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Community Ownership of Local Assists:

conditions for sustainable success

UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE
at Cheltenham and Gloucester

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Presented at the British Sociological Association Conference 12.4.2018

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)

Why is this important?

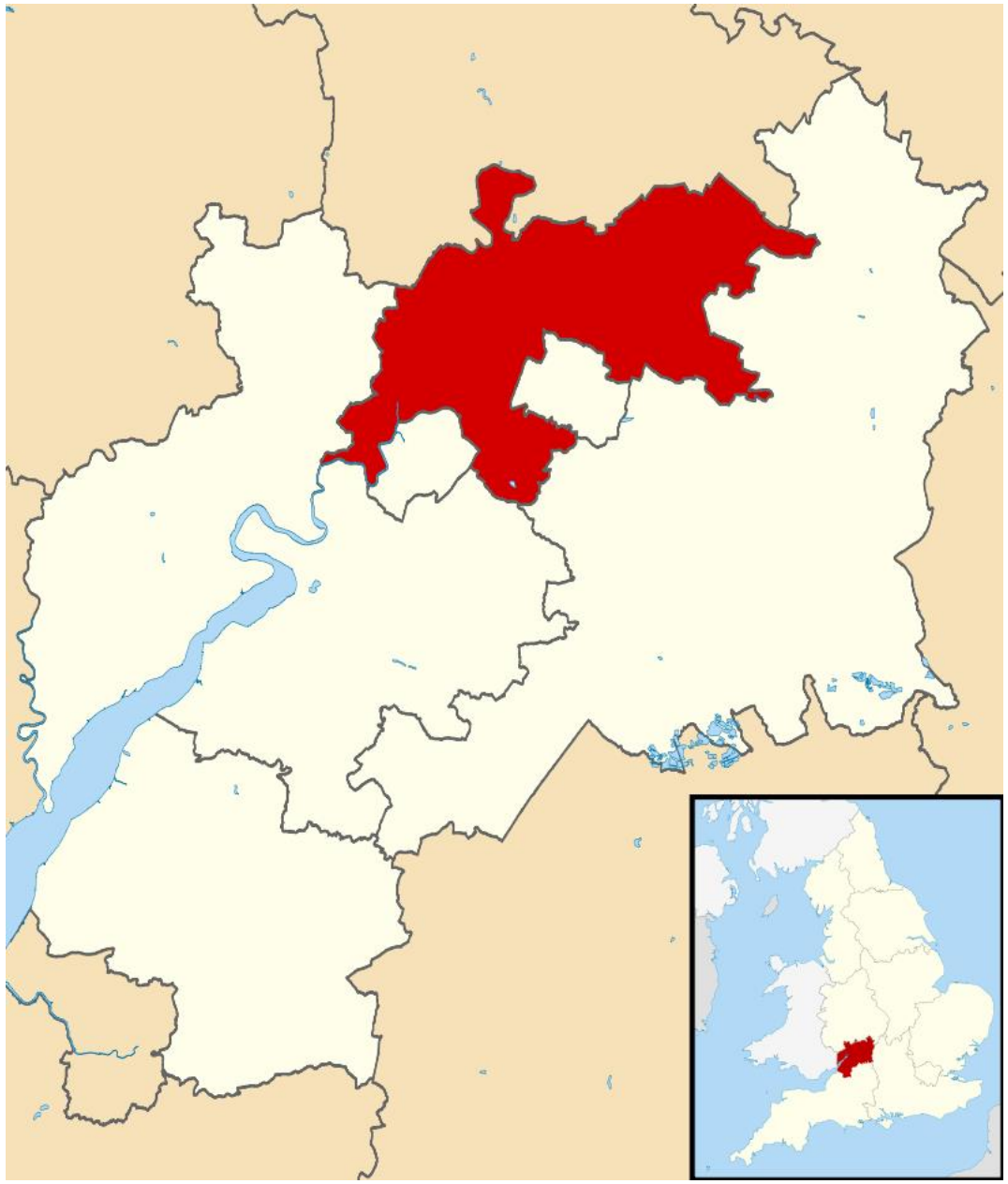
Kiernan and Porter (2014: 847)	Scott (2015: 130)	Macleod and Emejulu (2014: 431)
[a] *'glaring disconnect between the rhetoric of empowered, inclusive communities and the burgeoning reality of cuts to publicly funded community provision'*	*'The politics associated with localism contain 'deep ambiguities' between ideas of empowerment on the one hand and on the other the responsibilisation of local communities for situations beyond their control'*	[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'*

