeds the proportion of population in the *Urban with Major Conurbation* category: 54.92% of all grant funding is distributed among those LADs where only 35.89% of the population in England are located. In all the other rural/urban categories, the proportion of funding is lower than the proportion of population.

The data showed that the areas with higher rates of community-owned assets do not receive higher shares of charitable funding.

To explore the experienced funding realities in different contexts, two case studies were chosen: one located in an LAD with least and one in an LAD with average charitable funding.

### **Rotunda –LADs receiving least grant or charitable funding**

**registered charity – owning – multi asset – paid staff – volunteers – multiple services – older than 10 years**

Rotunda is a large community centre in Kirkdale, Liverpool, based in a large Georgian house. The buildings host many different entities ranging, from café, garden, nursery, an independent school, counselling offices, Job cCentre Plus, and more.

The key aim of the organisation is to reduce social isolation and to establish a coherent network, not only of organisations, but also of social relations within the neighbourhood. Rotunda offers key facilities in terms of adult education, breaking down barriers among communities. The charity facilitates people's increased engagement with the labour market by providing a holistic approach to skills and training among other services, such as the nursery and easy access to governmental services such as the Job Centre.

Although, Liverpool is among the most deprived LADs, they are also among the bottom 15% of LADs receiving the least charitable funding across England.

**Coningsby – medium asset density, deprived but only average funding**

**–unincorporated trust – owning – single asset – no paid staff – volunteers – leisure services - older than 10 years**

Coningsby, Lincolnshire, is an example of a typical English village hall. The hall is a main site for community activities and events locally, often the bookings are full, and it is not possible to fit everyone who wants to use the space into the schedule. The hall hosts clubs, groups, meetings, and private events.

The unincorporated trust has no paid staff, and all management is done by volunteers. Due to the lack of governmental funding they need to hire out the space in order to generate an incoming revenue stream to cover bills and maintenance costs.

Coningsby is a rural area with a medium density of community owned assets. Although being affected by deprivation, the area only receives an average of charitable funding.

## **5.4. Conclusion**

Exploring the geographical dimension of community ownership of physical assets and visualising information on a geographical map was facilitated navigating around categories and characteristics of specific areas. One of the main insights of the background mapping is the importance of coherence and alignments among geographical boundaries, definitions, data, dates, and styles.

The search for sources revealed several issues concerning the data; availability, contemporaneity, geographical specificity and how the data was collected. Sources which did not provide information on how the data was gathered or which methodology was applied were excluded. Most national statistics, however, were easily accessible via government online platforms such as the Office for National Statistics. However, irrespective of the accessibility, not all statistics are available and published on an annual basis. Some are estimates, and other data are only collected via the Census survey once a decade. Unfortunately, at the time of this research, the last Census data

available was from 2011. Hence, working with data from 2011, and particularly considering developments such as changed administrative boundaries, changes in population and changes due to the pandemic in the past ten years, suggests limited current accuracy of the data. Since 2011 decisive changes have occurred, such as nearly 10 years of austerity, changed political agendas: for examples, the silent termination of the Big Society; the Brexit referendum and the United Kingdom leaving the European Union; and Covid-19. The political and financial context had immense impacts on civil society and the third sector landscape.

Besides these already complicating circumstances of political developments, additional difficulties and issues emerged such as updated and changed administrative levels and geographical boundaries. Due to these changes in boundaries a comparison between the same scale and different years was difficult and inaccurate, particularly at a LAD level; but changes have also been made to Output Areas, Super Output Areas, Lower Layer Super Output Areas and Middle Layer Super Output Areas. Nonetheless, to maintain the ability to generate a coherent overview for several factors across several years and geographies, calculations to new boundaries have been the means of choice to facilitate a visualisation and analysis on the same map.

Other types of data than Census data were available on completely different geographical administrative levels; for instance, financial austerity measures were only available on an UTLA level; or the community life survey asking about volunteering which was only available on a regional basis. These needed to be investigated and compared via another set of maps and scales.

Although the background mapping derived several insights concerning characteristics and their potential impact on the geographical distribution of community-owned assets, these are, however, limited because the broad scale does not allow an investigation of the actual localities. Nonetheless, these provide an overview of the complexity of geographical analyses.

To account for these shortcomings and limitations, the cases presented above were chosen to complement the aggregated and quantitative analysis. The aim was to explore the experienced realities of the members of groups and organisations owning an asset on behalf of and for a community. Figure 10 below summarises the cases by the geographical distribution of the participating organisations owning physical assets.



Figure 10 – Map of all case studies



The cases introduced above all share a common characteristic of owning – in one form or another – a physical asset for and on behalf of their community. They also share many other aspects and attributes which relate to quantitative and qualitative dimensions.

The cases selected present a range of contextual differences, from those located in deprived and better-off areas, rural and urban areas, those with greater and less reductions in public expenditure, and those receiving differing levels of charitable funding. In selecting a variety of asset types, with differing ownership and operational models, the cases provided a view of the range of variations among community ownership arrangements, and it is this variation that I hoped would reveal key insights on community ownership of physical assets in changing times.

The geographical location of the cases in combination with the preliminary insights of the background mapping exercise provide an idea of the context these assets are embedded in. This serves as the basis for the qualitative investigation of the actual meaning of ownership for the people involved, and the impact of the pandemic on the community-owned assets.

The following chapters present the findings of the qualitative exploration and analysis of these experienced realities. Chapters Six and Seven describe and discuss the meaning of ownership, while Chapters Eight and Nine elaborate on the effects of the pandemic.

# Chapter Six – Exploring the importance of ownership

## 6.1. Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, the existing literature and research on community ownership mainly explores practical aspects of the community ownership of physical assets commissioned by policy or by umbrella organisations and foundations. This study tries to understand how the ownership of assets is perceived and understood by those managing them, and how perceptions change through the tumult of the Covid-19 pandemic. More specifically, my research objectives were to:

- i) examine the contexts of community ownership of assets at the local level;
- ii) explore the role and meaning for, and the effects of ownership on, organisations and communities;
- iii) identify the effects of the pandemic on the organisations; and
- iv) explore potential roles for these organisations and assets in post-Covid-19 conditions, organisationally and socially within their communities.

This chapter presents the data and findings on the importance of ownership of a physical asset to the organisations, communities, and the local contexts studied. The research sub-questions explore different understandings of the term “importance” and shed light on the various dimensions perceived to be important by the interviewees. I approach the importance of ownership by addressing the following aspects of the analytical framework which sets a constructivist stance: the processual understanding of the construction of space, while considering human agency, and habitus, by looking at the impacts of community ownership of physical assets through the lens of the experienced realities of those actors involved and how they re-construct the respective contexts.

Taking on the responsibility for a physical asset for and on behalf of a community poses several challenges to organisations, members and residents. At the same time, ownership also provides opportunities which would otherwise not be possible. The issues of community ownership in government policy in recent decades have been characterised by austerity and the Big Society agenda which have driven political decisions relating to disadvantaged communities. These policies have been framed in a

positive narrative declaring simple outsourcing of responsibilities and provision of infrastructure as empowering communities and allowing people to take back control, as discussed in Chapter 2.4.

Irrespective of the very nature of the intention to give away formerly publicly owned assets and transfer these into community responsibility, the outcomes for those organisations which have successfully survived the critical initial phases are diverse, and the effects of owning physical buildings on the organisations, activities and the communities are manifold. Although difficulties and disadvantages are revealed if investigated more closely, there are benefits for those involved if risks and challenges are managed properly.

The next section is structured as follows: first, I explore the impact of ownership on the organisations, their activities and the community by describing the main themes which emerged in the interviews. This is built from a grounded theory approach to data analysis, largely focused on description rather than theorising. Secondly, the chapter then elaborates the impacts beyond the individuals by exploring the perceived consequences of ownership for place, identity and community-making. These are described through the indirect processes of inclusiveness, embeddedness, development and empowerment which all affect and contribute to and shape place-, identity and community-making.

Whereas the first two sections largely explore beneficial impacts, however, not everything is experienced as positive and therefore, the third section is about barriers and challenges and how these become liabilities in different contexts.

These insights are further discussed, analysed and interpreted in Chapter 7, presenting an interrelated understanding of the emerging importance of ownership.

The next section covers the analytical insights and findings generated from the data and the most important aspects relating to the questions at stake are explored in detail. The methodology of grounded theory and related coding procedure revealed many different individual experiences which are not explored in depth here due to the specific focus of the study on the meaning of ownership.

## **6.2. The immediate impact of ownership**

During the interviews many aspects of the direct impacts of ownership on the organisations, activities and communities unfolded. First and foremost, nearly all organisations came into existence and took ownership of an asset because of an existential threat to a specific building. Hence, often the immediate effect of ownership on the organisations and related activities was that ownership conferred direct control of a physical space.

Analysis of my empirical data suggests that by owning the assets, organisations and communities are provided with spaces to operate and use for activities in ways which would otherwise not be possible. These spaces are exclusively designated for communities, their needs and interests, varying from nursery services, education and training to leisure facilities, or offering free places to meet up. Ownership changes the basis of operations and allows the community to choose what the resources are dedicated to. The threat to the specific buildings often caused the formation of voluntary groups dedicated to maintaining spaces and meet local needs. Although finding alternative spaces would have been possible, the impetus to form the organisation in the first place was often bound up with the availability of the assets at stake.

Emerging themes and topics are overlapping and, in some instances, deriving a clear distinction was not possible. Nonetheless, these themes are allocated to particular research sub-questions for descriptive purposes and to allow approaching the complexity of the issue of community ownership.

So, the next discussion – of the immediate impacts – refers to the first research question exploring the importance of ownership by revealing how these affect the organisations, activities and communities in this study.

### **6.2.1. The immediate impact on organisations**

The effects of asset ownership on organisations are varied and differ from case to case, depending at which stage of development the organisation was in, and the size, type, or condition of the asset. Although the community organisations deliver a wide range of

services and focus on different operations (see Chapter 5), there are common threads which are experienced irrespective of these differences.

These common, immediate impacts of ownership on organisations are explored in the next sections addressing the issues of: fulfilling unexpected roles: professionalisation: resource constraints: and learning.

### **Fulfilling unexpected roles**

Although the interviewees had ideas and expectations at the beginning of either taking on ownership or joining a community organisation owning physical assets, these were not always met. Some tasks develop over time and individuals involved in community organisations owning physical assets often need to take on more roles than they anticipated in the beginning. A main characteristic which many of the participants share is flexibility, willingness to learn and step out of their comfort zone when confronted with unexpected roles.

Dora, Bilston Football Club: “Yeah, as I said, when I first took on, I was part of a team. We all came from very different backgrounds. And you know, we all took on the bits that we were best suited to. Then, when I had to take on the other two parts as well and then understand them and be able to delegate them back out to the new people that have come in ... – whatever's presented to you, you just get on with it.”

In some cases, this requires community and organisation members to grow beyond their initial expertise and take on roles they were not prepared for. In other cases, fulfilling unexpected roles also meant taking care of tasks which were not part of their job description or role within the organisation. This often involved very practical issues emerging on a daily basis:

Sam, Bilston Football Club: “If I'm there on a match day, then you know, it's the case of sweeping up the dressing rooms at the end, and clean the kitchen, do the wash, and you know, do the little things that the people think the fairies do at the end. But yeah, it's not a glamorous role, it's not. There's four or five, six people that just look in, do the changing room, mop the floors, make sure the toilets are clean.”

A main requirement for organisational members is to be flexible and step in where resources and input are needed to compensate for organisational limitations, which are often caused by a lack of (financial) resources. The members must get jobs done by themselves rather than waiting for someone else to take over. However, this is perceived as a major benefit and strength of working in such versatile contexts.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “There is no [...] ‘That's not my job description, that's not my job role’. Because your job role can change from day to day and you're just mucking in where you need to, really. It's just whatever - whatever is needed you just do it basically.”

By owning the premises, the individuals also own the responsibilities and are therefore committed enough to undertake all these additional and sometimes unexpected roles and jobs.

Fulfilling unexpected roles may also be due to external factors, rather than internal.

Martha, Gatis: “[...] in fact, one of the biggest challenges around the Centre - directly around the Centre - is anti-social behaviour; drug use, drinking, that happens in the green space around the Centre. And that has been quite massive. But that has been one we have been able to tackle because [of] being at the Centre more and there being a greater presence.”

Although it was not initially planned to take care of anti-social behaviour, the presence of the organisation in the building and reviving the playground changed the local situation, causing the displacement of anti-social behaviour from the Centre and neighbourhood. This effect relates to aspects of community and place-wellbeing, a condition which differentiates a usual asset from an asset of community value as explored in Chapter 2. These changes achieved for the local neighbourhood are experienced as positive improvements which enhance the legitimacy of the organisation in the eyes of the local community. (This will be picked up in the next chapter).

Fulfilling many different and unexpected roles in taking on ownership of an asset produces further effects which can be recognised on an organisational level. The following cascading effects are described by exploring the dimensions of professionalisation, resource constraints, and learning.

## **Professionalisation**

The responsibilities experienced by those running community assets create processes of professionalisation. Professionalisation is used to describe the transition from an amateur or voluntary driven organisations towards better organised, business-like organisational entities. This responsibility creates a balancing act between, on the one hand, the management and running of the building, and on the other hand, the running of the organisation and fulfilling its intended social purposes.

In some cases, the organisation grew and developed in ways which required staff and volunteers to professionalise:

Daniel, Ashton Keynes Village Shop: “I mean initially we thought that the idea would be [that] the whole thing would be probably run by volunteers, with maybe one member of staff to oversee it. And indeed, [that’s] what we actually did do [...]. But [with] the turnover we have ... basically, in the end justified [taking on paid professional staff] not necessarily having to run with volunteers because the downside of volunteers is you can't tell them what to do.”

In other cases, organisations had to develop proper business plans to be taken seriously by external stakeholders such as city councils. The Gatis Community space needed to be set up as a formal organisation with a proper business plan in order to be considered eligible to take on the former council-owned building.

Martha, Gatis: “You know literally, [the Council said], ‘Within 6 months, you need to be a business, so we can give you the asset’. And out of that I'm running a business that I didn't want to for 6 years now (laughing).”

Martha highlights the contrasting realities experienced by people involved in the third sector taking on ownership because of a threat to the valued community resource. For some, in order to retain a valued asset, they have been forced to professionalise, which has caused tensions between being a business and a community organisation.

Professionalisation was expressed by the interviewees as tasks and duties which initially were not intended but became necessary due to ownership and the accompanying rights and responsibilities. Different manifestations were identified as being a sign of professionalising, such as employing a bookkeeper, implementing accounting systems, performing risk assessments:

Martha, Gatis: “Oh, we need health and safety, we need a policy for this - oh my god, we need a policy for that. The reality of it was a steep learning curve, I would say.”

Further the organisations are facing increased paperwork, the necessity to integrate IT solutions and systems, having to disclose finances publicly and taking care of marketing and digital issues as part of the professionalisation process.

The challenges encountered are also part of professionalising, for example, facing of legal challenges and requirements.

Diana, Alt Valley: “Legal aspects of everything are dealt with and the arrangements are all in place and there is a lot of negotiation and discussion and a lot of time it takes to get that right.”



The organisations often have complex legal structures to allow different activities to be pursued and to make use of different benefits by applying different legalities depending on the activity concerned. Trade and income generating activities are often run under other legal structures such as Limited (Ltd.) but for other areas of work such as social and community-oriented purposes, the organisations usually have a charitable type of legal construct.

Martha, Gatis: “The Council, they went, ‘OK, we’ll give you a license to occupy and see how you get on for a bit’. And then I think we have been doing that for a couple of months and they sort of said, ‘Look, we could transfer that asset to you, but you need to be a legal entity’. So, between May – I think we got the keys on the first of May 2015 - and by the 31st of October 2015 we’d set up the CIC.”

In this example, originally the organisation did not feel the necessity to set up a complex legal construct, however, to be eligible to take on the property, the Council required them to do so. The drive for formalisation and professionalisation therefore came from an external pressure.

The legal forms of community organisations are often highly dependent on the context and the specific activities and purposes which are being pursued. Hence, the resulting structures are similarly diverse:

Linda, Coningsby Village Hall: “We are a registered charity.”

Connor, Kirkgate Arts: “ ... the organisation is Kirkgate Arts which is a limited company, registered charity.”

Dora, Bilston Football Club: “It is a registered charity, it is a limited company, it's got premises, it is a business.”

Victoria, ETNA: “ [We are] currently going for CIO status as well. So that we protect the trustees a little bit”.

Patrick, Alt Valley: “Well [the different parts of the organisation] are separate, they are independent. One is a social business, the Neighbourhood Service Company and obviously the Alt Valley Community Trust is a charity and a social business as well. [...] We're a community business.”

Whereas for Dora, the organisation has a distinct identity, and her words reflect that the premises are owned by this entity rather than the community, in contrast, Victoria highlights that the legal structure has a social and individual purpose of protecting dedicated members. Patrick’s quote shows that as Alt Valley grew bigger the process resulted in two different legal entities.

A major part of the professionalisation process involves planning strategically. Planning is key in running a business and a significant characteristic of professionalisation of organisations is defining visions and missions of own actions.

Diana, Alt Valley: “In terms of what we do, [...] we try to sort of put it down on paper really and a strategy and that's always one of the difficulties for us.”

An important feature of strategy is the planning horizon. Defining focus, vision and mission of an organisation also entails identifying long-term objectives.

Sam, Bilston Football Club: “We have got some long-term plans, we want to improve, we want to strive, we want to get forward together. Our plans for the Club [...] we can't control the football, but we can control how the Club is run.”

Strategic planning concerns not only maintaining existing activities but also preparing for integrating factors which allow to expand and develop.

Connor, Kirkgate Arts: “I think originally the feel was that there would be a kind of Cockermouth Museum created in this building which is [...] a thing we're still working towards.”

A lack of clear strategy and measures to pursue it are experienced as putting community organisations at a disadvantage, in particular when the main activities are retail and business oriented. Business cases were mentioned as essential for running trading-related operations.

However, if an organisation is strategically well-prepared it is possible to successfully run it while, entering other fields simultaneously. In the case of Alt Valley, the significance of owning 12 buildings has been that strategy was an essential part from the very beginning.

Patrick, Alt Valley: “[We are] successful because of strategic approach right away. [...] Yeah. The big thing is that it's all the time, it was strategy, strategy, strategy. We have constantly reviewed.”

Strategic planning as a facet of professionalisation animates organisations to clearly and publicly define their vision and mission, for their internal members and for external stakeholders; the importance of clearly stating the organisation's mission was often raised in relation to professional organisational structures and financial reserves. Hence, general resource constraints were identified as another aspect of an organisation's ownership role.

## Resource constraints

While organisations and individuals developed new learning, by fulfilling unexpected roles and through greater professionalisation, these changes took place within a context of significant resource constraints. Financial difficulties were described by all participants, and these difficulties were amplified by financial and resourcing responsibilities of owning and maintaining a building.

Diana, Alt Valley: “I mean, finances are always a challenge for us and even pre-Covid it was unsure. You hear that a lot maybe with the people you've spoken to. But it's never been any different. I think in terms of managing the finances, [...] it's such a challenge all the time.”

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “There is always the need to find resources. There is always work to do in the Club in terms of raising money, in terms of improvements to the facilities, in terms of making sure that the team and the arrangement are able to actually play a game [...].”

Finances are experienced as key for any kind of operation, irrespective of their actual mission and vision, whether they are providing market-type services such as a village retail shop or non-profit facilities like open spaces and community cafes.

Victoria, ETNA: “Sort the finances out, then everything else falls in place. But if you don't have your money coming in, you can't run these organisations. So, it's quite scary how you can get in to such a mess so easily.”

The organisations are commercially limited, both due to lack of resources, and due to the actual focus and purposes of the organisations.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “If it would be properly funded by government and given wider remit in terms of the life of the community, the sky is the limit really. It's just [that] we're limited by our numbers and our resources.”

Services are often offered on a low-cost basis, especially as many organisations are situated in neighbourhoods which are economically deprived.

Dora, Bilston Football Club: “We try not to charge them or at least [the] very minimum, because it is a very deprived area that the Club is based in.”

The Gatis community space is reported to be the last of their kind in their local area providing the opportunity to make use of free public space, especially for low-income families. Providing low or no costs services affects the commercial viability of the organisations and can mean that the business-side of community organisations runs at a deficit.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “We took over five years ago. Within the first year we were making a profit within the building because the first thing we have done was, we took down the barriers, [and changed] the restricted opening hours. If it needed to be open in the evening for groups to use it, we were opening up in the evening. If it needed to be open on weekends for groups, we were able to do that. And it was a hard slog because, at one point, I was working seven days a week, probably 12 hours a day for the first few months. Because we didn't have an income that came with the building.”

The key tension emerging from the organisations’ operational models is that the combination of professionalising, owning their buildings and running a business all required generating income. Whereas governments support capital expenditure and projects, ongoing running costs were harder to cover through revenue. It seemed that costs that needed to be covered by income from revenue were received less interest and support politically, when they are experienced as crucially important by those experiencing things on the ground. And this is particularly the case when organisations are serving deprived communities which limits their opportunities to generate revenue income.

Maintenance, accessibility and making buildings fit for purpose are a major investment for which funding is provided that the organisations owning their premises are eligible for.

Marta, Gatis: “So, what we have done in that time really is, we've brought in quite a lot of grant funding to make improvements.”

Sarah, ETNA: “[That] sounds like a lot of money, but when you're dealing with accessibility, you talking about £10,000 pounds for a door. Because it's particularly worked for a wheelchair [...] you know what I mean. So, it seems like a lot of money, but actually [it isn't].”

Sophie, Alt Valley: “One of our buildings is being refurbished at the moment, which is called Communiversity. We have got funding from the Liverpool City Region to do that.”

Competition for charitable funding was reported to be continuously increasing while the number of grants available to bid for had decreased within the past years. Hence, community organisations need more staff, members or volunteers with experience in writing successful grant applications to be able to access funding.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “We don't get a lot of funding. I think we had a grant from the National Lottery and from Sport England, and I know Dora is always looking to draw down funding to help the Club. But predominantly it is through our own fundraising and money raising and dipping into our pockets that we're able to keep it going.”

Diana, Alt Valley: “And what we have put in place now is put [...] an extra tier of senior managers and staff to look for opportunities for funding.”

The issues are similar across the various cases, however, the size and type of organisation and assets affects their ability to respond. All bidding and fundraising take up resources which could be used differently.

Limited resources, financial or human, lead to increased collaborations with other local groups and organisations.

Diana, Alt Valley: “What we try to do is be an organisation that encourages and enables other organisations. If we can help with any of our experiences and challenges and what we have found difficult and make it a little bit more stream-lined and easy for them, we love to do that. [...] You know we have got some great organisations we have partnered with that have been really supportive of us, and then obviously like a two-way process, we've tried to give back to them.”

Being open to collaborations can realise opportunities for the organisations themselves, and also allow others to learn. The denser the network, the higher the likelihood of an organisation being able to access what is required. As one interviewee noted:

Sophie, Alt Valley: “I mean, obviously you have your core partnerships and relationships, but they have got their contacts as well. [...] So quite often what happens is, if somebody knows you, if somebody knows your building, your organisation, [...] they will signpost their contacts to you because [of] the way you work. Then your contact list becomes bigger.”

By collaborating scarce resources are used to increase benefits for the local community, as one interviewee explains with the example of sharing their spaces:

Diana, Alt Valley: “It's great to have the resources really where you can deliver multiple projects from. For example, renting space out to some like-minded organisations, so it is enabling them to do the work that they do.”

#### **The main immediate impacts on organisations are:**

- Organisations and organisational members are confronted with fulfilling unexpected roles as a consequence of owning an asset and owning accompanied responsibilities;
- To adequately manage these responsibilities, the organisations need to professionalise; while at the same time,
- being confronted with increased constraints on resources due to ownership of the community asset; and

- the emerging key tension is balancing asset-related interests versus community-related interests.

### **6.2.2. The immediate impact on activities**

This section focuses on the impact of ownership on how assets are used and the activities that take place within them which has been experienced the most by the interviewees in terms of being enabled to operate by the asset and the flexibility of the buildings.

The following discussion explores these two dimensions of impacts on the organisation's activities perceived by the interviewees.

#### **Being enabled to operate by the asset**

By owning the assets, organisations and communities are provided with spaces to use which would otherwise not be available. These spaces are exclusively designated for communities, their needs and interests, varying from nursery services, education and training to leisure facilities or providing places to meet and connect. Ownership changes the basis of operations and allows the community to decide what the resources are used for.

Sophie, Alt Valley: "One of the advantages is we can open it to the community as much as we want and need to, whereas beforehand the building was close at 6 and you'd have no chance for getting it open for a community event or activity after hours. Now we can. If somebody needs access to the building, then we can provide that."

By being open to several groups even though constrained by limited resources, community organisations combine different purposes and increase their reach.

Sophie, Alt Valley: "Another example with opportunities as well: we have a lot of sessions for younger children - so dance and drama sessions and stuff like that - but then the parents will come in and they all sit in reception and wait for the children to finish. Because we do adult education classes [and] stuff like that, you chat to them so then you're giving them the opportunity to go [to classes], and a lot of them do [...] access our education courses."

Besides hosting community activities, the premises are often used to generate income streams. Most assets are hired out for private or public events, or to other organisations providing services. The rates requested are usually below standard market prices as the main intention is not to generate surplus, but rather to secure a stable financial basis for organisations to break even, particularly for those organisations owning a single asset. For instance, Gatis rents out their spaces to other organisations offering nurse services, and the football club rents out their pitch for smaller non-professional groups.

For the larger organisations like Alt Valley in Liverpool, assets are a major factor in generating income. Hiring out their facilities when not making use of these themselves is possible because of the size and numbers of buildings they own, and ownership is possible because of being able to financialise the resources.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “We are quite lucky [because] we have separate rooms that we can hire out. Pre-Covid, all our room would be hired out all day, every day and that would bring in a surplus revenue.”

These decisions are made independently by the organisations and are possible due to the flexibility provided by owning the buildings.

### **Ability to respond to needs**

The interviewees described the possibility of using the assets flexibly in various ways. This was often a major shift, in particular for those organisations which went through a transition phase and experienced changes in ownership arrangements.

As community assets often accommodate more than one group, the activities the assets are used for are also diverse. This is highlighted and emphasised by the various uses described by the participants.

Charlotte, Gatis: “[We] attract people in with different activities. When we were open, people could just walk in, and we got different activities every day. I think the input of different events - like we have yoga, children’s groups, we have a lady that comes in it’s called tops play, so attracts babies, young mum babies [...] gives the building some use.”

As well as staging plays, the Kirkgate Arts Centre is used flexibly for different purposes in the community’s interest.

Connor, Kirkgate Arts: “The heritage group - that bunch of volunteers that manage it and develop it and kind of research and produce publications - they would do an exhibition in the summer, in August, when generally there was little or no activity in the Centre.”

In other cases, the buildings are used temporarily for certain purposes and change roles over time. Using the Alt Valley building flexibly has been a major driver of change and development.

Diana, Alt Valley: “So, [the usage of buildings] could change, you know, like next week or next year, we could do something completely different, but the core sort of mission of what we are trying to do [...] comes back to you [...] trying to help people to raise their aspirations and sort of live better and healthier and more fulfilling lives.”

Especially in changing times, being flexible and being able to adapt is key for organisations to survive.

Sarah, ETNA: “But even in terms of the things [...] they could have had, [like] a vaccination centre there at some point. It could have been used for something like that. It's like all these buildings, isn't it? They change their use during war and troubled times. And that's what it is, it is an asset.”

Ownership and the resulting ability to use the building flexibly and in accordance with the organisation's ideas, facilitates the organisations' ability to adapt to community needs.

Participation and being allowed to co-decide and co-produce what the community asset is used for is crucial for the adaptation to local needs. By having control over the asset, community organisations are free to implement governance structures which allow participation. This would not be necessarily the case if buildings were still owned by other institutions with different aims.

Martha, Gatis: “So, if somebody has a really good idea, if one manager and one director think it's a good idea, then we put it out wider. Who thinks this is a good idea? Should we do it and then get people's feedback and thoughts on it? And it means that we can respond to needs really fast.”

This has been emphasised by the interviewees. The attitude required for a successfully owned building run for and on behalf of a community needs to ensure that “it's got to speak to the needs of the community that it sits within” (Peter, Bilston Football Club) By adapting to community needs, many positive outcomes are generated such as providing training in educationally-deprived neighbourhoods or addressing social



isolation. By fulfilling local needs, local awareness of the organisation is simultaneously raised in the community.

**The main immediate impacts on activities are:**

- Ownership enables organisations and activities to operate by providing a physical space, which
- can be used flexibly and with the ability to respond to needs.
- By facilitating interactions and activities, spaces are generated (as explored in Chapter 3).

How this construction of space allowed a continuation of interaction and space-making in times of restricted access to physical gatherings during the pandemic will be explored in Chapters 8 and 9.

### **6.2.3. The immediate impacts on communities**

Many different aspects of community ownership of assets were experienced by the interviewees. The community organisations consist of local members, and the activities and services are intended to benefit the local community. Participants reported the following as important aspects in particular: 1) having a community resource; 2) communities having the guarantee of a physical building; which in turn facilitates 3) collaboration and participation in community activities and enlivens community spaces.

#### **Having a community resource**

The significance for communities of being provided with physical assets were described by the interviewees as having many positive facets, as reportedly publicly accessible assets for communities have become scarce.

The possibility of making use of spaces without financial obligation allows communities to access the resource in different ways. Whereas for-profit venues such as

restaurants, cafes or shops, attractions for children etc. require entry fees or people spending money, in contrast, unconditional usage of places in community control are reported to facilitate the development shared ideas, to identify shared norms and values and promote the generation of a sense of community, enabling relationships and connections to emerge.

Interviewees suggested that places of public and community interest are threatened by the trends of austerity and privatisation, and community organisations taking on new roles and responsibilities keeps these physical assets in community control, allowing community access. The role for community organisations is, and continues to be, expanding;

Sophie, Alt Valley: “Now everything other than education comes onto communities, so libraries and sports have come under communities, because obviously they are all community assets, community facilities. It does make sense. If we can give them [the community] opportunities by having a community asset available to them, it just makes sense that we take on that ownership.

The organisations aim to provide diverse services to increase participation and to allow everyone in the local communities to engage with and enjoy the asset.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “So, the Club offers the pitch and the facilities to a wide range of other organisations, predominantly schools, and youth football teams. So that is a really important part of what the Club is trying to do, to be a resource for everybody in the community. [...] And most importantly, the club is owned by the town. It's not owned by one individual, it's there as a resource for anybody.”

In this example, the asset is predominantly used for soccer. The Club, however, is run by volunteers and tries to open its doors to many groups beyond their primary users. The clubhouse is used for people to meet and organise events.

This is similar in practice to the Gatis community space. Providing spaces enable as many people from the community as possible to engage.

Charlotte, Gatis: “[The aim is to] attract people in with different activities. When we were open, people could just walk in, and we got different activities every day. We have got a big open space on the back of the building for children. They call it the ‘wilderness’ where it's just trees and campfires and activities down there. We have got a vegan café; when we're open people can come in just for a coffee and a chat if they want, there is no obligation to speak to people if you don't want. So just come and have a coffee and feel relaxed in a nice friendly atmosphere. We have activities like arts session, where somebody comes in and speak to people and start drawing and let them express themselves.”

In the case of the ETNA centre, the building has become a constant source of companionship for some individuals in the community.

Victoria, ETNA: “We're a lifeline for the community. Lots of [positive] feedback, [...] we had a lovely gentleman [...] using ETNA for over 25 years saying, ‘I don't know what I do if the place closes down, if it wasn't there as a resource’. So, he will come down with a group who run counselling sessions with us. But I think it becomes part of people's lives and especially if they've overcome, maybe, alcoholism or narcotics. You know we have been there to really, not WE, but the building has been there to save them. I think it's a very special relationship, isn't it?”

Victoria's quote highlights the meaning of the spaces for the community, rather than the meaning of the organisations reviving and occupying the buildings.

Many organisations have taken on buildings which otherwise would have been demolished or privatised, and the community has been enabled to maintain access to that resource often in the long-term. This provides the community, as well as the organisation, with the guarantee of having a building.

Martha, Gatis: “They were shutting the Centre and that was that. So, we kind of went, ‘We either walk away now or we do something about it.’ So we opted to do something about it.”

Having security of ownership and access to the buildings affects personal perspectives and creates a sense of security for community members and those being involved in community organisations. The predictability can enable people to become involved as there is an awareness of being part of something lasting rather than a short-term pop-up type of project.

Sebastian, Gatis: “I think the main thing with it would be, [...] it gives a sense of security if we own the building, we have a sense we're here forever now really.”

Victoria, ETNA: “For the community, it [...] takes away that concern, ‘Are you going to still be there?’”

Financial security is also provided by owning and using the building.

Daniel, Ashton Keynes Village Shop: “The main single benefit has to be retention. It isn't gonna go [away]. It would take an awful lot for it to disappear because we could, you know ... . If turnover started to shrink and we couldn't afford the staff, what we would do is to cut down on staff, minimising hours, or work on more volunteers. But the key thing is we got to do retention. We're not in the same level of risk of losing that asset as if it was a commercial enterprise.”

The long-term perspective and benefits of owning the building can also serve as a basis of trust on which communities engage and participate. This is the second dimension highlighted by the interviewees.

## **Participation and collaboration**

Local participation in planning processes leads to services being offered which are designed for local needs. Rather than using assumptions as a basis for service provision, the Gatis Community Organisation actively seeks input to ensure not only financial, but also human resources, are used for community benefit. The process of this in action was described by Martha, and this is worthy of an extended quotation:

Martha, Gatis: “We try and involve our community members [...] as much as possible about what we are going to do in the future. So actually, an example of that was, I came across some funding that would be really good for setting up a tool library. And we run repair cafes and every couple of weeks somebody says to me, ‘When is your next repair cafe? When is it going to happen?’ So, we know there is a need for it, we know there's people wanting it. I came across this funding last week but had a really short deadline, I think the deadline was today. And I was like ‘Oh my God, but we need some consultation on this’. So I put some posts out - we use social media a lot and we ask people questions - so I literally just put a question out with a picture of some tools and [asked], ‘If we had a tool library, would you use it and what would you want from it?’ And literally it exploded, three hours later, I'm still fielding messages at 10 o'clock at night. I'm like ‘Ok yes - ladder. That's brilliant because people that have ladders and they balance on chairs, yeah, that's keeping our community safe. Brilliant’. You know. And I managed to pull a funding bid together for all of that including training sessions within 24 hours. A week ago, we weren't thinking about it. But this is my community saying actually ‘Yeah’ [...]”

What this tells us is that active consultation allows resources to be spent effectively and efficiently, neither organisational resources nor funding are misguided, while allowing communities to actively shape what they need and want.

To further increase participation, transparent management structures and decision-making procedures are used to encourage people to co-create community assets and spaces.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “Basically, if anybody in the community wanted to use the Centre for a reason, we make it possible. But I think most of the people who use this building, they see that this is their Centre, it is not Alt Valley's. It's the community's and that's the way they see it. They got, like, an ownership of the building as well.”

The ownership of the community not only allows participation but also requires community members to take over roles and responsibilities to maintain the building and activities.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “The first question we will all have to ask ourselves is, can we afford it? Second question will be, who’s going to do it? “

There is a great need for voluntary input which must be coordinated. Therefore, the different community organisations allocate different people with varying backgrounds and knowledge to different tasks for which they become internal experts.

Martha, Gatis: “We advertised for new directors, and we got four new directors out of six that applied. We took on four of them who have specialist responsibility in areas that the rest of us don't really have. So that really added to the mix. We have got one who is so health and safety, she can actually train other people in health and safety. She is so up on our health and safety, so there is responsibility in being spread wider. And you know all these people come from our local community.”

Although, community participation is requested and being actively pursued by the community organisations, often only a few individuals take up roles and responsibilities. The danger of exploiting key individuals and losing them as main actors in the community organisation can have severe consequences, such as closing down buildings and other valued community resources.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “Let's be clear, the Club is reliant on a small group of individuals who are prepared to do the behind-the-scenes part, get the pitch made, get the pitch painted, make sure the stand is safe, make sure the showers got hot running water, making sure that holes are patched.”

Adam, Ashton Keynes Village Shop: “It comes down to small band of people who are activists, who if you like, [...] actually do put the physical time and effort into making things happen. Those are actually the people who make it work.”

Being reliant on voluntary contributions also influences the community as increased collaborations become necessary. These collaborations may emerge at many levels, across organisations and individuals.

As the buildings are not only assets from a symbolic perspective, but also in material terms, the buildings or parts of the buildings are hired out, for other local socially oriented services at affordable rents. These collaborations allow closer relationships and knit closer bonds among different elements of local social infrastructures.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “We have really strong links with other organisations and groups that work in the communities.”

This benefits the community by increasing the range of offers and internal benefits emerge from being in constant exchange with other individuals, ideas and visions.

Victoria, ETNA: “We have taken on a few new charities that all came together from a place they had been renting. They all knew each other but they were very helpful in sharing ideas, and we'd have meetings every month where we discuss how we can make it better. [...] Suddenly we got this extended team giving us ideas and sharing advice.”

Collaborating may also have further positive impacts, such as environmental and economic benefits for the communities.

Sebastian, Gatis: “Half of it [food donations] comes from local supermarkets, we work with Asda our biggest supplier at the moment, we collect off them twice a week. Yeah, yeah. So, we get Asda, we collect from Tesco, Coop, we occasionally collect from local green growers also, got partnerships with homeless groups.”

The consequences of ownership on organisations, activities and communities are manifold and the insights presented above are only a glimpse of the experiences recounted by the interviewees. However, all these identified themes were shared among various participants with differing backgrounds and across various cases.

#### **The main immediate impacts on communities are:**

- Communities are equipped with a longer-term community resource which gives security for social groups to have continued access to the buildings;
- Having security of ownership facilitates participation and collaboration in community generating processes.

#### **6.2.4. Summary**

The immediate effects of ownership on the organisations, activities and communities reveal the different experiences of the actors involved. Although the cases vary and ownership is formulated, operationalised, and claimed differently in each context, the themes which emerged are valid across the different cases and contexts.

For organisations, ownership immediately created further unexpected roles for individuals acting on behalf of the community organisation; increased resource constraints; and required the organisations to professionalise to properly take responsibility for a building. The activities of these organisations are enabled by owning the premises and providing a space. The flexibility that comes with ownership allows activities to be designed in accordance with and in response to changing needs and wants of the local contexts. The communities are equipped with a community resource which may be used to participate and collaborate in community related activities.

*Figure 11 – Immediate Impact of Ownership*



### 6.3. The indirect impact of ownership on place, identity and community making

Asset ownership on behalf of and for a community catalyses several processes, fulfils different roles in local socio-economic contexts, and impacts on the place-, identity and community making. The places occupied interact with community purposes at various levels and it is not always possible to clearly delineate between the causes and effects. The indirect impacts identified by the interviewees speak to the second sub-question of how ownership relates to place-, identity- and community-making.

The indirect impacts ownership has on the local contexts are varied and were described by participants as creating effects in terms of: 1) inclusiveness; 2) the organisation's embeddedness; 3) the community's development; and 4) empowerment.

These themes describe processes which are perceived to interact with place, identity and community-making by creating and shaping social interactions. As explored in Chapter 3, the creation of space, community and identity are understood as never finished but rather, are under continuous construction. Hence, the themes identified by the interviewees describe facets of this continuous creation experienced by those involved.

*Inclusiveness* describes how the local community is approached and is aimed at facilitating increased participation in relationships and activities within a community. The respondents felt that the deeper the *embeddedness* of the organisation, the greater was the ability to generate community and place-making. Whereas *development* describes the adaptation to steady changes within and among relationships in a community, *empowerment* describes the community's stake and co-creation in these processes. These themes are further explored in each of the following sections.

#### 6.3.1. Inclusiveness

The ownership of physical assets is reported to affect the place-, identity-, and community-making in particular as organisations and the venues occupied are intended for inclusive purposes.



Being or acting inclusively was described by several interviewees, not necessarily explicitly, but by their actions, vision and missions. These incidents, coded as 'being inclusive', relate to several levels of organisations, ranging from higher management and strategic planning to the activities of individuals being officially part of the organisation or those taking part individually.

Flat hierarchies and minimising barriers to access the community assets, the sorts of services offered are described acts of inclusivity.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: "That it has a more flat management structure and that it's constitution and the way it's funded and the way the Club is effectively thought of by the Council and by other bodies is that there has to be more than just a team that plays football on Saturday. The Club has to be interested in what's going on at schools, what's going in the community, what's going on in the town and it's sensitive [to] that response, if you like, and it is because it is community owned."

For Peter, several characteristics of the Club, its constitution and funding structure obliges the organisation to be as inclusive and concerned about their local context as possible. The fact of being community owned needs to be reflected in their organisation, not only in their activities but also in how they are organised.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: "Other clubs with an equivalent size play far lesser roles in their community because they don't have that impulse that sort of built into the constitution of the team and club."

This highlights organisations' different construction of their own understanding of and roles in their context.

Sebastian also emphasised the importance of opening up the Club to anyone who is interested:

Sam, Bilston Football Club: "We're trying to aim at trying to open football for anybody and everybody."

They not only offer soccer-related activities but also different kinds of activities for several groups of their community: café and bar facilities allow people to meet for a cup of coffee or tea; the independent supporters club is open for anyone who wants to contribute to the Club's success and future running; and the Club also organises Bingo rounds for the elderly.

Irrespective of their inclusive orientation and aims for getting as many people as possible contributing, the Club also struggles to engage community members.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “There is real opportunity I think for people's ideas and voices [...] it's not that we got too many and we're desperately trying to crush these people's ideas. It's like we want more of them, we want more participation, and particularly want to get younger [people] involved in the Club and coming to games and getting involved. [...] Ideas are actively encouraged.”

Whereas many organisations formed to combat vanishing community spaces and repurposed buildings, some also took over formerly publicly or, as in this case, privately run buildings. These contexts have a point of comparison:

Victoria, ETNA: “I like to think that we have made it more inclusive and open to more participants and I'd like it that we have made it more approachable and [...] we're receptive to our community's needs and wants. Whereas I think before it was more of a closed organisation.”

Inclusiveness by participation is an ideal which is aimed for by many organisations; however, many are struggling to actively implementing this.

Other interviewees described their aims for inclusiveness by demonstrating their openness to anyone in the community. Rather than emphasising that their activities are open to every member of their community, one participant used the example of welcoming anyone, highlighting that the aim is to not to include everybody while not excluding anybody.

Martha, Gatis: “We treat everyone like family. We just respect people for being people, so we don't try and judge anybody. If a smelly homeless person turns up and needs a cup of tea, we'll give a cup of tea.”

Thinking about and targeting excluded and hidden members of communities in a local geographical location, who are often most vulnerable requires many resources and skills. These may not be available to an organisation which was primarily formed to address the disappearance of open public space, or which initially aimed to protect a certain community asset from closure.

The organisations are aware of their resource and operational limitations and aim at referring people in need to suitable services and organisations. This not only enhances support networks for individuals, but also enhances the connectedness within a local geographical context. By being closely connected to other actors in a particular region, inclusivity is not only practiced in terms of individuals and support, but also broadened to the organisational level within a geography of concerns. These forms of connectedness and inclusivity significantly contribute to place-, identity- and community-making, increasing the frequency of exchange among actors across a neighbourhood. New relationships are built, not only among people, but also between

people and spaces and between organisations. This exchange can facilitate closer collaborations, allow exchange of spare capacities, and enhance the support network in a local context for all involved. Being inclusive does not necessarily mean having solutions at hand for all eventualities, but is, rather, the willingness to be open to any situation organisations might be approached with.

However, while being inclusive is often claimed, it is often interpreted differently. Whereas one organisation emphasises that they do not exclude people experiencing homelessness or people with mental health problems, other interviewees explained that they actively exclude some of these groups as they are automatically perceived not to be local.

Martha, Gatis: “He's been a carer for his mum, his mum dies, and he was thrown out of the house, he was homeless. So, we managed to get him referred on and getting some help and he was just like, ‘You know, actually without you guys, I’d probably be dead. But [...] beforehand I didn't appreciate you.’”

Sarah, ETNA: “I mean homeless people by default are not local. But I think the problem would be that [...], we will end up with not having enough staff to run it properly.”

Both examples highlight different framings; although both interviewees are aware of their organisational limitations, their handling of these limitations varies considerably. Whereas one interviewee aims to help anyone irrespective of whether the organisation can help them or whether they need to be referred to other services, the other participant is more concerned about the lack of available resources and their inability to address all potential needs among their local community.

Hence, claimed inclusiveness would seem to be ideologically inherent to community organisations, but in practice resources may dictate how individual groups are engaged with and included or excluded;

Martha, Gatis: “Our beneficiaries are anybody who lives in the community, anybody at all, we don't discriminate on anything at all. We try not to make judgments on anybody neither.”

Facilitating participation is also a facet of genuine inclusion aiming to include individuals in an organisation and increasing the number of participants, but also actively seeking to include more perspectives into the operations and changing the engagement of people from being passive recipients to active participants. This allows

activities to emerge from the people most affected, rather than the organisation defining what is needed in their local community.

Other examples show how small adjustments make services more inclusive.

Sebastian, Gatis: “[The food provided is] all meat free, not necessarily through my beliefs, all the environmental side which kind of links on to our growing and green thing. But also, it's for everybody, doesn't matter [who ...] You don't have to look whether it's halal or whether, you know, everybody can eat of the same menu. And that's quite important to get people eating together.”

There are several opportunities not only to design organisations and their set ups inclusively but also their activities and services practical implementations of the higher vision and mission. The example of actively choosing to design a shared activity as universally as possible allows individuals to gather around a common cause. Food is central, particularly for Sebastian; eating as a shared basic need is experienced as a unifying activity. Choosing the ingredients used as inclusively as possible, for example, by leaving out meat or dairy products, allows a broader audience to take part in joint lunches.

For other organisations, inclusiveness emerges not through the activities themselves, but by leaving activities to the tenants using the premises they own and setting the frame as universally as possible.

Victoria, ETNA: “So the idea of ETNA is we're non-religious, non-secular, we are open to all as long, you know, it's legal, something that's allowed to happen, and it is just a building for things to happen in. We are still a space for the community to use. [...] We don't run anything ourselves under ETNA umbrella, we really are about empowering the community.”

The process of inclusiveness is closely related to the organisation's embeddedness, the larger the outreach to and connection with the local context is, the more embedded organisations are.

### **6.3.2. Embeddedness**

The physical presence of an asset and the organisation is facilitated and maintained by a stable ownership and responsibility. This was reported to affect buildings and the organisations' ability to become embedded in the local context. Embeddedness was

described as a main indirect impact of ownership in respect to its stability. By their physical presence, the organisations can embed into the local context and gain access to local knowledge which is crucial in establishing collective leadership. As Rees et al. (2022) point out:

“You can lead from the bottom up because you have local, embedded and tacit knowledge of a place where somebody else (particularly local authority) has the formal power to lead but their leadership is constrained in practice by a relative lack of embedded local knowledge”.

This form of inclusive leadership allows place, identity and community-making processes to unfold in facilitating community interactions to emerge and be sustained.

In interviews, several facets of embeddedness were described, ranging from the central role an asset plays in a specific context to the appreciation and support expressed by the community. The assets have a distinct physical function in these contexts.

Diana, Alt Valley: “If we hadn't had the premises, we wouldn't have been ... we wouldn't have had a presence or history in those communities. For example, like Ellergreen, if we weren't based there, people wouldn't have known what we have done previously, wouldn't have known to come to us for help. [...] Having that asset has definitely been an advantage in that respect. So, they have got knowledge and awareness of us operating in that area because of us having that asset there. If they have needed more help and support, they have known where to come to really.”

Some organisations are even described and experienced as not only being embedded into the local context, but also shaping the local context itself:

Sophie, Alt Valley: “Alt Valley is sort of like their anchor organisation, so to speak. Obviously, we have been around for quite some time, we have built up the relationships over the years. We act as the anchor which brings it all together.”

Being locally embedded was constructed from various statements made by the interviewees. Many of them described their organisation and activities in relation to their local context and in particular that of being part of a bigger network. These networks are not necessarily formalised, but rather, are informal associations of actors within a certain geographical area.

Sometimes these networks consist of personal relations between individuals living in the same area, or having similar interests or other connections; they are personal networks of key actors within a community organisation owning an asset:

Dora, Bilston Football Club: “Whatever's presented to you, you just get on with it, if you don't know where to turn, then I've got lots of people I can refer to.”

For other organisations, these are part of a network concerned with a particular cause or interest.

Connor, Kirkgate Arts: “It's currently an un-constituted network of organisations and practitioners at all levels across the County, from individual freelance artists to the major theatres and art centres. [...] The fact that we have a relatively modest, in some ways, facility gives us a kind of status within that.”

Being locally embedded is also reflected in the way the organisations and buildings are central community resources. Many communities are affected by economic deprivation and reduced public services available to communities. In these places, non-profit and community-oriented activities affordable to everyone are reported to be rare and so are often well-appreciated and experienced as key in the local (social) infrastructure.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “I do think the Club plays a really, really integral role in a lonely community that it owns it., It's obviously by the community and for the community.”

