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Community Ownership of Local Assists: conditions for sustainable success

Presented at the British Sociological Association Conference 12.4.2018

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With
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Overview

1. Context
2. Study and data
3. Findings: Legitimacy and Community Capacity
4. Considerations for Sustainability
Part 1
Context

‘[as] public sector bodies at local and national levels respond to current financial challenges, reviewing and rationalising their capital portfolios, the disposal of public assets has become a critical component of change in this field.’

Aiken et al (2011: 14)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Why is this important?</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kiernan and Porter (2014: 847)</strong></td>
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<td>[a] ‘glaring disconnect between the rhetoric of empowered, inclusive communities and the burgeoning reality of cuts to publicly funded community provision’</td>
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<td><strong>Scott (2015: 130)</strong></td>
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<td>‘The politics associated with localism contain ‘deep ambiguities’ between ideas of empowerment on the one hand and on the other the responsibilisation of local communities for situations beyond their control’</td>
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<td><strong>Macleod and Emejulu (2014: 431)</strong></td>
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<td>[Communities strengthening public resources by using] ‘local knowledge, assets, and energy to rebuild local services on their own terms and in ways that meet their interests and needs’</td>
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Part 2
Study
and data

Work undertaken January 2015 - March 2016
Conducted in part with the Community and Economic Development team at Tewkesbury Borough Council, Gloucestershire.

Exploring what creates **sustainability** in transferred community assets, and avoiding **community dispossession** (cf Mackenzie 2012; Harvey, 2003)
Tewkesbury Borough

- Population 85,800 (2014)
- Mix of deprived and affluent areas (has top 20 UK for each)
- Semi-rural, abuts two urban areas: Gloucester (1); Cheltenham (2)
Case study Locations

GL3, Churchdown
• Run by Churchdown Neighbourhood Project as a Community Hub
• Activities including youth work, day services for elderly people, sport clubs and exercise in the renovated sports hall, IT facilities and training, cafe.

Brockworth Community Centre
• Transferred to Brockworth Parish Council in 2006 and run by Brockworth Community Project (BCP)
• Provides a Community Library and youth work services out of a nearby youth centre.

GIS map with thanks to Dr Lucy Clarke, University of Gloucestershire
### Our Data...

#### Brockworth

**Observations and 3 interviewees**
- A service manager
- Senior member of Community Project
- Parish Council key stakeholder

#### Churchdown

**Observations and 3 interviewees**
- Senior member of organisation
- Senior member of organisation
- Parish Council key stakeholder

#### Tewkesbury Borough Council

- Borough Council Community Development Officer
- RA placement with Community and Economic Development team
- Minutes for Council meetings for asset transfer
Part 3

Findings: Legitimacy and community capacity

I) Perceptions of legitimacy in transferred assets

II) Availability of community capacities for maintaining assets
## Findings theme 1: Legitimacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Assets as open to all...</td>
<td>A legitimate community asset should be \textit{something whole community can use and feel welcome using} (Brockworth)</td>
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<td>...and more responsive</td>
<td>All interviewees felt that the projects were more responsive to local community needs and offered many more activities to a wider range of groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Vs community</td>
<td>Has neoliberalism ‘won’ or do community-run assets pose an alternative (e.g. Mackenzie, 2012)?</td>
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<td>Political Legitimacy</td>
<td>Has the county council had been ‘let off the hook’ or was opposition political with a small 'p' - more about personality than party politics.</td>
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Findings theme 2: Community capacity

Brockworth more reliant on volunteers, especially in the library

Large-scale community volunteer offer occurred in response to threat of loss of service

Churchdown's library still council-funded.

As a charity the Community Hub needs to be more commercial in order to keep the building running.
The capitals (after Carney’s 2001 sustainable livelihoods approach)

**Human Capital**
- skills, knowledge, ability to work, and good health (Carney, 1999)

**Physical Capital**
- provides a location for the performance of other types of capital

**Social Capital**
- connections between people - Bonding, bridging and linking social capital (Woolcock, 2001)

**Financial Capital**
- sufficient economic resources to maintain buildings, pay for activities, employ and train volunteers and paid staff
Part 4
Considerations for sustainability?

Legitimacy?
• Who does the asset serve in the community?
• How do these groups generate the initial and continuing support?
• What happens with change?

Community capacity?
• Are ‘the capitals’ there?
• If not, how are they encouraged/achieved?
• What happens with change?
Responsibilisation or Collective responsibility (Scott, 2015)?

‘The strange benefit of funding cuts is the ones that have survived will probably be around for a long time...One of the things it's broken is that reliance on the public sector...Yes a harsh lesson, a more collective approach to doing with communities rather than doing to’

(Community Development Officer).