Part 2
Study and data

Work undertaken January 2015 - March 2016

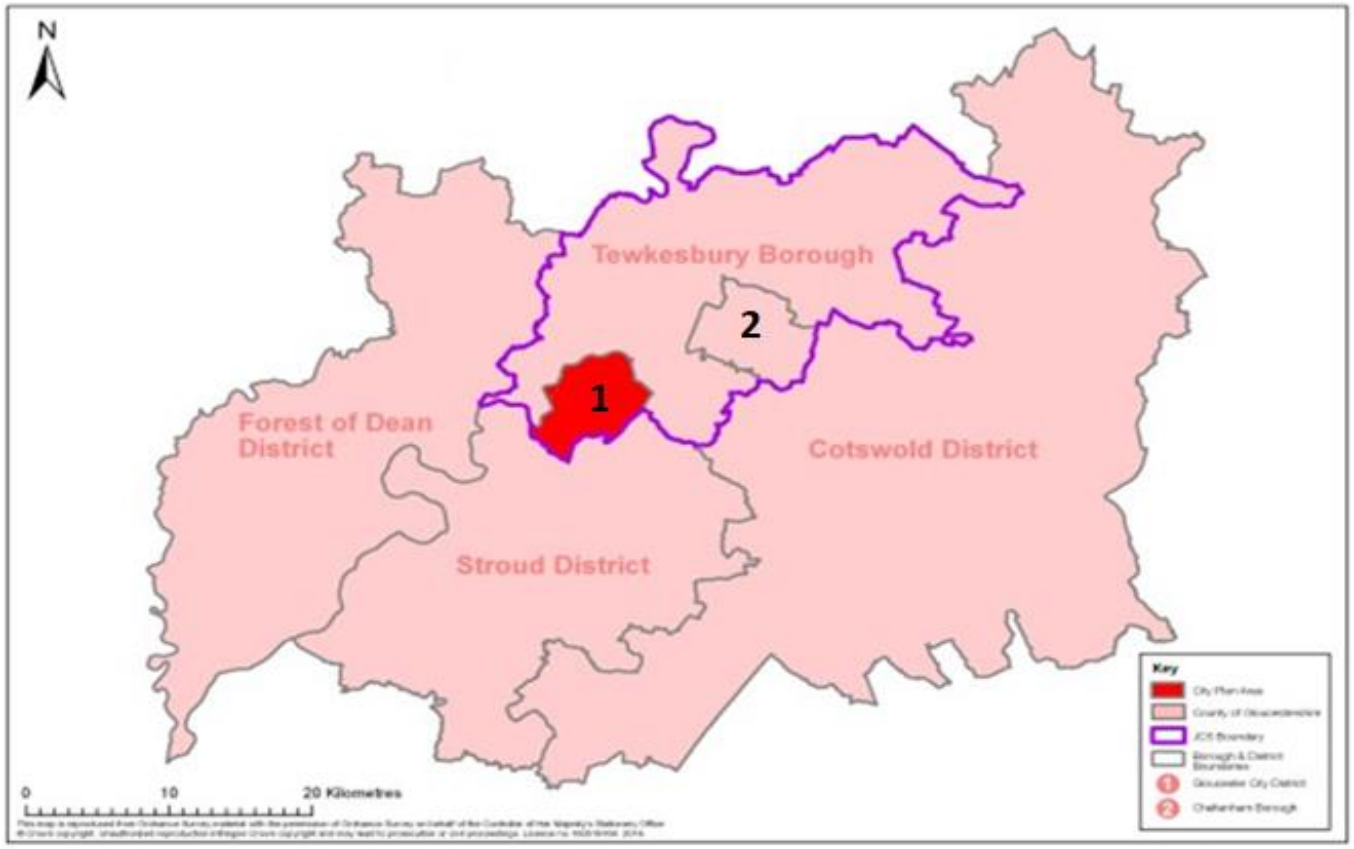
Conducted in part with the Community and Economic Development team at Tewkesbury Borough Council, Gloucestershire.