In more rural places where social activity may as well be limited due to a lack of participants, some organisations form and evolve around a specific purpose such as a theatre group, which then are used for many more purposes than originally intended. By having a spatial representation and offering places to allow encounters and meeting of community members, these organisations and their buildings are experienced as central resources for their communities.

Connor, Kirkgate Arts: “Kirkgate Centre has been able to be a real community resource in all sorts of ways.”

Providing a space for people to meet can become more important than the services organised for the local community. Sebastian reported that people not only come early to secure food from the foodbank, but also to meet each other.

Sebastian, Gatis: “First, we thought that was people who are making sure, because obviously it is first comes first serve almost. But then it was the social aspect of it and people were coming and having a chat for an hour before they go in.”

Embeddedness is reported to be made possible by the physical presence of the organisation in a building and the availability of the buildings to be used by the

communities. At the same time, the seemingly fixed nature of a building does not limit development and change within these local contexts.

Through time constant development may be encountered, not only on an organisational and activity level, but also regarding the communities, the local demographic structure and continuously changing needs. This change was reported as key element of successful ownership and is seen as a main effect of ownership.

### **6.3.3. Development**

Continuous development unfolds by adapting to ever-changing realities – for example, as emerging threats to valued community resources show. These kinds of changes sometimes posed by private actors, as in the case of the Village Shop which used to be privately-owned, but the owners decided to retire and were unable to find anyone to take it over. In other cases, threats are being posed by public bodies aiming to reduce costs by outsourcing responsibilities, as in the case of Gatis Community Space.

Contexts, communities and needs change and many interviewees reported that their organisations had formed in reaction to these changes by stepping in and filling gaps.

Patrick, Alt Valley: “We have grown over time, much of it has been to [...] fill gaps and to stop closures of important services or areas within the community.”

Patrick’s quote shows the original intention: to stop closure. Since then, the organisation has encountered many anticipated, as well as unanticipated, challenges and needs.

Patrick, Alt Valley: “You couldn't have planned to do what we are doing now.”

Alt Valley grew in terms of size and buildings, but also in terms of internal capacities, capabilities, skills and expertise. Their origin lies within the preserving of local educational infrastructure.

Patrick, Alt Valley: “The meetings in the community basically which led to ... well, a long campaign to keep the school open, including taking legal action or whatever. All of which, you know, after about a year or more failed and then the school’s going to close and at that point a decision was made to go and occupy the school.”

Emerging from an act of illegal occupation, Alt Valley has become a major driving force in Liverpool's social infrastructure. The school was occupied for a year and the city Council was urged to re-open the school to fulfil their duties as the education authority. However, since then Alt Valley has taken on several roles and services which are needed in the wider city region. They are still a major provider of education, even though this has evolved to provide mainly adult education.

Patrick, Alt Valley: "And then we all stayed involved, stayed together in terms of the community trust. We developed an adult education program."

Developing through time relates to internal structures as well. Alt Valley has operated for over 20 years and maintained several community buildings. According to the interviewees, this was shaped by, and made possible through, strong community commitment. The initial project created a tightly knit web of relationships: the experience of being able to actively influence and change the local context, policy decisions and improving the community's life empowered the group of individuals. This enabled them to take on even more responsibilities and believe that they could achieve more than just preventing the school closure:

Patrick, Alt Valley: "But bit by bit [in reaction to] closing the gyms - we stepped in; closing the libraries - we stepped in; closing the community centres - we stepped in. And on the other side, [our sister organisation] have taken over shops, shopping parades, developed them, taken over and stopped pubs from closing. But [the sister organisation] also developed a trading side separately [and] have got farms and all sorts of other things at the moment. That's why there is a link to our plans, it looks very complex, but it has developed over a number of years. So, it does fit."

The history of Alt Valley exemplifies how organisations adjust practically through time; however, they are not the only organisation reacting to threats or needs in the local context. Five out of nine cases investigated in this research actively occupy and run their asset due to an existential threat to the community resource.

Martha, Gatis: "Yeah, fast forward to now. So, yeah, we had a small volunteer group when the Council, basically ... they did one of the community consultations, but they had no plan on listening to what came out of that. They were shutting the Centre and that was that."

Developing through time and stepping in and filling gaps may apply on an organisational level which addresses challenges and difficulties in a local community. Stepping in and filling gaps is also applicable to the individual level within a community and community organisation. Many of the respondents described how they



had developed through time in respect to their abilities, perceptions, skills, and experiences - often growing beyond their own expectations.

Charlotte, Gatis: “Yeah, it's just grown. I think it just has grown between me and the directors and I have been given more and more and more to do [laughing]. But I'm happy to do that. [...] I have been doing a commercial advice and guidance course. I want to get more involved in [...] backup and again - helping and signposting people to support them through alcohol abusing problems, benefits and things like that. So, I got that certification to help people and refer them.”

Sophie, Alt Valley: “Well, I started at the organisation as a community champion, working with one area, Norris Green. My role was to work at grassroots level with residents' groups ... like, help and set up resident groups, helping to organise their own activities in the area, dealing with any problem in the area. [...] We work collaboratively to kind of combat any issues that are mainly antisocial issues, it was at the time. Then obviously my role has developed and grown within the organisation. I now manage across all the areas everything that happens within communities.”

Developing through time in response to needs and circumstances was described by many participants. Actively seeking new opportunities for engagement and being open for suggestions was also reported as a driver of change.

Development appears to be a decisive factor in the survival and sustainability of community-owned assets and organisations. This is especially in relation to the difficult circumstances of organisations owning assets: unstable and insecure funding streams; being subject to diverse expectations requiring individuals, communities, and organisations to generate creative solutions; needing to continuously develop in order to be able to survive.

The meaning of development for the realisation of different opportunities is explored in the discussion in Chapter 7.

#### **6.3.4. Empowerment**

Empowerment of the community as an effect of ownership appeared in many forms and was presented through various mechanisms. The interviewees identified various themes describing the self-efficacy of the community, which, for purposes of analysis, I aggregated under the theme ‘empowerment’.

Community empowerment particularly emerged as a central theme in the political arena concerning community policies in 2006 after the Labour Government released the 'Community Empowerment Programme' (see Chapter 2). This can be seen as the starting point of increased political support for community ownership.

The intertwined dimensions of development and empowerment were explained by the interviewees as decisive factors in impacting on place-, identity- and community-making as both emphasise change as a driving force in reactive social settings. Through change and learning, self-efficacy was seen to facilitate empowerment through individuals and aggregated to the community level.

To clarify the meaning of empowerment in this section, this is shortly defined: Several definitions have been developed; however, as different definitions are applicable to specific contexts, the applicability depends on the level of analysis.

According to Zimmerman (2000, p. 43) at an individual level of analysing empowerment the following definition may be useful: "Empowerment may be seen as a process where individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, and a relationship between their effort and life outcomes".

In contrast, another definition of empowerment highlights the interplay between an individual and the community and can clarify the idea empowerment relevant to this research particularly well:

"Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over these resources" (Perkins, 2010, p. 207).

Some participants were aware of the theoretical concept of empowerment and its implication for practical realities. Peter, with an academic background, had particular understanding of the issue at stake:

Peter, Bilston Football Club: "And to me, if [...] local governments and central governments were really invested in regenerating places like Bilston rather than top-down projects, we want to have a plan to really support and promote and give confidence to community owned resources."

Empowerment is described here as realising self-efficacy of the community by taking control of community resources which are designed and created from the bottom-up.

Adam, Aston Keynes Village Shop: “It was trying to be a bit of a hub, if you like, for the community, for, and to encourage, people to come along and really actually take advantage of it in a fuller way.”

The most fine-grained level of empowering communities is empowering individuals. Aggregating empowered individuals is perceived by the respondents to lead to a more dynamic and proactive community. The example of Charlotte is an instance successful empowerment by volunteering:

Charlotte, Gatis: “So, it has been a big boost for me do a role, just volunteer and help people at the Gatis Community Space staff. Getting the confidence again.”

Empowerment may take several forms on several levels, including reviving an area by taking on ownership. In relation to reviving an area, a more economic perspective by participants emphasised the importance of trying to keep financial flows and financial transactions in the local area. Instead of supporting (inter)national chains of, for example, grocery stores, by offering local solutions these financial transactions are kept within the community. This benefits local businesses, such as community-owned shops, or promotes local businesses by referring people to them. Incomes are maintained within the area, often providing employment opportunities and custom for local suppliers and other service providers. This supports local people to earn a living and empowers people to take part in social activities as well.

Martha, Gatis: “But I think there is something around the amount of money we have leveraged into the community. [This] has been a real advantage and had we not been doing it ... We put in - I can't remember what the total is now - it must be going on for £400,000 over 5 to 6 years. And that's a lot of money leveraged into [a] disadvantaged area. It's going directly to self-employed people in the area and we do try and use local businesses for whatever we can.”

Maintaining purchasing power needs local infrastructure. Many case study organisations were initiated in areas which were affected by political decisions which systematically reduced essential infrastructure, be it spaces for use by (low-income) families, or essential shopping opportunities in a local area.

Charlotte, Gatis: “There isn't anything really else where families can go. [Gatis is] just like a base for people to connect. There isn't anywhere else that people can go, and [Gatis], it's quite good.”

Charlotte's quote highlights the impacts of continued privatisation and vanishing community spaces – in their local area there is no other public space available for families. Sebastian confirms that their targeted groups do not have great purchasing

power, so relying on private enterprise would be pointless. The profit motive means that businesses are unlikely to locate in these areas or meet these needs.

Sebastian, Gatis: “I run the caff, which is only very small, but it's more about meeting ... just being there for people who are using the space really, rather than a destination. Again, because of the area is not the sort of place where people go out and spend money on meals really.”

In other locations, the rurality of the area was a main contributor to diminishing social and economic infrastructure. The main intention to take up ownership and make a difference in the local place was not necessarily driven by focus on a particular asset which needed to be maintained, but rather, focussed on the purpose of an asset – in this case, a rural community-owned shop.

In contrast to some other settings, a community-owned shop is not dependent on profit generation and there were several solutions available to retain and maintain the shop itself. This was reported as empowering because the opportunity to shop locally meant that residents were also able to purchase local products. The village shop was described as not only a location that offers opportunities to buy groceries, but also offers community members opportunities to meet other people, to talk to each other and share local information.

The retention of essential services was reported by the interviewees to influence place-, identify and community-making processes. By maintaining key infrastructure, relationships and social interaction are maintained locally during daily encounters.

In order to facilitate local empowerment, bottom-up rather than top-down approaches were perceived to be suited to addressing local challenges, and organisations strategically approached the dimension of how to put their goals and visions into practice. An Asset-Based-Community-Development (ABCD) approach was described as a tool to achieve this because it aims to enable sustainable community development by changing the perspective on needs within a community. Rather than defining people by their deficits, the available skills and ‘assets’ are emphasised. By changing the perspective, progress and success are, according to the interviewees, embraced and can foster positive development.

Martha, Gatis: “So what we have learned over the last six years, we now want to take people from the community and mentor them in doing it and the getting them to mentor somebody else. And potentially, in the long-term if we can be really successful, is employing those people to become an on-site employed team or start their own projects or whatever. So, we really want to develop a dream big ethos of potentiality.

Now let's tap into all those skills and expertise that people might have and never had the opportunity to experiment with.”

In interviews, respondents described knowledge transfer as another important facet of empowerment, enabling individuals to take action to improve their situation. For example, organisations were willing to transfer knowledge across communities and initiatives or enabled community members within their own organisation to perform activities for themselves.

Sarah, ETNA: “[We] talked about different members of the board learning different aspects of the Centre director’s job. The idea being that then we could pool that intelligence into ... import it into another director if we had one.”

Charlotte, Gatis: “Helping and signposting people to support them through alcohol abusing problems, benefits and things like that. So, I got that certification to help people and refer them. We have a lot of input through from the council. Benefits, police, social services and things like that so. [...] Yeah, [because] I have been through [it] myself I know where the help is in Wolverhampton.”

Charlotte’s example shows both approaches. On the one hand, the transfer of knowledge is experienced as an empowering process as it gives her control in her life and adds to the improvement of the community’s circumstances; and on the other hand, it is an empowered mechanism as the organisation itself is contributing to others being empowered and taking back control.

Empowering communities can be facilitated not only by actions which address individual behaviour and generates active engagement, but also by developing a barrier-free environment that allows engagement as easily as possible. “An empowered community is one that initiates efforts to improve the community, responds to threats to quality of life, and provides opportunities for citizen participation” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 54).

Barriers were explained in many different ways that varied from individual to individual. For some, difficulty with getting in contact with others was a barrier, whereas for others, active engagement or even finding a space for gatherings and exchange was a difficulty. Empowering the community to take control and bring about improvements and to get engaged in activities by breaking down barriers was also described by the respondents as getting into negotiation processes on behalf of a larger group of people. Breaking down barriers took place by convincing people to use the buildings, concentrating on the positives and building trust among community

members. Initial communication was perceived by the participants as an integral part of breaking down (immaterial) barriers and eventually empowering the community. To repeat Sophie's point:

Sophie: "First thing we have done was we took down the barriers, [and changed] the restricted opening hours. If it needed to be open in the evening for groups to use it, we were opening up in the evening. If it needed to be open on weekends for groups, we were able to do that. And it was a hard slot because at one point I was working seven days a week, probably 12 hours a day for the first few months.

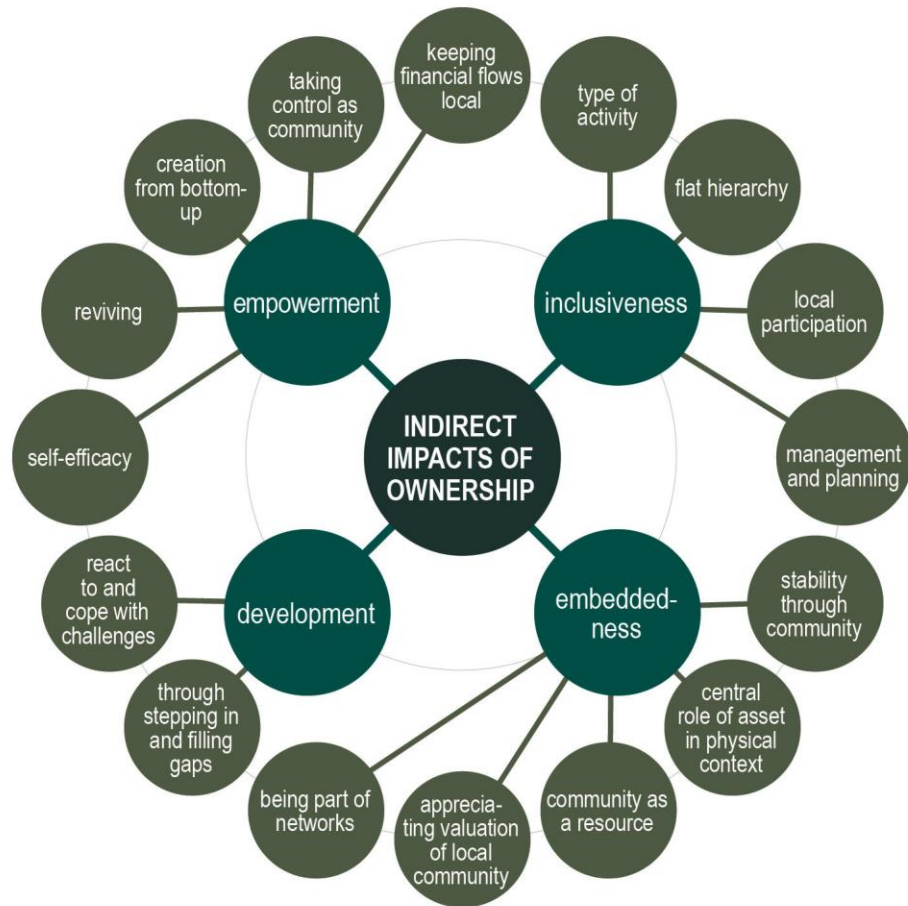
The interviews revealed how empowering processes appear different in differing contexts. This exemplifies that: "Empowerment is context and population specific. It takes on different forms for different people in different contexts." (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 45). Hence, for a single parent, being empowered may mean having a place to go where one can find childcare or family spaces and meeting other adults for conversations or advice, whereas for a person with mental health issues empowerment may emerge in a group activity. The conditions and contexts may change over time.

### **6.3.5. Summary**

The indirect effects of community ownership revealed the different processes contributing to local space, community and identity making.

Community ownership of a physical asset was reported to increase social inclusiveness in a local area, as the assets are used for local social purposes and are aimed at letting as many people as possible benefit from the community resource. The more the organisations and assets are embedded in the local context, enhanced by community ownership and a guaranteed status, the more networks and relationships are built and maintained and the greater the chance that local leadership may unfold. The continuous development and adaptation to changing realities highlight the understanding of space, community and identity making as never finished but under continuous construction. Empowerment was perceived to be related to ownership because it provides assets communities may use to experience self-efficacy, decision-making and co-creating of local lived realities.

Figure 12 – Indirect impacts of ownership



However, the impacts of ownership presented, immediate or indirect, were not always reported positively. The following section explores the explicit challenges and liabilities experienced by the interviewees as other dimensions of the impact of ownership.

## **6.4. The explicit challenges and liabilities – being subject to different paradigms**

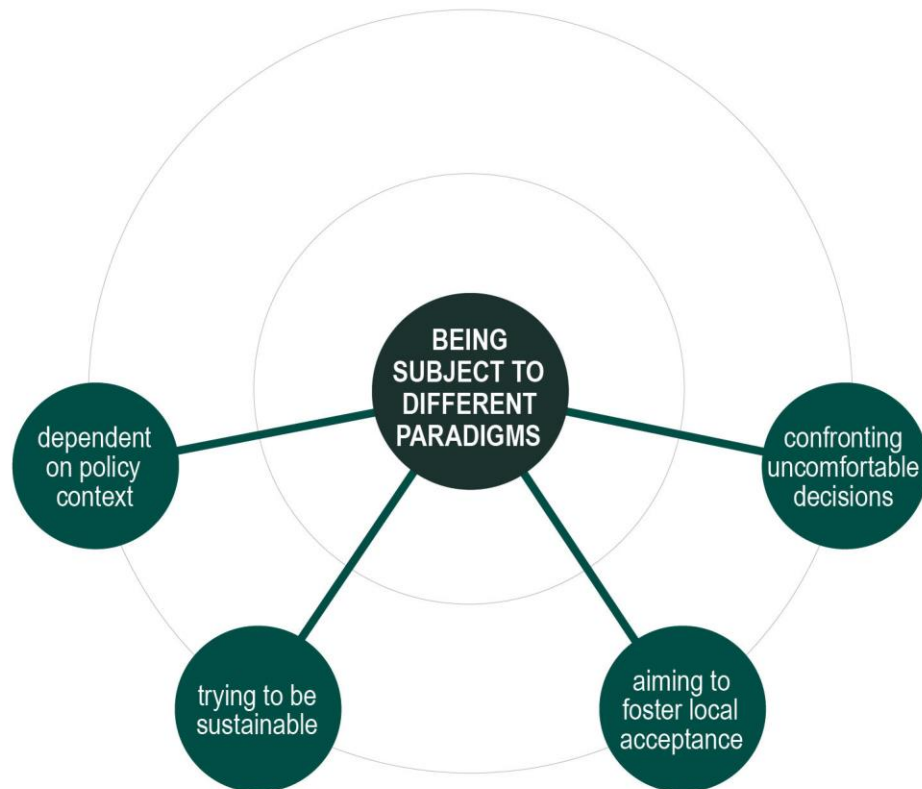
The interviews not only covered positive aspects of owning buildings, but also tried to unravel issues which are experienced as challenging. This aspect addresses the third sub-question of how assets can become liabilities.

Different challenges and liabilities in relation to asset ownership were raised: by owning and taking on associated responsibilities for a physical asset the community organisations are required to adhere to different rules and regulations by different stakeholders. These are summarised under the umbrella term ‘paradigms’ and describe perceived necessities emerging which evolve beyond the community organisation’s social purpose, mission and vision.

Asset ownership brings with it many situations, circumstances, and requirements which the participating organisations and individuals had never experienced before and hence, did not have extensive expertise. They found themselves in a field of diverse tensions: balancing available material and immaterial resources; being able to manage and run a physical asset; and deliver their social mission.



Figure 13 – Coding hierarchy ‘being subject to different paradigms’



Different dimensions of challenges and liabilities emerged during the interviews and have been identified as:

- Dependent on policy context;
- Trying to be sustainable;
- Aiming to foster local acceptance;
- Confronting uncomfortable decisions.

The category of ‘being subject to different paradigms’ consists of various factors influencing organisations, their governance and constitution. The challenges and liabilities emerging evolve from the exposure to different rules and regulations associated with ownership, in particular, the increased workload of legal and financial responsibilities.

The field of tension locates organisations torn between different expectations: the main challenges not only concerned the practicalities of maintaining the building, but also included balancing responsibilities and maintaining integrity.

The challenges are associated with entering different fields by owning on behalf of and for a community: legal, political, social, and economic. The aim to fulfil all the requirements and rules while balancing their own and the local community interests was perceived to sometimes turn assets into liabilities.

The following sections explore the main themes identified as challenges in detail.

### **6.4.1. Dependent on policy context**

Community ownership and asset acquisition is heavily dependent on the policy context and is particularly shaped by local levels of policy implementation. Different facets of this were explored during the interviews. ‘Relying on councils’, for example, was described as having various effects on the organisation’s operations and running of assets. The degree to which participating organisations rely on their local council varied from existential to bureaucratic requirements.

Whereas one organisation is heavily dependent on the council’s decisions as they are being commissioned by them to run their centre (ETNA), another organisation’s future operation mainly depends on the council’s decision to provide matched funding to finance essential equipment without which it would not be viable (Gatis).

This reliance and dependence are perceived to be influenced by the policy context in which the organisations are locally embedded. If a local context has Members of Parliament (MP) or local councillors promoting community ownership and implementing measures in support, processes and services in favour of organisations are more likely to be available.

Sarah, ETNA: “... The administration locally was at the time [...] was a Tory administration. We were supported by our local Councillor. [...] If we hadn't been commissioned, then we couldn't have gone for a longer lease.”

This example highlights not only the role of councillors in relation to allowing and

enabling community asset ownership, but also how the organisation itself and its operations depend on commissioning by the local council. As the commissioning provides the necessary income for the organisation to run and pay staff and other expenses, being commissioned entails political obligations to provide social services and infrastructure. Distributing public resources requires official procedures and hence, competition for public tenders.

Victoria, ETNA: “They decided that they were going to commission, in other words, you had to pitch for the job of whatever, in this case, running a community centre. We didn't have competition, because obviously we are just one community centre but other organisations maybe, organisations which provided services for the aged or something like that, they actually were competing with one another for the commission. So, it was an awful lot of paperwork.”

However, not all organisations are commissioned by their local council or depend on them as heavily as the examples above. Nonetheless, as most of the buildings held by the case study organisations came into ownership after being council run, there are often rules and regulations attached, particularly as the buildings are not usually sold outright by the local council but are given to communities via long-term leases. These leasing arrangements often require the buildings to remain in a certain state and be used only for certain purposes, mostly in favour of maintaining social purposes and to prevent commercial use of the buildings.

These limitations become problematic where ownership arrangements between the organisation and council are not completely settled. In the case of one organisation, the asset transfer process had been going on since 2013 and still had not found the satisfying outcome of a planned 35-year lease. This impeded the organisation from fully taking control of the asset. Not did they lack access to necessary resources because they lacked investment securities, but also the uncompleted ownership arrangement left the organisation and individuals with constant concerns and worries about potential pitfalls and changes ahead. Their experiences with the council created a relationship of distrust and caution. In particular, the frequent personnel changes and fluctuations in individuals in charge were experienced as reasons to distrust verbal promises. Hence, altering the building and installing permanent equipment was a risk, particularly since the current leasehold arrangement states that the building must be given back in the original state. These conditions pose risks for the organisation that invested financial resources, time and effort which may be wasted if there are unforeseeable changes to the councils' strategies and actions.

Sebastian, Gatis: “The kitchen space is too small and, yeah, so we would like to knock that bit of wall out and build a counter and things like that, which we can't do at the moment because it is council built and they're owning it ... Even though the council says just do [it] and then we'll deal with it afterwards ... We'd rather do it properly. So yeah, that will allow us to be able to do things like that. Slight modifications of the building really, nothing drastic, but...”

Although having the skills and resources available to organise a café and spaces for social meetings and exchange, and also providing an essential service to combat food poverty by serving affordable meals, the organisation is not able to perform these activities yet, because of the lack of official documentation and processes to be finished.

The fluctuation of personnel impacts not only those organisations depending on the local policy context but also affects the whole community. The example of Alt Valley highlights the importance of continuity, not only in the organisation's personnel providing social services for the local community, but also in having a coherent and continuous personnel to supervise the diverse processes internal to the council. This can help in generating and maintaining a sustainable social policy structure and its implementation.

Patrick, Alt Valley: “[...] We're a challenging organisation, we're to work with, support, on behalf of the community.... If you look at any organisation [...] we're working with now ... it's the council, the police, the health service, over the 20 years since we have been in the Communiversity, any of those key positions, they probably changed about three times and we're still here.”

The organisation developed all necessary professional skills due to their history of more than 20 years of operating. But decisive changes within the council may affect whether the social initiative is going to take off or will lose momentum. The case of Gatis highlights how important key individuals are in navigating around slow processes and particularly in ensuring momentum is not lost.

The dependency on policy contexts also confronts organisations with difficulties working with councils. One main issue raised was ineffective and inefficient processes at council levels; this inefficiency often wastes public resources and those of community organisations.

Martha, Gatis: “But apparently that's [inefficiency] a massive issue with many councils because each department looks after their little bit, but they don't know the bigger picture. So, their reason for shutting the building was to cut costs. Well, they cut the staff costs, but they haven't really cut much else.”

The offloading of assets by councils onto their communities is particularly influenced by financial motives and restrictions posed on public budgets. This quote highlights that the initial intention of cutting costs by shutting down public places was not met by outsourcing the building. In this case, the uncoordinated working process at the local council continuously delayed the transfer of the building which only incurred further costs. The high levels of fluctuation of employees and persons in charge amplify these drawbacks.

These external complications impact on the organisations' ability to plan strategically for the long-term and hence affects their potential sustainability, i.e., the ability to continue and develop. The issue of sustainability is further explored in the next section.

#### **6.4.2. Trying to be sustainable**

Many challenges faced by community ownership of physical assets relate to the broader issue of organisational sustainability. Sustainability refers to the continuation of an organisation, the assets and the maintenance of public access to it. Problems in sustaining assets and services emerged from the interviews in various dimensions ranging from practical issues of generating income streams and being able to secure a stable funding basis for the organisation, to immaterial dimensions such as the loss of local identity and community cohesion.

Financial aspects were reported to relate to limited resources. The tension between providing affordable services and maintaining organisations and assets affected all organisations, even longstanding ones.

Dora, Bilston Football Club: "Financial side, in terms of - we can make sure that we can access the funding to do it - and we can pay it back - and we have got the income in terms of where we sit financially- are we able to manage that? That responsibility financially wise [is] always a massive challenge for us and it's an ongoing challenge. That doesn't stop really."

Patrick, Alt Valley: "[...] We began then to look into the future and planning, from early days really. And obviously a big thing was the finance because we had a lot of responsibility staff-wise and whatever."

The financial side was reported to be particularly challenging for small and medium organisations: organisational models not based on trade or service provision suffered from a lack of income streams.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “We don't get a lot of funding. I think we had a grant from the National Lottery and from Sport England, and I know [Dora] is always looking to draw down funding to help the Club, but predominantly it is through our own fundraising and money-raising and dipping into our pockets that we're able to keep it going.”

Peter's quote represents one of many examples referring to the difficulty of winning grants and the general issues around bid writing.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “But that takes money, that takes resources. It takes people. And everything we do; we pay for ourselves”.

Organisations applied repeatedly for grants but were unsuccessful, irrespective of whether for budgets to replace old equipment or for larger amounts to alter the asset to make it fit for purpose. Losing funding competitions was a major source of disappointment, discouragement, and waste of organisational resources.

Financial constraints were ever-present. This forced organisations to incorporate institutional logics competing with their core intention. The organisations were mainly concerned with ‘doing social good’ rather than having internal capacity and knowledge on how to generate income streams. This exposed organisations to the risks of losing their integrity as they feared being forced to follow a business-and surplus-oriented approach, rather than concentrating on their social mission and vision. Resources were taken away from core activities of community work in order to find funding to sustain the organisation, exposing organisations to tensions between different purposes and paradigms. This was experienced as challenging by the participants.

Victoria, ETNA: “Finances don't always allow that [concentration on the social dimension] - do they? So that's always the challenge.”

A further main financial concern identified by all respondents was building maintenance. Buildings not being fit for purpose, organisations not being able to generate income streams with the building, in combination with a general lack of funding and financial resources amplified the difficulty of physical maintenance and changed buildings from assets to liabilities.

Sebastian, Gatis: "... obviously, the downside is when things start falling apart you have to pay for it."

The maintenance side of asset ownership was the only dimension clearly identified by the participants. Many other challenges were not presented or reflected explicitly, but rather, were secondary reflections. However, as maintenance, and particularly the related costs, directly affect organisations, their actions and especially their budgets, maintenance was seen as a clear issue and challenge.

Daniel, Ashton Keynes Village Shop: "The disadvantage, of course, is maintenance."

Connor, Kirkgate Arts: "And the disadvantages are, as I said, demands of an aging building that keeps having things crumbling and falling apart and needing attention."

The implication of the financial difficulties of owning a physical asset are the awareness that the unmaintained asset does not offer enough opportunities to generate income streams, and always being aware of the risk of serious damage and unexpected costs, not to mention health and safety.

Dora, Bilston Football Club: "So, whereas last summer, when that stolen car demolished the wall, if we didn't own [the building] that wouldn't have been our problem. It was our problem."

To overcome financial deficiencies and pending asset related problems, the community organisations needed to act and react creatively. This depended not only on the asset itself, but also on the actors organising, running and operating the asset. Participants identified council management of assets as one reason why venues were not successful in the first place.

Martha, Gatis: "The Council has made some improvements to the building so we could operate a toddler provision on site by a third party. But what's transpired with that since, is that there is not that much need in the area because all the schools have in-house provision for that. So, they spent all this money on doing changes to the building that haven't really benefited us."

The building was able to be altered, but the proposed use did not actually respond to local needs and left the organisation with largely unusable space that could have been put to better use. Nonetheless, creative action was performed to adjust the building and use of it to fit to the local context.

The participants described immaterial and community-related concerns which negatively affect sustaining. Many localities were affected by de-industrialisation and deteriorating community relations.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “It's [the asset] a bit like an identity of a place - Bilston has its identity very much from the work it did, it was very proud as a steel-making town.”

Some organisations benefited from having roots in the area and a history of strong sense of place and community which could be catalysed and transferred to the community asset instead. However, others identified increasing difficulties in engaging individuals and maintaining their involvement.

To remain sustainable as a community asset, community engagement is essential. To achieve this, the organisations taking up ownership experienced legitimacy as equally important and difficult to achieve. Legitimacy refers to communication and transparency in this instance.

Besides financial, material, and regulatory limitations, the dimension of the immaterial input needed to develop and perform activities and generate community spaces is often underestimated. A facet highlighted by the interviewees was the great efforts necessary to communicate and be transparent, not only about the organisation's existence, but also in explaining the organisation's intention, purpose and services.

Communication was perceived as a challenge, particularly internal communication, with scarce resources available, lack of individuals and time constraints.

Mia, ETNA: “Yeah, it's about transparency, and listening, in equal measure; and taking on board some of the comments that are made, I think, and some of the feedback that is made by the community. Just to make sure that they [the organisation] are delivering what people need and what's actually needed in a community and then sharing they are developing those things and offering those things. So, transparency in that sense, definitely, it's really important.”

Diana, Alt Valley: “And obviously, if it's a community where we have not worked as much before, there will be a process in terms of explaining more about what we are about and what we are doing.”

Communication and transparency were perceived to contribute to the generation and maintenance of legitimacy. Getting accepted locally was described as a major challenge. Several situations and circumstances were identified as barriers to becoming accepted, such as overcoming a bad reputation; a lack of experienced collective ownership of the



asset; competing with other organisations; and enthusing people external to and internal to the organisation.

Martha, Gatis: “So we have done something [...] kind of like, 'Hey look this place is great' kind of stuff. And that has been a big challenge.”

Sarah, ETNA: “One of the roles I've done [...] I went and spoke to the tenants individually and then if they had any concerns or questions, I would take their concerns and questions and come back to them with an answer. They were involved in the whole process, right along the way.”

At many levels, communication is key to embedding activities into a local context and allowing operations to run successfully in the long term, not only in terms of financial viability but also in uptake and local response.

Getting accepted is dependent on many factors which inter-relate, be it the type and form of services provided; whether these are needed and desired; the way in which community organisations facilitate participation; or their ability to generate an inclusive environment.

The complexity of the challenges – and the multi-layered nature of problems – is explored in the next section which describes how the individuals involved were confronted with uncomfortable decisions.

### **6.4.3. Being confronted with uncomfortable decisions**

Community organisations taking on ownership reported that to a certain degree, they needed to professionalise. The responsibility of taking care of a physical asset required organisations and the people involved to prepare for specific scenarios, such as health and safety-related consequences. This process of professionalisation can be accompanied with unanticipated and uncomfortable situations and decisions.

The participants described several situations in which unanticipated situations and conflicts emerged and caused actions and reactions which led to uncomfortable decisions. The interviewees reported problematic dynamics in groups they had to manage, or as in the case of Adam, personal preferences interfering with community goals.

Adam, Ashton Keynes Village Shop: “But we did have a situation where a committee member, one shop worker very much disliked somebody else [was] very uncooperative and all the difficulties that you get in that sort of situation.”

The general theme of being confronted with uncomfortable decisions was formed from several sub- themes which all relate to types of unanticipated contexts. ‘Fulfilling requirements and expectations of others’ required a lot of resources from organisations which otherwise might have been used differently. The balancing of the different interests the organisations needed to do was experienced as challenging by the interviewees. This was not only in deciding where to spend their resources most efficiently and effectively but also because these requirements exceeded their expertise, internal structure, and internal priorities concerning capacities and capabilities.

Balancing different interests and fulfilling other expectations led to unknown outcomes and changed initial plans and intentions. Challenges experienced by adhering to official regulations was one aspect, and another was to balance the interests of the local communities:

Mia, ETNA: “I mean, I have said this to Victoria, [there has been a focus] on the community kitchen for the last few years and it has felt a little bit like that that's the only thing going on. And I have said to her, ‘You know the Centre has to remember that it is about a lot more than just the community kitchen and the JunkFood project.’ But obviously, I accept that, you know ... [I] recognise that that's really positive stuff and it's great and it's a great facility for the local community.”

Although, the organisations aim to run the buildings on a community basis and let members and the community co-decide, in some cases and for some decisions, this is only limited. As one interviewee put it:

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “[...] The board still takes the decisions. Well, I think that you have to have a decision-making structure, you can't put everything on a vote, you can't call a meeting every time you want to buy new pens. I think that is one of those things that is getting the balance right.”

Nonetheless, establishing these decision-making structures required uncomfortable decisions to be made in the first place. As many of the participating organisations developed from a situation of need and threat, individuals involved did not thoroughly think about the responsibilities and requirements of running an organisation which aims to represent a community, or to run something by and on behalf of a community. The main challenges identified by the participants were not those of deciding actions and

reaction in relation to official regulations or laws, but rather the handling of social dynamics, strong personalities, and interpersonal relations in structures of ‘hierarchy’.

#### **6.4.4. Summary**

The challenges of community ownership of physical assets emerge from being exposed to different paradigms (see Figure 13). The responsibilities associated with ownership lead to organisations being dependent on policy contexts, the political realisation of community goals and the support of councillors. Being dependent limits the organisations’ flexibility and ability to respond to local needs. This in turn, affects the sustainability of the endeavours, and being confronted with legal and political and resource limitations make it increasingly difficult for community assets to be designed and operated sustainably. Another facet of sustainability concerns the challenge of local acceptance: engaging individuals in the long term while facilitating participation and co-creation are demanding tasks. These processes particularly confront the actors involved in making uncomfortable decisions, not only where and how best to invest resources and capabilities but as well, how to manage personalities and group dynamics and steering these to benefit the local community.

### **6.5. Conclusion**

The impacts of ownership, the challenges and aspects of assets which may turn into liabilities described in this chapter shed light on the complex social construction of the meaning and importance of ownership.

The interviews revealed the various levels at which aspects of ownership of a physical asset interplay with experienced realities, and how far the dimension of owning changes situations on the ground. By relating the main impacts to the immediate dimensions of organisations, the activities and the concerned communities, a complex picture of the dynamic processes becomes apparent.

Irrespective of the particular cases, there were significant similarities and synergies in responses. The issue of ownership in a poorly funded and voluntary arrangement poses additional challenges and requirements for organisations and communities.

In response, innovative solutions are found to overcome the hurdles encountered, notably by fulfilling unexpected roles, professionalising, coping with resource constraints and learning. Because they are enabled by the buildings to operate and use them flexibly, communities perceive the buildings as community resources which they have secured access to, and which facilitate participation and collaboration.

In the medium term, owning a building and being responsible for it on behalf of, and for a community is bound up with processes of community, space and identity-making through the requirements on inclusiveness, the embeddedness, the development through ownership and the local empowerment. Encounters and relationships could be established and stabilised through actions and interactions of community members. This contributed to the self-efficacy in decision making and co-creation of spaces and highlights the importance and meaning of having a physical space.

Simultaneously, challenges emerge and in particular circumstances, assets may become liabilities for organisations that are heavily dependent on external factors and policy contexts. The struggle to survive and sustainably run a community asset while maintaining integrity and being accepted locally leaves the organisations and individuals involved being confronted with having to take uncomfortable decisions.

What is often publicly portrayed as easily understandable and positive becomes extremely complex, and although this chapter has focussed on, ownership *per se*, it was not described or foregrounded in the interviews as one might have assumed. Many other facets of the interconnection of experienced realities and ownership were highlighted and explored. These aspects are discussed in detail in the next chapter examining the importance of ownership of physical assets to shed light on the last sub-question of the first research question: Which other assets – besides the physical one – are perceived to be essential to successfully take on ownership?

The present chapter has revealed the importance of ownership of a physical asset by exploring and reconstructing the experienced impacts on different aspects of organisations, their activities and communities, and the processes of place, identity, and community-making. The chapter also considered the challenges that may turn physical assets into liabilities, and these insights revealed that other assets are essential in

facilitating ownership. In Chapter 7 these other essential assets are explored and theorised.

# Chapter Seven – The importance of ownership and the opportunity context

## 7.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 summarised the impacts on actors involved in various aspects of ownership of physical assets, exploring the immediate and indirect effects on community organisations, activities and the community; the broader processes of place-, space- and identity-making; and the explicit challenges and liabilities of ownership.

These findings indicate that ownership poses challenges on the community organisations which can be demanding but in a positive way, but simultaneously be disadvantages, depending on the perspective. Although many aspects of owning are essential for organisations and communities, such as being able to operate in the first place, ownership emerged from the interviews as being seen as practicality rather than a desired status. Ownership per se was not an end in itself but seen as a step towards creating intangible assets. The analysis of interviews revealed the need to define ‘asset’ more broadly to encompass non-material assets and capitals which are created from engaging people, volunteers, neighbours, residents and facilitate participation and collaboration.

The words and perceptions of the respondents do not foreground ownership. Across the various cases, ownership is a response to the lack of alternatives to the provision and maintenance of community spaces and is facilitated by the ability of the actors involved to maximise the opportunities in the context the organisations, communities and individuals are embedded in. The interview responses highlighted and elaborated on the other essential assets perceived to be necessary in relation to community ownership and provided reasons for thinking beyond notions of ownership and the physical asset itself. These intangibles motivations and rationales were identified as critical in sustaining physical assets, but have gained little attention in previous research.

This chapter explores the other essential factors besides ownership of a physical asset and discusses how the configuration of these assets can be examined through the

concept of the ‘opportunity context’ driven by human agency, and by approaching the phenomenon of community ownership of physical assets from a processual perspective.

## **7.2. The other essential assets**

The interviews indicated that community ownership of physical assets was facilitated by several factors. Organisations running buildings on behalf of, and for communities require more than simply the premises in order to provide a community space on a sustainable basis - ‘sustainable’ in the sense that long-term access to spaces and meaningful activities for communities may be generated.

Ownership is accompanied by many opportunities, but equally, comes with obligations and liabilities. Hence, the interviews indicate that, to successfully own and run buildings, there are several other essential assets necessary. The iterative coding procedure condensed the information and experiences expressed by the interviewees and allowed a representation of the themes which emerged when the focus of analysis was shifted away from ownership.

Particularly, for those organisations fulfilling a social purpose without what would normally be seen as an economically viable business model, other essential assets are key to facilitate ownership. These organisations are heavily dependent on non-economic assets, such as volunteers, or donations, to achieve their purpose, manage impacts and emerging difficulties and challenges.

Perceiving ownership as a key element in the investigation of community-owned spaces and the use and provision of spaces, the data explored in Chapter 6 leaves a consideration which centralised the factor of ownership.

Figure 14 – Overview of the effects of ownership on the investigated local contexts

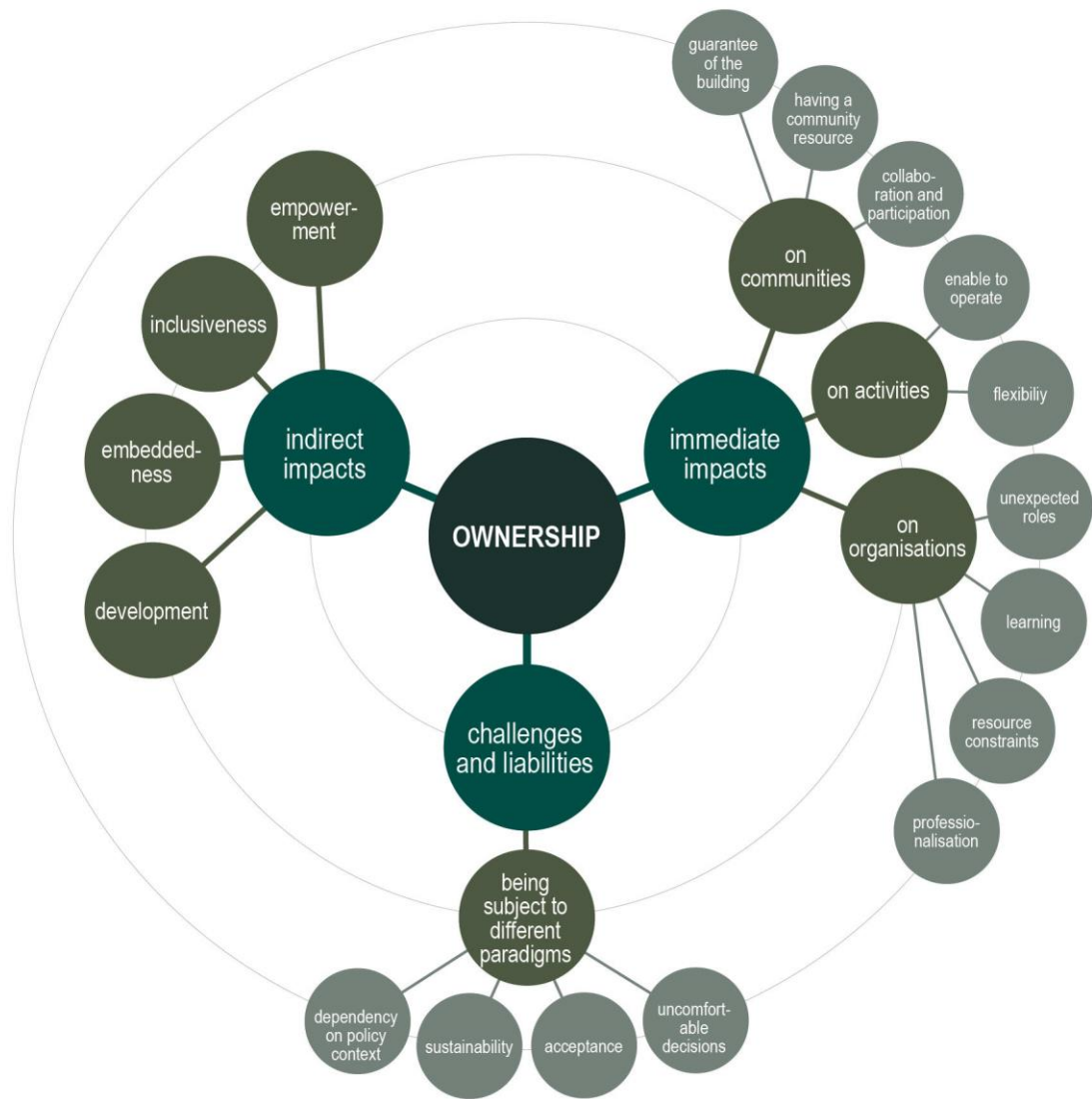
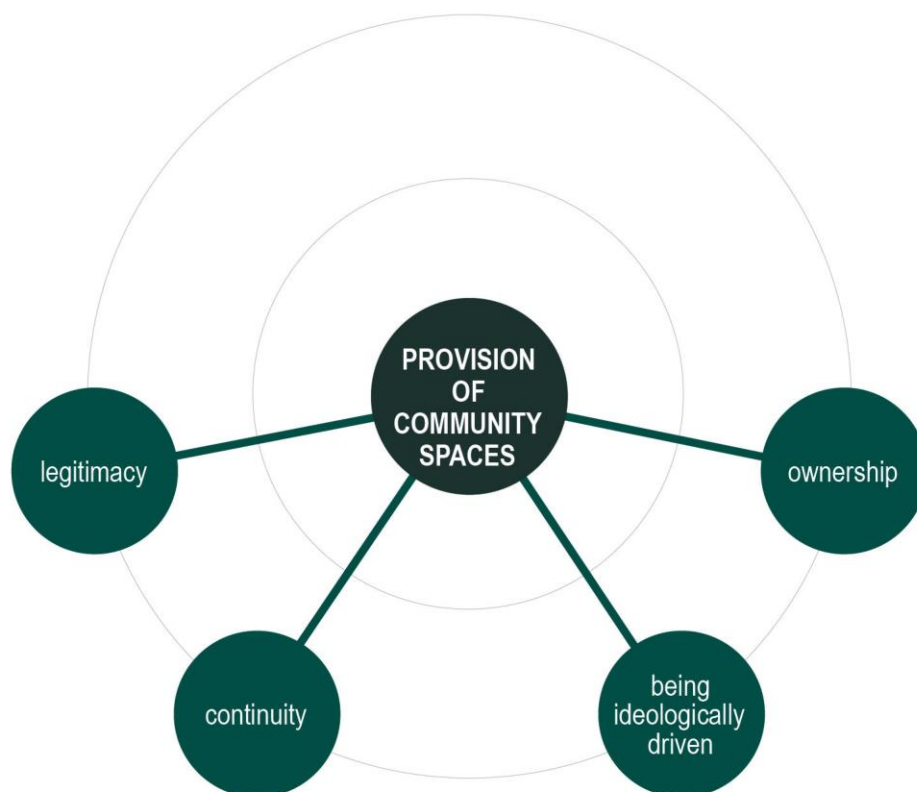


Figure 14 shows the dimensions of ownership of physical assets and how the research brought together the different levels of impacts in order to begin unravelling the meaning and importance of ownership for those involved. However, the insight, that other assets are necessary to facilitate ownership and are as equally important to the success of the project as the facet of ownership and the physical asset itself, shifts the emphasise of the analysis as a whole. Changing the perspective on the provision of community-owned spaces towards a processual understanding generates a new configuration of the important factors, and in particular, ownership. Rather than considering and positioning ownership as the centre of the provision, it becomes one factor in a larger equation which facilitates community-owned spaces (Figure 15).



Figure 15 – Processual conceptualisation of community owned spaces which decentralises ownership



In this configuration, ownership of physical assets is one part of the provision of community-owned spaces and its importance lies in its practical equipping of communities and community organisations with physical spaces. Ownership is equated with this provision, but only becomes possible through other essential assets. These other essential assets necessary to own and provide physical assets are of a processual nature and will be explored in detail in the following sections. Like the themes emerging in Chapter 6, such as professionalising and growing beyond initial expertise to fulfil unexpected roles, these are processes and difficulties which cannot simply be solved by adding extra resources but need to be developed over time.

The main themes emerging from the interviews concerning other essential assets necessary to own a building are:

- Being ideologically driven;

- Continuity; and
- Legitimacy.

Using constructivist grounded theory to analyse data, these themes are a result of the iterative scrutinising process of coding which revealed features of importance to the interviewees in relation to owning a physical asset on behalf of and for their respective communities.

It is important to highlight that the following Figures (16-27) do not describe a structure cascading from the top down but need to be read from the bottom to the centre. Rather than displaying static relations, the figures are used to illustrate how the aggregation and scrutinising processes of analysis evolved, and how the incidents described in the interviews relate to each other theoretically.

The next sub-sections explore these other essential assets - ideology, continuity and legitimacy - in detail and present how these interfere with or are interdependent and mutually reinforce each other.

### **7.2.1. Being ideologically driven**

Being ideologically driven was identified as an essential asset in running and owning buildings on behalf of and for a community, in resisting difficulties and challenges on the ground.

Hannah, Wilsford CLT: “You know, if you're going to do something like this, you have got to believe in it.”

The various concepts related to the term ‘ideology’ have been discussed in detail throughout time. In this study and in relation to the ownership of assets on and on behalf of communities, ideology “can be viewed as a set of assumptions and values about the world” (Hartley, 1983, p. 10). Hartley elaborates different approaches defining ideology, either pejoratively or analytically.

“Numerous strands of research in the social sciences have demonstrated the unattainability of objectivity in understand human action, from the research on the constructive nature perceptual and cognitive processes. [...] Biases and values are inherent in framing a view of ‘reality’. [...] Therefore, the question becomes not

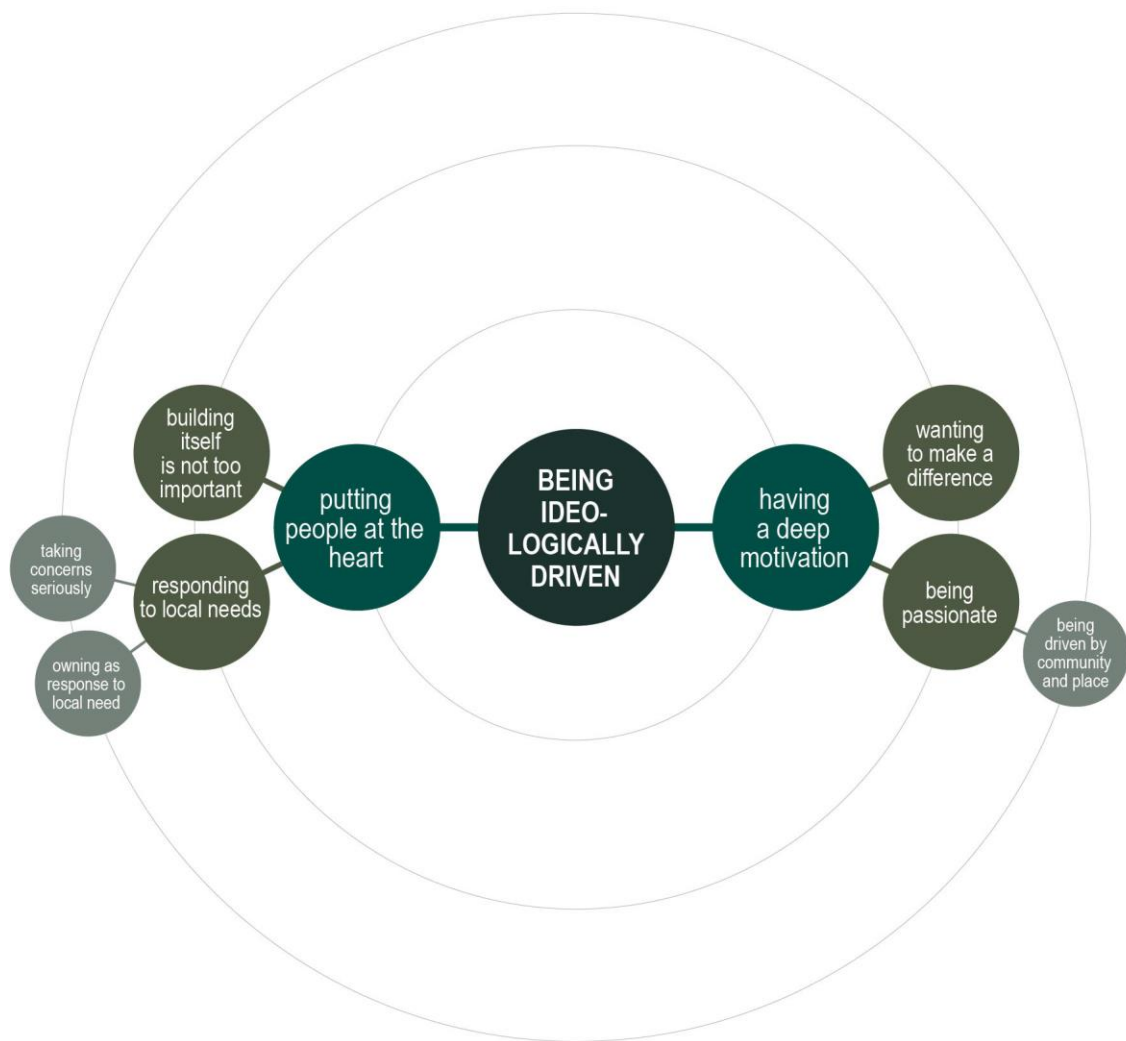
whether values and biases influence interpretations, but which values and biases and by what processes.” (Hartley, 1983, p. 12)

Further Hartley explores different dimensions of ideology argues that ideology consists of beliefs and values; is systematic in nature; is concerned with those who influence how social groups behave; is developed and maintained by social groups; and can have a strong link with behaviour. Considering this in the context of community ownership, the related beliefs and values allow the respective organisations and groups to overcome ownership-related difficulties in order to provide and sustain community spaces.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “[Owning] puts a lot of pressure on you. but at the time, as well it's ... When you got an itch and you shouldn't scratch because it gets worse, but you can't stop doing it. That what it's like. If you were in the midst of it, you're bit poured out that it wasn't or it is. But just seeing it all coming together and seeing what it does and how it benefits the community is all worthwhile.”

Figure 16 visualises the themes which emerged from the interviews showing how ideology and hidden beliefs and values drive actors’ specific behaviours in their respective contexts.

Figure 16 – Coding hierarchy ‘being ideologically driven’



Ideological reasons motivate people to get engaged in an activity, although this may not be related to direct personal benefits or interests.

Diana, Alt Valley: “We are all very passionate about what we do. We want to make a difference. That's really sort of why we do what we do. [...] If we take on something and we need extra resource or need extra expertise, it's always a case of we can find that somewhere. That's sort of an attitude really that I think, if there is something that we don't know, we'll find it out. That's the philosophy that we have.”

This theme is derived from several sub-factors which were identified by the interviewees. Although abstraction from their daily tasks and activities was not often present to the participants, theoretical concepts were implicitly articulated. Coded as ‘having a certain philosophy’, several underlying principles and attitudes were depicted and summarised: having a deep motivation; wanting to make a difference; being driven by community and place; being passionate and emotionally involved; as well as putting

people at the heart of the project. In particular ‘putting people at the heart’ described the practical realities which emerge in a context-specific setting.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “Our purpose is to serve the community in [which] we are working. We're community-led and obviously we consult with the communities, find out what it is that they want and what they need, and then try and find a way to bring that to them.”

Rather than perceiving the building itself as important, factors such as, responding to local needs; taking the involved individual’s concerns seriously; concentrating on the work done; and providing support to the local community, were highlighted by the respondents. This emphasises, on the one hand, the interviewees’ commitment, and on the other hand, that buildings are one piece of the necessary input rather than the single critical factor.

Nearly all organisations in this sample of cases do make use of available opportunities to benefit their own purposes. In these circumstances, ownership was not the initial aim or goal of the organisations but taking on ownership enabled individuals and organisations to implement and deliver their planned services. Hence, willingness to implement their envisaged aims and objectives facilitates the organisations to move beyond their original fields of expertise. A main requirement posed on organisational members is to be flexible and step in where resources and input is needed. This fulfilling of unexpected roles is, among other factors, enabled by the ideological motivation of the organisation and its members.

In addressing local needs by taking on ownership of a physical asset, the ideological motivation is decisive in overcoming attached challenges. Bourdieu’s theoretical framework (explored in Chapter 3.3) suggests that this motivation enables individuals to grow beyond their initial habitus and facilitates the acquisition of additional skills and resources. In Bourdieu’s terms, the value-based motivation in combination with the confrontation and experience of existing needs allows individuals to grow and move beyond their initial set of ‘fields’, accessing what is necessary to maintain assets, and provide support to their local context.

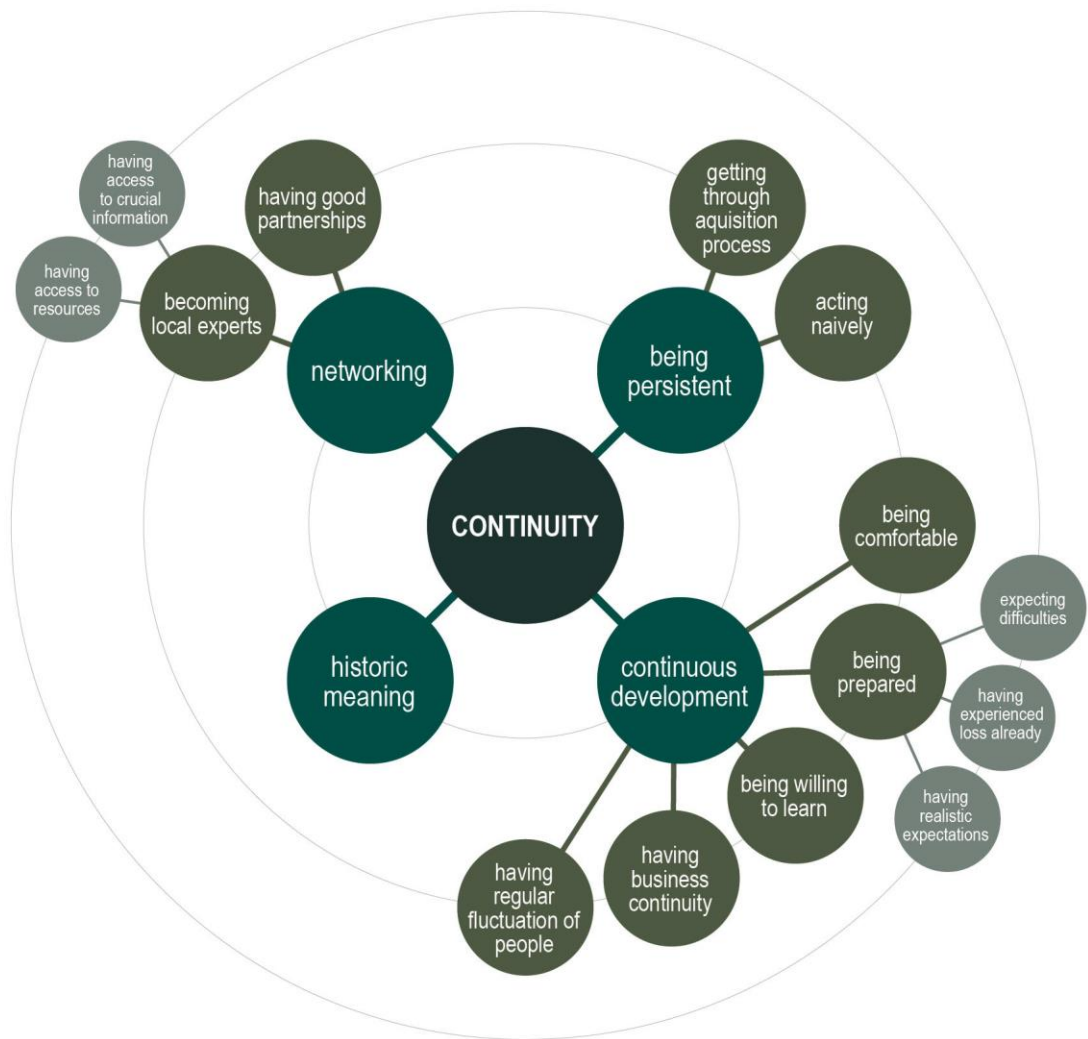
The challenges of being subject to different paradigms, being confronted with uncomfortable decisions and fulfilling unexpected roles explored in Chapter 6 are guided by these underlying values which allows organisations, members, and communities to learn and develop. These characteristics feed into the dynamics of being ideologically driven and express the importance of learning and growing to sustain

assets in community control over time. The interviews revealed that these processes are often characterised by trial and error, however, learning and developing does not happen immediately from one day to the next: rather it is experienced by continuous engagement and progress. The meaning and importance of this continuity is further explored in the next section.

### **7.2.2.Continuity**

Continuity refers to the duration of operations of an organisation which owns premises. The organisations operating for longer periods of time are able to build up reserves and capitals in several respects which facilitate a continued running of the organisation and ownership of physical assets.

Figure 17 – Coding hierarchy ‘continuity’



Continuity appears in several dimensions which cascade into various characteristics such as networking, being persistent, continuous development and historic meaning. In some cases, this historic meaning of either an organisation or a building greatly supports the preserving of these characteristics. For example, this may be the case for buildings which have been used for decades and are greatly appreciated by their community. For other cases, continuity is facilitated through continuous (business) activities. Continued running of an organisation allows building habits, not only for the organisation internally, but also for their users and communities. The relationship between an organisation and their community, offering and using services is not only mutually reinforcing but also mutually dependent. To maintain this relationship, organisations do

not only need to retain business or activity continuity, but also to continuously develop through time, to reinforce these bonds by meeting of changing needs.

The ability to develop through time is manifested in various ways (see Chapter 6): being willing to learn; allowing changes and fluctuation within the organisation; and being comfortable with innovations, makes development possible. Particularly, having the internal capacity to be prepared for change has turned out to be very beneficial for organisations to develop. Through their experiences, the organisations and individuals involved are capable of coping with, not only positive, but also negative impacts. Having diverse scenarios and tools at hand, even if simply an internally grown mindset of how to combat potential difficulties and being aware of possible negative side effects means organisations are able to overcome these challenges and continue to operate. But experiences and development are not the only contributions to continuity, willingness and ability to be persistent are also important.

Individuals being persistent has been a key feature for organisations in acquiring and running their own buildings. In the sample, organisations have experienced diverse routes to acquiring buildings and taking ownership of them. This highlights the diversity of local contexts and the complicated acquisition and ownership histories in different local contexts emphasises the difficulties in providing clear routes and guidance for these organisations, as well as for local authorities.

Acting naively also helps in maintaining persistence as it allows people involved to ignore the challenges accompanied to acquiring a physical asset.

Martha, Gatis: “We weren't ready, we didn't know what we were doing, we were just like: ‘Yeah, let's do it’. So, we did.”

Being persistent and following a certain aim can be related to being ideologically driven and deeply motivated. As there are rarely individual gains or personal interests to be pursued, the individuals involved need to be committed differently. This also exemplifies the inter-relationship of these dimensions perceived to be essential in community ownership of physical assets.

For a community-based, social organisation, it is essential to have networks in several dimensions to access required information, receive professional support, perform intended activities, and in turn to transfer self-acquired knowledge. Rather than financial spending on expertise, networking is a central feature which enables organisations to draw on assets which may be acquired through alternative routes.



Having good partnerships with other organisations and institutions can open new opportunities, such as making use of spare capacities.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “We use their training facilities; they use our pitch for [the] college game.”

Cooperating with others as a sub-code of ‘spare resources’ particularly describes how cooperation feeds into making use of spare resources. The example of the Gatis Community Space shows how cooperation helps not only the community organisation, but everyone involved.

Martha, Gatis: “Yeah, so we also work with other sort of fledgling businesses. So, one of our new volunteer directors is just in the process of setting up her own CIC, which is about training [and] mentoring people who've become recently unemployed. So, she's coming in onto one of the projects [...] in a training capacity. So, herself but also, she has got scope to hire the Centre at a reduced rate to run her own training programmes, so we are working in partnership with that and supporting [her]. ... I do a lot of bid-writing as one of my skills, so I offer support for some these other organisations with their bid-writing. We have got another organisation, Move Play café, who use the Centre as well as other areas and other centres across the city. They are leveraging some funding to improve our green space so they can use it, so they get free hire because they're putting in financial input. So, it's kind of like, ‘Yeah, what can you do for us? What can we do for you? How can we work together for best benefit for our community?’ And it's very exciting.”

Enabling others to benefit from a building and the available skills benefits both the community as the services become available to them, and the hosting organisation as they generate income by hiring out or, as in this case, by funding being brought in.

Establishing good relationships and having access to crucial information allows organisations to become embedded locally and to work out context-specific answers to specific problems. Having certain connections and knowing where to find required support or expertise may dictate whether an organisation can survive or not. The access to crucial information and resources can also vary widely, depending on the situation in which organisations owning their premises find themselves.

Having political contacts may help to speed up a council-related concern:

Dora, Bilston Football Club: “I probably would have got it [the permit], but would have taken me an awful lot time to get there, whereas one call to Pat, he put his secretary on, she knows someone in the Council who sorted it out, and three days later ... the number is in the account and that saved me six weeks of phoning and hanging on and stress.”

Patrick, Alt Valley: “I mean, to a certain extent we were lucky because I was working for the City Council at that time [in] various roles and I was looking after that building when it became empty, or after it became empty. So, you see the potential there.”

Knowing where to find urgently needed resources or knowledge is highlighted as a great advantage:

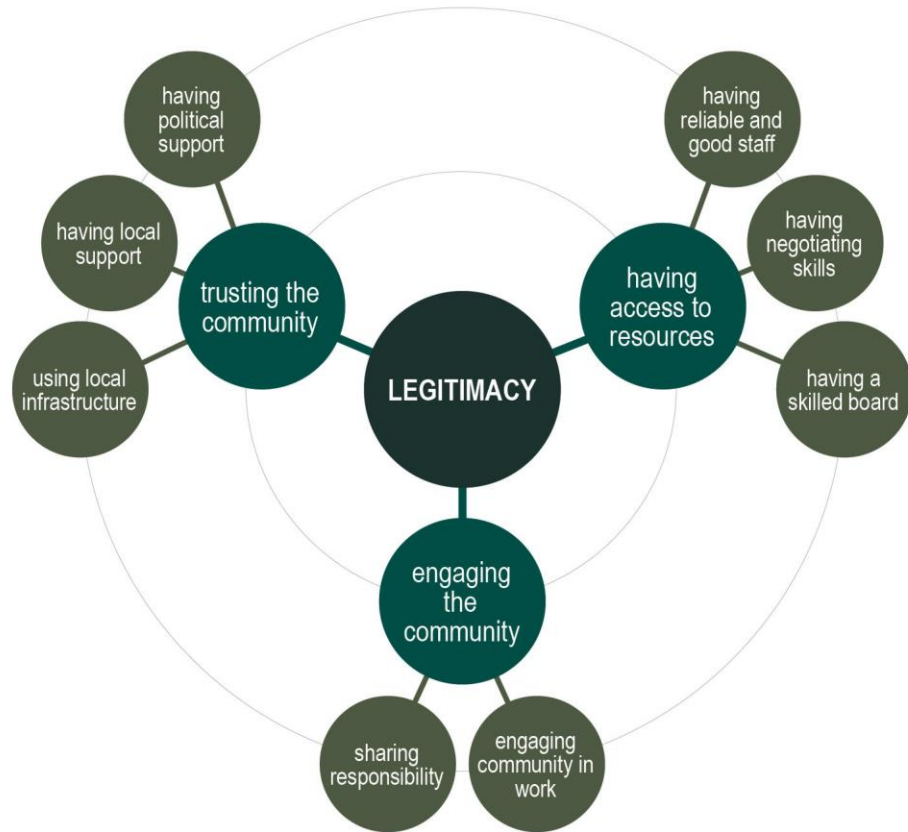
Patrick, Alt Valley: “What we get from outside agencies massively helps with the job that we’re doing.”

All these facets of continuity are, however, only possible when the organisation, their actions and the individuals involved are perceived to be legitimate. This legitimacy is interrelated and intertwined with both key dimensions - being ideologically driven and continuity - perceived as essential in community ownership of physical assets. This is further explored in the next section.

### **7.2.3. Legitimacy**

Owning an asset for and on behalf of a community may only be viable and successful if actions and organisational behaviour is considered to be legitimate by the concerned stakeholders. In the case of community owned assets, stakeholders can be the respective communities; the residents of the neighbourhood where the asset is based; the policy context and related institutions; funders; users and members of the community organisations and other involved individuals.

Figure 18 – Coding hierarchy 'legitimacy'



In general, ‘legitimacy’ describes the relationship between organisations and their environment: “organisations are legitimate to the extent that their activities are congruent with the goals or the superordinate system” (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975, p. 123). Legitimacy refers to the quality of being legal, reasonable and acceptable, and being fair and honest. Hence, there are several dimensions of legitimacy concerning community organisations owning assets. Whereas a legal legitimacy is generated via the legal forms of these organisations and their ownership arrangements, the social dimension of legitimacy may be granted by acceptance of and support for these organisations by their users and local community.

While interviewees did not question or address their own legitimacy concerning their activities and behaviours, all the respondents’ organisations had been in existence long

periods and are perceived to successfully own their premises and run activities in accordance with their context-specific conditions, and the interviewees revealed several circumstances which relate to and represent their legitimacy. The acceptance and support granted facilitate successful running of organisations responsible for the buildings occupied.

Engaging the community in organisational processes is described as key to providing high quality services which respond to local needs and are accepted as legitimate. Engaging local people in the organisation's activities generates, on the one hand, shared ownership of tasks, and on the other hand, ensures any actions are legitimate because responsibility is shared.

Successfully running an organisation which owns premises requires high levels of input at different levels of operation, ranging from socially related work to engage people and communities, to financial accounting skills and meeting legal regulations. Having all these skills available is not only a question of accessing the right people, but also, of being able to motivate skilled individuals to engage with the organisations and their services. People with the relevant skills may only be available if requested input is legitimate and trustworthy. Being trusted by the community allows individuals to become active on behalf of a larger group and to operate buildings and develop and offer services; and trusting the community enables services to be implemented. Hence, the reciprocal relationship of trust reflects a central necessity - without trust, responsibilities could not be shared, and spaces could not be legitimately community-owned. The importance of trust in relation to legitimacy was demonstrated by the interviewees in terms of being valued and supported. The support available to the organisations ranges from the political sphere to very practical input.

Sarah, ETNA: "We had the support of the councillors and the other borough."

Dora, Bilston Football Club: "Whatever's presented to you, you just get on with it, if you don't know where to turn, then I've got lots of people I can refer to."

Victoria, ETNA: "The centre is always open, and we run on a trust basis as well where we don't have security. We're there in the office on Monday to Fridays but any other time, people have their own keys and they run their groups and they lock up. And it's quite incredible. [...] And just do it, and it works. And I think this trust is a really important thing."

Diana, Alt Valley: “What we’re trying to do, how we're going to do it and being accountable for what we do. I think it's that what makes trust work.”

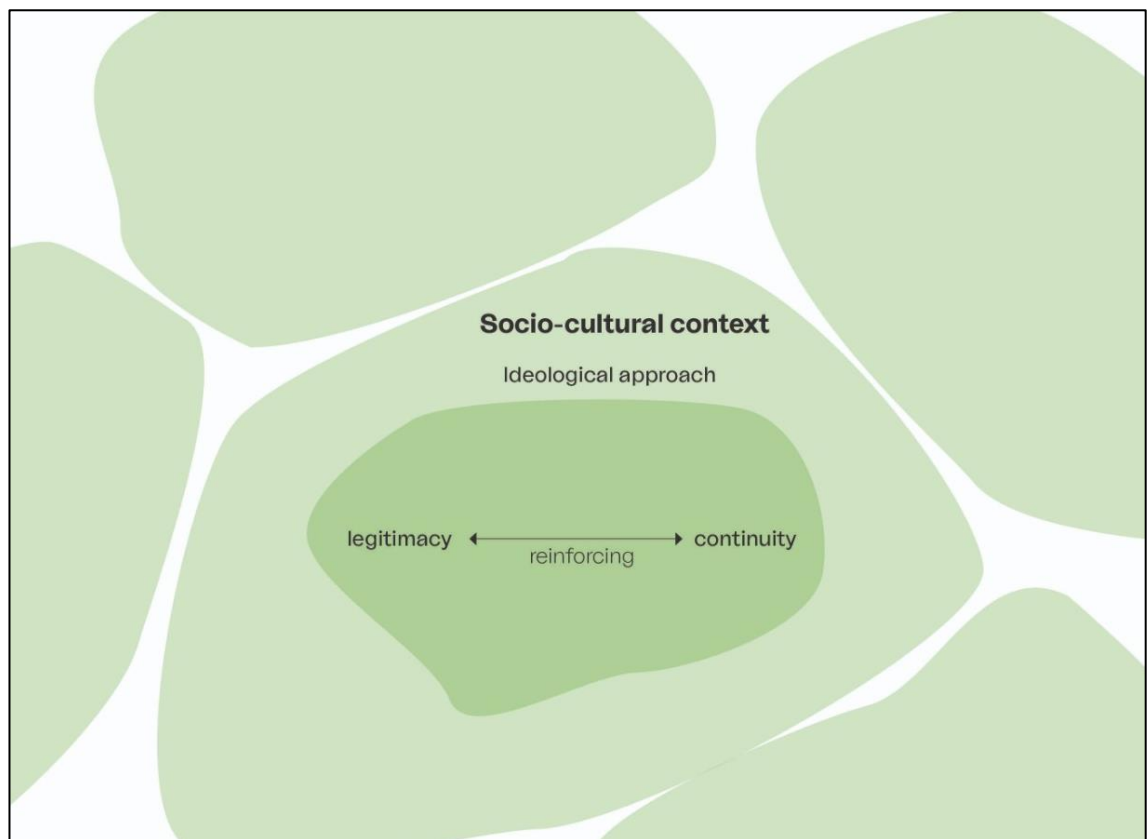
Martha, Gatis: “Yeah, what's changed is people trust us. I think we've added a lot of respect throughout the pandemic because we have carried on.”

Legitimacy, continuity and being ideologically driven form an interdependent and mutually re-enforcing relationship on which successful community ownership of physical assets rests and depends. These other essential assets describe characteristics which facilitate social organisations to run their organisations on a non-profit basis and simultaneously generate enough stability in a neo-liberal capitalistic context to bear the legal as well as financial responsibility for a physical asset.

Figure 19 shows how these essential assets are embedded in a socio-cultural and economic context which affects the lived ideological approach. The ideological approach may oppose public policies such as closure and austerity or may reinforce attitudes towards alternative scenarios which are perceived to be desirable and aspirational by those involved. Both aspects are mutually dependent and reinforcing. Changes in the socio-cultural and economic context can affect the desired outcomes and lived ideology and vice versa; whereas the practiced ethical approaches may have less transformative potential as changes at the micro level require aggregation in order to cause adjustments on a macro level (e.g., social mechanisms (Hedström & Swedberg, 1996)).

Continuity and legitimacy are embedded within this ideological setting; and again, are two concepts which are mutually dependent and reinforcing. Legitimacy allows practices to continue, and continuity generates legitimacy as illegitimate actions are less likely to continue over time. Several characteristics of legitimacy and continuity are interrelated. *Being supported*, for example, not only refers to action being legitimate but also contributes to continuity. Further support is essential for organisations to own their premises, particularly needing alternatives to paid services, such as voluntary input. Establishing and maintaining relationships not only allows continuity as resources and knowledge could be exchanged, but also may demonstrate that actors and actions are legitimate due to providing insights onto organisations and their operations.

*Figure 19 – Visualisation of theoretical interrelation of ideologically driven socio-cultural context and the embedded dimension of continuity and legitimacy*



This duality facilitates organisations in confronting challenges and fulfilling several roles which may require them take on responsibilities and liabilities which are neither intended nor desired. Embedded in changing socio-cultural contexts, community organisations are facilitated by individuals having ideological motivations which are shared among others in the local context, and enabled by legitimate actions and actors over time which generates continuity.

Although this analysis tries to separate, distinguish, and order the different themes and related characteristics, closer investigation highlights how intertwined the derived concepts are and how mutually dependent and reinforcing they are. Rather than considering the different elements as separate ‘silos’, theoretical abstraction suggests treating these as embedded in contexts. This helps to represent, explain, and make sense of interrelated factors.

In Figure 19, the green spheres represent different contexts and fields which co-exist and sometimes overlap. These are not static, but rather, represent continuously floating

and changing spheres. The dynamic environment in which ideology, legitimacy and continuity are embedded emphasises continuous change and adaptation.

Rather than perceiving the importance of community ownership of physical assets as a distinct factor of increased significance, the impacts and other necessary non-material assets indicate that ownership is one part in a process which facilitates ownership on various levels.

Assembling these insights by adding a processual understanding and highlighting the role of human agency in the phenomenon of community ownership indicates the importance of mechanisms of hybridisation (see Chapter 3.3.3) and how they enable communities to successfully manage ownership and control of physical assets.

The incorporation of diverse institutional logics aimed at overcoming the challenges experienced in maintaining assets in community control plays into the processual nature of community ownership. The ability to adapt and make use of what is presented to those involved in their specific context can be explored from the perspective of the concept of ‘opportunity context’.

### **7.3. The emergency of the opportunity context, the importance of human agency and a processual approach**

To understand the importance and meaning of ownership of physical assets on behalf of and for a community, the research explored the different impacts, challenges and liabilities. The main insight was that in practice and from an emotional and idealistic perspective, ownership *per se* is a decisive factor as it equips community organisations with spaces to use and in which to generate communities. However, in the interviews, ownership was not foregrounded and was not reported to be as important and empowering as the current public narrative suggests. Ownership is equated with the provision of community spaces, but this provision requires more than ownership alone. As expressed by many interviewees, the understanding of ownership is largely attached to the legal concept.

Dora, Bilston Football Club: “So, the stadium is owned by the Council, but we got a lease.”

This indicates that in these settings, the idea and image of ownership is not particularly important but rather one factor in the context of opportunities present to organisations and individuals involved. What makes ownership a vital aspect of community-owned spaces beyond the legal entitlement is the human agency in the processes of facilitating and providing these spaces – processes which are both dependent on and feed into the larger opportunity context.

An opportunity context is defined by the available resources in terms of material as well as non-material assets and the organisations and individuals’ abilities to make use of them to benefit their communities and to maintain the assets, the activities and organisations generally under prevailing contextual circumstances. The more resources available to community organisations, the greater the likelihood of them being able to maintain and successfully run physical assets for and on behalf of communities.

This is valid for financial and material resources as well as for immaterial assets such as legitimacy and continuity.

As elaborated above, the components of legitimacy, continuity and being ideologically driven are closely related and intertwined. The interplay of these immaterial processual assets allows organisations to recognise, access and realise opportunities. Hence, the cycles of ideological motivation, continuity and legitimacy feed into the opportunity context in the same way that the material asset of a physical space does.



Figure 20 – The concept of the opportunity context



The opportunity context of community organisations as conceptualised as processual can be applied to several circumstances. The following paragraphs describe how the process takes place in relation to ownership.

The resources available - for example a building, skills and particular expertise within the community, financial income generated by trading activities, etc. - are the material and non-material assets which are in the next step configured by the actors involved.

The configuration is facilitated by processes of ideological motivation, continuity and legitimacy, which unfold over time along with processes of incremental hybridisation. The organisations and assets position themselves in different fields they are engaging with and by processes of physical space making they generate communities, relationships and allow resources to be recognised, activated and mobilised. These are

in the case of community ownership of physical assets used to provide these community owned spaces.

The physical asset has a distinct function, as ownership by communities is only realised through the willingness to create community spaces. Providing and shaping physical space by and for a community is facilitated by taking on active ownership beyond the legal definition by co-designing spaces and their use. Space and place consist of, and are generated by, relationships and interactions. Facilitating these interactions to take place in practice and enabling spaces to be used are conditions under which spaces are generated. The indirect impacts of ownership on place, identity and community making in form of inclusion, embeddedness, empowerment, and continuous development may unfold.

Linda, Coningsby Village Hall: “Because the facility is there for them to use ... I mean, if it wasn't there, they wouldn't be able to use it and they wouldn't be able to raise their funds and wouldn't be able to meet. So yeah, in fact it [the building] is important.”

However, ownership and the physical provision of spaces are heavily dependent on external factors, other actors and institutions, the prevailing conditions and available resources. To better understand the phenomenon of community ownership of physical assets and how and why it works and is beneficial in local contexts, it appeared to be of greater importance to emphasise and focus on the individual configuration of contextual influencing factors and processes. The configuration is not static and approaching it from a processual understanding in which human agency facilitates an optimal usage of the given opportunities, demonstrates the importance of this opportunity context.

Martha, Gatis: “[It’s about] trying to make use of upcoming opportunities - not just about challenges.”

### **7.3.1. The configuration of opportunities**

Interviews indicated that community ownership of physical assets was experienced as challenging, but at the same time, also beneficial. In order to overcome the challenges and liabilities accompanying ownership and taking additional responsibility, the given, and often constraining, opportunity context must be taken advantage of.

Exploring the indirect, immediate, and explicit challenges and liabilities as consequences of community ownership of physical assets revealed the different levels and layers of impacts ownership has on organisations, their activities and respective communities. Depending on the perspective, many impacts can be perceived as challenging in general. For some, *professionalising* was experienced as a logical consequence of activities, whereas for others, this was not intended or desired. Irrespective of the individual perception and valuation of the impacts and challenges of ownership, all the identified issues interplay and affect the organisation's opportunity context. How these opportunities unfold and whether the processes have negative, transformative or positive consequences depends heavily on the local human agency; this agency shapes the incremental ways of change; hybridisation; and how the organisations and individuals navigate between different responsibilities, configurations and constellations.

The different impacts of ownership on organisations, activities and communities are facets of the experienced realities of those involved in owning an asset on behalf of and for a community. These impacts, depending on the context and perspective, can be perceived as beneficial or limiting or can be sources of adjustments to generate a configuration of opportunities within the local context which allows the maintenance and provision of community spaces.

Fulfilling unexpected roles, professionalisation and resource constraints can all be described as having negative effects on the organisation's abilities and resources to provide socially oriented services and community spaces dedicated to social purposes. However, the consequences of fulfilling unexpected roles allows individuals to grow beyond their original expertise and opens up new opportunities to the local contexts. Closely related to, and intertwined with, the dimension of professionalisation, this growth enables actors to enter new fields and position themselves, their organisations, communities and assets within these fields to optimise their access to resources, whether material or immaterial.

Resource constraints pose the additional challenge of limiting the opportunities within a context, although not equally in each context as the configuration of available resources differs depending on the human agency involved.

Often shortcomings in one dimension are compensated for by contributions of different types of other assets. Financial constraints are overcome by engaging members of the community with, for example, needed expertise, or services being changed or being set

up for the lowest cost possible. These practical limitations are largely compensated for by the immediate impacts of ownership and by providing a community space: through processes of inclusion, embeddedness, and empowerment, organisations are enabled to tap into the fields of further, often hidden, assets available in the local community.

The strategic ability to configure and assemble available assets and to use the possibilities of the given fields depends on the capability to understand different rules and conditions. Using Bourdieu's vocabulary (see Chapter 3), fields are understood as the components of the social world, the arenas of different practices. Applying this at an organisational level and exploring the different practices community organisations engage in, these fields are expanded by practices relating to the ownership, management and running a physical building. The available capitals define the fields an organisation engages in (for example, which practices are pursued, such as music, food, politics, etc.), and what position the entity takes within the field. Configuring these capitals and improving the position within fields may only become possible by internalising and utilising different institutional logics while negotiating and balancing the motives and internal values to maintain the ideological motivation of those involved, the continuity and legitimacy of the organisations and their respective assets and actions.

### **7.3.2. Conflicting logics and the importance of negotiation and the process of hybridisation: the example of the policy and the public contexts**

Ownership of physical assets on behalf of and for communities not only spatially opens up new opportunities, but also leads to new fields of interaction and responsibilities.

Dependency on the policy context (explored in Chapter 6) involves the public domain as a complex system with many agents operating alongside each other rather than collaboratively. This lack of collaboration affects the ability to work together to deliver coherent strategies and generate outcomes which are beneficial to the local public sphere and to community organisations operating in the third sector.

The conflicting interests and the power imbalances between political actors and the third sector usually create an inherent dependency of community organisations on the *good*

*will* of, for example, local councillors. Adhering to official procedures and requirements removes crucial resources from organisations and their communities. The dimensions in which the reliance on the policy context unfolds highlight how complex the relationship between organisations and their local council can become.

The community organisations are exposed to a public ‘logic’ which is not necessarily to their benefit and represents one of the challenges of being subject to a different paradigm (see Chapter 6). The organisations need to maintain their integrity in terms of their mission and vision and the implementation of their activities. The necessity to navigate and overcome problems posed by contrasting and contradicting paradigms is, in some cases, a burden on the organisations and represents a challenge which they are exposed to, particularly in relation to their asset – be it because they only have a lease, or are awaiting official agreement to a sale, or financial support from their council.

The core category of being subject to different paradigms highlights the aspect of human agency in addressing the explicit challenges as well as the impacts of ownership on organisations, their activities and the communities. This core category highlights the dichotomy in which organisations operate.

The social aims and objectives and an ideological approach driving and motivating local community organisations are exposed to neo-liberal and capitalistic logics. This divide creates a need to professionalise which requires organisations to adhere to other obligations beyond their initial intentions and build up capacities and expertise which they often do not have available. This key tension is continuously (re)negotiated and decisively affects the opportunity context of organisations and individuals.

Many factors and challenges which impact on the survival and success of organisations are nested within this dichotomy. They range from the very practical implications of owning a physical asset to the immaterial assets necessary to run a building. Decisions on how resources are used tend to be made in the tensions between at least two conflicting paradigms requiring constant negotiation. There has been an increasing trend in the third sector and other (overlapping) fields towards

“intensified competition within the third sector, and between sectors, for scarce resources, exacerbated by austerity measures; the increasing reach and scale of more conditional forms of public funding, associated with commissioning and procurement; growing demands for accountability, particularly in demonstrating the impact of activities; and the development of social investment, associated with the growing marketisation of public services and commercialisation of the third sector” (Macmillan, 2015, p. 106).

This has not only changed the landscape of social services, but has substantially affected the requirements imposed on social organisations, their governance, the expectations of stakeholders and the ability to satisfy various needs and purposes. How organisations adapt to changing contexts and simultaneously position and use systems to their own benefit by optimising their opportunity context can shed light on how the incremental processes of hybridisation facilitate this optimisation. To restate Mullins et al.'s (2012) approach explored in Chapter 3, a different understanding becomes possible by “focusing on dynamic processes of hybridisation rather than static descriptions of hybridity, ... setting these processes in a broader social and political context and ... [focusing on] underlying change mechanisms such as competing organisational logics, trade-offs between social and commercial goals [...]” (Mullins et al., 2012, p. 410).

These processes not only concern the organisation's economic performance, but also affect the integration of various institutional logics. Taking a processual approach to examining the key challenge of being subject to different paradigms explains how localities develop differently in relation to their contexts, evolve over time and adapt in alignment with a specific opportunity context which continuously changes. These hybridisation processes allow an understanding of how physical assets not only become challenges, but are as well, experienced and realised as beneficial for local contexts, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals. The physical asset represents a factor which plays into the respective opportunity context and opens up many further cascading opportunities.

## **7.4. Conclusion**

This chapter has approached the other essential assets identified as necessary to own a physical asset for an on behalf of a community. The interviewees did not foreground ownership as a particularly important factor, but experienced ownership as one of a larger mix of necessary assets to maintain and provide spaces devoted to social and community purposes. Hence, the importance and meaning of ownership should be understood and conceptualised as one factor feeding into the respective opportunity context of the localities at stake.

The other essential assets, beyond the physical, were identified as ‘being ideologically driven’, ‘continuity’ and ‘legitimacy’.

Ideology was understood of consisting of beliefs and values which influence how social groups behave: it is developed and maintained by social groups and can have a strong link with behaviour. Considering this in the context of community ownership, the related beliefs and values allow the respective organisations, groups and individuals to overcome ownership-related difficulties and is a source of motivation to realise, provide and sustain community spaces. This ideology was identified as key in maintaining and sustaining physical assets irrespective of emerging challenges associated with the complexities of owning.

Further, continuity was identified as a characteristic which not only allows the development of solution-oriented mechanisms and models over time, but also enables long-term embeddedness into the local contexts. Continuity therefore contributes to the capabilities of maximising opportunities, as it enables internal learning and the accumulation of knowledge while increasing the ability to access and establish local relationship and networks and activate resources for the organisation’s purposes. Continuity may generate legitimacy in relation to stakeholders like local communities and councils.

Legitimacy was in turn identified as key in ownership of physical assets as it allows the implementation and realisation of activities in community-owned assets. Being legitimate in the eyes of local stakeholders such as involved communities and councils, neighbours, residents and other voluntary sector groups, requires continuous balancing of actions and internalised logics. Legitimacy helps to access different fields and resources and increases available capitals. However, legitimacy depends on the perspective and context and needs to be developed and maintained over time through continuity and being accountable.

Legitimacy as a key asset while simultaneously representing a major tension for community organisations, in particular, concerning processes of hybridisation. Incorporating different institutional logics needs to be carefully balanced and managed in order to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of various stakeholders.

Continuity and legitimacy are interdependent and mutually reinforcing: legitimacy can be generated through continuity. Councils may come to recognise community organisations owning and maintaining assets as legitimate once the organisations have

operated for a period of time and prove to be reliable and capable of taking on additional responsibility.

The interdependent factors of continuity and legitimacy are facilitated by ideology and organisational and individual motivation.

All together these assets of ideology, continuity and legitimacy feed into the opportunity context of organisations and are necessary in order to identify, mobilise and activate resources within their respective contexts.

Ownership in general, and the community ownership of physical assets, have been equated with the provision of community spaces. However, ownership is only one part of the larger opportunity context which determines whether provision while owning is sustainable. The analysis revealed that changing the perspective from a focus on characteristics towards a processual one shifts the importance and meaning of ownership in terms of its position and highlights the social processes of continuity, legitimacy and being ideologically driven as decisive in facilitating ownership over time.

A processual approach identifies the continuous balancing, negotiating and configuring of the respective opportunity context by the actors involved. The continuous processes of hybridisation, the incorporation of different institutional logics to improve positioning within different fields of engagement which emerge, for example, through ownership, have positive impacts on the opportunity context.

The empirics of the research illustrate Bourdieu's theories of habitus, fields and capitals: intrinsic motivation enables individuals to grow beyond their initial habitus and facilitates the acquisition of additional skills and resources. In Bourdieu's terms, the value-based motivation in combination with the confrontation and experience of existing needs allows individuals to grow and move beyond their initial set of 'fields', accessing what is necessary to maintain assets, and provide support to their local context. These fields are understood as the components of the social world, the arenas of different practices, which are expanded by practices relating to the ownership, management and running a physical building. The available capitals define the fields an organisation engages in and what position the entity takes within the field. Configuring these capitals and improving the position within fields may only become possible by internalising different institutional logics while negotiating and balancing the motives and internal values to maintain the ideological motivation of those involved, the



continuity and legitimacy of the organisations and their respective assets and actions, and ultimately the respective opportunity context.

The following chapters utilise this conceptualisation of the opportunity context to explore the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on organisations owning physical assets.

# **Chapter Eight – Exploring the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Organisations owning Assets**

## **8.1 Introduction**

The previous chapters explored the importance of ownership of physical assets and the experiences and perceptions of those involved and revealed that ownership is one factor in a larger mix of other essential resources necessary to own, maintain and manage a physical asset. Ownership was not foregrounded by the interviewees, but rather a processual understanding of the respective opportunity contexts emerged as relevant. As explored in Chapter 7, an opportunity context is defined by the available resources in terms of material as well as non-material assets and the organisations' and individuals' abilities to make use of them to benefit their communities, to maintain the assets, the activities and organisations generally under prevailing contextual circumstances. The more resources available to the community organisations, the higher the likelihood of them being able to maintain and successfully run physical assets for and on behalf of communities. However, more resources do not inevitably lead to better outcomes, rather the importance lies within the purposes and circumstances under which the resources are put to use.

Hence, ownership becomes an element of the local opportunity context. This concept is applied to exploring the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on organisations owning physical assets by identifying how the pandemic changed their respective opportunity contexts.

The pandemic was an exceptional incident which had effects on realities experienced at various levels - individual, relational, social, spatial - and at the levels of communities, meso- and macro-economic trends and outcomes, and in the short- to mid- and long-term.

There have been several different shocks in the past decades which significantly changed the operational contexts for community organisations owning physical assets for community purposes: however, none of these crises changed the practical usage of

the assets as drastically as the pandemic did. In contrast, the number of community owned assets has increased in the last ten years since the financial crisis 2008/09 (Aiken, Cairns, Taylor, & Moran, 2011; Hobson, Lynch, Roberts, & Payne, 2019). Cuts in public budgets have caused accelerated asset disposal by public bodies which reinforced the existing disposal agenda imposed by the central government (see Chapter 2). In addition to this, disposal legislation was changed and eased acquisition of assets by community groups before these were offered publicly. Although pre-pandemic conditions were already difficult because of decreasing funding and increasing competition, and formerly public tasks and responsibilities were being taken up by the third sector to fill the lack of public responses to social problems, the pandemic threatened the past achievements of community groups' work in the third sector.

Since then, community organisations have been identifying different and new ways to maintain their community value and continue the support they can provide for their community's needs. For some of these support services, buildings have been important, for others the organisational capacity, reputation and networks and connections have been critical.

The adaptation of the research questions and aim (see Chapter 1) has enabled the developments and consequences of the pandemic to be captured in real time. The research is concerned with physical places which are community-owned and managed and the importance ownership has for the respective contexts. The interviews were conducted during times of lockdowns and social isolation and were characterised by feelings of high uncertainty, stresses around the future and the lack of significant guidance or assistance to help navigate through the pandemic. Understandable, participants felt a great need to talk about the pandemic in my fieldwork, to discuss the complications and difficulties for the organisation, their personal fates and individual stories. The amount of data was large, not only because of the research method of grounded theory, but particularly because of this need to discuss what was happening at the time. Therefore, this chapter explores the main insights into the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic by summarising the reactions and responses, the challenges and the emerging roles and responsibilities experienced by community organisations and their assets in the aftermath of the pandemic.

## **8.2. Reactions and responses to the pandemic**

The reactions and responses to the pandemic and its direct impacts on communities, organisations and buildings depended on the respective contexts, the different localities and specific circumstances of the case studies, their assets and main activities. Amongst the case studies only the Community Shop was permitted by Covid-19 guidance to remain open as it was providing an essential grocery retail service; the assets of other case studies all had to temporarily close their doors.

Although the forms and extent of pandemic related impacts were context-specific and differed in the degree of closure, the following key themes emerged across all cases: 1) adapting quickly; 2) responding to new needs and opportunities; and 3) ‘getting people to the other side’ of the pandemic.

The following sections explore these aggregated themes and figures will provide more insights into the coding hierarchies and the elements of the key themes.

### **8.2.1. Adapting quickly**

Although responses and reactions were context-specific, all organisations were required to adapt quickly on various levels, ranging from individual behaviour to organisational strategies.

For example, before the first lockdown was announced on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020 many of the participating organisations had already started to prepare and were able to adapt quickly in reacting to subsequent developments.

Martha, Gatis: “It was interesting, because we had our parade which was supposed to happen on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March last year [2020] and we saw what was happening and we took the early decision to cancel quite quickly.”

Sophie, Alt Valley: “I mean, obviously before Covid hit and before we went into the first lock down, we all knew something was coming along ... we all knew something was bubbling. So, we organised a meeting of community leaders which obviously included also our Ward Councillors as well. During the meeting we split up into different groups to discuss what we thought the impact might be on our

communities. So, trying to pre-empt the impact, what may happen, and then put things in place. So, when it did happen, we were [...] ready to go and it was a great example of how that happens. We literally had the meeting and then it was the following week we went into lockdown. But because we started the discussions, because we started that way, when it happened, we all knew what we had to do in order to support our communities and probably the most vulnerable within our communities and that our food hub was set up.”

Many interviewees described the requirement to react quickly and emphasised the need for ad hoc action. For some organisations, the immediate changes required them to either fully close or adapt their spatial management of individuals entering the premises.

The Village Shop was considered as essential and hence was not affected by forced closure. The Football Club in contrast, was considered as sports and leisure facilities, and irrespective of their community and social focus, were not allowed to perform any activities on their premises. This was specific to the kind of asset and their form of ownership which was not seen as being a community organisation.

The organisations used the first downtime of forced closure to take care of their buildings, reflect and elaborate how to best help their local community in the short term. An important aspect which was reported as being key to adaptation during a time of high uncertainty was the mindset and ability to see positives in the developments:

Victoria, ETNA: “Okay fine, what can I do, how can I turn this into an opportunity?”

During the course of the pandemic risks and infection levels changed, the government continuously re-evaluated the situation and implemented new rules and regulations, varying from national lockdown measures to regional and local tier systems. Consequently, many organisations not only had to quickly adapt to national lockdown in March 2020, but also had to continuously reassess the situation and react rapidly depending on the then current measures in place.