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)**



Gloucester City Council, 2018

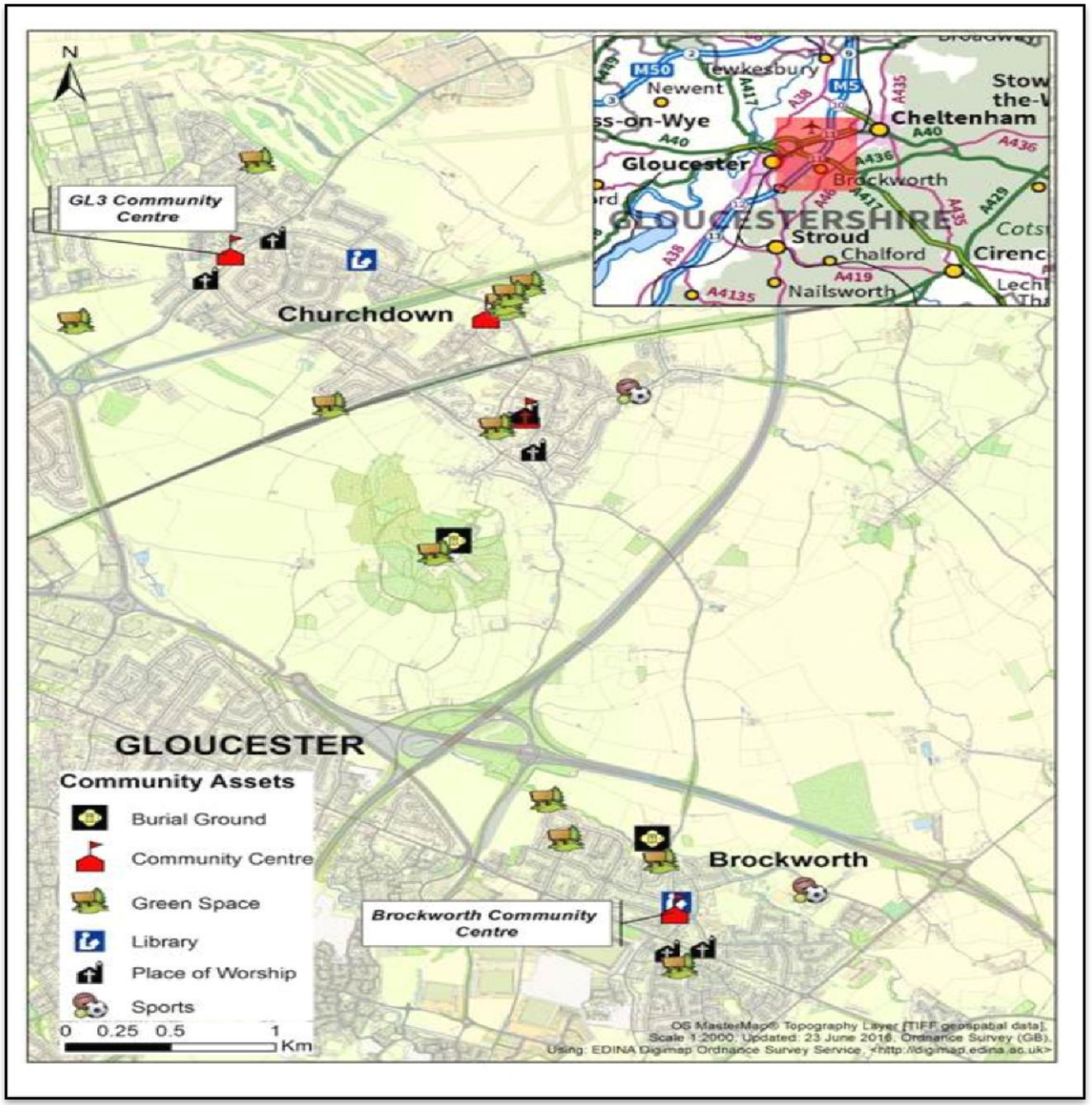
Case study Locations

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

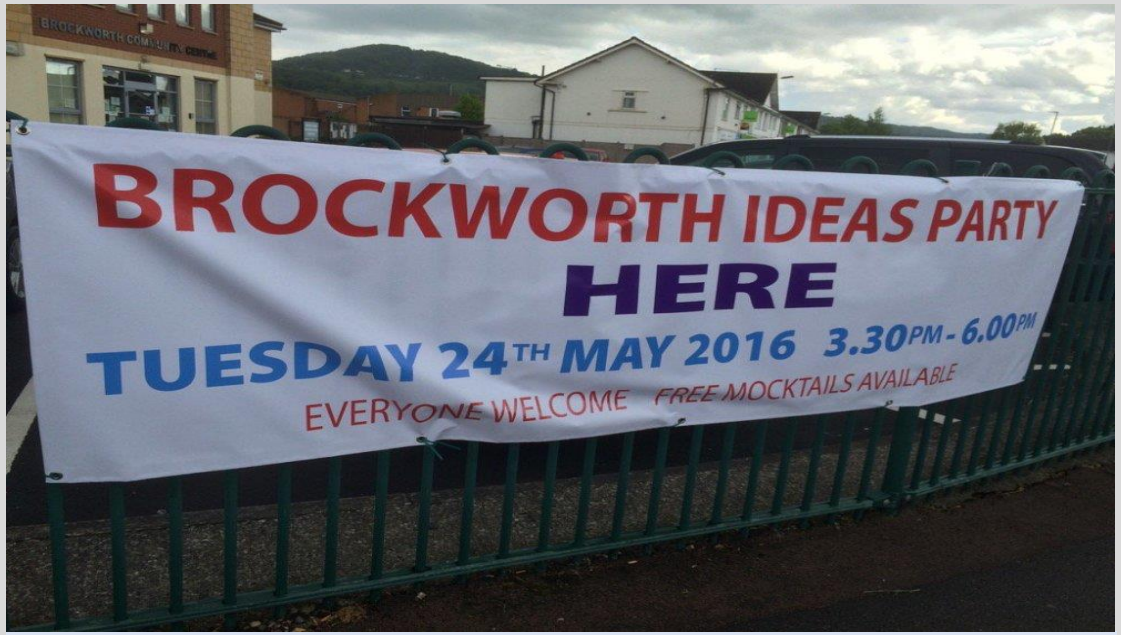
I) Perceptions of legitimacy in transferred assets

II) Availability of community capacities for maintaining assets

Findings theme 1: Legitimacy

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

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).

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