Diana, Alt Valley: “That flexibility was already one of the things that we had in place already. It's even more needed now. [...] Covid-19 - that's been something, as much as you could plan for something to happen and risks and the business, I think this has hit ourselves and a lot of other people massively. I can't underestimate it. But I think the way we responded, the organisation was already quite agile in the way it operates and quite flexible. [...] We can change quite quickly, and we can respond.”

The ability described by Diana relates to processes of professionalisation and diversification as explored in Chapter 6. The interviewees described being prepared and organised as an important aspect of adapting quickly. Preparation took place in developing solutions to potential scenarios before these became reality. Simultaneously, organisations prepared for difficult times and reacted by shrinking their organisations by furloughing and laying off staff and tried to get work done as best as possible.

Martha, Gatis: “That was a massive learning curve for everybody involved because we had completely changed, we had to create new systems, we had to create new marketing, monitoring, help for people.”

This allowed people to help themselves and each other, while at the same time, the alternative services offered by the community anchor organisations contributed to mitigating difficulties. The speedy adaptations and changes the pandemic made necessary led to ad hoc reactions and responses not only on a community organisation level, but particularly on a community level.

Sebastian, Gatis: “I think it has brought people together. And I know that a lot more networks and partnerships have been made.”

Further research accompanied community related adaptation process and how these formed to provide responses to the pandemic such as the Local Trust Rapid Research Covid-19 project (Paine et al., 2022). The main insights from this project are:

“[...] All the communities [...] followed have acted resourcefully in their different contexts and circumstances. However, some community responses have appeared to be more comprehensive, more strategic and more inclusive than others; [...] more comprehensive, strategic and inclusive responses to COVID-19 arose in communities where there was a strong network of community leaders, extensive connections between existing community activities and strong relationships with local authorities, although other factors were also important; [and] while all [...] explanations shaped how community responses to COVID-19 developed and unfolded, none alone could explain the differences between communities. It was the combination of all these factors which together accounted for the differences between community responses” (Paine et al., 2022, p. 3-4).

These key findings resonate with the findings of this study. The differences in adaptation processes formed various responses to meet new needs while taking advantage of emerging opportunities.

### 8.2.2. Responding to new needs and opportunities

In alignment with the Covid rules and regulations, the case study organisations developed new formats and ideas about how to support their communities with services to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. These responses not only helped in the short-term but for some, processes transformed the organisation's ways to arrange, design, and implement ideas and activities.

The responses from the third sector and the studied community organisations were ad hoc, creative and manifold to meet new emerging needs and take advantage of opportunities and are explored in the following sections.

#### Moving online

Due to the limited possibilities for engaging with and providing help for the local community, the simplest and most available way was to move online and make use of information and communication technologies to: organise internally; provide activities and programmes; disseminate information; and engage with the local community.

Online tools were also used to maintain internal communication and management. This enabled community organisations to react to the new circumstances in a connected way. However, it also caused difficulties and increased workloads in order to make use of formerly unknown tools and procedures.

Martha, Gatis: "Coz you're so busy embroiled with it, and [are] there on the computer writing bids and trying to do online meetings with team members who don't know how to use computers."

Charlotte, Gatis: "We do everything remote [...] we're having to get used to all the Zoom meeting [laughing]. Don't know, we're doing a lot of events online, like workshops, cafes which people can just join in, drink a cup of coffee and just have a chat. We have noticed that there are some regular people that turned up for the events. Feeling we are some sort of [...] a boost to the community, I think."

Educational classes, yoga sessions, reading and storytelling, and information events took place virtually. The new format not only affected activities the organisations already performed but allowed more ideas to be developed which could be performed online. This temporarily compensated for the lack of access to the physical building.

Connor, Kirkgate Arts: “So we have done a stream of a string of online performances, YouTube or Facebook. We have [...] commissioned a local theatre maker to make a new drama on film; we had an online discussion with a local author who has just produced a book [...] an area adjacent to us. So, we have been able to continue to present some forms of entertainment.”

Taking communication and services online has also created opportunities for remote working which might have not been thought as possible before. In this regard, community organisations do not differ from for profit organisations and businesses in the effects of the pandemic that enabled different ways of working to emerge.

Diana, Alt Valley: “We could offer [services], we could work remotely. One of the things to come from Covid is [that] we [...] in terms of remote working and sort of online delivery will supplement what we do.”

Shifting services and information online was an ad hoc solution for the social distancing measures being implemented to reduce the spread of the pandemic, but it also caused difficulties for the asset-owning organisations, particularly financially:

Sophie, Alt Valley: “So we have started this time around, we have organised some Zoom classes and stuff like that, but there is no charge for it, it's not bringing any income. Because you can't charge somebody to do a Zoom exercise class really, it's more about the wellbeing. We are doing some of this and our adult education seems to have moved a little bit more online as well. So, we get funded to do the adult education classes [...], but then it's more distance learning supported by WhatsApp groups and stuff like that. We are trying to find a way of around with some things you can't move online. You can't move everything online.”

While shifting online helped in many ways, as Sophie highlights not everything could be moved online. Hence, new ideas and models were developed to offer services to communities while using available resources such as community owned buildings.

### **Developing new activities and services**

The physical assets are valued by communities and utilised under normal conditions to respond to local needs and for community activities. However, the pandemic removed this characteristic which differentiates these community organisations from other third sector and voluntary organisations: the availability and self-determined use of the physical asset they own. The social value of physical meeting space increased because of recognising the importance through its absence. The pandemic highlighted the



difference of ownership by third sector organisations driven by community in contrast to economic actors:

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “And I think you'll be seeing the community resources that won't come back after this pandemic. We're already seeing it in hospitality, we're already seeing it in other sectors, the economy, clearly [the] retail sector will be decimated. 190,000 people in Britain lost their jobs in retail since the pandemic started. So, things which are privately owned; things which are owned by capital; things which are remote from the community - a number of these things won't come back. Things which are owned by the community which are of the community, will come back. So, I think it is really hard to overstate the importance of that model. And that gives me some optimism for future really. There is not too much to be optimistic about. The fact that we own it, and we got some control over it, means it will come back. Things you got no ownership or control over, we wouldn't be able to do anything, would we?”

Although they were affected financially and in terms of other resources, the community ownership model, as Peter shows, allowed the organisations to remain active. The pandemic disrupted the organisations' daily business, nonetheless, some were able to use the time in not only developing practical ways of maintaining engagement, but also at a strategic level by refocussing the core of the organisation and its activities. Alt Valley has an extensive managerial and strategic capacity since their development and activity dates back more than 30 years and their history highlights the importance of having strategies and planning behind actions. Despite the difficulties the pandemic caused at the strategic level, the organisation was able to appreciate the difficult circumstances, at least in some respects.

Patrick, Alt Valley: “We regrouped and refocused back to making sure that we're community focused more than ever.”

By being in the position of having to actively change the organisation's operations, Alt Valley utilised that opportunity to re-evaluate the tasks which they may have taken on only because of certain circumstances rather than actively seeking them. Hence, as Patrick highlights, the refocussing of the organisation on their community which the organisation emerged from was only possible due to the pandemic being a major disruption.

Patrick, Alt Valley: “But it gives us that time [...] ... because we were literally in the house or few of us in the building ... it has given time to sit back and think about it sooner rather than later. Coz we were in the process of looking at the new strategy and what that would mean [...] It's really difficult in reality, in human terms, you know ... what's going on. But we have got to look forward, we have got a big optimism about

it. That's what we are, we are an optimistic, challenging organisation. So, we are looking to the future, dealing with what we have got now, responding as best as we can to help our communities at the moment, but looking forward and rethink post-this to an exciting future.”

The new ways and activities developed enabled refocussing on the community and became a long-term guidance to maintain their facilities as well as the ideational construction of those as assets, particularly during times of prohibited use of physical buildings. The nature of third sector community organisations is predisposed to work with, and take advantage of, whatever is available or presented to them. Processes of professionalisation and facing constraints enabled them to learn how to maintain assets, whether material or non-material.

The other organisations in the study experienced similar processes of refocussing and concentrating on important activities and services. Alongside these long-term strategic changes, new practical formats and activities were developed to respond to needs during the pandemic.

To maintain and use the facilities, community organisations became active and creative in developing new formats and activities. The necessity of operating under severely limited conditions enabled individuals and organisations to think outside their usual organisational structures and modes of operations. Although community organisations owning physical assets are often quite inventive, the pandemic generated situations in which none of the organisations had existing expertise.

New activities were developed in accordance with the Covid-19 rules and regulations in place by using their available resources to respond to the needs emerging in communities.

At Gatis, the outdoor area used to be an adventure playground and had an important role from the very beginning as the organisation particularly focused on outdoor activities. The pandemic increased the significance and value of the available outdoor spaces and the opportunities that came along with them.

Martha, Gatis: “ ... the advantage of having an outdoor space is huge because obviously outdoor activities are a lot safer. So, in the summer we were going to open the grounds, we created a crazy golf course in the grounds which can be put out or not. And we were going to offer it open as a booked ... you could book a family bubble or whatever to come and have an hour and then the next family.”

Gatis developed new formats and offered the opportunity for households to get out and use the space, as explained by Martha above. This supported vulnerable community members, as spaces could be used free of charge, and spaces to go to as a family and for family activities had become scarce even prior to the pandemic (see Chapter 6).

ETNA made use of their gardens surrounding the community centre in a similar way. During the pandemic construction works were undertaken to improve their outdoor space which then could be used to organise shared lunches in accordance with Covid-19 restrictions.

Using outdoor spaces were periodically possible during lockdown and the peak of the pandemic. However, at different times and depending on the abilities of the different community organisations, other models were developed to maintain engagement with local communities. The interviewees generally recognised a considerable increase in demand and therefore increased their range of services. There was a twofold increase: in numbers of people in need; and in types of needs in their communities. The asset allowed the organisations to have the flexibility to develop differently and reimagine what they could offer.

The Village Shop, for example, experienced an increase in local customers, as many people used the opportunity to do their shopping locally rather than going by car and exposing themselves to other people in bigger supermarkets.

Daniel, Ashton Keynes Village Shop: “Covid-19 has had a dramatic effect because of course, convenience stores [takings and turnover] have just gone up and up and up. [...] Our business turnover is, I guess, 20 % up on last year. And of course, with the new lockdown starting on Thursday, it'll probably do the same again for the majority of November.”

A major increase in need was experienced concerning food and food supply. Covid-19 caused many households to lose income. “Almost 700,000 people in the UK, including 120,000 children, have been plunged into poverty as a result of the Covid economic crisis” (Butler, 2020). Food as a symptom of a deep economic crisis was addressed by many organisations. The biggest food bank charity in the UK, the Trussell Trust, experienced an increase of 33% in numbers of food parcels being delivered in 2020 to 2021 (Butler, 2021).

One volunteer shared her personal perception of this increase and explained what has happened since the onset of the pandemic:

Charlotte, Gatis: “Yeah, it started off where it was just basically for people who were isolating and vulnerable [who] had to shield. But now it has continued where people that need with children being off school and everything, so they need help with food. It has just grown and grown.”

The Trussell Trust emphasises “that food aid was not the answer to increasing numbers of people facing destitution amid the economic fallout of the pandemic.” (Butler, 2021). Nonetheless, addressing food poverty had been a part of many community organisations’ services prior to the pandemic and has become an essential activity for organisations as a response to, and mitigation of, the effects of Covid-19.

Charlotte, Gatis: “My family still get weekly food parcels to help, because I don't work, my husband doesn't work. [...] The time is not very financially stable for us. That weekly input of food every week, it's not a lot but it's like basics of bread, chicken, pasta. It helps us every week. So, we have bills to pay, [...] and] what's left isn't very much. So, it's a lot of struggle to get a lot of food every week.”

The models of how to supply communities with needed food support were adjusted and modified to allow Covid-safe distribution.

Sebastian, Gatis: “We decided we wanted to stop people coming into the building, that was the main concern, to keep people safe while still doing what we could. So I decided to take the parcels, rather than having a market, the only thing I could think of was, we need some sort of delivery service really. So that transformed very, very quickly.”

Martha, Gatis: “And then within the first couple of weeks was like well, what we are going to do with the food project? Because people need food now more than ever if they can't get out and what have you. So, within the space of a week, we decided that we are going to do food box delivery service. [...] [For] our food project we've been working with the Council and turned into a food box delivery project. So, we're delivering 150 boxes a week of surplus food to families in need. ... that's people who are isolating, people who are maybe, you know, they have lost their jobs, or their income has been vastly reduced.”

A main characteristic across organisations providing food support was unconditional access. Whereas foodbanks usually require a proof of being entitled to food support, the participating organisations reduced barriers to gaining their support offers.

Two of the organisations host branches of the Real Junk Food Project. The project aims at reducing food waste by redistributing excess goods and foods. Rather than aiming at mitigating food poverty per se, the aim is reduction in favour of environmental

considerations (The Real Junk Food Project, 2023). However, as the need for food aid has rapidly increased, the branch of the project at Gatis shifted its focus.

Sebastian, Gatis: “I mean, in the past I wouldn't have bought any food. That's one of our things, ‘coz it's surplus food, it's there, we shouldn't need to, to buy anything in because there is already that much waste. Obviously, things have changed now, and even though our project [is] about surplus food, that's the main thing. But obviously, the knock-on effects food poverty, particularly the fact that the food is wasted, it is even worse that people are actually hungry as well. And obviously, the last year or so, that has become prominent and I've kind of shifted slightly my priorities to people need food rather than it needs to be surplus.”

Due to the increased need it became more important to provide people with food rather than reducing waste. The increased demand for food aid was reported to be immense.

Sebastian, Gatis: “In a matter of weeks probably we went to distributing boxes to people. That's grown and grown. I think there is about 200 recipients a week now that we do. [...] We collected and distributed around 5 tonnes of food in January [2021]. Looking at last year's figures - it starts of sort of January- February - we were doing, like, 750 kg, maybe a ton. It was 35 tonnes at the end of the year, so we kind of cracked up by November. December we were doing 3 or 4 tonnes a month, and now we have 4 or 5 tonnes, which seems to be just about enough.”

Besides addressing food poverty and adapting delivery models to mitigate need, the organisations also took on different activities and service to react to pandemic-related consequences and social distancing measures. Gatis, for example, developed a book delivery system alongside their food parcels and efficiently used established systems.

Martha, Gatis: “So, we had loads of donated books at Gatis which we used to have in the cafe space. But the cafe space is now full of food that is going into the boxes and the books have taken up room. So, we were like, ‘How do we get rid of these books? Let's just get rid of them. We are never short on donated books.’ So we contacted local hospice, they have a big shop and asked would you like them, and they were like they are not allowed to take them at the moment. [...] Then we were like, ‘Well let's give them away. We're in more lock down, people like reading books.’ Actually, we have put flyers into the food boxes and now people can register what kind of books they like and get a free book every week.”

Martha exemplifies how internal structures evolved and were used to catalyse further action. Rather than assessing what people would pay for, the intention was to identify those actions that people would benefit from. This exemplifies the distinctiveness of motives in the case of these voluntary community organisations. It also shows the difficulties that emerge concerning formerly easily handled issues, such as taking up spatial capacity which needs to be used differently for a more urgent cause as food.

Other community assets were offered to function as pickup stations during lockdown. This provided people with the opportunity to collect deliveries locally as well as reminding the community of their local assets by enabling the use of buildings as well as allowing interaction.

Hannah, Wilsford CLT: “I actually think that using it as a hub for dropping, collecting things has probably had a positive impact in many ways. people being aware of it and that this is an asset that can be used in that.”

With the voluntary and third sector being the most important institutions in reacting spontaneously, creatively and quickly to the new emerging situation, many actors were inspired by the actions of others.

Hannah, Wilsford CLT: “So like a neighbouring village, they have done when the first lock down was really tight, and nobody could go anywhere, and again you're in rural areas where if you don't have your own transport, you're a bit stuck. They arranged with the local bakery you know if me made a bread order, will you bring it to our village hall? We'll sort and manage and sort it all out. And then people could come and collect it and that has carried on and it has carried post the first lock down.”

Some of these innovations had the potential to transform local economic structures: local producers were being supported by the changing distribution processes due to pandemic-related restrictions.

The new circumstances the organisations found themselves in required individuals and organisations to be flexible. A main category which was identified during the analysis process was the openness to new needs and new ideas.

The participants described their willingness to address emerging new needs in the context of the developments and potential scopes of action:

Daniel, Ashton Keynes Village Shop: “If anybody comes over with anything, we'll listen to it. If somebody says, ‘We can loan you a van to deliver’, we might even say, ‘Oh yeah, well okay’. We haven't done it yet, but ... you know. So, you're still thinking about if there is something coming up and there is an opportunity to support or organise something, you would do that anyway.”

Dora, Bilston Football Club: “We're always willing to listen to what is it that they want. And if we can provide - if they want it and we can provide it - then yes, we'll do it.”

To provide the needed services and emergency Covid responses, the community organisations increased collaborations. As resources were limited, both in material and in non-material terms, collaborations enhanced access to needed resources, sharing spare capacities and facilitated exchange of experiences and knowledge. Physical assets and communities played a key role in these collaborations, serving as key inputs for further actions.

Martha, Gatis: “And we have been working with the Council on that. Because when they did their [food] boxes, we had to make sure we weren't delivering to the same households. But the Council also did a massive fundraising, crowdfunding campaign which we have had, I think, about 6000 from. [...] I think we have brought in about £ 33,000 for that project which has helped with the running costs of the building. It kept staff and it's enabled us to hire a cold storage unit which we couldn't have done without.”

Collaboration increasingly became important as the increase in demand could not be met by single organisations. This was not only valid for community organisations but for the councils as well. Although their resource portfolio was larger and facilitated the outsourcing of tasks, there was still a need for capable organisations to implement these tasks. By proving their own skills and capabilities, the organisations gained a different perception of their own work which strengthened their position as serious partners in delivering urgent social services. Many of these collaborations and partnerships would not have been established if there had not been a physical asset being used for community organised activities. Without the assets, organisations would not have been recognised as legitimate to the extent that they were with a physical presence and proving their ability to fulfil responsibilities.

Victoria, ETNA: “The dialogue definitely changed.”

Covid-19, as a unique incident, disrupted usual structures, habits and ways of doing things and consequently affected the experience and perceptions of different issues, like the value of physical buildings, the value of community organisations or internal processes and the amount of work which can be done.

Martha, Gatis: “Yeah, change in perception. Like you said, we can't do everything.”

In this way, increased collaboration enabled services to be maximised and the number of beneficiaries increased.

Times of crises are often characterised by an increased level of solidarity and the re-appreciation of (hidden) infrastructures and alternative responses to needs.

Diana, Alt Valley: “Those relationship and partnerships already build up through either networks that we already had or people having space in our buildings [...] have been built on even more so during this time. [...] People had to work together, because there are so many people in need and people struggling, There was already collaboration there, but I think there are definitely a lot of instances where that's massively increased at the moment. The need has just gone through the roof really.

Developing new formats, responses, being open to change and new ideas and to bringing about increased collaboration were all means to the organisations' main ends and those of the interviewees: providing whatever was needed to support their community.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “So, for us as an organisation, we're just trying to support people through that as best as we can, which is why, like, the telephone service - just that little checking with people.”

The motives at play here lead to different types of action from those driven by profit.

### **8.2.3. ‘Getting people to the other side’ of the pandemic**

All the above-described reactions and responses to the pandemic were intended to support the local communities and getting people through to the end of the pandemic.

The needs and vulnerability of the communities increased during the pandemic, with many people losing their jobs, economic and social prospects. People were increasingly isolated and confronted with uncertain outlooks in the near-term future. Before the pandemic, community organisations owning assets had taken on the responsibility for their premises to be able to respond to local needs and were consequently confronted with even more needs under the changed circumstances.

A main reaction of the individuals involved was the recognition that first and foremost communities needed to be supported to get them through the pandemic.



Diana, Alt Valley: “For us, it is just about what support we need to put in place to best help our communities get out on the other side of this. [...] So as much as we could, we tried to keep contact with people.”

‘Getting people to other side’ described various measures implemented to support people: for example, the provision of emergency financial help for individuals in need.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “It’s winter, there is more use on utility bills. So, we have a hardship pot as well. Residents can access that to top up the gas and electricity, they are using more fuel, basically, during the lock down.”

The financial impacts on individuals and households were particularly damaging during both winters 2020/2021 and 2021/2022. In addition to the difficulties of lockdowns, being at home not only increased the need for and costs of food, but also increased the demand for electricity and heating. Hence, utility bills increased and worsened the financial difficulties. Community organisations and other entities such as councils offered emergency funding to those in need.

Diana, Alt Valley: “They’ve also helped with things like trying to help people that maybe struggling to pay for utility bills, gas and electricity, when they really have to. They have been able to access support from, maybe, local council for some funding to try and get that to people. Also, it’s also just been available in the community for people to know where to contact because they are not sure where to go to for help.”

To mitigate the negative social effects of the pandemic and isolation organisations kept in touch and maintained communications with the local community. Communication took diverse forms across the case studies, ranging from calling people, to volunteers delivering food parcels to having a chat on the doorstep and making sure vulnerable people could cope with the situation.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “So, this time, this lock down, we have got [...] a database of people who we knew were vulnerable, who were shielding. Basically, all we’ve done on the 5th of January (2021), we started ringing around everybody who we’d supported to see how they were doing, if they needed support with anything, or we could help with anything. This was really good. Keeping us really busy, keeping us on our toes.”

Sebastian, Gatis: “Even our drivers turn up a little bit earlier so that they can chat with each other [...] There are only 8 or 10 [food box] drops or something, but I try and keep [the drivers] on the same ones so that they build up some sort of a relationship. Not necessarily know them but at least it’s the same face that turns up, says Hello every week. Because of the restrictions we don’t just leave the box - the box will be left on the step and the door is knocked and you wait for them to take it in. So, there is that

little connection. One of my drivers actually said to me the other day that she spoke to somebody and said [...] she was there for 20 minutes and it just all came out, kind of thing. We're in touch more now and I think that's becoming more obvious, the longer this goes on. I think a lot of people are sort of seeing an end to it maybe and people's spirits are lifted. But there is a lot of people who are still struggling and struggling more so [...] just purely coz of the length of it really."

Sebastian's insight describes a neglected dimension of the pandemic when investigating civil responses. Those being involved in the provision of support services often need help themselves. The example of drivers arriving early to make use of the opportunity to catch up with the other drivers reveals that although they are voluntarily engaging in an organisation's response, they were subject to the same social distancing restrictions as everyone else, and the opportunity to have personal contact with others was greatly appreciated.

A major improvement for the organisations, their visibility and ability to reach out to their communities during lockdown, was social media and internet-based communication - for example, newsletters via email.

Victoria, ETNA: "Staying in touch. We do sort of monthly newsletters, or we'll send out this is what is happening now, coz we like to advertise the cafe and I think it's nice though."

Dora, Bilston Football Club: "The players [...] are all just kept together and informed via social media really."

The maintaining of services and keeping things running through the Winter 20/21 and retaining at least some access to the community assets was described by the interviewees as another major aim. This turned out to be very difficult during national lockdowns and other distancing measures, and the threat of losing assets, and in particular, losing communities was continuously present during the interviews.

Diana, Alt Valley: "It is very much about keeping the asset open for community use. We don't want them to be lost, we don't want them to go and to be knocked down or maybe more housing put up - we want to have those resources and facility for the local community to have - that sort of breadth of support. Thinking in some areas of Liverpool there could be, would just be a massive loss. Say, for example, it is a library, it would be a huge loss for the people in the local area."

Maintaining communities requires people to get active in different ways than they did before. Gatis developed a model to both maintain communication and interaction on

behalf of the community organisation, and to facilitate connection among people within the community, similar to other mutual aid groups which emerged under lockdown.

Martha, Gatis: “So, for example I set a WhatsApp group up for my street, Connect People. We got [for example] one lady who has a weekly shopping delivery, she'd put anything on that delivery. You PayPal her the money and you get the stuff delivered. And I'm a street morale officer. So, we set up other streets with morale officers and provided those people with support and advice and guidance on how to set up a WhatsApp group. What kind of activities they can do to help neighbours connect? Encourage them to find whether there is anybody in their group who needed a box delivered or who were struggling. Providing information on all the signposting opportunities. [...] And then we did one about the value of volunteering to try and encourage [people] just to volunteer, just to set up a WhatsApp group in their street, or little things like that.”

Here, Martha describes how community organisations initiate virtuous circles of community action and civic activities.

Providing physical spaces to enable community members to meet and communities to form and thrive was not possible because of social distancing and the closure of buildings. However, the community organisations tried to encourage individuals within their community to make and maintain connections among them, as it became clear that the organisational members did not have the capacities to take on everything themselves, but as well heavily rely on communities to set free further potentials.

Victoria, ETNA: “Before we closed, we were very much encouraging people, we have little groups that meet, they have only been 6 people: [...], ‘Please exchange numbers. [...] So, we were encouraging them to find ways that they could get in touch with each other then.”

## 8.2.4. Summary

Figure 21 - Summary of the reactions and responses to the pandemic



The reactions and responses by the participating community organisations were characterised by being ad hoc, flexible, innovative and creative. While there has been much research to accompany the pandemic-related developments in the third sector, this study focussed on those in the third sector owning their buildings and how they responded to the crisis of the pandemic. These reactions and responses are best summarised as: adapting quickly, responding to new emerging needs and opportunities, and ‘getting people to the other side’. These reactions were backed up by the availability of assets, not for public use due to the pandemic, but by providing storage facilities, bases to coordinate services from or representing the organisations in a space.

Adaptation processes were ad hoc and often the organisations reacted before governmental regulations were put in place. Within days and weeks, the modes of operations were adapted to ensure the communities' health and enable support in any way possible. The developed responses not only aimed to meet emerging new needs in those communities, but in particular, they made use of given opportunities, and developed mechanisms allowing engagement and interaction with and among their communities, via delivery systems or online interactions.

Getting people to the other side of the pandemic was the main emotional and practical motivation for those involved in the studied third sector responses. The idea of helping people through the worst time of the pandemic and keeping up hope that there was 'another side' allowed individuals to keep up despite exhaustion, uncertainty and challenges.

The challenges organisations faced are described in the next section, exploring the amplified pre-existing and new Covid-19 related challenges.

### **8.3. Challenges**

The pandemic created new realities for everyone and as described above, the reactions and responses to the new situation increased workloads and challenges. Although adjustment and adaptation were possible by creative and innovative ideas and actions, the changed conditions were accompanied by increased challenges.

Rather than describing the challenges which were faced by interviewees, individuals, organisations and their representatives, the study investigated how and in what ways the pandemic amplified already-existing challenges. This may facilitate a better understanding of the existing challenges, which contexts lead to which difficulties, which challenges are overarching irrespective of context, and how these may most effectively and efficiently be addressed.

Two main dimensions emerge when analysing challenges in relation to the pandemic: 1.) amplification of existing challenges (as explored in Chapter 6); and 2) new Covid-19 related challenges.

The following sections explore these two dimensions of the challenges experienced by the interview respondents.

### **8.3.1. Amplified existing challenges**

Many challenges faced during the pandemic had been existing before and were amplified by the crisis. The interviewees described these pre-existing amplified challenges based on their own experiences of the peaks of Covid-19 2020/21 and 2021/22. The following four key areas were identified by participants: i) increased workloads with diminishing resources; ii) financial risks; iii) the state of their buildings; and iv) the increasing, and often hidden, needs in their communities.

#### **Increased workload with fewer resources**

Third sector organisations experienced an increase in demand, not only because of the pandemic but also because of the effects of the austerity measures of the past decade. The political agenda of a shrinking state – less expenses, less tax – has generated huge deficits in public budgets formerly serving social needs and financing welfare services. Hence, the diminished public budgets have decreased the services provided by the government and the third sector stepped in and has taken over many of the formerly public duties. The increase in demand, in combination with less financial support for these organisations, have increased the workloads of those actively contributing to meeting the needs.

The pandemic accelerated demand even further.

Charlotte, Gatis: “Yes, it [the need] just has grown in numbers and demand for the service.”

Several factors caused an increase in demand and workloads for the participating organisations and individuals. Many people lost their jobs, incomes and economic prospects and were increasingly reliant on external support during the pandemic. This increased the need for offered services due to loss of income, more time was spent at

home because of lockdown, and schools closures caused higher costs for food, heating and energy consumption.

At the same time, those providing support were facing diminishing resources. Fewer volunteers engaged, because many were elderly and particularly vulnerable to Covid-19.

Daniel, Ashton Keynes Village Shop: “The volunteers - they stopped primarily coz of their age - they are quite ... most of them I would guess, are in their seventies. “

Reduced income as services and trading activities were disrupted and consequently fewer employees due to lack of revenue and furloughed staff meant organisations faced an increased workloads with fewer resources while at the same time, the pandemic forced adaptation and the development of more complex solutions than before.

Diana, Alt Valley: “Especially in terms of the financial side - like our finance manager – [...] the impact on him has been tremendous, because he is operating all the usual tasks and then he's had on top of that, furlough applications and extra grants applications going in. And in terms of workload for staff, I think that's just ... it was already high, but then it has just increased massively. That's been a challenge.”

The dimension of increased workloads with fewer resources is present in various lived experiences: individuals face an increased personal load by fulfilling several tasks and roles at once.

Victoria, ETNA: “The ask of the team has gone up considerably.”

The acute situation of the pandemic caused many engaged in emergency response to risk burn-out.

Victoria, ETNA: “All these projects are driven off of my energy, and my colleagues and board's energy. My fear is losing our Chair actually, coz [I'm not sure] how much longer will she want to do it for.”

The additional burden was not only being responsible for the organisation and the community, but also for buildings, running contracts and in some cases, tenants as well. As identified above, the diminishing voluntary input is recognised by the interviewees mentioning an increased demand for additional volunteers, in particular due to the rising workload caused by the pandemic.

In the overwhelming situation organisations found themselves in during the pandemic and being confronted with many distracting tasks and responsibilities, there was a risk of losing track of their original goals.

Martha, Gatis: “The only danger of that is, is sometimes you can get lost from your original plan. So, there has to be some way of updating that plan regularly.”

Patrick, Alt Valley: “It would be brilliant if the Council had the funding to run all these services, hopefully they'd run them differently and learn from us. But it would be great if they could run [them], because we have got other things to do.”

Patrick points to the negative side effects of taking up formerly public roles and stepping in to fill gaps may have for community organisations – being distracted from their intended activities and from the needs and demands of their own communities.

The increased workload was caused by the pandemic and the factors above contributing to an increased need for third sector organisations’ support and services on the one hand, and on the other hand, by the additional tasks accompanying ownership of assets by those organisations. This has been described as increasingly discouraging during the times of crisis.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “But I think it can be quite daunting, [and] if it's your first building you're taking on as well, it can be quite daunting taking on that responsibility. And now during Covid, even more so.”

During Covid-19, there was an increased managerial and administrative workload, which contributed to ownership as a daunting experience during the crisis. Ownership adds tension to many of the problems, especially in relation to being innovative or developing remote delivery.

Diana, Alt Valley: “The day-to-day management in terms of actually looking after the building is difficult at the moment for us and [on an] ongoing basis. Just in terms of the day-to-day management - opening and closing, maintenance. I think [it] is always something that was pre-Covid-19, during Covid-19 times, and will be still in the future. It just gets more and more difficult as obviously income has been reduced, and then having the staff available to physically manage those buildings is difficult and having enough staff, especially when you have got a large number of assets.”

## **Financial risks**

The funding situation for community organisations was generally considered challenging by those involved. Although, the participating organisations in this research are positive examples as they managed to overcome initial struggles and developed



modes of operations which sustained the necessary level of income to facilitate and operation of their asset during the pandemic.

Austerity and political agendas in combination with decreasing funds and an increased hybridisation (see Chapter 3) of third sector organisations made the third sector in general increasingly vulnerable to external financial shocks, particularly the pandemic.

Increased financial risks are at play at the same time. Losing income and paying the ongoing costs increased financial difficulties. The organisations simultaneously tried to remain financially sustainable and facilitate the survival of the organisation while keeping the ownership of their asset(s).

Hannah, Wilsford CLT: “In terms of income, there have been ... in the first lock down there was some money made available, grants for up keeping, but clearly income has collapsed.”

Although the government provided emergency funding which was accessible to community organisations irrespective of whether they owned their buildings or not, the financial support was only short-term and rarely covered the costs of employees or utility bills. In particular, the uncertainties faced by organisations when planning and preparing activities and income-generating trades increased the financial uncertainties.

Except for one community organisation - the Village Shop - all the other organisations lost their income streams because of the pandemic and the associated restrictions. However, loss of income had begun before the pandemic. Many public funding streams for social, cultural or arts purposes had already been terminated.

Connor, Kirkgate Arts: “But increasingly over the last years [...] we've lost various funding streams.”

But many organisations had to pay ongoing costs regardless of whether their income had decreased.

Hannah, Wilsford CLT: “But you've still got to keep the building secure, warm, and etc.”

Connor, Kirkgate Arts: “Well, I suppose sort of flip side of that is that we own the building, so it does have some ongoing cost. So, keeping the place ticking over and, yeah, there is just unavoidable regular costs associated with owning a property.”

These statements reveal the main difference between voluntary sector organisations not responsible for their buildings and the organisations which are the focus of this research; the additional burden of owning a building and the costs associated.

As complex as the different situations and dimensions of community-owned assets are, similar complexities are seen in the financial bases on which they operate. As reported, many received emergency funding which helped in the short run, however the worries about their future income streams and the lack of urgently needed immediate financial income were not mitigated.

These different conditions were present in the management of Alt Valley's assets. Some of their buildings were cheaper when closed, others not. Hence, Patrick's point...

Patrick, Alt Valley: "So, you have got to make sure you've got a purposeful [use], like now, for instance, with the corona virus we got buildings closed, but we can take the cost of running them right down, really. For instance, with the Communiversity, we were losing more when it was open than [when] it was closed."

The main goal is to remain financially sustainable and maintain organisations and assets.

Diana, Alt Valley: "For ourselves, it's not easy at all managing all the buildings that we have got and obviously we still got utility bills to pay, maintenance to do in the times we have got at the moment. It is a massive task to do that. But we don't want the assets to be lost to the community."

Pursuing this was mainly realised by applying for additional funding and developing new business activities to generate income streams, which was increasingly causing a hybridisation of the third sector as the necessity to incorporate income generating approaches. Hybridisation may become a key consequence of the pandemic within the third sector, and in particular, for community organisations owning assets as the responsibility for buildings exerts additional financial pressures.

In addition, many of these assets were not fit for their intended purposes and consequently required financial resources to be spent.

### **Buildings not fit for purpose**

The altered context created by the pandemic revealed some buildings unfit for purpose. Older buildings generally demand higher levels of maintenance and for this, financial

resources are essential to make or keep them accessible and usable for the community served. As elaborated above, the financial resources available to do this became increasingly scarce because of the pandemic.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “Now and obviously the downside is when things start falling apart, you have to pay for it.”

Paying for the upkeep of assets during the pandemic appeared to be the lowest priority for organisations worrying, in the first place, about their communities, staff and the general survival of the organisation.

The case of Gatis highlighted how the pandemic not only impacted on the financial side of the organisation, but also amplified the challenges they faced in sorting out their ownership arrangement with the city Council. This became increasingly predominant concerning the responsibilities for maintenance and costs. The Covid-19 restrictions delayed works being undertaken at the onset of the pandemic and the Council was still in charge of getting these works done. Hence, during Covid-19 the organisations not only had limited financial resources and diminishing reserves, but in addition, were reliant on their city Council to undertake all necessary works.

Martha, Gatis: “But over the summer the work was done. It has not all been done properly, so things like, they didn't replace all the windows, only the ones you can see easily. So like, the rotten windows in the hall, you can't see particularly well coz they are really high up - they painted [them] even though the wood's rotten. It's just been an absolute nightmare.”

Controlling and pushing through improvements took up resources which could have been used differently to help and support their communities. Additionally, the requirement to adjust services, activities and daily practices within buildings in alignment with Covid-19 regulations emphasised the flaws of buildings. Gatis, for example, provided food parcels, but this exacerbated a pre-existing issue concerning a lack of kitchen space. The Village Shop experienced a lack of storage space due to the increased use of their community and shopping order services.

There was rarely a community organisation owning a building which was perfectly suited to their needs and requirements, even if the building was in good condition. The routes through which communities usually acquired assets were in response to threats to the building: either taking on the responsibility irrespective of suitability for their

purposes or preventing loss of access to the asset or stopping valued venues being privatised.

However, the assets and community spaces were urgently needed as organisations were confronted with the increased problems of their communities, and therefore they had to use their space and resources as best they could.

### **Coping with increasing (hidden) needs and problems in society**

The pandemic decreased the visibility of certain difficulties and needs in society. Due to restrictions, many issues that arose during this difficult time happened behind closed doors. For many socially- isolating people, the local community organisation - be it a village hall or a community hub - was the first address to go to for support and ask for help.

As described in Chapter 7.2, a broad uptake of services offered by the local community is the basics of organisational legitimacy and continuity. Both represent the foundation of a trustful relationship between community organisations and the local community. Hence, the emerging needs were first evident at these community centres where there was a previous relationship. This contributed to the increased workload for those organisations and raised awareness for the ever-increasing difficulties and problems in their community.

The challenges faced were amplified, for example, concerning food poverty. Since the onset of the pandemic food poverty witnessed a sharp increase.

Sebastian, Gatis: “When people asked to join the scheme [food boxes], and they do tend to, a lot of people sort of get their story ready, and I have to reply that I don't want to know that, yeah. ‘You want food? Then just fill in this form’.”

The approach towards providing food completely changed in the case of Gatis; from aiming at reducing food waste to providing as much food as possible for those in need. Rising prices in combination with income loss worsened the pandemic situation.

Sebastian, Gatis: “Food, obviously ... food security, quite obviously ... has been a big issue. I mean, I remember particularly from earlier on [in the pandemic] [...]that, because, whether it was down to limited stock or whether it was down to panic buying or what have you, there were no [basic groceries available]. It was just little things, like somebody is already on a really, really tight budget and they usually buy their baked beans for 25p a can and suddenly they are like 90p a can.”

Although community-owned assets are more often located in rural and affluent areas, the Bilston Football Club, as well as Gatis for example, are located in deprived urban areas. Their experiences underline the media coverage about areas being worst hit already being worse off before the pandemic. Although, damage was probably equal in numbers, taking the same resources away when there is less available causes more damage.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “How do we support the local community which have had just an awful 12 to 14 whatever months? Where things have been really, really tough and the community is already very poor.”

As they were trusted actors in their area, many problems were brought to the organisation, which focused on food support but found they were having to deal with many of the other problems of poverty and deprivation. Through encounters and contacts with those in need the complexity of lived realities was presented and revealed to them. The trust the community had in the organisation meant that harsh realities were revealed.

Sebastian, Gatis: “But it's pretty obvious that people are going through hard times. Lot of health [issues] there as well, people who can't get out. Yeah, again, this is one of our [clients], she has health issues anyway [but] she used to come to our market. I actually went to see her the other day, tried to do nice. I think we had some celeriac, it's quite a hard vegetable, so I peeled it and chopped it up for her, because I know that she has got mobility problems. I didn't realise how severe they are until I went round to see her, [...] she can't move her arm at all. [...] It took her 25 minutes to put shoes on and she went out the house for the first time in 9 month and then came back 10 minutes later because her lungs were burning. She has got a carer, but she has to spend £20 for half an hour for her carer to come, [but] she can't afford spend 20 Pounds on a good day. [...] [We are] taking food round to her, bespoke food as well, because she has got a quite limited diet through allergies and various things. So, and there is quite a lot of that, you don't quite realise really how many people, [and] lots of carers who're stuck in because they are caring for people. I have another woman who - it brings things into perspective really - she has got a son who is probably in his early 20s but [has] severe learning difficulties, non-verbal autistic, and it's just her on her own. She used to live with her son, her son moved out because of the pandemic, he works in a hospital, so he didn't want to put her at risk. So, she spent 9 months on her own [after her son moved out]. Our driver and the doctor and an Iceland delivery man were the only people that she saw for 9 months really. She's not [an] only one-off really. Especially for people housebound who they are caring for, you don't know that they are there.”

Gatis, together with the Real JunkFood Project, were operating on the frontline of the pandemic and only able to provide a limited service, but in a context of complex and worsening needs.

The recognised increased isolation of vulnerable individuals caused the community organisations to also address social isolation, irrespective of whether this was intended to be an activity before or not. Mitigating isolation became part of other activities to allow communication in the long run.

The social isolation of elderly people had been a matter concern for more than a decade and was significantly amplified during Covid-19. One of the main fears of community organisations concerned with the elderly was how to re-engage them and facilitate reintegration into society.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “[Isolation is a problem] especially, if the people are classed as vulnerable. They have probably been shielding since March and it is a long time to not have communication with people, it's a long time [not] going out in society. [...] Because people are scared - and they've got every right to be scared - and especially if they haven't been out in society for the most part of 12 months, it's pretty scary, isn't it? I mean, I think I went into isolation on the Friday as the country went into lock down the following Monday and on my first day back outside, it was only 2 weeks I haven't been out for, been on the phone, I'd been working from home, I wasn't sick, somebody in my household had symptoms so we all had to isolate. But walking to work on the Friday morning, it was like when you come back from your holidays when you've been away for, like, so long, [...] it was the quietest of Sunday mornings – [but] it wasn't, it was Friday morning. But it just felt like everyone felt, like, so alien and that was just having to be in the house for 2 weeks. People who have been in for months and months and months, I can imagine it's going to be a really scary time for them to come back out in society. The biggest challenge for our organisation is helping people do that.”

Although isolation was a problem before the pandemic, particularly for elderly populations, the dimensions of isolation for all societal groups became an issue. The pandemic increased isolation while simultaneously making it recognised beyond pandemic-related effects.

The following section explicitly explores the challenges that emerged in relation to the pandemic and its direct impacts in contrast to the existing worsened problems.

### **8.3.2. New Covid-19 related challenges**

Covid-19 brought a range of new challenges, particularly because of the consequences of the nature of the virus and concomitant restrictions. These challenges were mainly

caused by the direct impacts of lockdown and other restrictions and the associated uncertainties. The following sections explore these in more detail.

### **Lockdown and other restrictions**

The immediate Covid-19-related effects and challenges were mostly those which were experienced by everyone irrespective of their personal or professional context.

Like many other social organisations, clubs, informal groups, businesses, stores and other types of public and open access venues and activities, in many cases, the organisations owning buildings were not allowed to use their assets. Whereas some were allowed to open because of the nature of their services (such as the Ashton Keynes Village Shop), others were not:

Sam, Bilston Football Club: “We are not allowed - within the community - we're not allowed to do any work. Covid has stopped just any work whatsoever. We're not allowed to do anything in the community. We can't do anything.”

Times of full closure caused loss of income, pausing of activities and engagement paired with high levels of uncertainty and worries, particularly for those who were forced to fully close. Other organisations were not allowed to perform their activities as they used to before, as explored in 8.2.2.

The challenges in relation to Covid-19 were described by the interviewees from a personal perspective of immediate impact of restrictions on personal lives and experiences. The emotional effects were described, but also the struggles of working at home, not being allowed to do anything, being affected by supply chain disruption and the liability of owning a building during those times. As one interviewee explained, having the responsibility in an exceptional situation for a building and the tenants: ensuring they adhere to legal regulations. Community organisations became an intermediate body between legislation and people using the buildings. The facet of ownership came along with the necessity not only to adhere to rules and regulations but also to have them accepted by the user communities.

The immediate impact of lockdown on individuals, communities and organisations were far reaching. The community organisations not only carried responsibility for their communities and organisations from an emotional and moral perspective, but

simultaneously were liable for buildings, associated costs and the safety of organisational and community members.

Planning ahead during the pandemic was experienced as one of the greatest needs, while the inability to do so was described as one of the biggest challenges.

## **Planning**

Planning was generally experienced as difficult for the community organisations, regarding their finances, their ability to implement activities, services, forecasting developments and other resources.

However, the pandemic caused a new extent of uncertainty. Although the financial crisis of 2008/9 brought many changes in the financial aid and funding structures of local governments which eventually influenced the opportunity context for communities to acquire assets, the pandemic in contrast, exposed the effects and changes of ten years of austerity on the third sector while the restrictions on physical interaction between people had never been experienced by the current generation. Therefore, many aspects which had been stable and certain before, became sources of uncertainties and worries.

Planning difficulties required new innovative approaches by community organisations, but also increased workloads. The need for alternative practices and ad hoc adjustments to respond to needs and demands led some organisations to develop several scenarios to remain agile and flexible, whatever regulations were in place.

Martha, Gatis: “We'll see. It all depends on how things go really. So, we try to kind of scenario planning depending on different outcome. You know, when this lock down ends, what will be the next phase? We'll open up for bookings, and you know, we have still got that limit of 15 people per booking and those kinds of things. They are all going to stay in place for a long time, I would imagine.”

The resources necessary to prepare for different scenarios were not available for every participating organisation and this reflects the importance of key individuals being ideologically driven to make a difference and to keep community assets open and running during the pandemic.

The organisations were very dependent on governmental regulations which determined whether or not activities took place. At the time of the interviews, the lack of knowledge about when to expect situations to change, the main challenge besides maintaining motivation became planning. Due to the lack of information about future regulations to



guide planning, positive outlooks were questioned. A major challenge experienced by the interviewees concerning their future prospects were worries about how, or even whether, a community organisation would manage to reintroduce people to sharing physical spaces again.

Charlotte, Gatis: “I think it's just re-engaging with community really. Once the pandemic is over [...] we have to live with it, I'm not sure. [...] I think that's going to be a big challenge coming up.”

A main insecurity expressed by the interviewees related to the re-introduction of people to their buildings and how to involve them physically at their venues, in particular those who were vulnerable, such as the elderly or those with pre-existing health conditions. As many activities taking place in the community venues were not necessarily only provided by the organisation owning the building but also by community members and other businesses, there were concerns about whether people, activities and other services would return to the buildings at all.

Charlotte, Gatis: “I think the big challenge is getting people back in the building. I'm not sure what is going to happen with the food boxes and stuff - if they are going back to being a market. [...] I think there'll be challenges as well, because people are getting used to get food boxes delivered [...]. That's quite odd ... I don't know”.

Victoria, ETNA: “[...] Where we've had to reintroduce people to the Centre, That has taken ages. We need to [be] rebuilding people's confidence. And that's going to be ongoing for a long time now.”

In this statement, Victoria reveals an important element of reintroducing people to community venues and activities – not only was the physical reintroduction was expected to be a challenge, but also the mental willingness to participate in community activities. Creating trust and comfort zones for people within their communities were described as challenges. The pandemic and resulting disruption increased mental health difficulties due to social isolation and it was expected that there would be parts of communities who would struggle to re-engage with community organisations and assets. It was also expected that there would be increased workloads and effort necessary to facilitate the uptake of offers as it used to be before the pandemic.

These concerns were expressed by interviewees across different contexts.

Connor, Kirkgate Arts: “The volunteers who run those spaces ... obviously, you know, they had all sorts of challenges, with how those village halls and other community venues operate. [...] Trying to test the temperature generally, they are very

tentative about starting to reopen and the possibilities how they would make that work with social distancing required and so and so forth.”

There were different connotations within these views: the dimension of being exposed to risks of catching Covid-19; and the cautious re-emergence of reopening because of a lack of confidence.

Dora, Bilston Football Club: “When we're allowed to open again, that depends on the restrictions on the opening, really. Because I don't suppose we're allowed to open fully. We'll be able to open with limitations and restrictions and it depends on what they are. [...] Short term we can't do anything, we got no plans, because we can't open, and everything is sort of on hold. As soon as we can open, we work with whatever restrictions are imposed on us at that time.”

Although the organisational representatives were in touch with their communities over the peak period of the pandemic, trying to address all urgent needs and providing support where necessary and possible, the interviewees were not able to imagine how, and in which ways, communities might be able to re-enter public life.

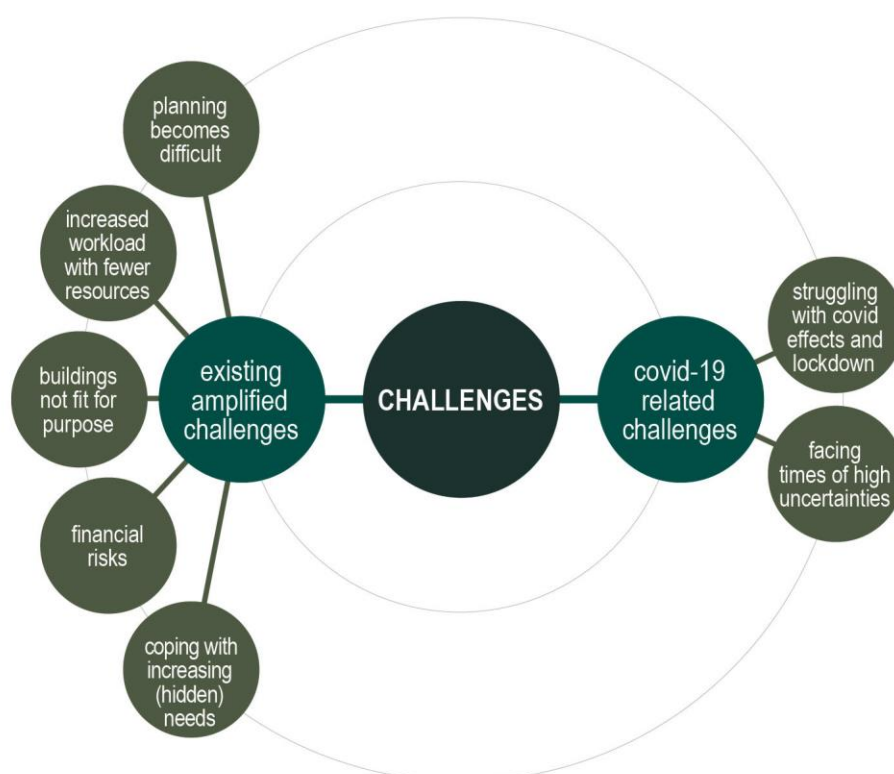
Planning was perceived to be daunting and exhausting as the experiences of the first year of the pandemic revealed the volatile nature of a global disease and political responses.

### **8.3.3. Summary**

Crises often reveal flaws in systems; the same is valid in the context of community organisations owning physical assets. New challenges emerged because of the changed situation resulting from Covid-19. And yet, many of the main difficulties identified were challenges which existed before the Covid-19 pandemic but were then amplified. New challenges are described by the interviewees as direct Covid-19 related incidents, such as: ‘struggling with the effects of Covid-19 and lockdown’; having to deal with insecure and vulnerable sections of the community, such as elderly and retired people, who used to be the main attendees of the organisation’s activities; and the changed conditions for planning. Although planning had not necessarily been very easy before and was a difficulty which at least partially existed pre-Covid-19, the systems shock generated by the pandemic brought another dimension of insecurity with it.

The amplified challenges pre-date the pandemic and highlight flaws within the structure's community organisations owning their assets operate in, as for example: 'being confronted with (hidden) needs and problems in society'; 'increased workload with less resources'; 'facing financial risks'; and 'having a building not fit for purpose'.

Figure 22 - Summary of the challenges



## 8.4. Post-Covid-19 roles and responsibilities

Although owning assets was described as challenging and daunting, the interviewees emphasised that it was now even more important that communities take over buildings.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “But I think at this time we need more community assets, and we will do coming out ... Definitely, coming out of Covid, we will need more people to take on that community ownership. But I can see why people would be put off to do so.”

The pandemic as a major disruption required society, systems, structures and relationships to be remade. There was much hope that this process of remaking society and social life would be transformative and innovative, as the pandemic exposed and revealed many flaws of predominant structures and systems.

The representatives of organisations in this study identified a major future role in the immediate post-Covid-19 phase as that of ‘rebuilding communities’.

Key elements in rebuilding communities were identified as communication and soft skills to facilitate a re-emergence of people into civil society beyond their own households after long periods of social isolation:

Mona, ETNA: “I think, you know, talking, discussing, expressing, listening, all of those things are going to be really, really key.”

Mona emphasises the other essential factors needed beyond the physical asset to meet the community needs.

Rebuilding was described in two main dimensions: 1) ‘empowering communities’; and 2) ‘becoming stronger and growing’.

These two dimensions characterised the two different fronts on which the remaking of society and the rebuilding of communities was expected to take place for community organisations.

Whereas empowering communities described the interviewees ideological and practical approaches by which rebuilding and remaking of communities could be facilitated, the dimension of ‘becoming stronger and growing’ was described as community organisation-related factors enabling organisations to guide and support rebuilding and remaking.

### 8.4.1. Empowering communities in a post-Covid-19 'new normal'

The interviewees described community empowerment as a central element in rebuilding their communities in a post-Covid-19 context:

Peter, Bilston Football Club: "And for example, where we can do that [empowering people], because I think too much of life now has been sort of... people's agency has been taken away from them. It is ever more remote and mysterious actors who decide what happens, whereas this is an example of where we decide what happens. And it's all the better for it. And I think that is something that other communities ... look, I know loads of these community-type projects taking off, not just in football, but there are some great community-run football clubs now, but in other areas as well. Foodbanks, groups which have come together to support local members of the community groups, which are backgrounds in green local community. To me really, this model is critical, particularly in the deindustrialised or poor areas. I think these are critical to give people space where they can regain some control over their lives, and begin to build better lives. I think in the post-Covid-19 world, where the government or the private sector [take the lead], it's not a place where I want to be. I want as much control over my own life ... as possible. And I want community to collectively have as much control as possible, and I think, on a small scale. A football club like Bilston gives people that opportunity and it's such a valuable resource to the community."

Regaining control both after periods of increased privatisation and austerity over community spaces and after the immediate phases of the pandemic had taken any control over public life away from people, suggests there is an increased demand for communities to control spaces and actions again. However, most sections of society were expected to need some form of empowerment to do so.

Mona, ETNA: "I think lock down has sort of made us a bit insular and very kind of ... our world has shrunk, basically. So suddenly we have to kind of come back out into the world and find a way to communicate and I'm going to need help. I certainly can't do this on my own."

Hence, empowerment of their communities was perceived by respondents as essential in rebuilding society. Empowerment was envisaged by the community organisations in diverse ways: increased concentration on community activities; increased support for local collaborations; creating meeting spaces; and training people to take on responsibilities.

As the timing of the interviews (either during Winter 2020/21 or Winter 2021/22) hindered many of the participating organisational representatives to envisage which

forms their post-Covid-19 work might take, there were only a few vague ideas of how to continue in the immediate Covid-19 phase:

Martha, Gatis: “[We are] reviewing what's happening [...] [on] principles-based approaches, asset-based community development. It's all that and I really think that's where we need to head and go and explore and experiment.”

However, there was consensus about the type of activities: rather than identifying needs within the community and responding to these as was the main route for emergency responses to Covid-19, the approaches were envisaged as being oriented towards empowering and facilitating contribution and participation.

Asset-based community development was a main concept for the interviewees to facilitate self-help by turning the perspective around. Rather than defining people based on their needs, their skills are identified and highlighted, ultimately empowering people and their communities.

Connor, Kirkgate Arts: “[The aim is to] develop more activities with and for the local community, within the building, but also in other spaces. So, I think that area of community engagement and more participatory arts and community activity is definitely an area that we want to do more of where there can be funding support for as well.”

Diminished financial and non-material resources led to increased collaborations; by sharing what was available with other organisations and communities, the interviewees reported that the reach and benefit of these resources could be increased, and more people empowered to take advantage of them. Collaborations also used immaterial capital such as networks and outreach.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “I mean obviously, you have your core partnerships and relationships, but obviously they have got their contacts as well. They got their contacts, so quite often what happens is, if somebody knows you, if somebody knows your building, your organisation, they will signpost their contacts to you because the way you work and stuff like that. Then your contact list becomes bigger”.

Alt Valley is a community organisation depending on partnerships to allow community empowerment actions to take place.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “What we get from outside agencies massively helps with the job that we're doing. On the other hand, as well, I think Alt Valley are usually one of the first organisations they [the City Council] will come to if they need help or they need support with something. We are probably the first organisation they approach because if we can't help them, we'll find somebody who can.”

A main factor in allowing community empowerment remains, however, the creation and maintenance of community spaces. Although not explicitly stated, the participating organisations all have this at the very heart of their organisations, activities and missions, since they had taken on the responsibility of a physical asset particularly for this reason.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “One of the things that I think is really important is that the people create spaces where they can re-establish and create their own lives and own community.”

#### **8.4.2. Growing stronger**

The interviewees perceived that growing stronger was a key factor in sustaining organisations throughout and after Covid-19.

Patrick, Alt Valley: “So, I think with Covid-19, I'd say now, and I have said to some of our funders, when we come out of this, because [...] of the micro-management, our finances as well our micromanagement of the buildings, we will come out stronger. [...] We might be smaller, you know, relatively. But we'll have strong foundations to build from. Our funding has probably taken from 2.5 million to 1.5 million or something like that - might be 1.75 million. But the base will be stronger. We have ideas for the rest of it and we can develop our ideas as we move along and bring more partners in and [...] like, unity is strength, isn't it? You know, the more people that come in and work together, the better opportunity you've got then for success emerging from this. But as I say, as far as we're concerned, [...] it's bringing challenge after challenge after challenge because you can't predict what's going on. But having been through the first wave, then we're prepared for the second and the third. Don't know when it's coming or whatever, but you know, you are there, able to deal with it as it comes along. And as I say, we're quite confident that we will come out, as it currently stands, stronger than we went into it.”

Patrick highlights the importance of agency in the responses to Covid-19. Different community responses to crises such as the pandemic have often been analysed in terms of resilience and resourcefulness (McCabe et al., 2020, p. 1). Resilience has the sense of bouncing back “to withstand shocks to the status quo”, whereas resourcefulness may be better suited to capture not only the coping with difficult circumstances, but also the “pro-active capacity to develop creative solutions to those systems shocks”. Patrick highlighted that the change had negative impacts on organisations at first, however the

learning, the experiences, their resourcefulness could allow them to re-emerge even stronger than before.

Growing and becoming stronger was described by the participants in the following key areas: remaining open, creative, innovative, having and allowing big ideas and visions while preparing for further challenges.

The future role of community organisations was expected to be heavily dependent on whether they could make use of their assets. Therefore, their future success and the role they might play in rebuilding communities was determined by their ability to continue the adaptation and flexible management of their facilities.

Those organisations owning their premises were still operating and managed to keep the responsibility for a building because of their ability to be open, creative and innovative.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “But my view is that we'll find a way to do it because we always do. We survive despite the difficulties, not because of it. This is an important thing, really anyway.”

The pandemic also caused many changes in the organisation's activities as explored above.

Sophie, Alt Valley: “Obviously, we haven't been able to do any of the nice stuff that we usually do within the communities this year.”

The ambitions were high to remain open, creative and innovative in order to be able to respond to the emerging needs in the near future. To do so, the organisations prepared alternative ideas and programmes, covering action plans to make use of outdoor facilities, for example, organising an outdoor cinema or providing outdoor sports activities.

There was, nonetheless, a clear need for community organisations to experiment with which approaches and solutions were organisationally viable and which services and activities might be taken up by their communities. The preliminary ideas raised by the interviewees were concerned with their community activities and how they might be adjusted to account for rules and regulations, the community's demands and the organisational capacities at the same time. Experimenting with different aspects allowed the organisations to develop and offer suitable activities and services which could contribute to rebuilding their communities and growing stronger. Their experiences are a main element of value of these organisations and can help with assessing the need for



former services and activities offered, continuing and expanding the use of digital opportunities.

Part of this was to have ideas and visions on an organisational level drawing on the many new demands which emerged in their communities during the pandemic. For example, increased demand for food support led to new and systemic ideas and plans at Gatis.

Sebastian, Gatis: “Well, I think part of the adaption of the Junk Food, and what we have learned through giving people boxes and to let them choose, we'll carry that on to some extent. I'm also involved in other things which are more on the Zoom meetings ... on things like what we can do afterwards. Something that I wanted to set up for years is sort of a hidden harvest. The fact that there are loads of fruit trees and things around locally down the canal and hedge rows and that kind of thing, and also particularly elderly people who have got a couple of fruit trees in their garden which are too much for them. I have got one of my mate's dads and every spring he goes out in his garden with a big stick, and he beats off all the blossom of his plum tree and pear tree because few months later he can't handle all this rotten fruit. So, our idea is to map these places and get groups of volunteers together and go on a group foraging thing, get whatever fruit, help all these people. Clear their garden with the fruit at the right time of the year, take it back to Gatis. We'll be doing some sort of preserving and pickling and maybe even have wine making. We can repay the people with the gardens with a hamper of produce that we make from various other places. So yeah, again address food poverty, the mental health side of it, the community side of it, the cooking side of it, and preserving and jam-making and that kind of thing and using the utilities we got at Gatis.”

Irrespective of the difficulties, Sebastian here exemplifies how ambitious ideas shape organisations, motivate individuals and focus community development. Individuals developed ideas and approaches which can systematically mitigate difficulties. These big ideas and visions are perceived to be key in growing and becoming stronger.

Belief in their organisation and their ability was also an elementary part in growing through the pandemic and being positive about their future was necessary in order to have plans, visions, and big ideas for this future.

Victoria, ETNA: “We're going to make it even better. We have got so much opportunity in the future. How do we then bring that positivity to our community.”

Patrick, Alt Valley: “But in terms of ... we have got to look forward, we have got a big optimism about it. That's what we are, we are an optimistic, challenging organisation. So, we are looking to the future, dealing with what we have got now, responding s best as we can to help our communities at the moment, but looking forward and rethink post-this to an exciting future. Interesting definitely. At some point we will get out of this, bit by bit. And as I say, all our building work, what's going on,

re-organisation, people are working closer together. It has been a good time for community re-grouping in that respect. And we are looking forward to it”.

The positive impacts revealed by Patrick highlighted how crises may have negative as well as positive side effects at the same time, but interpretation depended on perspectives.

As times had been difficult, the organisational representatives were increasingly aware of the difficulties already managed, but even more of those still to come, with many problems looming and only beginning to unfold.

A main challenge at the time of the interviews was the respondents’ inability to assess their organisations’ futures due to the lack of certainty and assessable outlook. In particular, the additional responsibility of owning their buildings added another layer of uncertainty.

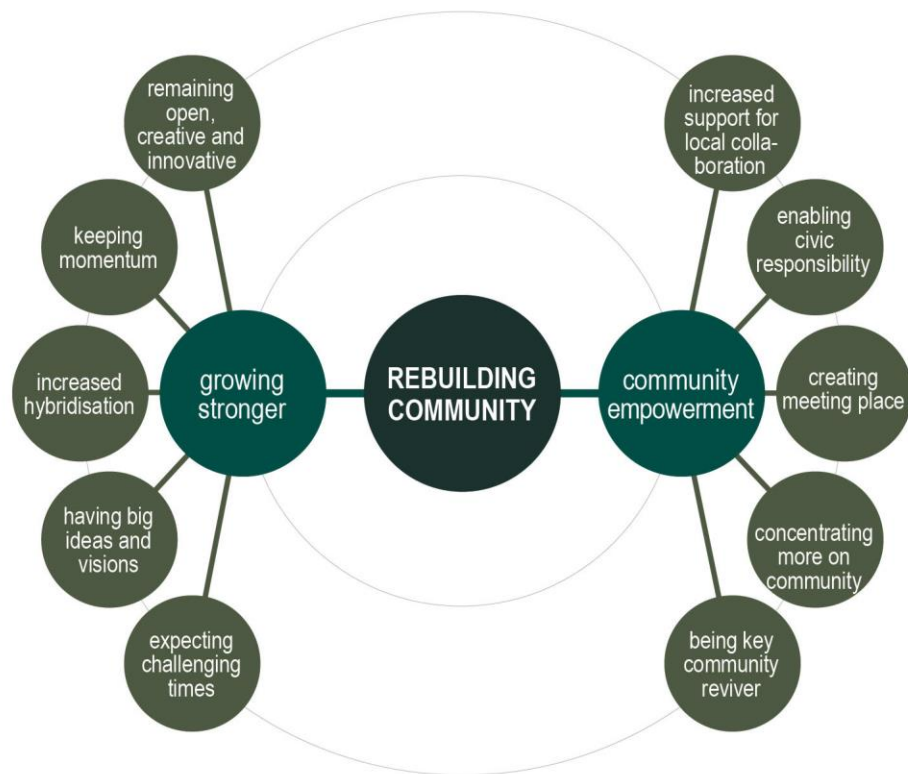
Optimism for the near-term future was largely absent, but the interviewees emphasised their overarching willingness to undertake all necessary actions for the community organisations to survive, maintaining access to their assets and supporting their communities with what is needed.

Peter, Bilston Football Club: “I think that at this point it is impossible to predict what the consequences in the long term are of the pandemic. And I think the first thing is, we [will] know all this when things might get back to normal and my guess is that’s going to be a long, long time away. [...] But to go back to normal, I just think it’s impossible to predict [...] in terms of the economy, and in terms of jobs, in terms of health, in terms of changes in people’s own lives. [...] A lot of people have been touched by this, and I just think with trying to think things through what we will do at the moment is far too early really.”

Sarah, ETNA: “I really don’t know, because I really don’t know how the world is going to look then.”

### 8.4.3. Summary

Figure 23 - Summary of post-Covid-19 roles and responsibilities



The key post-Covid-19 role and responsibility for community organisations owning physical assets was expected to be rebuilding communities after lockdown and restriction measures were eased. This rebuilding was envisaged to proceed by empowering communities and for organisations to grow and become stronger.

Rebuilding communities was expected to concern the physical reintroduction of people into the public sphere and shared spaces while empowering communities to actively shape the processes of remaking by participation and collaboration. Community organisations continued to provide the urgently needed community spaces to

redistribute control to the individuals engaged. Continued growth and becoming stronger was envisaged as key to supporting communities, by further developing visions and ambitions, and implementing ideas while at the same time, expecting further challenges.

## **8.5. Conclusion**

This chapter explored the pandemic-related effects on community organisations owning physical assets during the unique period when usage of these assets was not allowed. The data revealed rich insights into the practical and emotional impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on personal, organisational, community and professional aspects of the interviewee's lives.

The responses and reactions to the pandemic were characterised by ad hoc, rapid adaptation processes which were facilitated by well-organised structures, ambitious individuals and creative capacities in the communities. Responding to new needs and using new opportunities simultaneously allowed the community organisations to shift the offer of many existing services online, while developing new digital formats. But not every type of support could be transferred to online tools and channels, and the individuals involved managed to develop Covid-19-safe responses to mitigate effects of the pandemic on their communities by providing leisure activities, food support and even financial hardship funds to ensure their communities were equipped with essentials to get through the most difficult times. The key motivation and ambition were to get people to the other side and enable the community to help themselves again as soon as possible with the help of the physical assets – buildings and spaces, and with continuing the provision of community owned spaces. This emphasises the distinctiveness of the third sector since, whilst not mutually exclusive, this motive is more likely to emerge here than with for-profit models.

The pandemic revealed flaws in predominant systems, and exacerbated challenges, needs and problems which had already existed before, not only on mental health, but on access to basics of life, food support, economic consequences of job loss and increased costs. Many challenges experienced by community organisations owning physical

assets were amplified during the crisis with increased workloads and fewer resources available, the financial risks of maintaining buildings not fit for purpose, while being confronted with ever-increasing needs and (hidden) problems in their communities.

The timing of the interviews provided an opportunity for the respondents as organisational representatives to reflect on the rapid changes throughout the pandemic. Although the participants were clear about their motivation and willingness to continue their engagement in community support and the provision of physical assets for and with their communities, the interviews were characterised by uncertainty, worry and the difficulty of planning ahead. Hence, the future roles the interviewees envisaged for their organisations and assets were vague and tentative. The aims were to facilitate the rebuilding of communities by providing community-owned spaces which could be used to physically reintroduce people to each other and enable regaining of collective control after the pandemic. The motive to rebuild communities by empowering these to actively take part in the processes while growing back stronger was clearly articulated.

The impacts of the pandemic were experienced on various levels by all participants: the availability of resources; their organisational or personal ability to use these; or identifying and addressing community benefits.

To make sense of these developments and reinterpret the impacts of the pandemic the next chapter re-applies the concept of the ‘opportunity context’.

The opportunity context is used to explain how the changes, disruptions and challenges of the pandemic affected each organisation’s unique circumstances. This will help a better understanding of why and how different routes and outcomes were developed in the different localities, while experiences, difficulties and challenges were similar.

# **Chapter Nine – Mid-pandemic and the changed opportunity context for community organisations owning assets**

## **9.1 Introduction**

Ranging from ad hoc emergency responses to strategic and comprehensive response schemes, different localities reacted to the emerging needs and difficulties of the pandemic in accordance with their respective opportunity contexts. The previous chapter explored the effects of the pandemic by examining the reactions and responses of community organisations owning physical assets for and on behalf of their communities, the challenges and the emerging roles and responsibilities of community organisations and their assets in the aftermath of the pandemic. The present chapter uses the concept of the opportunity context (see Chapter 7) to explain how the changes, disruptions and challenges caused by the pandemic affected the organisations' unique circumstances.

In this study, the opportunity context of the community organisations owning physical assets is defined by the available resources in terms of material as well as non-material assets and the organisations' and individuals' abilities to make use of assets and resources to benefit their communities, and to maintain the assets, the activities and organisations under the prevailing contextual circumstances. The more resources available to the community organisations, the higher the likelihood of them being able to maintain and successfully run physical assets for and on behalf of communities.

This chapter explores how the effects of the pandemic changed the opportunity contexts of the organisations and communities and evaluates the resources available, the ability to use resources and steering the usage for local benefit.

## 9.2. The changed opportunity context

The concept of the opportunity context, developed in Chapter 7, was used to categorise, contextualise, and understand the inputs necessary to maintain ownership of physical assets on behalf of and for communities under the prevailing conditions during and after the pandemic. The concept helped to examine how asset ownership was realised, and why context-specific configurations of other assets, beyond the physical buildings or spaces, contribute to differences in realisation and operationalisation of physical ownership and provision of community spaces. The research revealed that although physical assets gain most of the attention in government and policy, academic research as well as community aims, when considering community-owned spaces, ownership was not foregrounded by respondents responsible for buildings. Rather, the data shows that many more assets are necessary to facilitate community ownership of physical assets and maintain the provision of services and activities in community owned spaces. The other essential assets were perceived to be particularly of a non-material nature, as explored in Chapter 7, and were equally important factors when considering community ownership.

The immediate responses to the pandemic, the pre-existing but amplified challenges and new Covid-19 related challenges were explored in Chapter 8 and are used here to examine how and why the outcomes in the different localities differed and why similar factors caused opposite effects in different localities, and again emphasising the importance of context in affecting community ownership of physical assets.

The aim is not to restate in detail how systemic the responses were or how well or strategically some organisations reacted to and coped with difficulties, but rather to establish a perspective which allows a re-examination of how and why different agents in different context generated different outcomes. The opportunity context is therefore a variable and flexible framework which is tentatively applied to shed light on the impacts of Covid-19 beyond the acute and direct effects noted at the time of data collection.

The last round of interviews took place between November 2021 and February 2022 and therefore only included information about the situation mid-pandemic. The findings are thus tentative and derived from the timing of the empirical data collection. As explained earlier and emphasised by the interviewees, the situation was difficult for assessing long-term impacts, consequences and changes caused by the pandemic.

Hypothesised future scenarios were based on beliefs about how societal and economic, social, environmental factors might change. The application of the concept of the opportunity context is similarly tentative. The examined data only describes the mid-pandemic impacts on the opportunity context of the community organisations studied.

The concept of the opportunity context consists of three levels: the resources available; the ability to use resources by discovering, activating and mobilising them; and steering the use to benefit the community (see Chapter 7 and Figure 24).

*Figure 24 - Opportunity Context*





The concept of the opportunity context is used in the following sections to explore how the pandemic and its consequences impacted on the different levels for the organisations mid-pandemic.

### **9.2.1. Resources available**

The impacts on the availability of other material and non-material resources varied and affected the organisations' abilities to react and respond to the pandemic: for example, adapting quickly, responding to new needs and opportunities and getting people to 'the other side' (Chapter 8).

The interviewees described their work being pushed to the limits because of increased workloads, at the same time as having fewer resources available (see Chapter 8.3.1.).

There were various forms of loss of resources caused by the pandemic, not only because of social distancing measures but also because of economic and financial considerations. Redundancies of employees, furloughing staff and resignation of volunteers reduced the human capital available for community responses because these management tasks also demanded much administrative time and effort to put in place.

The largest impacts on resource availability during the pandemic were recognised either in human resources or in financial terms. Both impacted on the first level, the availability of resources, of the processual concept of the opportunity context. The following elaborations do not aim to meticulously examine every change in resources available but rather, tries to exemplify how the different localities were affected by similar causes but coped with these in different ways. This sheds light on the importance of the contexts and human agency unique to any locality.

#### **Human resources**

Not only by decreasing personnel available for practical implementation of actions and services, but also by occupying those remaining with emotionally, socially and practically difficult consequences human resources were strained:

Diana, Alt Valley: “Part of my role was dealing with all the consultations and actual redundancy procedures. So, that was really difficult and it's people that, you know, worked with for a long time.”

Facing increased urgent demand while being responsible for taking care of staff and/or volunteers and members, the practical and mental workload increased simultaneously with decreasing available human resources. This placed a significant burden and additional stress on those individuals.

Extended communication caused by the disruptions of the pandemic became increasingly time consuming. Setting up and working remotely changes the running of programmes and services, as well as individual modus of operandi and affected human resources.

Key individuals particularly were occupied with the bureaucratic procedures the pandemic-related developments brought with them, while being at the front line to be approach for all concerns, internally and externally.

Victoria, ETNA: “They're so reliant here on just myself and [my colleague] knowing everything.”

Centralised organisational structures supported these circumstances as key individuals were responsible for all emerging issues.

In contrast, support available for the community organisations and responses to the pandemic increased considerably. This was reflected by more people taking up offers of services and activities.

Martha, Gatis: “We're getting much more community engagement than we were before, and [...] this has been throughout the pandemic, which is bizarre. Because we were there for them before and people did use us before, but much, much more of the local community use us now. And when I say local community, I'm talking much more, the people in need.”

This emotional support feeds positively into the opportunity context of the organisations, strengthening and reinforcing the ideological motivation of those involved. Recognising that efforts were mitigating pandemic-related effects and reaching out to those in need, helped key individuals to continue.

Not only did communities increase support by either volunteering to help or taking advantage of activities and services offered, but also local governmental entities supported the organisations by recognising their contributions.

Sebastian, Gatis: “We're not [...] just a group of people who are volunteering, we're trying [...] of make something happen. And perhaps our attitude is slightly changing to a point of like, "We need this to happen now", rather than, "Can this happen, please let this happen". And we feel a lot that we're in a better position as well. We're aware that other people will [...] contact us - for example, my next Zoom meeting later on this afternoon is from the Council who contacted me saying that they want to learn lessons from their emergency food boxes that they did last year. And would like us to run something instead. Basically, that wouldn't have happened without being where we are already.”

This change in perception allowed organisations to develop activities and models by accessing further resources. Councils as supportive partners not only increased their recognition of, and value placed on community organisations, but also helped with accessing financial resources by commissioning services from them. The pandemic affected a change in how these organisations were valued.

### **Financial resources**

The pandemic reduced the community organisations' abilities to generate income streams due to social distancing and closure of buildings. Activities which were run to generate income for organisations and cover costs of maintenance, for example, were suspended. When possible, activities were shifted online (see Chapter 8). However, this aimed either to mitigate effects on vulnerable individuals in the community, or to fulfil contractual responsibilities. In addition to ongoing running costs of the physical assets, costs increased for most because the additional expenses of transforming models into online formats were not covered and many online services were not charged for or were running on a pay-as you-feel basis.

Mona, ETNA: “I run it as a pay-as-you-go, I never know how many people turn up on a day.”

Others, such as the Kirkgate Arts Centre, were affected even more drastically.

Connor, Kirkgate Arts: “Well, it has completely knocked everything out for the first few months. Obviously from the ... what was it? ...16th of March we stopped: we closed the building. There was no ... we weren't presenting any events, none of the hirers - the regular hirers or the people who've made one booking - were able to do anything. All of the Arts Out West activities stopped. So yes, everything stopped and [...] with it all those income streams.”

Although the government offered a £10,000 emergency grant for all charitable organisations, for many the predominant financial effects of Covid-19 were negative, particularly for those organisations having more than one asset and relying heavily on trading income.

Despite the predominant impacts, the restricted ability to use buildings and capacities paired with the opportunity to furlough staff or delay payment of bills and regular commitments allowed some organisations to build reserves while applying for funding.

For Gatis for example, as described above by Sebastian, the funding situation changed because of the effects of Covid-19 on the organisation, its enhanced reputation and the recognition they since received by the Council: being commissioned for Covid-19-responses increased the resource available to them.

It can be seen that the effects of the pandemic on finances varied across cases. For some, it was really difficult to cope with restricted allowances and loss of income streams, but the government grant did help them to survive through the immediate and acute phases and the emergency funding meant that some organisations were able to afford running costs of the buildings and maintaining staff.

Others had the chance to adjust to new situations and managed to improve their financial resources throughout the pandemic:

Diana, Alt Valley: “So it's, sort of, that's built even further with the response to Covid-19, and then Yeah, the amount of funding that was coming through, you know, and [...] it was quite a massive increase really. So, we've been successful, you know, with quite a few bids that we have put in to help with the response to Covid-19, so that's massively helped the organisation.”

Governmental funding support was a major contributor to improving resource availability in many local contexts. The interviewees reported that emergency support was available not only via the one-off grant that charitable organisations received, but also other pots of money which were available to respond to Covid-19 needs.

However, the availability of resources in the different organisational contexts differed depending on their ability to use them (explored in Section 9.2.2).

## Other resources

There were other further changes to resource availability, such as of surplus food at supermarkets or food donations to food initiatives.

As explored in the previous chapters, the decrease in donations caused some organisations to adjust their approach to (re)distributing food in order to mitigate food shortages during the pandemic, particularly for families having to feed their children at home, or households suddenly losing their income.

Additionally, outdoor spaces became increasingly interesting because of Covid-19. Although the pandemic itself did not impact on the availability of this type of resource as such, it however shifted its value and therefore increased demand for this type of asset. Hence, the pandemic related consequences and restrictions on social interaction generated a new type of asset which was not that important before.

## Summary

There was a generally increased demand for resources during the pandemic, particularly those of human and financial resources.

Although the situation was not as bad as initially expected by many, the funding landscape changed during the pandemic, the long-term effect of which this study has not been able to investigate. However, it was a period of significant government investment in charitable organisations. Much of this investment was to keep organisations afloat and into the future, but for others, it was investment in Covid-19 responses as well. The organisations participating in this research all underwent changes in the resources available to them during different phases of the pandemic.

These changes were not necessarily all negative, and by their ability to adapt, their intrinsic motivation other immaterial assets at hand, the organisations managed to turn difficulties into opportunities.

Figure 25 - Resources available



These opportunities were only realised through the context-specific ability to use the resources, as examined in the next section.

### 9.2.2. Ability to use resources

The ability to use resources is closely intertwined with the availability of resources and vice versa. This section explores how the pandemic impacted on the opportunity context of the community organisations owning physical assets in regard to their ability to use resources.

This ability to make use of available resources was perceived by respondents to be mainly dependent on key individuals and their emotional and ideological motivations and the organisations' legitimacy and continuity. These available resources were found to be decisive by the respondent's statements and the analysis in facilitating community asset ownership of buildings by significantly contributing to the organisations' abilities to recognise, activate and mobilise resources (Chapter 7).

These factors also were considered to be of importance in responding to the impacts of the pandemic. The following section explores how the pandemic affected the ability to use resources.

### **Pre-existing ability**

Many interviewees described the necessity to make use of what was available to them. Chapter 8, in particular 8.2.2 - responding to new needs and opportunities - exemplified how the organisations managed to develop and offer new services and formats to mitigate emerging gaps in provision, needs and difficulties.

Due to the difficult circumstances in which non-profit community organisations emerge and operate in normal times regarding the challenges of taking on ownership and management of physical asset, (see Chapter 6), the actors involved learned through experience how to overcome difficulties and to develop alternative and creative ways to realise ideas.

The pandemic impacted on the ability to utilise resources in differing degrees, ranging from negatively affecting the participants' imaginations of possible alternatives to overloading respondents with increased workloads while at the same time, exposing them to increased mental pressures due to the crisis. However, the ideological drive and ability to support their local communities helped these individuals to continue and overcome emerging challenges. Being limited in their opportunities did not hinder the organisations making use of what was available to them.

The change in context made it possible to develop new ways of operating for those being resourceful, in particular the different perception of community organisations and their essential role in responding to the social challenges of the pandemic enabled them to activate and mobilise further resources.

Diana, Alt Valley: "We've been successful with some Covid-19 recovery funding. So, that's really helped. And some of the lenders that we work with have been

supportive, you know. We had to do a lot of work with them explaining where we're up to and [explain] some of our example projects and the types of support we're able to give. [...] There's been an increase in some funding around for that. That's been good because we've been able to access that, and I think one of the things is because we've got that [...] longer history and, you know, we've got that legacy of what we've done in the past. What we are doing now is we have got some projects that we might not [have] been successful with for whatever reason, but they were really good bids that we put in. [...] What we're finding now is, we're getting those bids back out and ideas that we had and we're trying again now. So, I think that's quite interesting because of thinking now there's different types of funding or an increase of funding. People are a little bit more interested and, you know, there might be another opportunity.”

Diana's elaboration, like Steve's (see 9.2.1.), are both examples that emphasise the changed perception of the community organisations by external stakeholders and how this affected their ability to access resources. Drawing on the key assets of legitimacy and continuity, the organisations were able to use the opportunity offered by the pandemic to demonstrate their ability to address urgent challenges in their local communities and show how effective and essential their contributions were during the pandemic.

The altered valuation of providing social and community support and services led to these organisations being approached by Councils and other governmental entities to help develop, implement, and realise social policy goals. The goals were accompanied by resources, particularly of financial nature, and the criteria for these awards were shifted in favour of organisations which may not necessarily have been of great interest before - due either to the existing political agenda and goals or to the lack of visibility of the organisations' existing expertise.

The community organisations' knowledge of their own abilities and limits helped in realistically assessing which resources it was necessary to activate and mobilise and what could be used to support activities. Establishing a focus on important assets alongside having individuals at hand specialising on the different tasks was needed. Alt Valley had the capacity to set aside personnel on order to identify and apply for funding opportunities. This helped the organisation financially.

Insights by key individuals at ETNA, that they could not take care of everything, were similarly important.

Sarah, ETNA: “The place grows bigger, and we have more users and different sorts of users. [...] [I] think the problem would be that we perhaps don't have ... we will end up with not having enough staff to run it properly. [...] That's a problem I would foresee - that we don't have enough staff to actually [do everything we would need to do].”



ETNA's ability to define and set out their own limitations and boundaries contributed to their being able to make use of the resources available to them. On an organisational level, this was conditioned by their internal set up and strategic strength.

Diana, Alt Valley: "But you know, and I think I mentioned to you in the earlier meetings, [...] I personally feel the leadership and management from our board and our chief exec has been very strong and steady. That put us in good standing: the instructions and the information coming through were very clear and, you know, everybody understood why and what we were doing."

Refocusing the organisations' activities also altered their ability to use resources. The more their actions and interventions were in alignment with their internal strengths and capacities, the greater were the abilities to use resources, because particular needed inputs could be identified and mobilised. Respondents reported this capacity to be important in developing visions and ideas.

### **The physical asset**

The physical assets owned by the organisations had use value in normal times and still had value of some sort throughout the pandemic although the self-determined use of the asset was affected as no public access was allowed. Nonetheless the buildings were assets to those involved enabling them to be used for other activities and resources. In particular, the physical presence had great meaning for the organisations as it helped them to maintain and sometimes even increase awareness of their activities and services.

Diana, Alt Valley: "It's a visible presence. [...] Even if somebody can't physically come in, you know, they'll find out the number or they'll [...] find out a way of getting in touch with us. And that links back to what we were saying about ... you know ... making sure that we're out there in terms of how to contact us, how to get help."

The awareness of a physical presence allowed communities to discover, activate and mobilise the resources and increase community engagement (see Martha's quote 9.2.1). This engagement during the pandemic contributed to supporting communities and maintaining cohesion over the periods of isolation.

Victoria, ETNA: "I think you just naturally pick up good vibes [through the physical presence]. [...] It's a good feel-good project that has made the community feel connected. That's good and necessary."

A physical asset represents community in space by reminding people of the activities that took place before the pandemic. The limited use during the peaks of lockdowns was reported to be of great importance because it provided a possibility for future opportunities to generate communities again after the pandemic.

## Hybridisation

The ability to use resources in discovering, activating and mobilising what was needed was dependent on processes of hybridisation. The pandemic changed the context of these organisations and showed that hybrid organisational structures had increased abilities to use resources.

Hybridisation in its constant development and negotiation of different institutional logics (see Chapter 3), became increasingly important during the pandemic. Whereas different relationships had to be established and negotiated, financial aspects were often limited by governmental expectations. Government funding was often attached to certain expectations concerning implementation and outcomes which often collided with practical realities. Although the pandemic provided opportunities for community organisations to demonstrate their abilities, without an active advertisement, attention and winning funding bids becomes difficult. Different institutional logics, such as the contrasting government regulations concerning record-keeping, hindered organisations from fully using what could be available to them, as Diana explains.

Diana, Alt Valley: “I think we are so busy, always just getting on with the job and we haven't traditionally been very good at that [getting jobs done]. You know, we obviously intend to report, and if you need to do evaluations for the project, we do those, and that's fine. But we don't really shout about what we do outside. And I think one of the things has come through in the last [...] 6 to 12 months is we need to be better at that, you know, [...] we need to promote that more. [...] When you go on the website, we need to be able to say: ‘This is the people we have delivered to, this is the impact we've had’. [...] There is more competition - there's more funding available, I think - but there is more competition. So, you know, we need to think about what we do and that's really difficult for us because sometimes that's not really what we have ever been about. We just sort of, you know, I as I said, just get on with it. We don't want to say we've done this, we have done that, you know, [but] it's so something that we need to do.”

Fulfilling their own and external expectations, which sometimes conflict, not only leads to being overlooked, but also means resources need to be spent differently from just targeting social missions, but for example means “shouting about” what the organisation does. Expenditures, in a financial manner as well as human input, sometimes need to increase before benefits are realised. This as well requires risks to be

taken and skills to be developed which allow the organisation to advertise itself. However, in order to comprehend the necessity and importance of marketing, different logics need to be incorporated.

The pandemic affected hybridisation in different ways: increased collaborations (explored in Chapter 8) required organisations to adapt to new circumstances while simultaneously incorporating different logics to comply with funding regimes, economic performance targets and adhering to legal regulations. At the same time, the commercial structures of the case study organisations were affected by the pandemic: disrupted supply chains, furloughed staff, redundancies, insurance, and emerging marketing issues.

The Covid-19 pandemic was an external driver for accelerating these hybridisation processes in community organisations owning assets. The constant development allowed the identification of new roles and tasks in a Covid-19 situation, finding niches to fit in and support communities. Community organisations were confronted with difficulties in making decisions concerning their focus and which issues they would like to address:

Diana, Alt Valley: “Where do we want to be putting our energies really?”

But the processes of negotiating different logics, incorporating commercial structures while constantly developing and questioning their own positions, habits and visions allowed those organisations characterised by hybridisation before the pandemic, to react more quickly. Adapting different approaches and learning through experience equipped organisations with abilities to navigate different contexts. However, others, such as the Village Shop which mainly relied on paid staff and some elderly volunteers, and which continued to operate under the new circumstances, were confronted with the necessity to discover, activate and mobilise resources.

The interviewees reported the difficulties they faced when considering their ability to use resources because capacity was taken up by hybridisation and the associated processes of adjusting. For example, reporting to governmental entities, recruiting new volunteers and increasing or maintaining contact and relationships to the local communities, while at the same time, applying for funding from different foundations requires many roles to be fulfilled, often by only a few key individuals within an organisation.

## Summary

The ability to discover, activate and mobilise resources via processes of incremental hybridisation was affected by the pandemic; likewise, engaging and positioning within different fields, physical spaces and community-making were also affected.

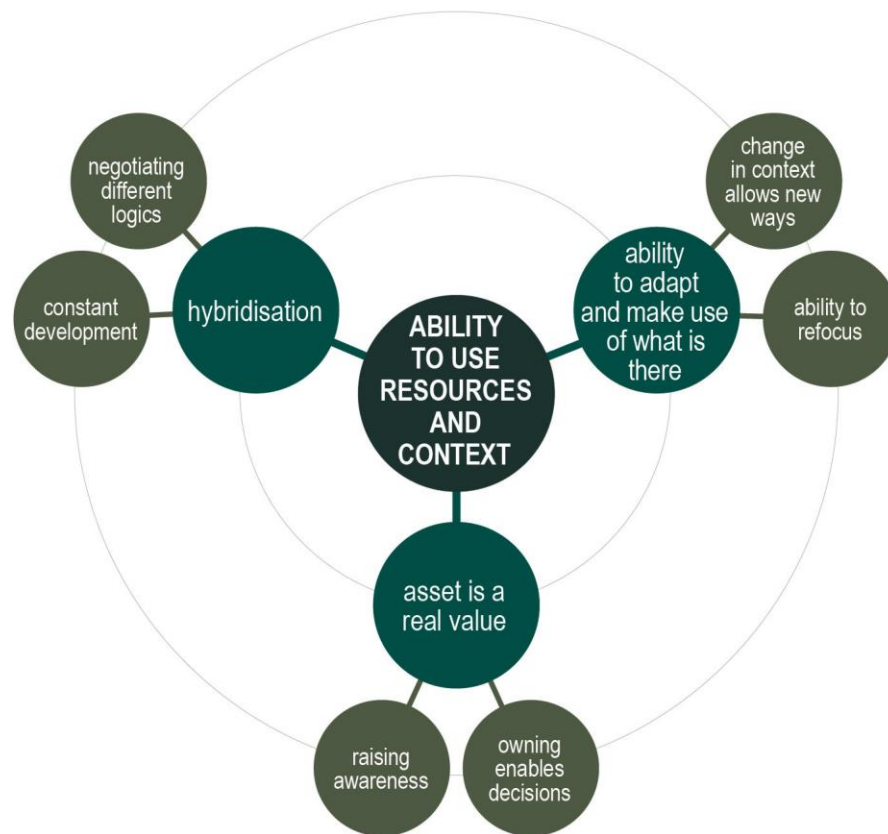
The organisations increasingly had to develop alternative, flexible and creative ways to access and use resources. Although, their pre-existing abilities conditioned by being non-profit organisations inhabiting a contested and difficult field of activity from the very beginning, equipped many of the involved actors with the necessary abilities to continue operations under limited and restricted circumstances of the pandemic.

The pandemic as an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to produce ad hoc responses and demonstrate the importance of providing essential support for those in need, increased their ability to activate and mobilise resources, such as expertise and funding from external parties.

The physical assets played key roles in facilitating activities in the background (such as preparing food boxes) while increasing and maintaining visibility and awareness during times of lockdown. Engaging in physical space-making during times when use of these spaces was prohibited kept momentum and reminded people that there were places to ask for support and gave hope for future times.

Hybridisation as the essence of the organisational structures of those community organisations owning a physical asset for and on behalf of their communities became a key factor in maintaining their ability to use resources during the pandemic. The processes of hybridisation of negotiation of institutional logics, maintaining integrity while constantly developing and adapting, enabled the actors involved to find those niches where resources could be found and mobilised, while making optimal use of their internal capacities to react and respond to changes in their opportunity context.

Figure 26 - Ability to use resources and context



### 9.2.3. Steering use to benefit communities

The last dimension of the opportunity context of community organisations owning physical assets is the steering resources to benefit their communities. Like other aspects of the opportunity context, ‘steering’ the usage of resources for community benefit is not necessarily clearly distinguishable from the availability and the ability to use resources. The aim of this section is to analyse how the pandemic changed the opportunities for community organisations to generate benefits for their local communities.

The interviewees described many ways in which resources were used and formats and activities were developed in order to benefit their local contexts. This was particularly difficult during the pandemic: the availability of and ability to use resources was limited due to pandemic-related restrictions and regulations, and the ability to ‘steer’ resources to create the best community benefit was similarly affected. New ways had to be developed and identified in order to respond to the pandemic, and the emerging challenges and needs. However, in the first place it was necessary to identify what was needed and what would benefit communities most during the immediate crisis.

### **Knowing what is of benefit for the community**

Steering the use of resources to benefit communities during the pandemic was dependent on the knowledge of the local context, the emerging needs of the communities, the services already provided and the ability to develop models and mechanisms to allow distribution of support and services to reach those in need.

Martha from Gatis gave an example of where the Wolverhampton Council started delivery of food boxes in a local neighbourhood where Gatis had already stepped in and was filling this supply gap. It took time and resources to coordinate efforts to ensure a maximally effective and efficient use of resources available.

Martha, Gatis: “And we have been working with the Council on that. Because when they did their boxes, we had to make sure we weren't delivering to the same households.”

Bearing in mind other actors providing services in the area and maintaining an overview of the services being developed and delivered to communities was key in ensuring resources were directed to suit local needs. Those organisations which were locally embedded and had been operating for a longer time were better aware of responses already in place. The closer the network was knitted, the more complete the overview of the responses was.

In addition to local knowledge, the organisations also implemented monitoring and evaluation schemes which were, necessary to access project-based funding with requiring specific outcomes.

Diana, Alt Valley: “A lot of the projects, they always want monitoring and evaluation.”

But in addition, this provided feedback on the reception of services and in some cases, also offered emotional back up for those involved.

Victoria, ETNA: “And so, we just did a survey. And, you know, it's pretty much, it's the same sort of heart-felt things. You know, I love the centre, I love coming in.[And there were] a few new people as well, which is really good, so that because they're active people running somewhere else, or they just found out about the centre.”

The insights generated by monitoring and evaluation were valuable for increasing knowledge about the local community, their needs and how well services offered were being taken up. The pandemic meant it was more important to reflect on the actions of the community organisations. Formal evaluation, local knowledge and close engagement with the communities went hand in hand and enabled services target needs.

Martha, Gatis: “But when you are working with the community, people are always doing, doing, doing and they don't factor in time to reflect on what they've actually achieved. And where things have gone wrong and so this year, a lot of our work going to be focused around actually reflecting on what works and what doesn't.”

As explored in Chapter 8, time and resources for reflection were limited, but were of increasing importance for those involved in providing benefits for their communities.

## **Legitimacy**

Steering the use of resources was also dependent on the legitimacy of actors and actions. As explored in Chapter 7, legitimacy was perceived to be a key asset in facilitating community ownership of physical assets. The social dimension of legitimacy may be granted by acceptance and support of these organisations by their users and local community.

The legal legitimacy of the ownership arrangements continued throughout the pandemic. However, governmental regulations to mitigate the pandemic and rising infection rates undermined the ability of community organisations to determine the use their asset. Nonetheless, their social and emotional legitimacy enabled other activities which could steer the usage of resources to benefit their communities.

Like the pandemic being an opportunity to demonstrate abilities and capacities to external stakeholders such as funders or governments, the organisations could also demonstrate their stability and reliability through a crisis or emergency.

Martha, Gatis: “What's changed is people trust us. I think we've added a lot of respect throughout the pandemic because we have carried on.”

Irrespective of the closed buildings, awareness of the organisation was increased by their presence, even if ‘invisible’, as Diana puts it.

Diana, Alt Valley: “I think the work we've done in that area is increased and our [...] relationship with the community has changed. We've become [...] like invisible presence in the community that if somebody is struggling and they don't know where to go, they'll come to us.”

The uptake of the services offered, not only had an effect on the organisation's available resources or the ability to use them, but also affected steering the use to benefit the local context. Some organisations became anchor organisations through the developments of Covid-19, despite them not being able to fully use their assets, in particular their physical asset.

### **Provision of community spaces**

The provision of community spaces was a key characteristic of all the organisations studied: and the main motivation for owning physical assets was to provide spaces for community activities without profit interests or economic requirements.

The provision of community spaces was intended to steer the use of assets to the benefit of the local communities and hinder further privatisation or loss of valued social assets. Although the forced closure of buildings was only temporarily, the measures removed the organisations most distinct quality – physical space for interaction and shared activities.

However, by continuing activities, either online or developing alternative formats, the organisations managed to maintain engagement with their communities, cultivate alternative community spaces such as virtual classes, e-learning sessions, WhatsApp street groups, or socially-distanced opportunities using outdoor spaces when possible and allowed. During those down times the organisations also worked on and improved their spaces to ensure their use after the pandemic to rebuild their communities and continue the provision of urgently needed community spaces in a post-Covid-19 ‘new normal’.



Victoria, ETNA: “We've got a brand-new kitchen space. [...] We've got newly refurbished car park, we've got a new sensory garden at the front. [...] You know, before looked awful. It was like the worst derelict building site.”

Although pausing the activities and putting everything on hold, the organisations did not stop investing in their assets and reinvesting in their communities. The long-term goals were to ensure that these venues would be retained in community hands and that ownership is felt to be shared, not only by the individuals involved but also by the wider community.

Martha, Gatis: “But talking of ownership as in community ownership, it's massively important that the community need to feel that it's their Centre, that it's not a service from the Council [anymore] that run for so long. And there's so much negative resentment about that.”

Beyond Covid-19 and in the long term, the organisations aim to facilitate the self-determined provision of spaces as part of their opportunity context to benefit their communities. To achieve this, Diana concluded:

Diana, Alt Valley: “So, I think we realised, you know, we need to do more work to help people understand and invite people in.”

## Summary

Steering the use of resources to benefit communities is another processual part of the organisation's opportunity context. By directing resources to the advantage of communities' further potentials, dynamics are created and maintained.

The ability to steer resources in the first place comes from being locally embedded and having the knowledge about what is of benefit in the local contexts. To ensure their knowledge is accurate and represents what is needed locally, the organisations reported that reflecting on activities was an important factor, alongside monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, in communicating with external stakeholders but also particularly, in internal decision-making processes and revalidation of assumptions and actions. During the changing circumstances caused by the pandemic, local knowledge in connection with continuous reflection and evaluation became even more important.

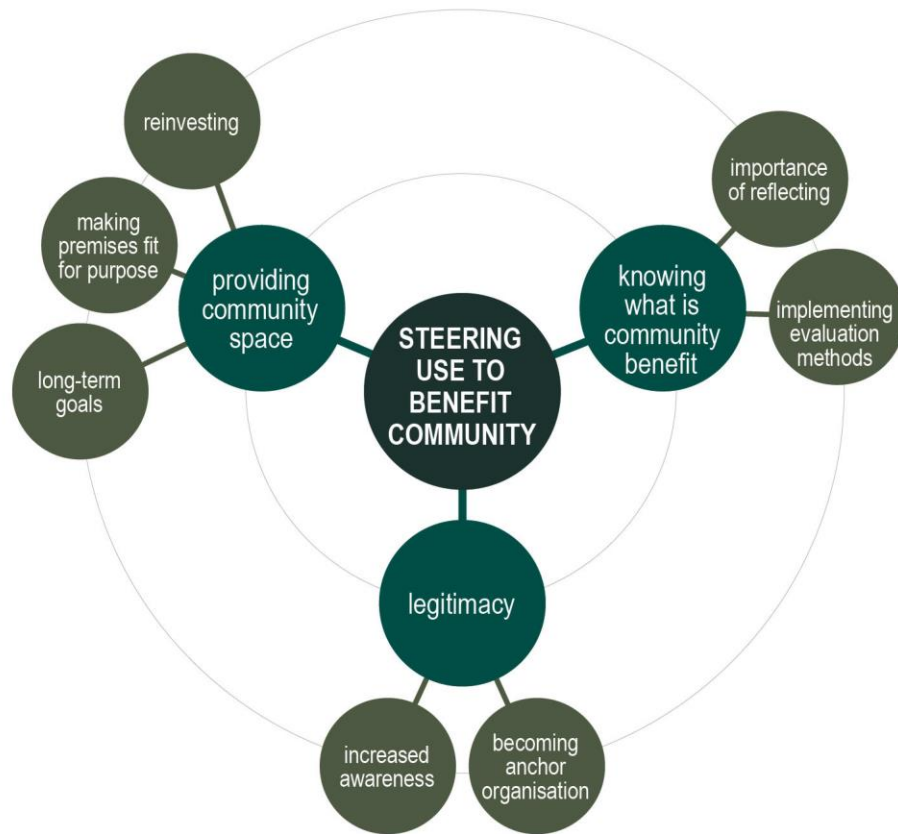
Legitimacy was perceived to be essential to gain access to and be embedded in these local contexts. As explored in Chapter 6, legitimacy granted by local communities

generated by trustworthy actions, was reinforced by the pandemic as the crisis provided an opportunity to increase awareness of the organisations, their actions, and their buildings. The physical presence was particularly highlighted by the denied access to the buildings. However, these buildings were key in facilitating local responses and helped the organisations to become anchor organisations in their communities during the pandemic and organising emergency responses.

The provision of community spaces was the main purpose of the organisations both before the pandemic and also their clearly defined long-term goal in a post-Covid-19 'new normal' world. In a context of increased privatisation and diminishing community spaces, the community organisations reinvested in their buildings and made them fit for future purpose. The downtimes of the pandemic were used to ensure maximum community benefit.

Some organisations, however, experienced severe drawbacks: for example, the Bilston Football Club were not allowed to run activities under Covid-19 restrictions and who lost most of their income. Similarly, Coningsby Village Hall mainly relied on renting out their spaces for income and were not able to do this. There were probably more challenges and difficulties the case study organisations faced and struggled to recover from, however this was not assessable during the time of the last interviews.

Figure 27 - Steering the use to benefit communities



### 9.3. Conclusion

The pandemic, as a game changing event, disrupted usual structures, habits and ways of doing and affected experienced realities on various levels - individual, relational, social, spatial, community, and affected meso- and macro-economic trends and outcomes, in the short- to mid- and long-term. The opportunity contexts of the community organisations owning physical assets were similarly affected on various levels and from different perspectives. The aim of this chapter was to demonstrate how the pandemic

affected the different overlapping, intertwined and intersecting processes of the opportunity contexts of case studies.

During the pandemic, resources were increasingly squeezed, particularly human and financial resources. Nonetheless, the organisations developed ways to cope with fewer resources while facing increased demands for services. Assets identified as facilitating key factors in regard to physical asset ownership were also found to be of great advantage in responding to the pandemic and turning challenges into opportunities.

The ability to use resources by discovering, activating and mobilising them was affected by the pandemic because the disruption required pre-existing abilities to be further elaborated and developed. Although operations could not be performed as usual under the challenge of the pandemic, the ability to use resources was affected in positive ways as well. The ad hoc Covid-19-responses were able to reach out to those in need, and by demonstrating their capacities, skills and expertise organisations were even able to increase access to resources from third parties like funders and governmental institutions. The physical asset helped to facilitate the use of further resources while maintaining a physical presence in the community and increasing awareness of the organisation. The incremental processes of hybridisation allowed adjustment to different situations and requirements via the constant negotiation of institutional logics while maintaining integrity. However, hybridisation was also experienced as an additional necessity which reduced capacities to concentrate on initial aims and goals. Continuously incorporating and negotiating different logics caused increased tensions between different goals and approaches and needed careful attention and skill development.

Lastly, steering the use of resources to benefit the communities was affected by the pandemic because access to the physical asset was restricted which limited one of the main characteristics of the case study organisations which differentiated them from others - the provision of community spaces without few requirements attached, and without a profit motive. The legitimacy of the organisations was increased by their pandemic responses and continued provision of community support. The specific characteristic of the organisations being embedded in the communities and local contexts allowed them to have expert knowledge about what was needed by the community.

The impacts of the pandemic on these processes are seen to have been fluid, overlapping and intertwined, not clearly distinguishable and cascading and reinforcing

each other. Ownership was perceived to be an asset which provided stability during these times of high uncertainty. However, the participants were mostly concerned for their communities rather than their assets, and hence, the opportunity context heavily depends on the individual's ability to react to and cope with these changes and impacts.

The application of the concept of the opportunity context to the unique situation of the Covid-19 pandemic went beyond the descriptive and explored the effects of the crisis on the community organisations owning physical assets. The theoretical separation of different stages of opportunities allowed assessment of the meaning of the physical assets in the different responses and abilities. However, as the concept is still in early stages, further exploration and clarification needs to be undertaken. The division between the stages may become blurred when applied to practical examples, and the interrelations of the different stages could be explored in greater detail, further identifying which levels are at play when systematically considering contexts.

Nonetheless, the opportunity context enabled a systematic analysis of the developments of the pandemic in the case study organisations, identifying how the same impacts affect different localities in different ways as the interrelated and processual approach allowed the consideration of contextualities rather than isolated factors, emphasising the importance of interplays between inputs and assets beyond the physical structures.

The last chapter will present the study's conclusion, summarising the key insights gained from the data and the presented analysis and which implications for concerned actors such as practitioners, policy and academia emerge.

# Chapter Ten – Conclusion

## 10.1. Introduction

In line with the aims and objectives of this research, set out in Chapter 1, this study has explored the phenomenon of community ownership of physical assets in changing times, with the global Covid-19 pandemic as a focus. The research examined the contexts of community ownership of assets at the local level, explored the role of, meaning for, and the significance of ownership on organisations and communities. It then identified the effects of the pandemic on organisations, communities and assets, and explored the potential roles for these organisations and assets in post-pandemic conditions.

Community ownership of assets refers to the ownership or management of physical assets such as land and or buildings. Although “the term ownership may [...] refer to a clearly defined legal status, the working definition covers organisations which are responsible for their ‘owned’ assets in several respects, such as financial and managerial” (Skropke, 2022, p. 131), and this ownership may take different legal forms and shapes, the emphasis is placed on responsibility for the assets.

This phenomenon has a longstanding history in the UK (McKee & Moore, 2014; Wyler, 2009) with a recently re-emerging interest (Quirk et al., 2007). Community ownership is perhaps seen as a means of generating or maintaining key benefits, without public ownership or regulation of markets (Aiken et al., 2011; Aiken et al., 2016; Hobson et al., 2019; MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014; McKee & Moore, 2014; Moore & McKee, 2012; Murtagh, 2015; Quirk et al., 2007). Hence, there have been several attempts to systematically investigate the occurrence of community ownership.

This Conclusion reflects on the research and thesis and summarises the contributions to knowledge and key findings. By reviewing and critiquing the methodology and methods, the strengths and weaknesses of this study are delineated. Further, the implications of this research for practitioners and policy makers are suggested. Concluding, the chapter suggests directions for future research and where to move from here.

## **10.2. Summary of contribution to knowledge and findings**

First, the key contribution to knowledge of this thesis is outlined, followed by the key insights and findings of this research which are summarised in relation to the research questions. For each research question, it is explained how the new concepts and frameworks can be used to make sense of this phenomena.

### **10.2.1. Contribution to knowledge**

The thesis has explored issues largely missed by the existing literature on community ownership of physical assets. Academic research and grey literature (such as practitioner reports) on the issue of community ownership in the UK has sought to delineate its characteristics, understand its impacts, or position it within current policy agendas. The political agendas of the former Conservative Liberal Coalition Government's 'Big Society' (2010-2015) and the political programme of 'levelling up' support the devolution of rights and responsibilities to local levels, lower governmental entities and communities (HM Government, 2022). Hence, community ownership has often been approached by: delineating applications and existing manifestations; their strengths and weaknesses; the conditions under which assets are acquired and ownership achieved; and discussing how to categorise the existing landscape of community organisations owning physical assets (Aiken et al., 2011; Aiken et al., 2016). Much of the literature was commissioned to support political interests in increasing civic responsabilisation and the devolution of former governmental tasks, irrespective of the effects, the practicability and whether improvements had been brought about by community ownership.

Whilst these issues are important, the present research has aimed to make a unique contribution in terms of understanding the significance of owning physical assets, and how the Covid-19 pandemic affected community ownership. This is a largely untouched field of enquiry. However, by identifying the importance of ownership in experienced realities, the research aims to contribute a holistic understanding of the phenomenon to

support community ownership which facilitates social improvements rather than uncritically supporting political agendas.

In response to the gaps in the approaches, the present research aimed to explore the experienced realities of actors involved in the communities, organisations, and in the running of the physical asset. This approach considered the key terms and existing definitions and descriptions while at the same time, acknowledging the ideas, perceptions and conceptualisations of actors who were ‘living’ community ownership. This accounted for different implementations and interpretations of the key factors and allowed different contexts to have different implementations and manifestations of the key elements such as defining ‘ownership’ and ‘assets’. The study contemplated these variations in definitions and interpretations and allowed those to be represented, expressed and analysed in order to explore the importance of the ownership of physical assets. This was facilitated by applying a constructivist grounded theory approach in combination with case study examples allowing an investigation of individual perceptions. By maintaining analytical freedom and flexibility, themes and concepts emerged from the data, complemented by pre-existing knowledge and theories throughout the analytical process. This aimed to allow the data to speak for itself rather than developing an additional classification scheme. Such classification might be valid for the cases chosen and aim at being generalisable but would not necessarily be applicable at a larger scale. Accounting for these variabilities via a constructivist grounded theory approach not only allowed freedoms for specific characteristics to emerge, but also helped to find patterns and similarities across this diversity.

However, due to the amount and depth of the data it was difficult to assess which information was not relevant to my research. Navigating around and processing the data also felt largely descriptive and moving from description to abstraction was a difficult step as only little and vague guidance is offered by GT methodologists.

By questioning the dimension and importance of ownership for the actors involved, the research enabled an alternative perspective to emerge and supported recommendations not only for policy makers, but in particular, to support the development of third sector organisations owning or about to take on the responsibility of physical assets (see Section 10.4).

The investigation of community ownership based on a constructivist examination revealed that a classification beyond static factors of costs, conditions, size, type of asset, etc. becomes possible when the phenomenon is treated as a dynamic social



process. The processual understanding foregrounds other essential (non-material) assets which are necessary to own a physical asset and shifts the focus of investigation. Ownership of physical assets per se was not foregrounded by the respondents, but a combination and composition of several different kinds of assets was identified and insisted on as important. Hence, irrespective of the contextual specifics, varieties and differences, the study was able to identify similarities and uniting features which facilitate a more comprehensive understanding.

Approaching the phenomenon from a critical view and aiming to reproduce constructed realities highlighted how different epistemologies derive different insights into the same issue. It carved out what these differences mean for the understanding of success and feasibility of community ownership, developing support schemes and structures and understanding how and why community ownership works where it works.

The research has contributed timely scholarship on the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts on the voluntary sector, in particular the effects on voluntary sector organisations owning physical buildings and spaces self-determinedly used for community purposes (Skropke, 2022). However, the activities and operations of these organisations are heavily reliant on their physical spaces, to which access was denied during the pandemic.

The research enabled the documentation and analysis of the effects on the organisations, their communities, and the potential future role of these in relation to their physical assets. Although the pandemic related effects were similar across cases, the processual understanding of community ownership of physical assets through the application of the concept of the opportunity context facilitated an understanding of the different outcomes in different contexts.

The opportunity context, as a unique conceptual device, provides a model which describes the different outcomes of ownership based on local contextual factors which feed into the opportunity context of each case study. The contextual approach highlights the location-specific configuration of material and non-material assets, the local ability to use these assets and the steering of activity to benefit a specific community.

Subtle differences were apparent in the organisations' abilities to make use of assets depending on human agency, their positions within activity fields and ability to access new fields, actors and resources, their level and degree of hybridisation and their ability to steer the use of resources to benefit local communities.

Hence, while conditions often converged, the opportunity context accounted for the uniqueness of local conditions and resources, while highlighting shared and common features of each unique opportunity context.

What is absent from the concept, however, are for example meso- to meta-level characteristics such as socio-economic circumstances, particularities of place, or the policy landscape. Although not being explicitly mentioned as impacting factors on the respective opportunity contexts, it is however assumed that these external circumstances are reflected in the availability of assets, the ability to use these and steering the use to benefit the local communities. Figure 19 (see Chapter 7.2.3) illustrates the embeddedness of the other essential assets necessary to facilitate ownership of physical assets in a wider socio-cultural context; this socio-cultural context is characterised by the above identified absent factors on a meso- and or meta-level. This however may leave dominant factors rather implicit and impact on the ability to understand and interpret the respective opportunity contexts.

Whereas previous categorisations and classifications were seen to have shortcomings for understanding the similarities and differences between organisations and assets, the processual perspective allowed these to be seen more clearly. Rather than categorising organisations according to their size or number of assets, examining processes at play can explain how ownership is facilitated. Rather than addressing community ownership of assets as a distinct sector, the study approached assets and their ownership by community organisations as part of an infrastructure which is needed to build and support strong communities.

In sum, the contribution to knowledge made by this thesis relates to approaching the study of community ownership from an angle which enables a critical investigation of, and insights into, the experienced realities of those involved in the ownership of assets for and on behalf of a community. This allows an identification of which assets are essential in facilitating community benefit and how non-material assets are of great advantage in crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

The research has moved beyond the scope of current research on community-owned assets, which has largely focused on developing classifications, categorisations in relation to a distinct sector of community organisations owning physical assets.

Although these contributions provide insights to the phenomenon and its costs and benefits, this thesis has more rigorously investigated the experienced realities of those involved, in order to explore the *meaning* of ownership for those involved. Instead of

seeking to demonstrate how well community ownership can respond to current social and community-related difficulties, the thesis has addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the importance of ownership of physical assets for the actors involved?
2. How did Covid-19 change the opportunity context for organisations and related communities owning assets?

Having summarised my contribution to knowledge, I now discuss the key findings in relation to each research question.

### **10.2.2. What is the importance of ownership of physical assets for the actors involved?**

The research uses the term ‘importance’ to shed light on the different dimensions experienced by the actors involved in managing community-owned assets. The research sub-questions explored the impact of ownership on organisations, their activities and communities; how ownership was seen to affect place-, -identity- and community making; how these assets can become liabilities; and the other assets that are perceived to be essential to successfully take on (and maintain) ownership of physical property.

The constructions of the meaning and importance of ownership by the interviewees are complex and characterised by dynamic social processes. Irrespective of the variety of cases and circumstances, and types of assets and communities, significant similarities and synergies were identified across the organisations and individual experiences.

Ownership in a poorly funded, often voluntary context with limited access to material and non-material resources, poses additional challenges for organisations. The research underlined what the literature concerning innovation and creativity in the third sector suggests (Halfpenny & Reid, 2002): innovative solutions are creatively developed in response to emerging challenges and difficulties. To meet this issue, certain processes emerge within these organisations and for the individuals concerned: fulfilling unexpected roles; becoming more professionalised; facing resource constraints; and deepening learning. The requirements of asset ownership were articulated by the actors and organisations involved, but they also described how asset ownership enables other

objectives to be achieved. Organisations were equipped with a resource which they and their respective communities could use flexibly and to which public access was secured and participation and collaboration were facilitated. The respondents understood the importance of ownership to be associated with the practical usage of the physical asset available. At the same time, ownership affected local place-, identity- and community-making processes. Ownership placed requirements on organisations in terms of inclusiveness, embeddedness, development and empowerment and these processes increased social inclusion in the areas as the assets acted as community resources serving social purposes with the aim of benefitting as many people as possible. Organisations owning assets serve as a community hub in their neighbourhoods, sometimes being the last remaining of their kind, offering low-cost services, a place to meet or engage with others.

While local embeddedness increased the out-reach of the organisations and their assets, and expanded the networks and relations built and maintained, continuous development was a difficulty posed by ownership, but was also a reassertion of the understanding of space as “never finished, never closed” (Massey, 2005, p. 9). The continuous construction of place, community and identity-making through encounters and social relationships were experienced as facilitated by the assets in community ownership. These encounters and relationships were manifested in actions and interactions which also contribute to the experience of self-efficacy in decision-making processes and the co-creation of lived realities, spaces and relations. Hence, the importance is reflected again in the practical implications of having a physical space.

However, ownership is associated with challenges which may easily turn assets into liabilities if these cannot be managed properly due to the lack of other material and non-material assets. These challenges reflect the social, economic, and political context at the time of the research, but also indicate the organisation’s ability to maintain integrity and local support, while concurrently maintaining and running the physical asset. These trade-offs left organisations with unanticipated and uncomfortable decisions: how to establish decision-making structures which balanced personal and community interests; how to manage emerging conflicts among members and determine how many, and which, resources to allocate to managing buildings versus needed community and social work.

What is publicly portrayed as a solution to degraded high streets, diminishing social infrastructure, decreasing public provision of welfare services, and deteriorating social cohesion, becomes increasingly complex in the real-world application.

Key insights from the data collected and analysed show that ownership of the assets *per se* was not foregrounded by those involved. It could be assumed that the ownership of a physical asset would be of great meaning and importance for the individuals, organisations, communities. However, other assets were experienced as equally important in facilitating and maintaining physical asset ownership. These other essential assets were: 1) strong ideological drivers; 2) organisational and asset continuity; and 3) being perceived as legitimate.

Ideology is understood in this study as consisting of beliefs and values which are developed and maintained by a social group (Hartley, 1983), and in the case of community ownership of physical assets, was defined as a driver of maintaining and providing community spaces, irrespective of challenges. The continuity of the organisation and asset enabled organisations to develop solution-oriented mechanisms over longer time periods, which in turn added to the embeddedness of those assets and organisations in their specific contexts. Hence, continuity was identified as enabling internal learning and accumulation of valuable knowledge, whilst increasing the scope and effectiveness of local networks and relationships. Continuity was defined in the analysis as being in close relationship with legitimacy, the remaining essential asset and key for community ownership. Legitimacy was defined as the acceptance by a variety of stakeholders of the organisation's role in implementing activities in community owned assets. This sometimes also has practical significance in terms of commissioning and winning funding. Being legitimate in the eyes of community members and local stakeholders such as councils and other voluntary sector groups, requires continuous balancing of actions and internalised logics. Legitimacy is a key asset but simultaneously represents a major tension for community organisations. This is the case, in particular, concerning processes of hybridisation: the incorporation of different institutional logics needs to be carefully balanced and managed in order to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of various stakeholders.

The interdependent concepts of continuity and legitimacy are facilitated by ideology and organisational and individual motivation. All together these assets of ideology, continuity and legitimacy help to construct the opportunity context of organisations and

are conditional in order to identify, mobilise and activate resources within their respective contexts.

Consequently, ownership of physical assets was not foregrounded by respondents as being particularly important, but rather, was experienced part of a larger mix of necessary assets which feed into the respective opportunity contexts. These contexts enabled the maintenance and provision of spaces dedicated to social and community purposes.

This conclusion aids a better understanding and acknowledgment of the contextual circumstances which are decisive for facilitating community ownership. This may enable to improve policies, support schemes and expectation management of those onboarding ownership on behalf of and for a community as it diverts attention from ownership on other aspects which are (at least) equally important but do not receive sufficient consideration.

Physical space was identified in the findings as important as it is a reassuring of communities in space. This reassurance highlights the meaning of physical spaces to create and maintain relationships, and ultimately community. The ownership arrangement (legal form and associated powers and responsibilities) however, was experienced as secondary.

Having summarised the findings on the importance of ownership and the role of non-material assets in constructing opportunity contexts for these organisations, the next section sets out how Covid-19 shaped the forms of community ownership, the organisations' responses and opportunity contexts through this period of upheaval.

### **10.2.3. How did Covid-19 change the opportunity context for organisations and related communities owning assets?**

Considering the concept of the opportunity context developed through the course of this research through a grounded theory approach to analysis, it becomes clear that all components of the opportunity context were affected by Covid-19-related changes, restrictions, limitations and developments throughout the pandemic. Buildings owned by the organisations contributed to the opportunity context by representing a resource

which could be used. Although this use was decisively affected, they still played a central role in responses to the pandemic by representing communities in space and providing a basis to work from. Although the buildings contributed to maintaining organisations and communities throughout the pandemic, nonetheless, ownership posed additional challenges for the organisations.

The importance of ownership only fully unfolds in combination with other essential assets and in relation to the wider opportunity context. The opportunity context consists of the available material and non-material resources and assets and the organisations' and individuals' abilities to make use of them in order to benefit their communities, to maintain the assets and the activities in them, and the organisations more generally, under prevailing contextual circumstances. The more resources available to the community organisations, the higher the likelihood of them being able to maintain and successfully run physical assets for and on behalf of communities (see figure 28). However, more resources do not inevitably lead to better outcomes. The importance lies within the purposes and circumstances under which the resources are put to use.

Figure 28 - The opportunity context



The pandemic affected the opportunity contexts of the organisations on different levels and to differing degrees, both positively and negatively.

### Resources available

The resources available were decisively affected by Covid-19, in particular, financial and human resources. Pandemic-related restrictions and limitations forced the closure of buildings, meant that people had to physically distance from each other and activities were suspended. Consequently, incomes were reduced for many private households and for organisations whose income generating activities were restricted. At the same time, the need for social and community-related services, such as counselling and food



support, increased. The increased workload had to be undertaken by fewer people. Nonetheless, emergency funding schemes helped organisations to cope with the peak of the pandemic and all organisations experienced changes in their resource availability during different phases of the pandemic. Through adaptation and adjustment, the effects of the pandemic were not only negative, because key individuals were able to turn the challenges into opportunities.

### **Ability to make use of resources**

Recognising and seizing opportunities, however, were found to be dependent on the context and the specific ability to make use of the available resources. Discovering, activating and mobilising resources via the processes of incremental hybridisation, engaging and positioning within different fields (e.g. the political domain, business relations or civic engagement) were affected by the pandemic as alternative approaches needed to be developed. The organisations studied were used to being underfunded and navigating precarious resourcing, and so were well-equipped with the necessary experience and skills to continue operations under challenging circumstances. The pandemic was an opportunity for organisations to demonstrate their ability to develop ad hoc responses, and to activate and mobilise resources which were not identified as such by other actors. This facilitated the provision of essential support for those in need during the peak of the pandemic.

The physical asset(s) in the cases studied played a key role in facilitating these operations in the background, while increasing and maintaining visibility and awareness of the organisations during times of lockdown. Engaging in physical space-making during times of prohibited use of these spaces kept momentum. The buildings and spaces were places to go to ask for support and at the same time, maintained hope for the future by providing a symbol of what might be possible again - meeting in person and community-making.

Hybridisation – which was identified as key in facilitating successful ownership of physical buildings – was also recognised as key to responses to the pandemic and the altered opportunity contexts. Hybridisation is understood as “the purposeful adaptive response by organisations to a turbulent environment” (Mullins & Acheson, 2014p. 1608). Hence, hybridisation of the organisational structures of community organisations owning physical assets became a key factor in maintaining their ability to use resources

during the pandemic. The processes of hybridisation - negotiation of institutional logics and maintaining integrity while constantly developing and adapting - enabled the actors to find niches where resources could be acquired and mobilised while making optimal use of their internal capacities to react and respond to changes in their opportunity context. The ability to adapt to, and make use of, different institutional logics also allowed organisations to adapt to changing circumstances.

### **Steering the use of resources**

The use of resources needs to be steered in order to ensure that community benefit is generated. Steering the use of resources is another processual part of the organisation's opportunity context. By directing resources to the advantage of communities' positive social effects are generated.

Part of this ability to effectively direct resources comes from being locally embedded and having knowledge about what is of benefit in the local context. The respondents in this study reported that reflective processes were an important factor along with monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in ensuring their knowledge was accurate and represented what was needed locally. Reflection, evaluation and monitoring were important requirements for external stakeholders, but were also particularly central to internal decision-making processes and revalidation of assumptions and actions. During the uncertain circumstances of the pandemic, local knowledge in connection with continuous reflection and evaluation became even more important.

The processual understanding of the opportunity context allows to explain why and how the pandemic had similar effects on community organisations and different outcomes were produced. The concept enables the capturing of contextual specifics in various settings, a theoretical scrutinising of elements feeding into the opportunities available and simultaneously highlighting that the actual difference is made by the actors involved. However, the concept could be developed further, and systematically applied to a larger number of cases, integrating quantitative and qualitative indicators to further refine the theoretical approach.

These responses to and effects of the pandemic of the organisations participating in this research were not necessarily different from those organisations not owning the assets they occupy. However, the opportunity context of these organisations differed. The participating organisations owned their assets and hence, were equipped with physical

spaces which could be used, even if different and only limited compared to prior the pandemic.

Whereas previous research focused on the static factors describing organisations, trying to identify how to classify and characterise organisations owning assets, the present approach aims to identify the meaning of ownership as one factor feeding into the opportunity context, being composed of various other assets.

Hence, this contributes to identifying those areas which are politically and practically neglected and could be used to improve the expectation management of organisations involved in asset ownership and other related stakeholders.

Based on this processual understanding the design of support schemes for community ownership could be improved to equip concerned actors with urgently needed information. Focused intervention could alleviate pressures from concerned organisations to enable this mechanism to become a meaningful tool in combating societal difficulties and rebuilding communities in the aftermath of the pandemic.

The findings resonate with ideas around the transformative potential of community ownership models and how these alternative economic practices may change predominant logics. Whereas the variety of cases and the experienced realities of community owned assets challenge the uniformity of the community asset ‘sector’, the implemented mechanisms and models emphasise tensions between “the logics of economic value and social asset” (Bottomley, 2020, p. 251). These spaces may represent incidents of transformative potential when intentionally designed as such, however, even without transformative practices, these spaces do offer opportunities for oppositional community organising in response to decreasing social provision (DeFilippis et al., 2009; DeFilippis et al., 2019).

The next section provides reflections on the methodology and methods applied to develop the findings and how the pandemic affected the research process.

### **10.3. Reflections on methodology and methods and the effects of Covid-19 on the research and research process**

The research was decisively affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The methodology and methods had to be adjusted in order to conduct research under pandemic-related restrictions and to account for the particularities emerging during the period. The crisis provided a unique opportunity to observe community organisations and their assets at a point of national emergency.

In March 2020, I was preparing the documentation required for the Confirmation of Doctorate. The plan set out the research aims, objectives, questions, methodology and methods intended.

However, as Covid-19 emerged, it quickly became clear that the disease was about to become a pandemic and would last longer than predicted. Not only did Covid-19 and the accompanying restrictions on travelling, working, social interactions and public life affect the research plan and implementation, but also profoundly affected what was being studied.

While the initial idea and research plan set out to investigate the geographical distribution of community-owned assets across England, the impact of the pandemic on the landscape could not have been foreseen or anticipated. At that point, it was neither clear in how far and for how long the pandemic would affect daily lives, nor was there any idea or certainty about the ability of organisations to overcome emerging challenges and difficulties, and whether there would be any support provided. This uncertainty led to shifting the research focus from the geographical dimension to the impacts of the pandemic on community-owned assets.

The adaptation of the research questions and methods was made rapidly to ensure that the research could continue and focus on the unusual times of the pandemic by investigating community-owned spaces when their use was restricted or prohibited. The decisions made for and against different methods need to be considered against the background of the pandemic and its implications for the practicability of conducting research under limited possibilities.

### **10.3.1. Case study design and the combination of grounded theory and a conceptual framework**

The research design centred around a series of case studies, aimed at capturing data at different points in the pandemic. This approach, and the selection of cases, was built on a significant quantitative assessment of the distribution and characteristics of community-owned assets in England (see Chapter 4 and Appendix 1). The case study data provided the basis for detailed analysis informed by grounded theory. Initially applying a rigorous grounded theory approach to data, and then introducing other ideas and concepts later in the analytical process, helped to move beyond description to sense-making. This created a framework which supports a grounded theory approach to the construction of experienced realities, while simultaneously providing theoretical orientation. The aim was to not develop a theoretical framework which forces a certain theory onto the investigation of community ownership, but rather to develop a conceptual guidance to how this study approached this phenomenon.

In the combination of abstract ideas of space and place, how these are created, constantly changed and under continuous construction through interrelation, and by an exploration of realities through Bourdieu's field and habitus, the emergence and persistence of hybridity becomes apparent. Rather than being positioned in one certain field of activity, the continuous construction of space and place by interaction and interrelation contributes to actors' engagement in various fields, constantly aiming to better positions for their organisations, to increase access to resources. This is facilitated by processes of hybridisation, the incorporation of different logics, skills and capacities to adapt and adjust to changing circumstances. The common idea of all these concepts is dynamic and processual nature of these mechanisms.

During the pandemic it was difficult to investigate these processes as physical encounters were not allowed. Resultingly, different means had to be developed in this research to identify how spaces are created during times of lockdown and restrictions and how to capture and investigate the processes of place- and space making as field visits were not possible.

Case study research is used to explore a particular real-life phenomenon on the basis of specific cases (Norander & Brandhorst, 2018). In this study, the cases chosen were all examples of organisations that own physical assets. As Yin (1981) emphasises, case

studies allow the investigation not only of the contemporary phenomenon at stake but also the context it is embedded in. The methods chosen served the aims of the research to investigate the importance and meaning of ownership to those involved and how the Covid-19 pandemic affected the organisations.

On the basis of specific cases, it became possible to identify different aspects of the chosen theoretical framework such as engagement in different fields and processes of positioning and of space making as it allowed to discuss and compare developments prior and during the pandemic in the case study organisations.

I was able to find similar procedures and mechanisms across the cases, irrespective whether cases were single or multi-asset, in a rural or urban context, embedded in an economic vibrant or deprived neighbourhood. These all were confronted with similar social dynamics and underlying processes.

Although case study research is generally critiqued for lacking generalisability due to its focus on in-depth information based on a limited, mostly very small, number of cases (Norander & Brandhorst, 2018), the in-depth insights allow an analytical and theoretical generalisability. The investigation of nine cases, four of them in-depth, enabled identification of patterns and similarities across cases in respect to the research questions. Case studies and the combination of grounded theory and a theoretical framework allowed to investigate different localities and different implementations of community ownership to be investigated during the pandemic. By using grounded theory, the emergence of themes from the data was supported rather than forcing theories or concepts onto experienced realities while the conceptual framework enabled theoretical focus navigating the large amount of data. In particular the theoretical foci of Habitus, fields, space- and place-making were in practice affected by the pandemic. This enabled the shift in perception and allowed the findings to emerge in regard to the underlying social processes of the importance of ownership, shifting its position to be one factor in a larger mix and highlight the other essential assets necessary to facilitate the provision of community owned spaces. By the disruption of the pandemic, the different angle became possible and allowed the concept of the opportunity context to emerge.

## **Limitations**

Although the case study design and the combination of grounded theory and a theoretical framework led to develop important findings, it was however a messy process.

Using a case study design based on a rigorous quantitative background analysis helped to make sense of the final selection. However, the pandemic severely affected this selection strategy as explored in Chapter 4. Alternatively, the case selection could also have been reduced to a certain type of practiced ownership, such as full ownership (in legal terms) or only those leasing ownership arrangements to reduce distortion in the case sample. I was only able to study those organisations having sufficient resources to devote to participate in this research during the peaks of the pandemic. I was not able capture developments in those manifestations of community ownership being massively burdened by the pandemic as they rejected participation due to lacking resources. Hence, although difficulties were experienced in all cases, the sample reflects those organisations managing the pandemic and effects relatively well. Additionally, community organisations who failed to maintain ownership of a community owned asset would have been of great interest to identify what has led the organisations to lose assets, or further explore contexts in which community organisations decided against ownership after embarking on the journey to acquire a building.

Further, as explored in Chapter 3, grounded theory is particularly contested regarding the subjectivity of the analysis. The thesis aimed to be as transparent as possible, the coding hierarchy can be found in Appendix 6, to alleviate the effects of my own impact on the research. This will be further elaborated in the next sections.

### **10.3.2. Data collection**

The data in this research was collected by conducting twenty-three in-depth interviews with eighteen individuals from nine different case study organisations.

The collection process was decisively shaped by the pandemic. Conducting social research during Covid-19 was challenging from the very beginning.

As described in Chapter 2, the recruitment of participants during peak periods of the pandemic took longer than initially planned. Many of the organisations contacted did not reply or rejected participation due to limited resources and the necessity of focussing on pandemic support activities. Hence, rather than having four case studies, interviewing different stakeholder groups in each case, the selection strategy was broadened in order to contact more organisations in the hope of finding participants across a variety of cases. The benefits were that by expanding the strategy, more participants could be recruited; however, the disadvantage was that only the organisational perspective could be explored.

The initial idea was to explore different perspectives in the different case study contexts, hence, interviewing members, volunteers, neighbours, and other concerned stakeholders and third parties using the assets. The pandemic however led to persons being reluctant to participate in the research. This caused the interviews to only represent organisational perspectives rather than those of the concerned communities. Nonetheless, this may as well be seen as an advantage of the pandemic as it imposed a focus on the data collection which was initially not intended.

The restrictions on travel and social interactions did not allow in-person site visits. Hence, data was collected via ICT tools. This enabled access to key individuals and key insights into organisations, processes and pandemic related developments. Many of the interviewees used the opportunity to take a moment to reflect on their work and organisation. The opportunity to conduct the data collection from home, not only for me but also for the interviewees, enabled this to be done when it was most suited – some interviews were conducted very early, others during evening times, depending on the preferences and daily obligations of the interviewees. This also allowed in-depth conversations and data collection as interview partners were less distracted and often took longer than the initially expected 60 minutes to discuss the interview guidelines. The findings were facilitated by these extended and personal conversations.

To compensate the lack of physical and personal access to the field, social media posts, internal documents, and research reports and descriptions from an earlier study (Archer et al., 2019) to which many of my case study organisations contributed to were used to complement the fragmented picture. Under normal circumstances this may not have been taken into account as field visits would have complemented the data collection. Nonetheless, this additional information did contribute to the validation of the data provided by the interviewees, such as narratives of civic engagement which could be



recapitulated by vibrant online engagement. It also provided additional evidence for alternative ways of generating space and place during times of prohibited physical interaction.

The pandemic did not only affect organisations in their practical activities or economic circumstances, but also affected all of us personally on all aspects of daily lives. Hence, the availability of participants was limited due to the personal impacts which were experienced by community members, volunteers, neighbours. While a personal presence would have led to small conversations with various stakeholders, a formal invitation via mail did not lead to any interviews beyond the organisational representative level, hence I was not able to access volunteers, visitors or neighbours in many cases except from Gatis.

### **Limitations**

The reduction of interviewees to the organisational representatives is interpreted as a benefit to the data collection and the ability to draw conclusions as central players in the different case studies could be compared, the initial aim was to explore the contexts the organisations are embedded in. This was limited due to the lacking physical access to the cases and concerned communities.

Using ICT and conducting video calls was difficult in the beginning, nonetheless, the participants and I settled very quickly into the virtual meeting spaces.

However, the research would have benefitted from field visits, observations, and the informal insights which would have been possible. Video conferences allowed to share a virtual space and have a verbal conversation; small gestures and body language were not observable. Discussion flows were as well sometimes interrupted due to the lack of feeling for speech tempo and technical issues.

Systematic collection of data and information from social media was not possible due to a lack of time and resources, and the differences in usage of social media and other online tools such as newsletters. The amount of available data per case varied as not all participating organisations were active and present on social media platforms. This means insights were richer for some organisations more than others.

Irrespective of the difficulties and shortcomings, I was able to access crucial actors in the different case studies and gather data of great qualitative value to this research. By repeatedly contacting people, without stressing or overwhelming them, I was able to establish relationships and enabled participants to also take advantage of the interviews themselves by using our conversations as opportunities to reflect and leave enough space for their thoughts to be heard. This has provided rich insights into people's perceptions and experiences and facilitated the rigorous data collection.

### **10.3.3. Data analysis**

Although the initial aim of the research, design and methodology before the pandemic was to use grounded theory to explore the meaning and importance of ownership to the communities involved, the changed circumstances emphasised this approach.

Covid-19 as a unique crisis incomparable to other shocks of the recent decades made it inevitable for me to explore the experienced realities of those involved as no prior existing experiences could have been taken into account relating to pandemics and their consequences on society, economics and policy, and in this particular case the voluntary sector.

This however produced a vast amount of data; in contrast to applying a certain theory or assumption, the research explored what might be of interest and importance to the problem at stake (Bitsch, 2005). Hence, the meaning and importance of ownership and the changes the pandemic caused in the respective opportunity contexts were developed from the empirical data gathered during times of the pandemic and allowed themes to emerge which I did not anticipate. This decisively shaped the findings as it allowed me to reconstruct the experienced realities based on the insights of those involved. Through the use of grounded theory, the individuality and uniqueness of each opportunity context became apparent, as different conditions, factors and external drivers were explored by the interviewees which I probably would not have explored when applying a theory or certain predetermined hypotheses.

The amount of data produced in the long conversations (up to 2:15 h) was overwhelming at times and navigating through all the qualitative information was a

lengthy process. However, the different coding steps which were performed iteratively helping to identify those interesting and insightful statements which were relevant to the specific questions and problems in this study and separate those bits which were of interest but not relevant.

The timing of the interviews (Winter 2020/21 and Winter 2021/22) provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on rapid developments throughout the pandemic. Irrespective of the difficulties and uncertainties, the participants were clear about their motivations and their willingness to continue their engagement in community support and the provision of physical assets for and with their communities. Nevertheless, the interviews were characterised by uncertainty, worry and inability to plan ahead. Hence, the future roles the interviewees envisaged for their organisations and assets were vague and tentative. In spite of this, the aim to rebuild communities by empowering them to actively take part in this process while growing back stronger was clearly articulated and would be facilitated by the asset they occupied. The assets were seen to be of critical importance, particularly in reintroducing communities to face-to-face social interactions.

Without the pandemic prior knowledge and existing theories might have found more application to the data analysis and findings, however the unique circumstances revealed mechanisms identified in this research which would probably not have been discovered under normal circumstances.

## **Limitations**

The method of CGT requires increased elaboration to do justice to the complex analytical process and the quality of the data. This analytical process resulted in a rigorously developed coding hierarchy which formed the basis of the findings chapter of this thesis (see Appendix 6). Hence, the amount of analytical work and necessary words to explain the accuracy and diligence of this is larger than it would have been using other analytical methods.

Further challenges were seen in decision making concerning the development and construction of the analysis into findings chapters, thematic analysis versus a case-based approach. Due to the variety of cases, the assets, the geographical and local contexts, it felt important to elaborate on each individually. However, the limited scope of this thesis and the number of cases led to the denial of developing the findings chapters on a

case basis. As the aim was to develop generalisation, the thematic analysis was chosen to analyse and present the findings. It has to be accepted then, that some qualities of the contexts and or organisational characteristics may be lost in this thematic approach.

The methodology and methods and consequently the research design, process, data collection and analysis were decisively shaped by the pandemic. Not only did the unique crisis change the whole focus of the research, it also affected the access to the research field, the approach to collecting data and the analysis, ultimately allowing these circumstances to be captured and analysed based on the first hand experiences of those involved in organisations owning physical assets on behalf of and for communities.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the research several implications can be derived which are presented in the next section.

## **10.4. Implications of the research**

The insights gained from the research involve a number of implications for different groups engaging with, interested in and supporting community ownership of physical assets. There are valuable lessons which can be taken into account, particularly regarding the developments in support for community ownership and the availability of buildings for community use. These implications are relevant to government initiatives relating to community ownership.

First, the UK Government initiated a £150 million Community Ownership Fund (COF) in 2021 (GOV UK, 2021) which was planned to run for four years until 2024/25. In May 2023 a second round was announced with amended conditions and requirements, reacting to feedback with a view to making the fund more effective and efficient (DHLC & MHCLG, 2023).

Second, the Covid-19 pandemic changed spatial structures and occupation of city centres, high streets and historical and community venues. “Britain saw the biggest rise in vacant shops in over two decades late last year and the sharpest increase in empty offices since the financial crisis” (Milliken, 2021). Community ownership and

community business models are perceived as a solution to increased vacancy of commercial sites which can contribute to restoring symbolic spaces, reusing vacant venues and repurposing buildings and spaces to meet community needs (Dobson, 2022).

These policies assume that community ownership can play a crucial role in the remaking of communities and a post-Covid ‘new normal’. Hence, the insights generated from this thesis may be of great interest for future developments to steer a solution-oriented use of community ownership of physical assets which facilitates improvements and benefits all involved.

By exploring the importance of ownership, it became clear that there are more assets necessary beyond physical ones to facilitate ownership (Chapters 6 and 7) and maintain the provision of community-owned spaces. The study of the effects of the Covid-19 crisis revealed how the organisations coped with and responded by incremental processes of hybridisation (see Chapter 8 and 9).

The next two sub-sections reflect on what these findings mean for practitioners engaged with community owned assets, and then what the findings mean for the development of policy affecting these forms of action.

#### **10.4.1. For practitioners**

The findings in this research showed that there are many factors playing a crucial role considering successful and long-term community ownership of physical assets. What emerged as a clear theme is that ownership per se was not experienced by respondents as the most important factor in the mix. Rather, many other assets, most importantly non-material assets, are urgently needed to facilitate the provision of community spaces for community purposes: assets such as being locally embedded, having diverse skills available and local knowledge are crucial.

Community organisations taking on responsibility for buildings often have great expectations for what they will be able to achieve once they control assets; however, questioning the intention of why and how assets are transferred to communities and community organisations may be crucial in managing the expectations what they can put into practice. For example, outsourcing cost-intensive assets onto communities may

hinder these to devote the necessary resources into their community work. The case study organisations participating in this investigation mostly acquired their assets in response to threats to valued spaces, but an active acquisition of buildings by organisations seems rather rare. Active acquisition may include clear visions and missions of organisations and their activities as well as sufficient knowledge about asset ownership and the assets condition. As the case studies showed, many buildings were not fit for purpose and needed renovation and restoration efforts. It is therefore important for those intending to take assets into community ownership to keep the rights and responsibilities regarding the physical aspects of the assets in mind before taking on the responsibility for the building. Workload, financial commitment, and maintenance of physical assets are often not emphasised enough. Those involved could make better decisions about whether they have the capacity, resources and skills before taking on the asset if the physical assets and surrounding circumstances are given special attention and financial viability is thoroughly explored using the tools of business plans. A comprehensive assessment framework for organisations taking on ownership may be of interest for further research.

Although, ownership was expressed as positive for providing space for community purposes and responding to community needs and ideas, respondents also highlighted the difficulties and challenges encountered. In particular, they mentioned the isolated and fragmented support structures, which often address only one aspect or challenge of ownership, rather than providing integrated and holistic support. Problems were identified in bidding processes, which only provide funding for certain purposes, for example, accessibility repairs or specific activities only addressing unemployed young adults. Organisations often cannot adhere to such strict criteria and need more general funding.

Being clear about which responsibilities and tasks are feasible when relying on external funding and project-based financial support is vital for the actors involved as resources and capacities need to be factored in from the very beginning. Simultaneously, community and social tasks need to be considered and fulfilled while maintaining a physical asset in all respects, from physical maintenance, to legal and insurance related issues and safety measures. There is a lack of knowledge about the associated responsibilities beyond the obvious level. Hence, detailed guidance and reference to emerging tasks and trade-offs should be developed to equip decision-makers with sufficient knowledge.

The opportunity context in terms of resources available, the ability to use, and to steer the use to benefit communities, is maximised in terms of available opportunities when close-knit networks of well-connected and well-embedded organisations are apparent. Therefore, developing networks and connections may need to be paid special attention to ensure the other essential assets needed to facilitate the provision of community spaces are in place. In particular, the Covid-19 pandemic revealed how precious these assets are in changed contexts by enabling the ability to adapt. The durability and long-term effects of the pandemic are yet to be investigated.

Nonetheless, the research also revealed how the physical assets were central to the importance of the spatial presence of community organisations is in local contexts; to how the organisations maintained contact with their communities; and to how they provided support and crucial local services. The pandemic restrictions on the self-determined use of their buildings re-enforced the importance of community spaces and fostered community empowerment during the early stages of a post-Covid-19 ‘new normal’.

#### **10.4.2. For policy**

The political environment for community ownership of physical assets is of a fragmented nature. Devolution processes increased differences in local actions and responses to opportunities and challenges and implementations of different rules and regulations. Some councils in this research were experienced as supportive and helpful, while in other cases governmental entities were not experienced as open for or in favour of transferring responsibilities and/ or buildings to local communities. Although legal guidelines were established, such as the right to bid and the right to buy (Beckett, 2015; Bristol, 2021), there are few recommendations or guidelines available for local councils on how to establish transfer processes or provide support after completing the asset transfers.

Hence, local outcomes of community ownership vary immensely depending on the attitude of local governmental entities, not only in terms of councils being former owners, but also how to guide local community organisations through the acquisition and ownership process and beyond.

Rather than perceiving and using community ownership as an universal solution to decreasing public budgets, vacant city centres and high streets, it is important not only to facilitate the acquisition of assets in the first place, but also to develop holistic support schemes which enable long-term and sustainable ownership to allow buildings to become integral parts of the local social infrastructure filling this lack in many modern settlement structures caused by governmental withdrawal from former public tasks and provision.

One key insight from research on village halls through the pandemic (Archer & Skropke, 2021) was that we only really understand the value of these types of assets in a crisis. The pandemic highlighted the importance of halls as ‘designated places of safety’ where crucial services were provided. However, this statutory status confers few additional resources for the organisations managing them.

The developing literature on social infrastructure, in particular on places facilitating human interactions and encounters, community building and maintenance – “spaces of sociality” (Klinenberg, 2020; Latham & Layton, 2022, p. 659) – may support increasing attention and interest in these types of infrastructure and challenge the lacking resource spending in these areas. Social infrastructure has become an issue of interest across the globe and may become of increasing meaning for future policy design and development to address current and future societal challenges (Hollis et al., 2023; The British Academy, 2023).

Funding schemes such as the COF only represent one part of a larger (financial) support package that would be required to ensure community ownership becomes an integral and sustainable part of maintaining and re-establishing local social infrastructure which is not as vulnerable to external shocks as economic and profit-oriented models.

Although the funding schemes provides revenue funding as well as capital funding, this is only of a temporary nature. After the funding for running costs, such as utility bills, staff costs or external services, ends, the organisations are again confronted with the same difficulty of how to establish a stable funding basis which allows them to pursue urgently needed social and community work without having the constant worry of finding sources of revenue.

However, there is more support needed to help manage emerging additional responsibilities which come with taking on ownership and responsibility for a building. Skills training in various dimensions is one urgent need in the local context; how individuals in communities are activated to contribute to a common local good, how



organisations internally manage resource and input demands, and training in making funding bid applications, are just a few examples of the types of support which are needed.

The research reveals some of the interventions which are required in order to support community ownership and to develop the mechanisms in ways which support a remaking of communities in the aftermath of the pandemic and generate true benefits for all actors involved.

## **10.5. Some future directions for research**

Community ownership is a recurrent theme in the policy responses in England to a range of social, community, economic and spatial issues that have arisen as a result of Covid-19. The Levelling-Up agenda, in particular the COF, are instruments which aim at transferring rights and responsibilities to communities and civil society. The question emerges, however, as to whether these devolution processes are desired in local contexts or whether these developments and outsourcing of responsibilities onto civil society represent an additional burden for those individuals and organisations already experiencing difficult circumstances.

The findings in this research reveal that ownership itself is not sufficient; in order to ensure successful provision of community spaces and community infrastructure other (non-material) assets such as continuity, legitimacy and ideological motivation are essential.

The research identified that a shift in focus from the static factor of ownership towards a dynamic processual approach facilitates an understanding of the mechanisms at play when considering community organisations' ownership of physical assets in relation to withstanding challenges and difficulties.

The concept of the opportunity context could be developed further, and systematically applied to a larger number of cases, integrating quantitative and qualitative indicators to further refine the theoretical approach. This could contribute to developing a universally

applicable tool to assess the strengths and weaknesses of local contexts regarding ownership and help to design customised support needs and services.

Additionally, theoretical considerations need further attention. Bourdieu's concept of habitus could be integrated into the concept of the opportunity context by systematically exploring how behaviours and ideologies emerge, are maintained and institutionalised, and how these processes are compatible with, re-enforce or contradict the change-based idea of hybridisation.

The data used for this investigation can serve as a basis to further assess the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on community-owned assets and the role these play in the aftermath of the pandemic and the remaking of communities. Due to the timing of this study, the insights generated for the post-Covid 'new normal' are only of a tentative and preliminary nature. It would be of great interest to compare the expectations, concerns and ideas of those involved since the Covid-19 pandemic when restrictions were lifted in February 2022 (GOV UK, 2022). The long-term effects of the pandemic on community organisations owning physical assets and their ability to maintain a viable running model is still to be investigated.

Similarly, there is an ongoing need for geographical information on community ownership. It would be of great benefit for the academic field to assess if, and to what extent, the pandemic changed the national landscape of community-owned assets – either in increases due to new assets coming into community ownership or the closure of existing ones – and what factors led to these changes to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of community ownership.

Identifying those cases where ownership could not be maintained by community organisations would be of great value for researchers to identify those factors which hindered community ownership and to determine further support requirements. This would contribute to improving the design of support schemes and to a better understanding of how ownership by community organisations can be promoted in a sustainable way which truly benefits communities.

Community ownership of physical assets may play a crucial role in redistributing control and self-efficacy to communities over the spaces and places they value. Irrespective of the dominant neo-liberal move to reduce public expenditure and minimise the role of government, access to and maintenance of spaces designated for

community purposes may be central to the social infrastructure required to withstand new shocks and crises, equipping communities, and individuals, with the resources required to cope with and adjust to changes. By investigating the meaning and importance of ownership and revealing the mechanisms at play which facilitate successful ownership on the ground, the research hopes to contribute to the improvement of community ownership models, the design of arrangements, and to the creation of more effective and efficient support schemes which allow communities to fully take advantage of the assets they value.

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# Appendices

## Appendix One – Practicalities of the background study

### Community Ownership of Assets - the Data

The data used in this section is based on data set of the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research (CRESR) which will be taken over by MySociety held on KiitC. These have been acquired for a research project commissioned by Power to Change and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in mid-2018. Main purpose of this research was to generate a national overview of the *community* ownership of assets concerning their financial viability and economic impacts. The report describes a fast-growing rate of community ownership and encounters mainly stable financial circumstances; however, as well vulnerabilities and emphasises those areas where more support needs to be established and provided in order to strengthen and facilitate ownership by communities.

The result of the research was a data set of assets which are highly likely and probable to be in community ownership. The number of identified assets accounts to 8856 assets located in England.

Further preparation was necessary in order to make use of the data set, unfortunately two entries had to be neglected as the gathered information was incomplete and not verifiable. The remaining 8854 entries were cleaned and their location was verified by allocating coordinates to postcodes in form of latitude and longitude. The data was also allocated to the Ordnance Survey National Grid reference system which is a geographic grid system used in England. Similar to Latitude and Longitude, the Easting and Northing are a given numeric grid reference which is used to define a location on a map using the Coordinate Reference System OSGB 1936 / British National Grid, EPSG: 27700.

The data provided by CRESR contains several detailed information: Names of organisations owning assets, addresses of organisations and of assets if different to the

organisational address, postcodes, type of assets, type of ownership, if the local community is the primary beneficiary of the asset, if mainly local residents form the board of these organisations. Not all information was provided for all database entries.

To allocate a precise location to all assets listed, it was necessary to further clean the given postcodes. Some were incorrect in form of typing errors, too short or not existing. The verification and identification of location was performed by online research in three steps by means of the organisation's name: 1. Google; 2. Mutuals Public Register (Financial Conduct Authority); and 3. Charity Register.

The final dataset was the basis of information being used in the background study.

## **The Software**

The software used to visualise the geographical information is QGIS; a free and open source Geographic Information System software which allows to visualise, edit, create and analyse geospatial data. Different versions of QGIS have been used, due to technical limitations (Version 2.18.0; 3.4.13; and 3.10.0). This did not have any impact on the output maps as the different versions continuously use equal functions and visualisations.

The necessary data format to make use of QGIS roughly includes two types:

Vector layers in form of Shapefiles and delimited text layers in form of Excel Comma Separated Value (CSV) files to read in and display geographical information. Shapefiles function as the vector layer which represent the actual underlying map of England, whereas CSV files were used to read attributes and characteristics into the software.

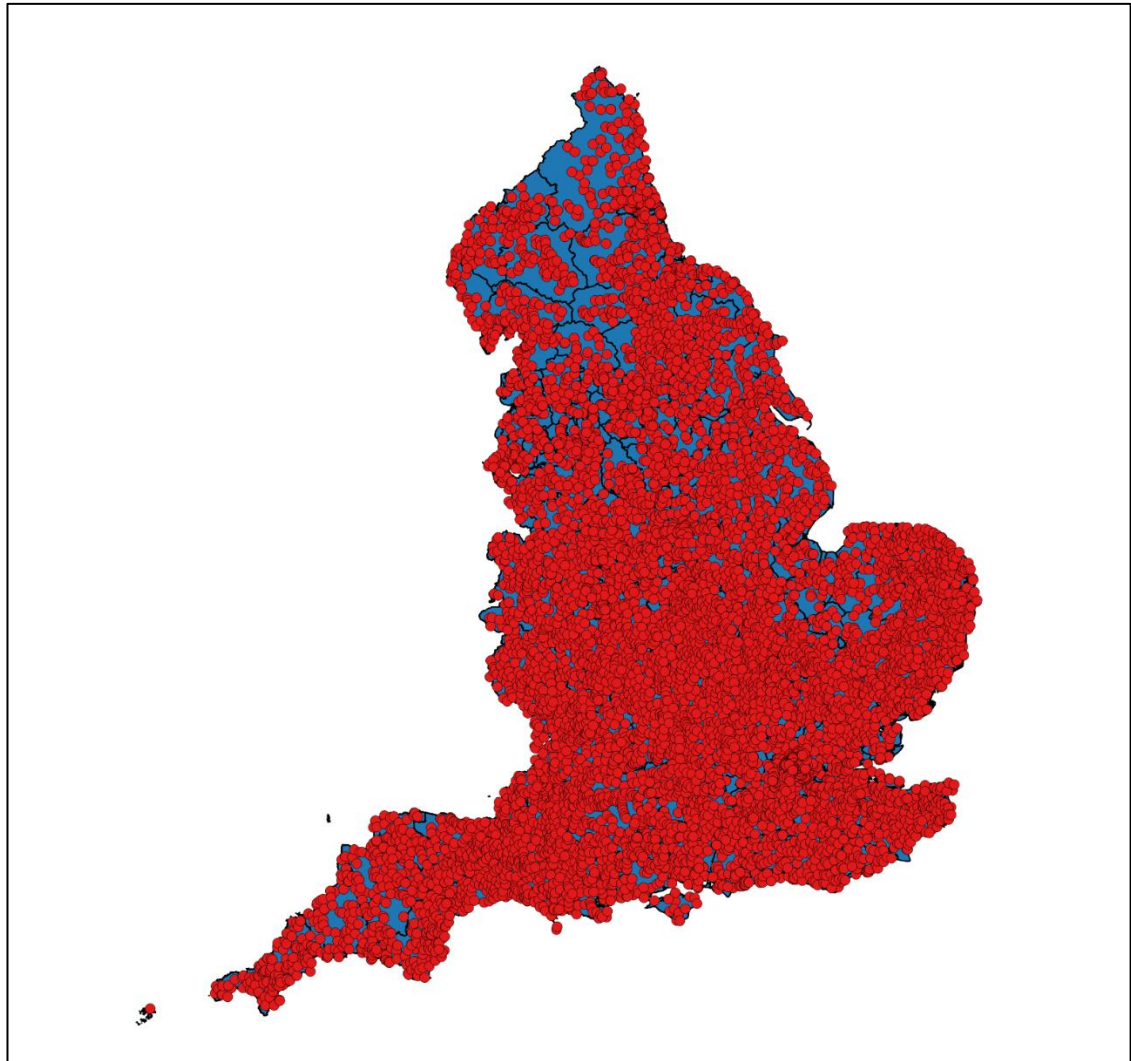
The basic geographical data of England was obtained from the Open Geography Portal of the Office for National Statistics. This guaranteed a reliable source for geographical data, however some modifications had to be performed to generate a Shapefile containing only areas in England.



## The Geographical Level

The database contains 8854 verified entries. Mapping these in form of point data does not generate a very accessible or understandable visualisation:

*Figure 29 - Point Data on Map of England of all identified Assets.*



Hence, lower geographical level were necessary to categorise the coordinates and aggregate these to enable a visualisation which may allow insights by viewing maps.

## **Administrative Levels in the United Kingdom**

The UK has several levels of administrative boundaries. These are used as the general frames in which the quantitative part of the research is nested. Statistical data used to further analyse the geographical distribution of community ownership of assets were mainly obtained from the Office for National Statistics and other governmental sources, as well as secondary sources which were based on information published by public bodies.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland consists of four constituent countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Each country has a distinctive administrative geography hierarchy. This research focuses on England, which is mainly divided into Regions, Counties, and Local Authority Districts.

### **Administrative Boundaries in England – Geographic Structure**

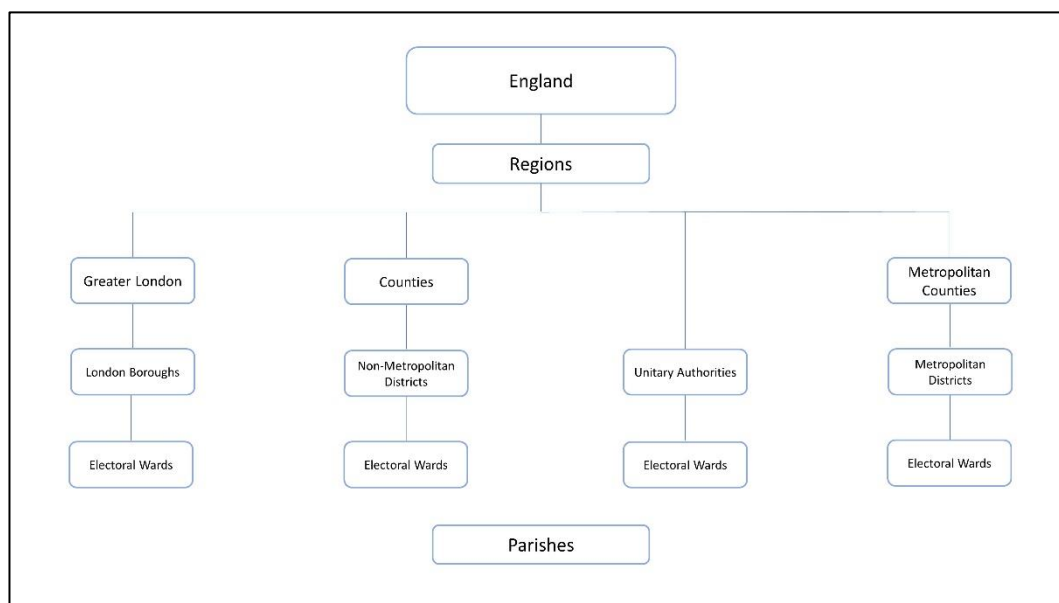
The nine regions in England are: East Midlands, East of England, London, North East, North West, South East, South West and Yorkshire and the Humber. These regions are further divided into Counties of three different types: Counties, Metropolitan Counties and Unitary Authorities. The next lower administrative level is the District Level in form of metropolitan districts and non-metropolitan districts and finally the Electoral Wards and Divisions which are the key entities of the administrative geography (Office for National Statistics, 2019b).

The Electoral Wards/Divisions are the geographical level on which basis governmental councillors are elected in metropolitan, non-metropolitan districts and unitary authorities. In average, each Local Authority District (LAD) is divided into 23 Electoral Wards/Divisions. The size of wards may vary, depending on the population counts; the average is 5,500 inhabitants. The more urban the LADs are, the populous are the Electoral Wards. In 2019 there have been 8,887 electoral wards/divisions. (Office for National Statistics, 2019a).

A separate spatial entity are Parishes, which used to play an important role in representing administrative areas. However, due to their limited functions and irregular

spatial occurrence these are not used anymore as a unit for national statistics (Office for National Statistics, 2019b).

Figure 30 - Overview of Geographical Administrative Hierarchy



The geographical levels of major interest for this research were the LADs and the attached sub-divisions. Although, LADs provided a suitable level of visual representation, this spatial dimension varies considerably in terms of geographical size and population. For example, Northumberland has a size of 5,013km<sup>2</sup> and 320,274 Inhabitants; the neighbouring LAD North Tyneside has 205,985 inhabitants and a size of only 82.39km<sup>2</sup>. The analytical opportunities are hence limited on such a broad and varying scale but provided an overview for preliminary insights.

Due to changes in population, the boundaries are regularly controlled and changed if necessary. Consequently, comparing statistical data and changes over time may increasingly become difficult due to these boundary changes. Particularly the lower level boundaries of electoral wards/divisions are affected by changes as the main rationale for changing the boundaries is the electoral equality – to ensure that each elector's vote has a similar weight in the higher administrative level.

However, not only electoral ward/division boundaries are subject of change, there were considerable amendments in the LAD level between the last Census (2011) and 2019/2020. Whereas in 2011 there were 326 LADs in England; in 2019 there were only 317 left. Fourteen LADs were dissolved and five new created, combining different existing LADs to one. The new LADs in 2019 compared to 2011 are:

- **Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole** (which used to be three separate LADs before)
- **Dorset** (combining East Dorset, North Dorset, Purbeck, West Dorset and Weymouth and Portland)
- **East Suffolk** (combining Waveney and Suffolk Coastal)
- **Somerset West and Taunton** (combining Taunton and Deane and West Somerset)
- **West Suffolk** (combining St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath)

Additional geographical levels were implemented for statistical purposes, in particular, for the census survey. The Census is a survey performed every ten years with the aim to picture an accurate estimation of people and households in order to facilitate systematic and proper planning for governmental entities (e.g. provision of public services). Other actors make use of the gathered data as well, such as businesses, voluntary organisations, or academics. The census provides a source for statistical data on a national scale, which allows a comparison of characteristics among various locations.

The lowest geographical level of Census data is the Output Area (OA). These have been established for data collection and output of data, especially for estimations. In 2011, there were 171,372 OA in England with an average population of 309. In addition, Super Output Areas (SOA) were designed as an aggregate of groups of OAs in order to improve the reporting of small area statistics. There are two types of SOAs: Lower Layer SOA and Middle Layer SOA. The OAs are generally intended to contain similar sizes (people and households) to form a stable and consistent geographical level. OAs are formed on the basis of postcodes to group household according to their location with the additional intention to also group socially similar households. The attached thresholds for the (S)OAs are:

*Table 9 - Threshold for Output Area Categories*

Geography	Min population	Max population	Min no. of households	Max no. of households
OA	100	625	40	250
LSOA	1,000	3,000	400	1,200
MSOA	5,000	15,000	2,000	6,000

In 2011, there were 32,844 LSOAs and 6,791 MSOAs in England.

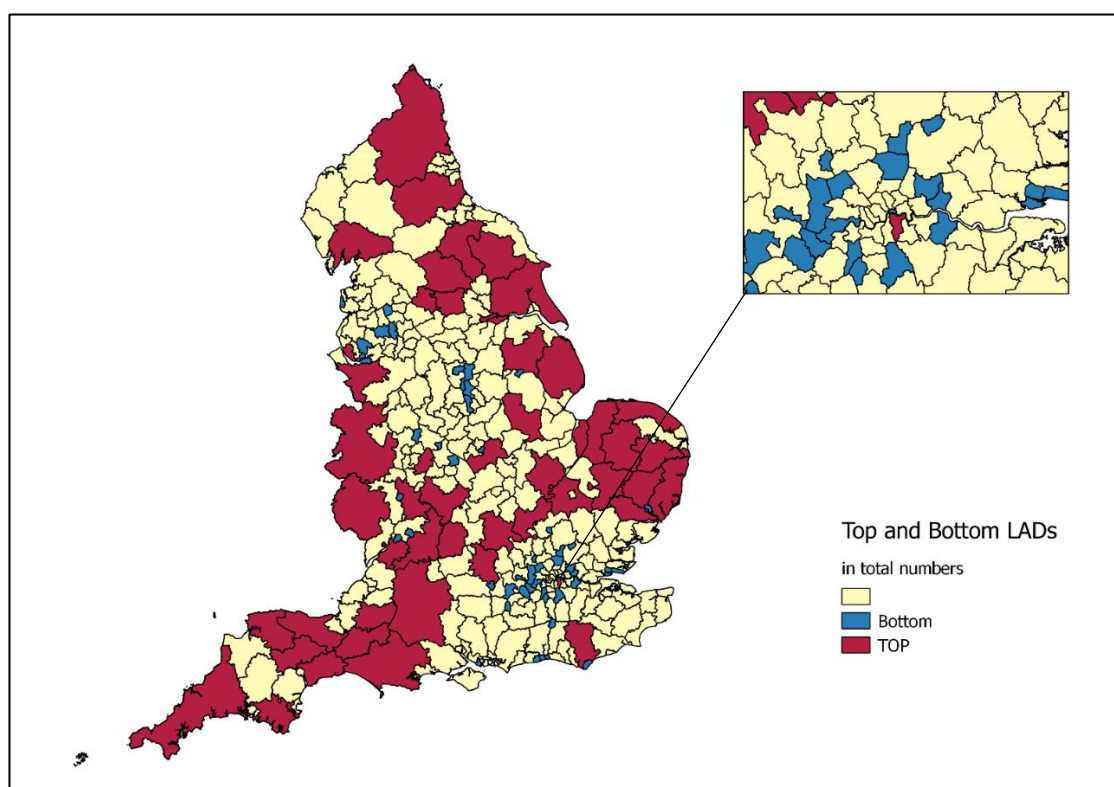
For anonymity reasons another *frozen geography* was created for Census Detailed Characteristics tables. The more detailed information is disclosed, the higher the risk of potential identification of persons or households becomes. Hence, Census Merged Wards were created to allow the merging of wards in case their population size is lower than the required threshold (Office for National Statistics, 2019a, p. 26).

## **The Top and Bottom 15% of LADs**

The visualisations provide a first overview of the geographical distribution of COA, the assorted characteristics of diverse factors for each region, upper tier local authority and local authority district. However, considering the huge number of assets and the detailed possibilities to choose in regard to the administrative boundaries, it was decided to have a deeper look at the top and bottom 15% of LADs, i.e. those LADs where the most and the least number of assets are located.

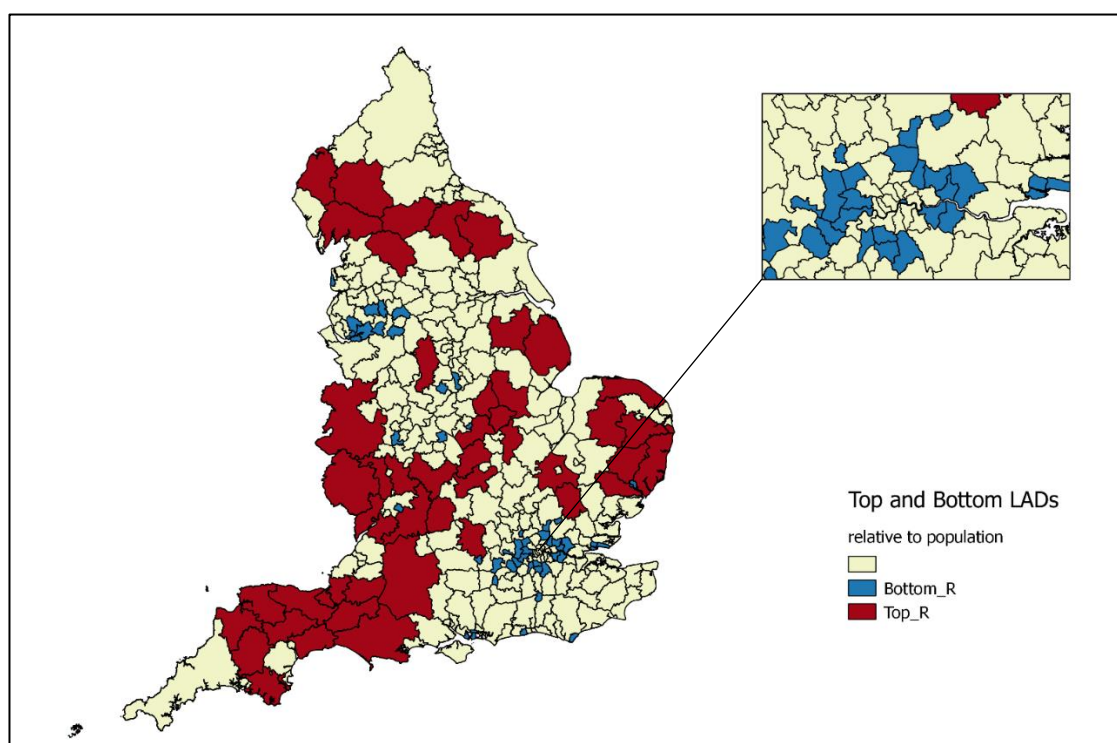
There are two options to define these: i) the total number of assets per LAD; ii) The number of assets in relation to population.

Figure 31 - Top and Bottom LADs in Total Numbers



**Total numbers:** The top 15 % of local authorities (total number) are those 48 Local Authority Districts containing the most community owned assets. These account for 44.22% of all COA, whereas the bottom 15% (total numbers) only account for 1.18%.

Figure 32 - Top and Bottom LADs Relative to Population



**Relative numbers:** The top 15% of LADs (relative to population) account for 37.45% of community owned assets, the bottom 15% (relative to population) for 1.48%.

Table 10 - Top and Bottom LADs - Total and Relative to Population

Bottom 15 %		Top 15 %	
TOTAL	RELATIVE	TOTAL	REATIVE
Adur	Barking and Dagenham	Aylesbury Vale	Allerdale
Ashfield	Bexley	Babergh	Babergh
Barking and Dagenham	Blackpool	Birmingham	Breckland
Bexley	Bolton	Bradford	Cotswold
Blackpool	Bracknell Forest	Breckland	Craven

Bolsover	Broxbourne	Central Bedfordshire	Daventry
Bolton	Broxtowe	Cheshire West and Chester	Derbyshire Dales
Bracknell Forest	Bury	Cornwall	Dorset
Broxbourne	Castle Point	Cotswold	East Devon
Broxtowe	Cheltenham	County Durham	East Lindsay
Bury	City of London	Dorset	East Northamptonshire
Cannock Chase	Crawley	East Devon	East Suffolk
Castle Point	Croydon	East Lindsay	Eden
Cheltenham	Derby	East Riding of Yorkshire	Forest of Dean
Chesterfield	Dudley	East Suffolk	Hambleton
City of London	Ealing	Hambleton	Harborough
Crawley	Eastbourne	Harborough	Herefordshire County of
Croydon	Enfield	Harrogate	Isles of Scilly
Eastbourne	Gosport	Herefordshire, County of	Malvern Hills
Enfield	Greenwich	Huntingdonshire	Melton
Epsom and Ewell	Halton	King's Lynn and West Norfolk	Mendip
Gloucester	Harlow	Leeds	Mid Devon
Gosport	Harrow	Liverpool	Mid Suffolk
Halton	Havering	Mendip	North Devon



Harlow	Hillingdon	Mid Devon	North Norfolk
Harrow	Hounslow	Mid Suffolk	Richmondshire
Hillingdon	Ipswich	North Devon	Rutland
Hounslow	Kingston upon Thames	North Norfolk	Ryedale
Hyndburn	Merton	Northumberland	Sedgemoor
Ipswich	Nuneaton and Bedworth	Ryedale	Shropshire
Isles of Scilly	Oadby and Wigston	Shropshire	Somerset West and Taunton
Kingston upon Thames	Oldham	Somerset West and Taunton	South Cambridgeshire
Lincoln	Portsmouth	South Cambridgeshire	South Hams
Nuneaton and Bedworth	Reading	South Hams	South Kesteven
Oadby and Wigston	Redbridge	South Kesteven	South Lakeland
Reading	Runnymede	South Lakeland	South Norfolk
Redbridge	Rushmoor	South Norfolk	South Northamptonshire
Runnymede	Slough	South Oxfordshire	South Oxfordshire
Rushmoor	Southend-on-Sea	South Somerset	South Somerset
Slough	Spelthorne	Southwark	Stratford-on-Avon
Southend-on-Sea	St. Helens	Stratford-on-Avon	Stroud
Spelthorne	Stockport	Stroud	Torridge
St. Helens	Sutton	Wealden	Uttlesford

Stevenage	Trafford	West Lindsay	West Devon
Tamworth	Waltham Forest	West Oxfordshire	West Lindsay
Watford	Warrington	West Suffolk	West Oxfordshire
Worcester	Watford	Wiltshire	Wiltshire
Worthing	Worthing	Wychavon	Wychavon

## Which level to choose?

Looking at the maps, it becomes obvious that, although the administrative level is equal, the Local Authority Districts do not represent a similar and comparable extent.

In particular, the sizes of LADs vary remarkably. Hence, this level may not provide the best suited analytical level. Nonetheless, LADs are useful means of visual representation, whereas regions in England are too large to visualize differences, Wards and Output Areas are too detailed to enable a visual representation.

In order to generate an accountable basis to continue analysing on the Local Authority District level, the relation to population was established. The number of assets per capita then functioned as the indicator for identifying those 15 per cent of LADs with the highest value for assets per capital and the lowest value per capita, consequently the top and bottom 48 LADs.

The two different sets of bottom and top LADs do not vary extremely; however some LADs disappear from the categories; others are added. An interesting example is the LAD “Isles of Scilly”: in total numbers, the LAD is categorised in the bottom 15 %, whereas in relative numbers, this changes to the top 15% of LADs. Isles of Scilly only has one identified asset which is being owned by a community; however, in relation to the small number of inhabitants (2242) this leads to an asset per 1000 value (as asset per capita is unusable for accessibility/understanding reasons) of 0.45 which is among the highest values in relative numbers.

## Political Decisions - the top and bottom Upper Tier Local Authorities

In order to be able to compare the relation between the occurrence of community ownership of assets and the political decisions in terms of austerity cuts, it was necessary to establish a similar geographical basis.

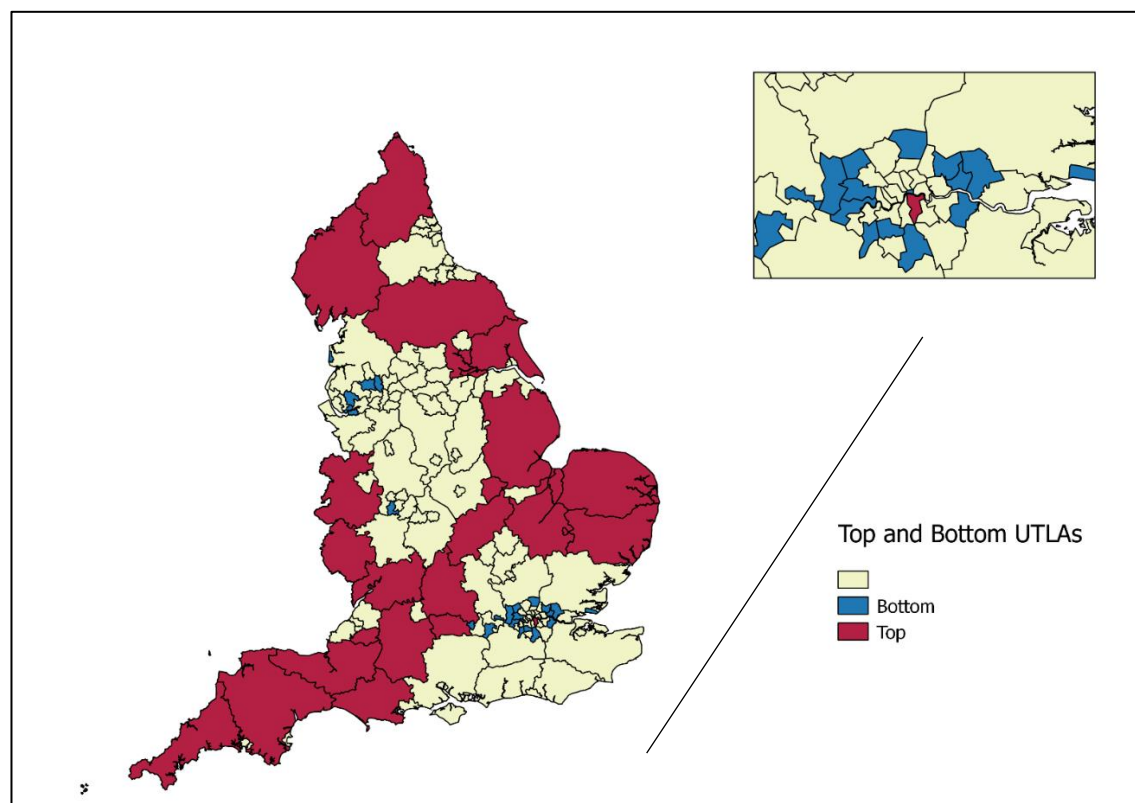
The top and bottom 15% of Upper Tier Local Authorities (UTLA) are those 23 UTLAs which count the most and the least assets in shared ownership in relation to the population.

*Table 11 - Top and Bottom UTLAs in Relation to Population*

<b>UTLAs relative to population</b>	<b>Top UTLAs in relation to population</b>
Harrow	Herefordshire County of
City of London	Rutland
Barking and Dagenham	North Yorkshire
Bexley	Dorset
Hillingdon	Shropshire
Bracknell Forest	Somerset
Blackpool	Devon
Bury	Cumbria
Reading	Isles of Scilly
Redbridge	Wiltshire
Slough	Suffolk
Croydon	Norfolk
Bolton	Lincolnshire

Enfield	Cornwall
Hounslow	Northumberland
Ealing	Gloucestershire
Halton	Oxfordshire
Kingston upon Thames	West Berkshire
St. Helens	East Riding of Yorkshire
Southend-on-Sea	Bath and North East Somerset
Dudley	Cambridgeshire
Havering	Northamptonshire
Merton	Southwark

Figure 33 Top and Bottom Upper Tier Local Authorities



The higher the geographical and administrative level, the larger become differences in size and extent. The reference used in this case is again population in order to establish a reference value.

## Appendix Two – Participant information sheet

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

#### **Research Study – Community ownership of physical assets in changing times**

My name is Carina Skropke; I am currently undertaking a PhD at Sheffield Hallam University in cooperation with Power to Change, an independent charitable trust which supports and develops community businesses in England. I am investigating the phenomenon of collective ownership of physical property. You can contact me if you have any questions or difficulties with regard your participation in this research. My contact detail can be found at the end of this information sheet.

You are invited to take part in a research study about community ownership of assets in the current changing times. The purpose of this research is to investigate the importance of ownership of physical assets to organisations and the individuals managing and using them. I aim to explore the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on those organisations, their activities and local communities, and to find out how different local settings are reacting. I am keen to learn which coping strategies and management models are being developed in this ‘new normal’.

Before you decide to participate it is important for you to be fully aware of study and what this will involve and this briefing sheet aims to give you all necessary information you need to make this decision.

#### Why do I ask you to take part?

I would like to ask you to take part in this research because of your particular relationship to the organisation owning a physical asset. The aim is to explore the phenomenon of collective ownership from various perspectives and therefore, your insights and experiences will be of great value to this study.

#### Do you have to take part?

Of course, you do not have to take part, it is up to you whether you would like to participate in this research or not. I am sending this information sheet alongside with a separate consent form for you to keep and to use if you want to take part in this research. You can still decide to withdraw from the study without giving a reason, or you can also decide to not answer particular questions. Withdrawing from the research is possible until two weeks after the interview.

#### What you will be required to do?

I would like you to participate in this study and this includes taking part in two interviews which will be recorded (only audio). It is your choice whether this interview will be conducted via phone or via internet-based software in form of a video call. There will also be the opportunity to have a video introduction and continue without video. The interview will take about 60 minutes and you will be required to talk about your experiences and perception of community ownership and the impacts of the COVID-19

pandemic on the organisation's activities the evolving new models and your role in relation to these changes and developments. There will be a further point of contact. This second interview is to capture your further experiences and so I can track the changes in your perception and experiences on two main topics: the issue of collective ownership and the changes occurring which can be traced back to the pandemic and its consequences.

Where will this take part, and for how long?

Due to the pandemic and the resulting travel restrictions accompanied by University safety policies it is currently not possible to conduct face-to-face research. Therefore, the interviews will be

performed remotely. The planned duration per interview will approximately be one hour.

Are there any possible risks or disadvantages in taking part?

There are no obvious or known risks or disadvantages in participating in this research. I will be asking questions about your experiences and perceptions of collective ownership of physical assets and the impacts of the pandemic on the organisation and performed activities.

If you feel vulnerable regarding the topic of COVID-19 and would prefer not to talk about aspects of the pandemic I would recommend not to participate. This part of the research is essential for the main purpose and targets of the study.

In case you are not aware of any mental health problems concerning the pandemic but experience personal negative consequences because of talking about it, I will be prepared to support you with information material and knowledge about local support groups or phone numbers for immediate and professional psychological support.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The potential benefit for you will be that participating offers the unique opportunity to contribute to knowledge generation as well as broadening your personal horizon by being made aware of different theoretical as well as practical aspects of your involvement in alternative approaches to the organisations of our very own society.

Although, there will not be any direct benefits for you as a participant, the individuals taking part in the research will contribute to improve the support for social organisations owning assets in general.

One aim of the research is to investigate the question whether ownership itself is of any importance for those involved and whether ownership of property is an asset or a liability. Partly, this will also shed light on the question whether asset transfers of formerly public assets is either real empowerment of local communities or this is a means of public enclosure and shifting of problems and responsibilities from the government to the local communities. By finding answers to those questions a more effective support for local communities will be achieved. Additionally, the study gathers data and insights about the new emerging models which are being developed as ad hoc responses to the coronavirus crisis. By sharing the activities, practices, processes and knowledge, the individuals participating in this research will enable other organisations to benefit from their learnings and vice versa.

Sharing knowledge, collaborating and cooperating in changing times like these are of immense value – for you as a participant as well as for those reading about it.

When will you have the opportunity to discuss your participation?

You will have the opportunity to discuss your participation at any stage of your involvement. I am intending to have a debriefing group session after you have completed the last diary entry. In the best case, this debriefing will be face-to-face. In case this will still not be possible, the debriefing will take the form of a written debriefing note.

Irrespective of the planned debriefing, if you want to discuss your engagement in the research you can contact me at any stage.

Will anyone be able to connect you with what is recorded and reported?

You will be treated anonymously and I will make sure that all information will be anonymised and additional information which may allow tracing your identity will be removed. The data will be coded and pseudonyms will be allocated to names, the data gathered will be stored electronically in a password protected folder on a password protected and secure online data storage supplied by the University. In small local settings it can be difficult to guarantee anonymity due to the limited amount of people involved and opportunities given. However, we will endeavour to present any of the material you provide in such a way as not to disclose your identity.

Who will have access to the data, be responsible for all of the information, and what will happen to the information when the study is over?

I will personally be responsible for all the information, and I will take care of securing the data during the study. Afterwards all data, interview notes and record as well as diaries will be destroyed at the end of this study. The raw data will not be stored and saved.

How will I use what I find out?

The information of interest to this study are those concerning the experiences and perceptions of collective ownership of physical property and new developments during the current pandemic. I will investigate diverse actors involved which will all have a particular perspective on the issues at stake and by gathering all these different positions I am aiming to generate comprehensive insights to answer the defined research questions. The results will be used to produce the final thesis. Additionally, the findings and thesis will be used to publish research articles and presentations.

How long is the whole study likely to last?

The study will be finished in July 2022 by the submission of the PhD thesis. The active fieldwork will last for approximately 10 months. The findings will be analysed and will be followed by the writing up of the final thesis.

How can you find out about the results of the study?

If you are interested in the outcome and result of the study, I will make a digital copy of the thesis available to you, which will be the main output of this research.

The thesis will as well be available at different websites, such as the Sheffield Hallam University's Research Archive (SHURA) and the website of Power to Change who are co-funding this research.

In case you have any further questions or seek clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.



### Researcher Details:

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### Legal Basis:

The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in public interest. A full statement of your rights can be found at: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notices/privacy-notice-for-research>.

However, all University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately, and their rights respected. This study was approved by UREC with Converis number ER24898096. Further information at: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>.

<p>You should contact the Data Protection Officer if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ You have a query about how your data is used by the University</li><li>▪ You would like to report a data security breach (e.g. if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately)</li><li>▪ You would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data</li></ul> <p><a href="mailto:DPO@shu.ac.uk">DPO@shu.ac.uk</a></p>	<p>You should contact the Head of Research Ethics (Professor Ann Macaskill) if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ You have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated</li><li>▪ </li></ul> <p><a href="mailto:a.macaskill@shu.ac.uk">a.macaskill@shu.ac.uk</a></p>
<p>Postal address: Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WB Telephone: 0114 225 5555</p>	

## Appendix Three – Participant consent form

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

#### COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP OF PHYSICAL ASSETS IN CHANGING TIMES

*Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies*

	YES	NO
1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study within the time limits outlined in the Information Sheet, without giving a reason for my withdrawal or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study without any consequences to my future treatment by the researcher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the Information Sheet.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study, once anonymised (so that I cannot be identified), to be used for any other research purposes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Name (Printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact details:**

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**Researcher's Name (Printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's contact details:**

(Name, address, contact number of investigator)

**Please keep your copy of the consent form and the information sheet together.**

## Appendix Four – Interview topic guide

### Interview guideline – first interview

The following guideline is subdivided into two parts. The first part addresses the issue of *ownership* and asks for diverse ownership related insights concerning the organisation itself, your activities and your engaged community.

The second part addresses COVID-19 and related changes and consequences. This aims to shed light on the changes caused by the pandemic and also asks for your personal insights, imagination and ideas about the future, your organisation and the organisational role in the emerging ‘new normal’.

#### Intro and Background

- Please describe your organisation’s activities
  - Who are the main beneficiaries? How does it involve and benefits its community?
- What is your role? Who else is involved and what is the involvement of the community?
- What assets does your organisation own and how do these assets feed into your activities?

### OWNERSHIP

1) Taking ownership of your assets (which also can inform factors affecting the geography of assets).

- Why did you seek ownership of these asset(s)?
- What factors (barriers, obstacles) did you have to overcome to take ownership of your asset(s)? (prompt: explore features of local place, role of local stakeholders etc)
- What were the main contributing factors supporting your organisation to take ownership of its asset(s)? (prompt: explore features of local context, role of local stakeholders etc).

2) What difference does ownership make to the organisation and the community

- What are the advantages and disadvantage of ownership to your organisation?
- How do these compare to your initial expectations?
- Did ownership change how your organisation operates or engages/collaborates with other organisations?
- What are the advantages and disadvantage of ownership to your community? What benefits or negative consequences did/does it bring?

- How does ownership of your asset(s) support your organisations relationship with its local community?

### 3) Ongoing experience of ownership

- What (ongoing) support/skills/resources are necessary to manage/operate your asset? Are these in place?
- What risks or opportunities does ownership of assets bring to your organisation? How do you manage these?

## **COVID-19**

The pandemic has caused unimaginable impacts on all dimensions of our daily life, the economy, our personal perspectives and prospects and of course on communities and community organisations.

There are four broad themes: 1) The initial effect and response to Covid, on the organisation and its community. 2) What difference (effect) has ownership made to the organisation. 3) How they plan to meet current and short-term challenges. 4) Plans for the longer term ‘new normal’.

### 1) The initial effect and response to Covid, on the organisation and its community:

- What effect did Covid-19 have on your organisation both in terms of the demand for its activities/services and your ability to deliver them?
- How has your community/users/beneficiaries been affected by Covid-19 and what role/action has your organisation taken to support them (if any)?

### 2) What difference (effect) has ownership made to the organisation:

- What effect has owning your asset(s) had on your organisation since the onset of Covid-19?  
*Advantages of ownership// disadvantages of ownership// how have the advantages/disadvantages of ownership changed since pre-COVID*
- Have you changed how you manage or operate your asset(s) because of Covid-19?

### 3) How they plan to meet current and short-term challenges

- What are the current challenges facing your organisation and how it manages and operates its asset(s)?
- How do you think your organisation, and how it manages and operates its asset(s), will change over the next 6 months?
- How will you respond to challenges and seek to take advantage of opportunities?

### 4) Plans for the longer term post-Covid ‘new normal’

- How do you think your organisation, and how it manages and operates its asset(s), will change in the longer term, 'post-COVID'?
- How will you respond to challenges and seek to take advantage of opportunities?

## Interview guideline – second interview

- 1.) What happened since we last spoke?
- 2.) Have there been changes

### In your **organisation**

People left? New on board? Changes responsibilities, etc.

### In your **community**

Fluctuation/ Influx or outflow of people engaging, participating, contributing or using the community organisation/offers/services? Did needs change?

### In your **activities**

New activities, models, services, etc

Targeted group changed?

How would you describe your position within the community and the role you play? Has this changed?

Are you more or less sustainable since our last interview? Probe in terms of finances, resources, the physical assets, demand for services etc

- 3.) The pandemic

Has the disruption the pandemic caused

Changed relationship to community? If yes, how? Positively? Negatively?

More or less accepted by community?

Changes in your approach to your organisation and activities? Have priorities changed? Changes in income generation? How is this playing out? What processes are driving this?

Have risks changed?

Changes in risks now compared to those last year

4.) Outlook

What changes would you like to see within your organisation or externally?

What are you hoping for?

## Appendix Five – Overview interview participants

ORGANISATION	INTERVIEWEE	GENDER	AFFILIATION	STATUS	SHORT INTRODUCTION	DATE OF INTERVIEW(S)
ASHTON KEYNES VILLAGE SHOP	Participant 1a Daniel	Male	Vice chair	Voluntary	Being part of the endeavour from the very beginning, campaigning for a community run shop rather than losing it. Taking over a leading role in pursuing the realisation of the shop and now taking care of the maintenance and running of it.	3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2020 19 <sup>th</sup> January 2022
	Participant 2a Adam	Male	Committee member	Voluntary	Moved to the village and was interested in connecting to the local community and	23 <sup>rd</sup> November 2020



volunteering. Joined the Shop in 2016.

<b>ALT VALLEY COMMUNITY TRUST</b>	Participant 1b Diana	Female	Assistant chief executive	Paid	Strategically planning the organisations direction, in particular the re-adjustment during Covid in order to realign with the initial aims and goals of the organisation. Being part of Alt Valley for more than 20 years has brought in various activities which may not initially had been intended.	14 <sup>th</sup> January 2021 18 <sup>th</sup> January 2022
	Participant 2b Sophie	Female	Community manager	Paid	Changed roles and centres during the time at Alt Valley until finding herself in the situation of building up a new community	19 <sup>th</sup> January 2021

centre in a new neighbourhood.  
Experienced community manager  
as she knows what to take care of  
in order to establish a legitimate  
community resource.

Participant 3b Patrick	Male	Chief executive	Paid	Was part of the organisation from the very beginning, occupying a school, realising the neighbourhood has no educational resources left and in particular no educational capacities for adults. Since then strategically using resources not only to provide community spaces but to shape the local socio-economic profile.	20 <sup>th</sup> January 2021
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ETNA	Participant 1c	Female	Centre director	Paid	Highly skilled from a business background bringing in economic thinking paired with community interest, achieving a secure future scenario for ETNA by getting a long-term lease. Still aiming to extend this and further improve the facilities.	18 <sup>th</sup> January 2021
	Victoria					19 <sup>th</sup> January 2022
	Participant 2c	Female	Chair	Voluntary	Joining the organisation's committee to help the management of the organisation, staying in touch with the local community and making fruitful use of time while being retired.	8 <sup>th</sup> February 2021
	Sarah					

	Participant 3c Mona	Female	Community member, renting the space	Voluntary/freelance	Runs a sing along group in the centre and focuses on mental health improvement and reducing social isolation. In particular addressing dementia.	2 <sup>nd</sup> March 2021
<b>GATIS COMMUNITY SPACE</b>	Participant 1d Martha	Female	Director	Paid	Starting as a herbalist and aiming to implement a gardening project, now running the whole organisation which has become a proper business. Since then, not only focusing on gardening and herbalism, but exploring further roles and interests.	1 <sup>st</sup> February 2021 24 <sup>th</sup> January 2022
	Participant 2d Charlotte	Female	Volunteer	Voluntary	Experienced difficult times herself and was signposted to the organisation. Since getting better	11 <sup>th</sup> February 2021

and settling in, she helps out in particular with back-office tasks and bookkeeping.

	Participant 3d Sebastian	Male	Catering manager	Paid	Runs the Real Junk Food Project at Gatis and has become the Catering Manager of the organisation caring for all food related projects they run.	1 <sup>st</sup> March 2021
<b>BILSTON TOWN COMMUNITY FOOTBALL CLUB</b>	Participant 1e Dora	Female	Chairman	Voluntary	Unintentionally taking over the role of the chairman, taking care of all essential tasks and responsibilities.	12 <sup>th</sup> January 2021 10 <sup>th</sup> February 2022
	Participant 2e Peter	Male	Volunteer	Voluntary	Football enthusiast and deeply embedded in the local community, taking care of everyday tasks. Personal	27 <sup>th</sup> January 2021

					educational background allows a comprehensive contextualisation of the meaning of ownership for the local club and community.	
	Participant 3e Sam	Male	Volunteer	Voluntary	Football enthusiast involved in soccer related activities, such as training and coaching of young adults and children. Engaging in training sessions and helping out when necessary.	4 <sup>th</sup> February 2021
<b>WILSFORD CLT</b>	Participant 1f Hannah	Female	Chair	Voluntary	Being part of the local community and interested in the village's future and in particular the influx of new members into the small and rural context led to taking on the role of chair.	25 <sup>th</sup> January 2021

					Representing community interests in negotiation with others and among members.	
<b>VILLAGE HALL CONINGSBY</b>	Participant 1g Linda	Female	Secretary	Voluntary	Secretary of the village hall for many decades, taking care of organisational tasks, managing bookings and occupation times. Living in the village and appreciating having the community resource.	22 <sup>nd</sup> January 2021
<b>KIRKGATE ARTS</b>	Participant 1h Connor	Male	Creative director	Paid	Creative director, not only taking care of cultural programme of the organisation but as well developing the organisation and future outlook. Has however	9 <sup>th</sup> November 2020

					been replaced during the period of the research.	
<b>ROTUNDA</b>	Participant 1i Lilly	Female	Director	Paid	Benefitting from the organisation in earlier life herself, developing professional skills and progressing through various jobs in various business and government related context, now being director of the overall organisation supporting in particular young adults, compatibility of family and job-related development.	7 <sup>th</sup> October 2020



## Appendix Six – Coding Structure in NVivo

### Research question 1

impact of ownership on activities, organisations and community								Search Project
Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By		
organisational		0	0 21/05/2021 16:47	CS	21/05/2021 16:47	CS		
resource constraints		7	14 26/03/2021 12:56	CS	12/01/2023 16:55	CS		
collaborating with other organisati		8	19 24/03/2021 18:30	CS	03/05/2021 15:16	CS		
sourcing locally		1	1 20/04/2021 17:05	CS	20/04/2021 17:05	CS		
aiming to work in partners		1	1 23/04/2021 14:13	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS		
supporting local initiati		5	7 25/03/2021 14:34	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS		
collaborating to develop skills		1	2 23/04/2021 14:18	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS		
working at grassroots level		3	4 22/04/2021 10:19	CS	03/05/2021 14:01	CS		
supporting youth		5	6 31/03/2021 11:40	CS	03/05/2021 13:48	CS		
providing youth sports		1	1 29/04/2021 15:54	CS	29/04/2021 15:54	CS		
having new relationships w		2	2 24/03/2021 11:30	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS		
collaborations are context		2	2 23/04/2021 16:01	CS	03/05/2021 14:52	CS		
being commercially limited		3	3 24/03/2021 09:26	CS	29/04/2021 18:13	CS		
using pay as you feel		2	2 15/04/2021 17:40	CS	04/05/2021 15:16	CS		
running the business deficientl		2	3 20/04/2021 16:22	CS	04/05/2021 17:10	CS		
accessing funding		12	29 24/03/2021 18:13	CS	07/05/2021 16:51	CS		
being a team of volunteers		5	8 23/03/2021 16:14	CS	29/04/2021 17:42	CS		
not being able to afford emplo		2	3 25/03/2021 11:22	CS	04/05/2021 17:08	CS		
having a board of trustees		6	10 25/03/2021 11:24	CS	25/08/2021 10:49	CS		

professionalising		7	19	23/03/2021 17:45	CS	12/01/2023 16:55	CS
providing employment		7	14	23/03/2021 16:15	CS	03/05/2021 17:35	CS
implementing decision makin		1	1	01/04/2021 16:04	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
implementing flat hierarch		3	3	16/04/2021 12:44	CS	29/04/2021 17:28	CS
having a management co		3	3	23/03/2021 16:21	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
having employees to take care		2	3	25/03/2021 11:24	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
dealing with staff		3	3	24/03/2021 11:18	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
planning strategically		9	19	23/03/2021 16:22	CS	28/04/2021 14:24	CS
integrating IT solutions		3	3	19/04/2021 11:54	CS	03/05/2021 17:34	CS
having professional support		6	10	25/03/2021 12:12	CS	30/04/2021 15:07	CS
having a proper business appr		8	15	23/03/2021 16:16	CS	23/08/2021 10:59	CS
being tight with financial reso		3	5	31/03/2021 16:52	CS	29/04/2021 18:10	CS
having complex legal structures		6	6	23/03/2021 17:09	CS	30/04/2021 14:53	CS
learning		6	14	16/04/2021 12:40	CS	12/01/2023 16:55	CS
working harder		7	13	24/03/2021 09:42	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
winning awards		1	1	05/05/2021 15:44	CS	05/05/2021 15:44	CS
improving own services		2	3	23/04/2021 17:03	CS	04/05/2021 11:37	CS
identifying and using synergies		3	7	25/03/2021 11:31	CS	03/05/2021 17:11	CS
having steep learning curve		4	7	16/04/2021 12:40	CS	10/05/2021 09:42	CS
being invested in		3	5	01/04/2021 16:05	CS	04/05/2021 15:35	CS
being able to respond quickly		1	3	26/03/2021 12:27	CS	04/05/2021 16:51	CS
acting as a benchmark organisatio		5	9	24/03/2021 11:21	CS	07/05/2021 16:54	CS
building up reputation		5	5	26/03/2021 12:45	CS	03/05/2021 14:09	CS
being approached to take ove		4	5	26/03/2021 15:05	CS	03/05/2021 17:15	CS
fulfilling unexpected roles		10	19	24/03/2021 09:48	CS	12/01/2023 16:55	CS
running a building		1	1	24/03/2021 18:08	CS	24/03/2021 18:08	CS
profiting from uncertain owne		2	2	15/04/2021 18:08	CS	03/05/2021 16:47	CS
profiting from ownership arra		2	3	19/04/2021 11:32	CS	30/04/2021 15:32	CS
improving assets		8	21	29/03/2021 11:47	CS	04/05/2021 11:37	CS
enabling additional funding		5	6	23/03/2021 14:31	CS	30/04/2021 14:11	CS
fulfilling several roles		8	12	23/03/2021 16:05	CS	24/08/2021 10:20	CS

community		2	2	21/05/2021 16:48	CS	21/05/2021 16:48	CS
having a community resource		10	17	25/03/2021 14:41	CS	20/12/2022 17:08	CS
community as only viable solution		5	7	23/03/2021 17:40	CS	29/04/2021 18:37	CS
reaching out and explaining		8	12	29/03/2021 09:29	CS	04/05/2021 17:09	CS
lacking community response a		2	7	20/04/2021 17:18	CS	30/04/2021 15:14	CS
excluding people		2	3	30/04/2021 15:12	CS	30/04/2021 15:54	CS
being more effective as comm		2	2	16/04/2021 09:46	CS	20/04/2021 11:58	CS
being altruistic		1	1	26/08/2021 10:31	CS	28/04/2021 15:13	CS
havig security of the building		8	10	23/03/2021 18:03	CS	21/05/2021 17:39	CS
having a physical base		2	3	24/03/2021 18:22	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
facilitating collaboration		9	18	01/04/2021 14:24	CS	03/05/2021 14:52	CS
helping others to take off		4	8	15/04/2021 16:09	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
enabling community participation		7	11	01/04/2021 14:11	CS	03/05/2021 14:10	CS
taking up of roles by few individua		7	9	23/03/2021 16:06	CS	30/04/2021 15:13	CS
organising people around differen		6	7	25/03/2021 11:34	CS	30/04/2021 15:40	CS
involving tenants in asset transfer		1	2	22/04/2021 11:08	CS	22/04/2021 11:11	CS

activities		0	0	21/05/2021 16:47	CS	21/05/2021 16:47	CS
using the building flexibly		7	16	24/03/2021 18:34	CS	25/08/2021 11:40	CS
providing services in premises		2	2	23/03/2021 15:16	CS	01/04/2021 12:01	CS
performing diverse activities		3	6	26/03/2021 09:56	CS	05/05/2021 13:05	CS
organising special events		3	4	31/03/2021 12:39	CS	04/05/2021 11:44	CS
open up for several groups		4	5	25/03/2021 11:53	CS	22/04/2021 15:14	CS
not being completely reliant on b		2	4	25/03/2021 12:22	CS	23/04/2021 18:00	CS
exhibitions		1	1	24/03/2021 18:35	CS	24/03/2021 18:35	CS
adapting to community needs		13	21	26/03/2021 10:35	CS	26/05/2021 10:22	CS
running a school		1	1	23/04/2021 12:32	CS	23/04/2021 12:32	CS
raising awareness		2	2	26/03/2021 15:04	CS	01/04/2021 17:39	CS
providing essential services		1	1	21/04/2021 11:41	CS	21/04/2021 11:41	CS
offers on low cost as possible		1	1	31/03/2021 11:52	CS	15/04/2021 16:07	CS
being reliant on older clients		1	1	23/03/2021 18:01	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
addressing isolation		2	2	15/04/2021 16:10	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
being enabled to operate by assets		1	1	29/03/2021 12:04	CS	04/05/2021 16:52	CS
type of operations		0	0	17/08/2021 16:51	CS	19/08/2021 11:39	CS
providing nursery services		1	2	01/04/2021 11:59	CS	19/04/2021 16:38	CS
providing education		6	12	26/03/2021 10:32	CS	05/05/2021 13:14	CS
becoming key provider of		1	2	23/04/2021 14:49	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
hosting a heritage collection		1	3	24/03/2021 18:08	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
getting a food project up and		5	7	01/04/2021 14:34	CS	03/05/2021 14:22	CS
being able to attract and com		3	3	22/04/2021 15:21	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
offering sports and well be		5	6	26/03/2021 10:28	CS	05/05/2021 13:00	CS
offering space for families		1	1	28/04/2021 10:33	CS	28/04/2021 10:33	CS
offering outdoor activities		2	2	15/04/2021 16:11	CS	03/05/2021 13:50	CS
offering health related acti		1	2	04/05/2021 09:34	CS	04/05/2021 09:45	CS
offering garden and relate		1	1	03/05/2021 13:49	CS	03/05/2021 13:49	CS
integrating different offers		2	3	22/04/2021 12:01	CS	23/04/2021 14:25	CS

<input type="radio"/>	being an incubation hub		1	1	16/04/2021 12:45	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
<input type="radio"/>	being able to signpost inte		3	8	22/04/2021 10:13	CS	28/04/2021 10:57	CS
<input type="radio"/>	making use of other community a		2	2	23/03/2021 15:04	CS	15/04/2021 16:07	CS
<input type="radio"/>	making things happen		2	2	19/04/2021 12:41	CS	04/05/2021 17:08	CS
<input type="radio"/>	making building more accessible		2	2	19/04/2021 15:01	CS	22/04/2021 12:02	CS
<input type="radio"/>	generating income stream		7	12	24/03/2021 18:21	CS	03/05/2021 16:12	CS
<input type="radio"/>	renting out spaces		6	11	01/04/2021 11:58	CS	03/05/2021 16:12	CS
<input type="radio"/>	being ambitious means more wor		1	1	30/04/2021 14:45	CS	30/04/2021 14:45	CS
<input type="radio"/>	being able to open up the buildin		1	3	22/04/2021 11:33	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
<input type="radio"/>	being able to adapt and change the f		6	8	26/04/2021 16:34	CS	30/04/2021 14:04	CS
<input type="radio"/>	being a handmade organisation		1	1	29/04/2021 15:34	CS	29/04/2021 15:34	CS
<input type="radio"/>	beig confronted with very practica		3	6	24/03/2021 17:57	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
<input type="radio"/>	becoming more efficient		2	4	19/04/2021 15:53	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS

## Impact on place, identity and community making

Search Project

Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
revealing contradicting expectations		4	5 24/03/2021 09:47	CS	12/08/2021 10:28	CS
having local support		12	18 23/03/2021 17:48	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
empowering community		5	12 22/04/2021 10:15	CS	29/04/2021 18:40	CS
developing through time		4	11 25/03/2021 14:34	CS	29/04/2021 16:37	CS
being locally rooted		13	26 24/03/2021 10:48	CS	04/05/2021 11:42	CS
being locally embedded		10	23 26/03/2021 15:08	CS	03/05/2021 17:21	CS
being inclusive		9	17 16/04/2021 12:06	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS

revealing contradicting expectations		4	5 24/03/2021 09:47	CS	12/08/2021 10:28
experiencing ownership as curious		1	1 21/04/2021 10:24	CS	21/04/2021 10:24
being emotionally overwhelmed by support		1	1 15/04/2021 17:42	CS	06/05/2021 17:25
being disappointed		3	3 25/03/2021 12:40	CS	05/05/2021 13:50
having local support		12	18 23/03/2021 17:48	CS	07/05/2021 17:44
loving the building		2	2 25/03/2021 12:29	CS	07/05/2021 17:44
having enough community spirit		1	1 21/04/2021 09:52	CS	05/05/2021 14:36
having diverse skills available		6	9 25/03/2021 12:18	CS	29/04/2021 15:15
having an enhanced position in the community		1	1 24/03/2021 11:28	CS	29/04/2021 15:15
building is well used		1	3 21/04/2021 15:47	CS	28/04/2021 09:28

empowering community		5	12	22/04/2021 10:15	CS	29/04/2021 18:40	CS
willing to create community spaces		8	9	25/03/2021 11:07	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
using physical space for community		7	8	31/03/2021 11:39	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
using community basis rather than individual		2	4	22/03/2021 16:52	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
using community access as strategy to professionalise		2	3	26/04/2021 16:13	CS	16/03/2022 16:23	CS
attracting new volunteers		1	1	01/04/2021 14:45	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
shaping community space		9	11	23/03/2021 14:44	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
providing community space		12	21	26/03/2021 14:46	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
providing a village facility		1	1	21/04/2021 16:45	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
making proper use of facility		2	3	22/04/2021 10:43	CS	30/04/2021 14:12	CS
facilitating more help by more assets		1	2	29/03/2021 10:32	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
emphasising importance of physical interaction		1	2	29/03/2021 12:06	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
aiming to generate feeling of shared ownership		3	3	19/04/2021 15:06	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
being owned collectively		2	2	20/04/2021 16:48	CS	28/04/2021 14:05	CS
being able to activate people when necessary		1	4	20/04/2021 17:19	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
serving local community		4	6	26/03/2021 12:20	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
providing substitute to church and religion		1	1	30/04/2021 09:33	CS	30/04/2021 09:33	CS
providing something to focus on		1	2	27/04/2021 17:36	CS	28/04/2021 11:11	CS
keeping financial transactions local		5	6	24/03/2021 11:55	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
having a place to go		1	1	25/03/2021 14:42	CS	05/05/2021 14:36	CS
reviving local area		4	5	16/04/2021 15:45	CS	03/05/2021 13:47	CS
taking back control		3	4	28/04/2021 13:52	CS	03/05/2021 14:00	CS
reversing negative trend		1	1	31/03/2021 15:02	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
retaining local infrastructure		6	13	24/03/2021 11:38	CS	28/07/2021 12:31	CS
occupation as means to combat political decisions		1	1	23/04/2021 12:15	CS	23/04/2021 12:15	CS
improving the area by being there		3	5	15/04/2021 16:21	CS	03/05/2021 18:09	CS
combating gentrification		1	1	15/04/2021 18:28	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
combating deindustrialised history		2	3	29/04/2021 16:03	CS	29/04/2021 18:09	CS

participating community		8	11	23/03/2021 14:29	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
initiating collective action		1	2	28/04/2021 13:53	CS	28/04/2021 14:05	CS
engaging local community		6	14	29/03/2021 12:01	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
increase of outreach by assets		2	2	29/03/2021 10:25	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
not being restricted by geographical outreach		4	6	26/03/2021 12:21	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
making people happy		1	1	30/04/2021 09:39	CS	30/04/2021 09:39	CS
having regional outreach and reputation		5	7	25/03/2021 11:29	CS	07/05/2021 13:42	CS
holistic approach		3	4	26/03/2021 11:49	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
transferring norms and values		2	2	31/03/2021 11:55	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
transferring knowledge		5	6	29/03/2021 11:37	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
having an abcd approach		2	7	15/04/2021 16:21	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
working centred around people		2	2	15/04/2021 17:24	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
helping people		5	10	31/03/2021 16:39	CS	04/05/2021 09:44	CS
facilitating self-determination		1	1	28/04/2021 16:44	CS	28/04/2021 16:44	CS
changing social and local behaviour		3	5	23/03/2021 14:19	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
empower people by volunteering		3	3	27/04/2021 17:21	CS	29/04/2021 17:44	CS
having participatory decision making processes		7	10	23/03/2021 16:59	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
selling shares as mechanism to produce community		2	2	23/03/2021 16:56	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
promoting active community engagements		3	6	01/04/2021 14:52	CS	29/04/2021 17:54	CS
maintaining community control		2	5	16/04/2021 09:21	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
consulting the community		4	5	15/04/2021 17:37	CS	05/05/2021 14:27	CS
breaking down barriers		2	4	22/04/2021 12:01	CS	07/05/2021 14:15	CS
offering space for the community		7	10	25/03/2021 14:21	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
going through long negotiation process		2	2	23/03/2021 17:43	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
fulfilling contradicting interests		3	3	19/04/2021 11:30	CS	29/04/2021 17:32	CS
facilitating exchange		8	13	19/04/2021 14:54	CS	04/05/2021 09:33	CS
facilitating cultural spaces		2	2	15/04/2021 16:05	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
facilitate community activities		7	10	25/03/2021 14:22	CS	04/05/2021 09:33	CS
establishing communication		1	1	29/03/2021 09:32	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
convincing and taking people with you		2	5	16/04/2021 11:32	CS	05/05/2021 15:28	CS
concentrating on positives		4	7	15/04/2021 17:27	CS	03/05/2021 16:10	CS
disadvantage to the organisation as advantage for community		1	1	22/04/2021 12:11	CS	05/05/2021 14:28	CS



developing through time		4	11	25/03/2021 14:34	CS	29/04/2021 16:37	CS
stepping in and filling gaps		4	11	23/04/2021 11:49	CS	28/04/2021 13:51	CS
taking over assets		3	3	26/03/2021 10:33	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
stepping in before losing asset		7	11	22/03/2021 16:51	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
preserving threatened community asset		10	17	25/03/2021 11:07	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
maintaining the building		5	9	24/03/2021 18:12	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
maintaining community assets		8	11	26/03/2021 14:58	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
addressing lack of adult education		1	2	23/04/2021 12:51	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
addressing issues in less privileged areas		4	6	24/03/2021 18:32	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
seeking new opportunities		3	3	25/03/2021 12:40	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
generating creative solution to unprofitable situation		1	1	23/03/2021 17:32	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
raising money collectively		5	7	23/03/2021 14:48	CS	05/05/2021 14:23	CS
generating income for community hall		2	3	23/03/2021 15:04	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
being open for suggestions		6	8	23/03/2021 17:05	CS	04/05/2021 11:14	CS
being able to find own strengths		1	1	27/04/2021 17:21	CS	27/04/2021 17:21	CS
being locally rooted		13	26	24/03/2021 10:48	CS	04/05/2021 11:42	CS
having a place of history		3	3	25/03/2021 14:55	CS	29/04/2021 15:58	CS
having a geographical focus		6	8	26/03/2021 11:01	CS	03/05/2021 17:18	CS
getting a good team		2	2	24/03/2021 09:43	CS	04/05/2021 10:33	CS
forming committees with the same people		1	2	24/03/2021 10:43	CS	07/05/2021 14:22	CS
building is part of the local fabric		2	2	25/03/2021 14:44	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
being the last old building open for community use		1	1	25/03/2021 14:45	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS

being locally embedded	10	23	26/03/2021 15:08	CS	03/05/2021 17:21	CS
being valued for the work	2	2	28/04/2021 11:12	CS	30/04/2021 15:02	CS
being part of a network	4	8	25/03/2021 11:30	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
being an anchor organisation	3	5	22/04/2021 10:16	CS	28/04/2021 10:32	CS
being a central community resource	5	8	25/03/2021 14:42	CS	03/05/2021 16:33	CS
being point of contact and reason to gather	1	1	30/04/2021 09:33	CS	30/04/2021 09:33	CS
being local cultural institution	1	1	25/03/2021 14:21	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
being described as family and warm hug	1	1	16/04/2021 12:07	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
being inclusive	9	17	16/04/2021 12:06	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
being listened to - listening	1	2	04/05/2021 11:15	CS	07/05/2021 10:59	CS
adapting to the needs of disabled	2	2	19/04/2021 15:05	CS	30/04/2021 15:06	CS
acting in the interest of the community	1	4	29/04/2021 16:36	CS	29/04/2021 17:58	CS

## Liabilities - Challenges

Search Project

Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
being subject to different paradigms - maintaining integrity		10	22 24/03/2021 09:32	CS	06/05/2021 16:57	CS
trying to be sustainable		5	6 25/03/2021 12:28	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
struggling with financial responsibilities		7	15 26/03/2021 12:58	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
providing affordable services		6	6 24/03/2021 11:08	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
organising match funding		1	1 23/04/2021 14:10	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
not being able to make surplus money		2	2 22/04/2021 11:20	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
needing to be financially viable		1	1 19/04/2021 11:31	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
losing funding competition		1	3 25/03/2021 09:54	CS	15/04/2021 16:07	CS
difficulty of winning grants		5	7 23/03/2021 17:48	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
being reliant on external funders decision makers		1	2 26/04/2021 16:32	CS	26/04/2021 16:41	CS
aiming to break even		1	1 23/04/2021 15:31	CS	23/04/2021 15:31	CS
not being able to attract younger volunteers		1	1 20/04/2021 18:01	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
needing to find a place		1	2 23/03/2021 17:41	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
needing creativity to keep assets		1	2 26/03/2021 13:12	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
planning strategically takes resources		3	3 26/03/2021 11:37	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
facing lack of new volunteers		2	2 24/03/2021 11:55	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
maintaining the building		8	14 23/03/2021 18:03	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
not having a building fit for purpose		5	12 23/03/2021 16:37	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
covering additional unexpected costs		9	13 23/03/2021 17:54	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
building doesn't offer enough income generation		2	2 25/03/2021 15:52	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
having lost local identity and community cohesion		1	1 29/04/2021 16:14	CS	05/05/2021 16:09	CS
struggling to maintain engagement		1	5 21/04/2021 10:23	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
taking asset for granted		1	1 20/04/2021 17:01	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
losing key actors		1	1 28/04/2021 17:12	CS	28/04/2021 17:12	CS
losing further engagement		1	1 20/04/2021 17:58	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
having ineffective participatory system		2	2 20/04/2021 17:32	CS	28/04/2021 09:44	CS
facing difficulties in engaging community		2	2 20/04/2021 17:40	CS	04/05/2021 12:11	CS
necessity to communicate		4	6 26/03/2021 11:33	CS	04/05/2021 11:43	CS

getting accepted locally		3	6	15/04/2021 16:19	CS	06/05/2021 14:33	CS
needing to represent community - lack of diversity		2	2	04/05/2021 11:47	CS	04/05/2021 11:51	CS
needing to overcome bad reputation		4	5	31/03/2021 14:46	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
needing to convince internally		2	2	01/04/2021 17:49	CS	28/04/2021 14:58	CS
lacking sense of collective ownership		3	3	05/05/2021 14:39	CS	05/05/2021 15:27	CS
having ethnic diversity internally to represent community	👑	1	2	29/04/2021 17:43	CS	06/05/2021 16:47	CS
getting familiar with new community		2	2	29/03/2021 09:30	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
competing with other organisations		2	3	01/04/2021 14:10	CS	04/05/2021 11:36	CS
community doesn't take on work		1	1	23/03/2021 18:04	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
accessing different populations within local community		1	2	04/05/2021 12:12	CS	04/05/2021 12:18	CS
facing contradicting realities		1	2	20/04/2021 17:49	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
depending on policy context		5	11	31/03/2021 15:01	CS	05/05/2021 16:36	CS
struggling to fulfill different requirements		1	1	26/03/2021 11:38	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
lacking professional support		3	3	16/04/2021 15:49	CS	28/04/2021 14:32	CS
not having required background or experiences		1	1	24/03/2021 09:38	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
lack of central information about funding		1	1	28/04/2021 14:34	CS	05/05/2021 16:05	CS
finding needed expertise		2	2	25/03/2021 14:59	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
fulfilling bureaucratic requirements		2	2	16/04/2021 10:58	CS	03/05/2021 15:41	CS
relying on council		9	29	16/04/2021 09:48	CS	05/05/2021 16:36	CS
risk of building being taken away because of worth		1	1	30/04/2021 15:28	CS	30/04/2021 15:28	CS
council wants to offload buildings		4	9	22/04/2021 10:44	CS	03/05/2021 15:42	CS
being affected by changing public strategies		2	4	16/04/2021 11:19	CS	23/04/2021 16:33	CS
being confronted with unprofessional council work		5	17	01/04/2021 16:29	CS	03/05/2021 15:42	CS
suffering from unclear ownership arrangement	👑	2	2	16/04/2021 12:15	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
experiencing uncoordinated asset based transfer process		1	1	16/04/2021 16:02	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
experiencing degradation in relationship with official institutions		1	1	01/04/2021 16:39	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS

being responsible for everything		6	11	31/03/2021 16:18	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
working continuously		1	1	29/04/2021 15:37	CS	29/04/2021 15:37	CS
needing to secure property		1	1	26/04/2021 16:31	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
juggling with several assets		1	1	26/03/2021 13:04	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
facing risk of emergency		3	3	24/03/2021 14:58	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
being responsible for health & safety on the grounds		5	7	16/04/2021 12:55	CS	03/05/2021 13:49	CS
being responsible for non-intended local issues		1	1	16/04/2021 11:27	CS	16/04/2021 11:27	CS
balancing various interests		2	2	29/04/2021 17:33	CS	04/05/2021 14:50	CS
acting against strong personalities		1	1	28/04/2021 16:21	CS	28/04/2021 16:21	CS

Other essential assets							Search Project
Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By	
legitimacy		0	0	31/05/2021 09:02	CS	31/05/2021 09:02	CS
having trust in and being trusted by community		3	3	26/03/2021 12:46	CS	31/05/2021 10:52	CS
being valued for the sake of being there		1	1	20/04/2021 18:11	CS	20/04/2021 18:11	CS
being supported		6	11	23/03/2021 17:46	CS	07/05/2021 16:54	CS
having political support		4	4	31/03/2021 14:59	CS	30/04/2021 14:01	CS
having local support and using local infrastructure		9	13	23/03/2021 17:56	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
having access to resources		7	13	25/03/2021 12:17	CS	01/03/2023 17:39	CS
having reliable and good staff		6	14	26/03/2021 11:19	CS	04/05/2021 10:33	CS
having negotiating skills		4	6	24/03/2021 11:08	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
having a skilled board		7	11	26/03/2021 12:45	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
engaging the community		1	2	28/04/2021 14:03	CS	01/03/2023 17:40	CS
sharing responsibility		3	3	28/04/2021 16:31	CS	29/04/2021 17:52	CS
engaging community in work		2	2	29/03/2021 09:48	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
continuity		9	15	26/03/2021 11:19	CS	31/05/2021 08:56	CS
networking		3	3	28/04/2021 15:05	CS	31/05/2021 10:58	CS
having good partnerships		9	14	22/04/2021 10:25	CS	01/03/2023 17:28	CS
becoming local experts		1	2	28/04/2021 10:57	CS	28/04/2021 10:58	CS
having access to crucial information and resources		4	5	16/04/2021 15:52	CS	22/04/2021 12:02	CS
understanding how local policy works		5	7	01/04/2021 15:44	CS	28/04/2021 15:06	CS
knowing where to get expertise and knowledge		6	6	01/04/2021 17:48	CS	03/05/2021 17:35	CS
knowing where to find funding		1	1	28/04/2021 14:35	CS	05/05/2021 16:58	CS
historic meaning		1	2	29/04/2021 16:08	CS	29/04/2021 17:56	CS

continuous development		2	3	23/04/2021 17:11	CS	01/06/2021 13:49	CS
having regular fluctuation of people involved		4	6	01/04/2021 15:49	CS	30/04/2021 14:53	CS
having business continuity		3	8	23/03/2021 14:12	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
being willing to learn		4	4	24/03/2021 09:37	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
being prepared		5	7	31/03/2021 16:29	CS	31/05/2021 08:35	CS
having realistic expectations		3	3	29/03/2021 10:43	CS	04/05/2021 11:10	CS
having experienced loss already		1	1	23/03/2021 17:57	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
expecting difficulties		1	1	25/03/2021 12:41	CS	01/03/2023 17:31	CS
being comfortable		1	1	28/04/2021 16:29	CS	06/05/2021 10:43	CS
being persistent		2	2	30/04/2021 14:51	CS	31/05/2021 10:43	CS
getting through aquisition process		2	4	28/04/2021 14:01	CS	06/05/2021 10:23	CS
acting naively		2	3	15/04/2021 15:22	CS	28/04/2021 09:28	CS
being ideologically driven		8	13	31/05/2021 10:29	CS	31/05/2021 16:18	CS
putting people at the heart		4	6	16/04/2021 12:13	CS	21/03/2022 11:59	CS
responding to local needs		2	2	04/05/2021 11:19	CS	04/05/2021 11:24	CS
taking concerns seriously		1	1	28/04/2021 15:00	CS	28/04/2021 15:00	CS
owning as response to local need		3	4	23/03/2021 17:13	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
building itself is not too important		3	5	21/04/2021 10:57	CS	04/05/2021 14:50	CS
having a deep motivation		5	8	26/03/2021 11:32	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
wanting to make a difference		4	4	26/03/2021 11:32	CS	29/04/2021 16:38	CS
being passionate		2	3	26/03/2021 11:27	CS	07/05/2021 17:44	CS
being driven by community and place		3	4	26/03/2021 11:50	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS

## **Research question 2**



## Reactions and activities in response to the pandemic

Search Project

Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
responding to new needs and opportunities		0	02/03/2023 11:11	CS	02/03/2023 11:11	CS
shifting offer online		10	16 24/03/2021 18:04	CS	21/05/2021 16:00	CS
setting up mediation and wellbeing activities online		3	4 16/04/2021 17:29	CS	03/05/2021 17:45	CS
offering budgeting courses online		1	1 16/04/2021 17:32	CS	16/04/2021 17:32	CS
offer story telling online		2	2 16/04/2021 17:36	CS	28/04/2021 11:09	CS
Developing new activities and offers		0	0 03/02/2023 13:22	CS	30/03/2023 12:33	CS
generating new formats and activities		4	5 25/03/2021 16:02	CS	18/03/2022 11:00	CS
refocussing of core activities and organisation		2	3 23/04/2021 18:09	CS	23/04/2021 18:12	CS
providing food delivery		6	13 15/04/2021 18:14	CS	21/05/2021 15:21	CS
providing book delivery service		1	1 16/04/2021 17:34	CS	16/04/2021 17:34	CS
collaborating to react to local needs		10	21 29/03/2021 09:51	CS	18/03/2022 13:47	CS
offering signposting service		4	5 16/04/2021 17:28	CS	18/03/2022 11:00	CS
developing mutual aid system		2	5 15/04/2021 18:18	CS	18/03/2022 11:00	CS
cooperating with council		3	5 15/04/2021 18:16	CS	18/03/2022 11:00	CS
being open to new ideas and needs		10	18 24/03/2021 16:07	CS	08/09/2021 16:34	CS
increasing portfolio		1	1 19/04/2021 17:27	CS	19/04/2021 17:27	CS
providing emergency support		1	1 22/04/2021 16:57	CS	22/04/2021 16:57	CS
getting additional services to compensate lack of resources		3	4 23/03/2021 16:38	CS	23/04/2021 17:43	CS
functioning as drop off point		2	2 21/04/2021 11:24	CS	28/04/2021 16:55	CS
addressing food poverty		9	20 29/03/2021 12:37	CS	04/05/2021 16:06	CS
increased management requirements		7	8 16/04/2021 17:13	CS	04/05/2021 15:13	CS
increased demand of services		6	8 23/03/2021 14:54	CS	10/03/2022 16:23	CS
developing new ways of working		3	4 29/03/2021 12:50	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
organising socially distanced events		2	2 28/04/2021 16:55	CS	03/05/2021 17:43	CS
identifying further improvement needs		2	2 29/03/2021 12:10	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
having massive learning curve		2	2 16/04/2021 16:55	CS	23/04/2021 14:16	CS
being inspired by innovations		2	3 28/04/2021 14:40	CS	18/03/2022 12:27	CS
thinking about online ordering offers		1	1 24/03/2021 17:54	CS	24/03/2021 17:54	CS
looking at other opportunities to act		2	3 24/03/2021 15:37	CS	25/03/2021 11:15	CS
being creative and innovative		4	6 16/04/2021 17:35	CS	28/04/2021 11:02	CS

getting people to the other side		1	1	22/04/2021 16:58	CS	21/05/2021 16:15	CS
trying to keep offers running		5	6	24/03/2021 15:41	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
providing emergency funding for people		2	2	29/03/2021 12:38	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
keeping in touch with communities		7	12	29/03/2021 12:27	CS	21/05/2021 16:20	CS
encouraging to volunteer		2	3	16/04/2021 17:34	CS	19/04/2021 17:28	CS
connecting people		5	6	16/04/2021 17:27	CS	04/05/2021 16:36	CS
adapting quickly		10	26	26/03/2021 12:25	CS	18/03/2022 11:00	CS
realising importance of reflecting		5	5	16/04/2021 18:38	CS	18/03/2022 11:00	CS
identifying new emerging needs		4	4	30/08/2021 16:48	CS	02/03/2023 11:38	CS
hoping to re-focus in the aftermath		1	1	03/05/2021 15:28	CS	03/05/2021 15:28	CS
having ambitious plans		6	10	31/03/2021 17:04	CS	04/05/2021 15:57	CS
increased meaning of community		3	3	30/04/2021 09:27	CS	18/03/2022 11:00	CS
increased valuation of community spaces		6	8	31/03/2021 17:02	CS	02/03/2023 11:38	CS
increased awareness of availability		5	5	21/04/2021 11:45	CS	18/03/2022 12:26	CS
being part of community allowed providing help		3	3	29/03/2021 12:41	CS	03/09/2021 11:31	CS
closure of buildings affect communities		4	5	26/03/2021 13:20	CS	02/03/2023 11:39	CS
being organised and prepared		3	4	19/04/2021 17:25	CS	23/04/2021 17:40	CS
having a building is a security		9	10	25/03/2021 15:44	CS	18/03/2022 11:00	CS
waiting to be allowed to open again		5	10	21/04/2021 15:29	CS	04/05/2021 16:24	CS
offering something to look forward to		2	5	27/04/2021 17:29	CS	28/04/2021 16:56	CS
experiencing the importance of keeping assets		2	3	29/03/2021 11:46	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
benefiting from premises		5	10	16/04/2021 17:43	CS	19/04/2021 15:05	CS
being able to survive		3	4	25/03/2021 15:59	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
shrinking organisation		1	3	23/04/2021 17:48	CS	23/04/2021 17:57	CS
profiting from self-employing		1	1	16/04/2021 12:49	CS	16/04/2021 12:49	CS
making employees redundant		4	5	29/03/2021 12:17	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
furloughing staff		5	6	25/03/2021 15:59	CS	30/04/2021 15:37	CS

maintaining income by adapting		5	6	24/03/2021 16:33	CS	21/05/2021 15:57	CS
performing risk assessments		5	6	23/03/2021 15:25	CS	03/05/2021 18:02	CS
making payment mandatory		1	1	04/05/2021 15:45	CS	04/05/2021 15:45	CS
becoming test centre		1	1	26/03/2021 13:17	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
getting work done irrespective of available resources		1	2	29/03/2021 11:24	CS	29/03/2021 12:26	CS
accessing emergency funding		11	23	24/03/2021 18:05	CS	02/03/2023 11:41	CS
adapting management of facilities		0	0	03/02/2023 13:20	CS	01/05/2023 10:29	CS
closing the building		12	18	25/03/2021 15:55	CS	04/05/2021 14:57	CS
making use of the quiet times		6	8	01/04/2021 09:38	CS	04/05/2021 16:21	CS
resources being freed up		1	1	19/04/2021 15:54	CS	19/04/2021 15:54	CS
reassessing of organisation		1	1	22/04/2021 17:25	CS	22/04/2021 17:25	CS
improving the building		3	3	30/04/2021 15:35	CS	03/05/2021 16:56	CS
granting rent holiday for tenants		3	3	19/04/2021 16:09	CS	02/03/2023 11:42	CS
changed governance		0	0	21/05/2021 09:39	CS	21/05/2021 09:43	CS
using premises by different institutions		1	2	23/03/2021 15:24	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
shifting management to online tools		6	7	29/03/2021 12:48	CS	28/04/2021 16:58	CS
making use of outdoor facilities		4	6	16/04/2021 17:41	CS	04/05/2021 11:11	CS
implementing of new evaluation and monitoring systems		1	1	19/04/2021 15:55	CS	19/04/2021 15:55	CS
having less volunteers		1	1	23/03/2021 16:16	CS	23/03/2021 16:16	CS
combining of resources		2	2	29/03/2021 12:23	CS	16/04/2021 16:56	CS
changing or pausing services on offer		11	15	23/03/2021 15:46	CS	04/05/2021 14:56	CS
applying safety measures in premises		10	15	23/03/2021 15:47	CS	03/05/2021 18:01	CS
needing to disinfect		1	2	22/03/2021 16:09	CS	19/05/2021 13:05	CS
managing assets spatially different		4	9	24/03/2021 16:16	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
restricting number of people in the facility		5	5	24/03/2021 16:07	CS	03/05/2021 18:01	CS
adapting to new realities		10	24	24/03/2021 15:19	CS	04/05/2021 16:25	CS
taking risks		1	1	30/04/2021 15:37	CS	30/04/2021 15:37	CS

## Challenges

Search Project

Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
existing amplified		0	0 29/10/2021 11:58	CS	30/05/2023 18:27	CS
planning becomes difficult		8	14 25/03/2021 11:16	CS	04/05/2021 16:37	CS
remaining flexible		5	6 16/04/2021 18:15	CS	04/05/2021 16:32	CS
reintroducing people physically		9	15 19/04/2021 15:57	CS	21/03/2022 12:23	CS
increased workload with less resources		9	23 24/03/2021 16:09	CS	03/05/2021 17:44	CS
ownership increasingly daunting		2	2 22/04/2021 17:04	CS	22/04/2021 17:06	CS
managing all the buildings		1	4 26/03/2021 13:07	CS	29/03/2021 12:49	CS
increased administrative workload		3	3 29/03/2021 12:25	CS	22/04/2021 17:10	CS
losing track of actual goals		2	2 16/04/2021 18:33	CS	23/04/2021 16:16	CS
increased demand of volunteer input		2	2 19/04/2021 15:41	CS	28/04/2021 11:02	CS
having less volunteers		1	1 24/03/2021 16:09	CS	24/03/2021 16:09	CS
facing increased personal load		3	5 19/04/2021 15:40	CS	04/05/2021 15:57	CS
ensuring contracts are delivered		3	3 29/03/2021 12:58	CS	17/03/2022 15:26	CS
burning out people		2	4 19/04/2021 17:35	CS	30/04/2021 15:43	CS
being responsible for building and users and tena		2	3 22/04/2021 17:14	CS	30/04/2021 14:52	CS
having a not fit for purpose building		5	7 23/03/2021 16:39	CS	21/04/2021 09:50	CS
having an old building		4	8 24/03/2021 16:58	CS	28/04/2021 09:35	CS
getting planning permission for adjusted use of space		1	1 24/03/2021 09:25	CS	24/03/2021 09:25	CS
facing financial risks		4	6 19/04/2021 15:47	CS	03/05/2021 17:38	CS
remaining financially sustainable		3	3 19/04/2021 17:23	CS	29/04/2021 18:35	CS
needing to develop new business plan		3	3 25/03/2021 11:32	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
applying for further funding		7	9 25/03/2021 16:07	CS	29/04/2021 18:13	CS
paying ongoing costs		7	10 25/03/2021 16:05	CS	29/04/2021 18:24	CS
paying running costs of credits		1	1 22/04/2021 17:20	CS	22/04/2021 17:20	CS
facing increased costs		2	5 24/03/2021 15:19	CS	26/03/2021 13:07	CS
losing income		11	27 24/03/2021 16:46	CS	04/05/2021 16:37	CS

being confronted with (hidden) needs and problems in so		2	2	03/05/2021 17:56	CS	18/03/2022 13:36	CS
recognizing increased mental health problems		3	3	31/03/2021 16:57	CS	29/04/2021 18:17	CS
pre-existing challenges have increased		3	4	29/03/2021 12:40	CS	03/05/2021 17:52	CS
being doubled hit due to deprived already		2	2	29/04/2021 18:36	CS	03/05/2021 17:53	CS
addressing isolation		3	4	22/04/2021 16:46	CS	03/05/2021 17:59	CS
Covid related challenges		0	0	29/10/2021 11:57	CS	03/02/2023 13:18	CS
struggling with Covid effects and lockdown		3	6	27/04/2021 17:28	CS	21/05/2021 12:00	CS
working from home		2	2	19/04/2021 16:43	CS	03/05/2021 17:45	CS
not everything is possible online		3	3	21/04/2021 15:40	CS	28/04/2021 16:58	CS
not everyone has access to online		1	1	22/04/2021 17:23	CS	22/04/2021 17:23	CS
maintaining internal infrastructure		3	3	29/03/2021 12:07	CS	28/04/2021 14:35	CS
lacking digital expertise		1	4	29/03/2021 11:26	CS	29/03/2021 12:30	CS
not being allowed to do anything because of legal re		2	5	26/04/2021 16:39	CS	21/05/2021 11:57	CS
getting people to adhere to regulations		1	1	22/04/2021 17:14	CS	22/04/2021 17:14	CS
being affected by disrupted supply chains		1	2	20/04/2021 16:35	CS	20/04/2021 16:37	CS
facing times of high uncertainties		10	17	21/04/2021 09:39	CS	18/03/2022 11:00	CS
financial change		1	1	31/03/2021 16:53	CS	01/09/2021 14:04	CS
reduced utility costs		2	3	21/04/2021 17:20	CS	26/04/2021 16:38	CS
changing consumption locally		1	1	21/04/2021 11:13	CS	21/04/2021 11:13	CS
being fortunate		1	1	25/03/2021 16:00	CS	29/04/2021 15:15	CS
being negatively affected by constantly changing lega		6	7	19/04/2021 16:46	CS	18/03/2022 11:52	CS

## Future role in post-Covid 'new normal'

Search Project

Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
rebuilding community		1	2 19/04/2021 17:26	CS	19/04/2021 17:29	CS
growing and becoming stronger		2	5 23/04/2021 17:57	CS	17/03/2022 12:08	CS
remaining open and creative, innovative		5	7 16/04/2021 18:22	CS	29/04/2021 18:30	CS
using outdoor space to contribute to recovery		2	3 16/04/2021 18:12	CS	03/05/2021 18:11	CS
sports facility to combat pandemic related		1	1 29/04/2021 18:25	CS	29/04/2021 18:25	CS
offering outdoor cinema		2	2 16/04/2021 18:22	CS	03/05/2021 17:16	CS
needing to experiment		1	1 16/04/2021 18:33	CS	16/04/2021 18:33	CS
shorter offers to increase amount of people		1	1 22/04/2021 17:27	CS	22/04/2021 17:27	CS
picking up of former services		1	1 21/04/2021 11:28	CS	21/04/2021 11:28	CS
making use of digital opportunities way mo		4	5 25/03/2021 16:14	CS	16/03/2022 11:55	CS
keeping momentum		6	8 19/04/2021 17:29	CS	03/05/2021 17:59	CS
being better off because of agility and flexibilit		2	2 16/04/2021 18:30	CS	22/04/2021 17:29	CS
increased hybridisation		1	1 03/11/2021 12:21	CS	03/11/2021 12:21	CS
generating profit		3	3 24/03/2021 17:05	CS	21/04/2021 10:08	CS
fearing not be able to keep all assets		1	1 29/03/2021 12:55	CS	29/03/2021 12:55	CS
depending on resourcing and funding		1	2 29/04/2021 18:28	CS	29/04/2021 18:35	CS
having big ideas and visions		4	4 16/04/2021 18:34	CS	28/04/2021 17:10	CS
thinking about expanding to a cafe		1	2 21/04/2021 11:59	CS	21/04/2021 11:59	CS
providing cultural activities		1	1 25/03/2021 16:10	CS	25/03/2021 16:10	CS
making the building more fit for purpose		3	3 25/03/2021 16:09	CS	03/05/2021 17:06	CS
imagining how to help others with premises		1	2 16/04/2021 17:59	CS	16/04/2021 18:14	CS
being positive		3	4 19/04/2021 17:26	CS	23/04/2021 18:12	CS
address food poverty systematically		1	2 03/05/2021 18:06	CS	08/11/2021 09:13	CS
expecting challenging times		1	1 21/04/2021 17:21	CS	21/04/2021 17:21	CS
not able to envisage anything because of curre		11	15 25/03/2021 16:10	CS	03/05/2021 18:09	CS
fearing public 'step-over problems' mentality		1	1 29/04/2021 18:30	CS	21/05/2021 14:04	CS
being worried about what will come back		5	5 01/04/2021 14:49	CS	04/05/2021 16:36	CS
being uncertain how sustainable behaviour cha		2	2 21/04/2021 11:14	CS	29/04/2021 18:24	CS
being more resourceful		1	1 29/04/2021 18:46	CS	29/04/2021 18:46	CS

community empowerment	2	2	29/04/2021 18:43	CS	21/05/2021 13:57	CS
increase support for local collaborations	3	4	21/04/2021 11:53	CS	22/04/2021 16:09	CS
educating and enabling people to take on responsi	2	2	16/04/2021 18:25	CS	18/03/2022 12:23	CS
creating meeting place	1	1	29/04/2021 18:42	CS	29/04/2021 18:42	CS
concentrating more on community and communit	2	3	25/03/2021 16:08	CS	16/04/2021 18:33	CS
being key community reviver	1	1	29/04/2021 18:26	CS	29/04/2021 18:26	CS

## Covid and the opportunity context

Search Project

Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Opportunity Context mid pandemic		2	6 10/03/2022 12:23	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
steering use to benefit community, organisation and asset		3	16 10/03/2022 12:24	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
providing community space		3	7 10/03/2022 16:48	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
reinvesting		3	8 28/02/2022 10:55	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
making premises fit for purpose		3	4 23/02/2022 15:14	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
long-term goals		3	6 10/03/2022 16:43	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
legitimacy		1	5 23/02/2022 13:53	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
increased awareness		4	8 28/02/2022 10:38	CS	21/03/2022 11:58	CS
becoming anchor organisation		2	9 16/03/2022 17:22	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
knowing what is community benefit		3	18 10/03/2022 16:49	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
importance of reflecting		1	4 18/03/2022 10:48	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
implementing evaluation methods		3	5 11/03/2022 12:16	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS

resources available		3	5	10/03/2022 12:23	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
working at limit		3	13	10/03/2022 15:53	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
working against windmills		1	1	18/03/2022 13:37	CS	18/03/2022 13:37	CS
needing steady resource flow		2	5	10/03/2022 16:16	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
supportive local context		2	4	23/02/2022 14:39	CS	02/03/2023 16:29	CS
supportive team		2	6	11/03/2022 12:46	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
council is supporting		3	5	23/02/2022 15:02	CS	23/03/2022 16:29	CS
increased cooperation among departments		3	3	23/02/2022 15:07	CS	21/03/2022 11:59	CS
increased demand for resources		3	16	10/03/2022 16:27	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
needing more community input		2	5	28/02/2022 12:00	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
volunteers helping out		2	3	23/02/2022 14:54	CS	18/03/2022 12:23	CS
difficult to find right human capital		2	4	16/03/2022 17:18	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
become more efficient		1	1	17/03/2022 12:47	CS	17/03/2022 12:47	CS
additional governmental resources		3	9	10/03/2022 12:44	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
finances		2	5	23/02/2022 13:53	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
losing income		2	2	17/03/2022 12:38	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
increased application for funding		3	10	23/02/2022 14:21	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
importance of grants		5	12	23/02/2022 14:52	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
being affected by macroeconomic trends		3	4	28/02/2022 11:52	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
changed income generation		4	9	23/02/2022 14:28	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
having different income sources		4	10	23/02/2022 14:23	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
building reserves		3	9	10/03/2022 13:06	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS



[-] Covid		3	3	23/02/2022 14:55	CS	18/03/2022 11:00	CS
[-] stepping in		1	2	16/03/2022 17:21	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] revealing how much owning devotes from actual community work		1	1	21/03/2022 12:31	CS	21/03/2022 12:31	CS
[-] remaining uncertainties		5	7	23/02/2022 14:58	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] refocusing locally		2	3	28/02/2022 10:01	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] redeveloping		1	2	18/03/2022 11:42	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] losing volunteers		1	1	28/02/2022 09:56	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] losing activities and groups		3	4	28/02/2022 10:18	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] longlasting consequences of covid		2	4	17/03/2022 15:56	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] less visitors		3	6	23/02/2022 14:55	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] hit severely by consequences of covid		1	2	18/03/2022 11:48	CS	18/03/2022 13:42	CS
[-] change and impact flattened		1	1	28/02/2022 09:54	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] causes internal conflicts		3	6	28/02/2022 09:56	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] causes delays		2	2	23/02/2022 15:11	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] caught covid		1	1	28/02/2022 09:11	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] being limited		2	5	28/02/2022 09:45	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] being affected differently		1	1	28/02/2022 13:49	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] acting economically responsible		3	4	28/02/2022 09:43	CS	17/03/2022 12:39	CS
[-] changes because of Covid and Brexit		2	5	16/03/2022 16:08	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] ability to use resources and context		3	24	10/03/2022 12:23	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] hybridisation		2	4	23/02/2022 13:53	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] negotiating different logics		3	11	11/03/2022 12:51	CS	21/03/2022 11:58	CS
[-] taking on formalised constitution		1	1	10/03/2022 16:40	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] increased collaboration		2	6	16/03/2022 11:56	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] having commercial structures		3	16	28/02/2022 10:00	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] importance of insurance for economic activities		1	1	28/02/2022 09:53	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] implementing marketing strategy		3	6	28/02/2022 10:40	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] employing		3	4	10/03/2022 15:28	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
[-] being more social business than community organisation		2	2	28/02/2022 11:57	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS

constant development		2	8	16/03/2022 12:26	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
having plans in the pipeline		5	11	23/02/2022 15:01	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
growing from challenges		2	7	11/03/2022 16:56	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
get inspiration		2	3	11/03/2022 12:53	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
finiding niche where to fit in		2	2	11/03/2022 12:19	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
figuring new roles and tasks		1	1	28/02/2022 10:20	CS	28/02/2022 10:20	CS
asset is a real value		3	9	10/03/2022 16:26	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
raising awareness		3	3	11/03/2022 12:22	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
owning enables decisions		2	4	10/03/2022 16:49	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
still being limited by condition of asset		2	4	28/02/2022 10:57	CS	21/03/2022 12:25	CS
benefiting from unclear ownership		1	1	21/03/2022 11:25	CS	21/03/2022 11:25	CS
ability to adapt and make use of whats there		3	21	10/03/2022 16:38	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
change in context allows new ways		2	2	17/03/2022 16:18	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
utilising chances to digitalise		2	5	11/03/2022 16:55	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
knowing own abilities and limits		3	8	10/03/2022 16:51	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
ability to refocus		2	9	16/03/2022 17:19	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
building on own achievements		2	2	17/03/2022 16:17	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
being independent		2	2	28/02/2022 10:52	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS
being able to imagine and have visions		3	3	10/03/2022 16:44	CS	14/04/2023 14:34	CS